TEACHING PRACTICES AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN
ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

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TEACHING PRACTICES AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

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Department of Child Development
Abstract

of

TEACHING PRACTICES AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

by

Amanda Marie Carlson

This study explored a teacher directed and learner-centered teaching approach and how children developed literacy within these approaches. Two teachers and eight students participated in this study. Video and audio data classroom data were collected in two second-grade classrooms over a period of two months and was transcribed, coded, and analyzed using discourse analysis. Three aspects of classroom discourse were explored: a) teacher initiation into literary discussions, b) child experiential and personal connections to literature, and c) teacher response to child connections. In both classrooms, children achieved literary competency in the day’s lessons, however the process in which the children in each class arrived at the knowledge was significantly different. A mixed method approach of both practices was found to be the most beneficial.

_____________________, Committee Chair
Dr. Juliana Raskauskas

_______________________
Date
DEDICATION

Individuals come into your life for a reason, season, or a lifetime. There are two people whom I must dedicate this thesis to, for they are my lifetime supports. I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Carol Carlson. Mom, you are the best person I know. You have the strongest and kindest heart that I know. You are living proof that when times get tough, you know how to get by. Thank you for listening to me and showering me with hugs whenever I became frustrated. You know how to remind me to stop taking things so seriously with a ridiculous joke. Without your constant love and support, I have no idea how I would have completed this process. Thank you for always believing in me.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Children learn in a variety of ways (visually or audibly) and in many different contexts, such as home, school, or the community. However, children tend to encounter many of their first formal learning experiences within the classroom context (Frisby, 1998). Based on past research, schoolteachers are often expected to provide children with sets of tools and strategies (known as teaching practices) that help guide the students’ learning (Chang, 2008; Frisby, 1998; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Lau, Singh, & Hwa, 2009; Macqueen, 2010; Rogoff, 1994). There are two main types of teaching practices used in American classrooms: teacher directed practices and learner-centered practices. Teacher directed practices are known as classroom instruction in which the teacher is the sole source of knowledge and provides their students with the content information (Derewianka, 2012; Frisby, 1998; Roberson & Woody, 2012). For example, a teacher directed classroom employs a traditional pedagogical approach and implements curriculum with the goal of students mastering content knowledge provided by the instructor. In contrast, learner-centered practices focus on the developmental needs of students and allow instruction to be tailored to each individual (Donohue, Perry, & Weinstein, 2003; Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, & Massengill, 2005; Firkins, Forey, & Sengupta, 2007; Frisby, 1998; Lambert & McCombs, 1998). An example of learner-centered practices is a classroom in which the teacher acts as a facilitator of knowledge and guides students toward understanding content knowledge through social interaction.
It is important to note that students in both teacher directed and learner-centered classrooms learn subject matter, the main difference lies in how they learn and relate to the subject matter (Roberson & Woody, 2012). Although teacher directed practices are still considered to be the most common form of teaching practice in today’s schools, research suggests that learner-centered teaching practices enable students to become active participants in the construction of their own knowledge (Lau et al., 2009; Macqueen, 2010).

Literacy development is stressed in the school curriculum because literacy skills are needed to communicate effectively and optimally in most individual relationships (Johnson, 2010). Moreover, when students develop literacy skills, they equip themselves with a set of tools that may enable them to become more successful in the future (Firkins, Forey, & Sengupta, 2007; Rightmyer, McIntyre, & Petrosko, 2006). Research suggests when teachers focus on learner-centered practices, students are provided more opportunities to actively participate within the learning environment, such as a classroom discussion (Derewianka, 2012; Frisby, 1998; Gardner, 2010; Jones, 2010). As a result, studies have shown that students are more likely to engage in more sophisticated literacy practices (Matusov, 1996). In contrast, when teachers employ teacher directed practices, students may not be engaged conceptually in the content matter and simply complete assignments without negotiating the information through social interaction (Roberson & Woody, 2012).
Statement of the Problem

Sylvester and Kragler (2012) argue that when children participate in high quality interactions with their peers, their language use promotes the development of conceptual knowledge and accompanies an increase in vocabulary. They go on to suggest that high quality interactions contribute to successful problem solving skills, and opulent student-teacher and student-student communication. Moreover, Dickinson and Sprague (2000) explain that interactions among peers (students and teachers) are critical components in the development of children’s thinking. Insofar as the classroom context importance is stressed, interactions that are considered to be positive and high-quality have been found to increase a child’s literacy skills (e.g., increase in vocabulary, feedback) and conceptual development (Firkins, Forey, & Sengupta, 2007; Lewin, 2008; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). Vandell and Wolfe (2000) argue that when children are cognitively involved in a classroom environment where learning occurs through positive social interaction among peers, children are more likely to display conceptual development and advanced literary skills. Therefore, providing a context in which children are able to learn through social interaction is critical for the development of literacy in children (Vygotsky, 1978).

The above findings suggest that the quality of children’s interactions with teachers and peers has a significant influence on children’s literacy development (Derewianka, 2012; Firkins, Forey, & Sengupta, 2007; Gibbons; 2005). Since more than one type of teaching practice exists, it may be that one form of teaching practice is more beneficial to children’s literacy development than others. Thus, the present study aimed
to explore classrooms under two different teaching styles that promote the development of literacy in children. Further, a goal of the current research study was to provide a valuable synopsis of the acquisition of literacy through different teaching practices.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate teaching practices and children’s literacy learning in elementary classrooms and to determine how children are learning under different styles of practice. By examining these variables, the current study expanded our understanding of how learner-centered teaching practices are beneficial to the development of literacy in children. More specifically, the study attempted to answer two questions:

1. How do children develop literacy under a teacher directed practice?
2. How do children develop literacy under a learner-centered practice?

**Methodology**

The current study utilized a qualitative design to explore two different styles of teaching practice. Participants (teachers and students) were recruited through principals from two elementary schools in a large Northern California city; a total of three teachers and 21 students expressed interest in participating in the study. Two teachers were selected through purposeful sampling and were interviewed about their teaching
practices, educational background, and length of experience. Teachers and students were audio and video recorded during four literacy lessons over the course of two months for a total of four hours per classroom.

Data from the video and audio recordings was transferred into Transana and transcribed verbatim. Data was first read line-by-line and open coded (e.g., exploring initial concepts) for broad themes. Then, data was organized using axial coding (e.g., comparing concepts against similar categories). Next, data was re-read and closed coded (e.g., comparing similar concepts against one another in the core theme); three themes emerged from the data. These themes will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3.

**Definition of Terms**

It is important to define the reoccurring terms in the current research. There are five terms that will be defined in this section: literacy, teaching practices, learner-centered, teacher directed, and intersubjectivity. First, literacy is defined as the ability to read and write (Applebee, 1978). Second, teaching practices are defined as the approaches teachers utilize to transfer knowledge to students (Donohue, Perry, & Weinstein, 2003; Frisby, 1998).

Third, learner-centered is defined as an approach utilized by a teacher whom acts as a facilitator of knowledge and encourages collaborative knowledge building discussions. In this type of teaching practice, the teacher shares an egalitarian relationship with her students (Frisby, 1998; Gardner, 2010; Roberson & Woody, 2012).
Fourth, teacher directed is defined as a traditional pedagogical approach in which teachers deliver information in a lecture format and they participate as the sole source of knowledge in the classroom (Roberson & Woody, 2012). In this type of classroom, the teacher outlines clear expectations and goals for learning (Frisby, 1998).

Fifth, intersubjectivity is defined as an underlying mechanism that promotes the social agenda of meaning making processes (Vygotsky, 1986). It is through this process that learning and development occur (Stone, Underwood, & Hotchkiss, 2012).

Limitations

There are some limitations in this study that need to be addressed. First, the length of the study is relatively short. Data was collected over a two-month period and only four visits occurred per classroom. Had the data collection period been longer, different results could have been generated. Second, the data collection occurred during the beginning of the school year. During the beginning of a school year, children and teachers may still be familiarizing themselves with one another. Toward the end of a school year, children and students may feel more comfortable with one another and different dynamics in discourse could have been uncovered.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter 1 provided an introduction of this study that explores employed teaching
practices and literacy development in second grade classrooms. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth review of the literature associated with Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theoretical framework, learning, literacy development, the importance of teachers, and teaching practices (teacher directed and learner-centered). Chapter 3 describes the methodology, procedures, and data analysis used to complete the study. Chapter 4 will introduce exemplars from transcribed video and audio classroom data from three themes: (1) teacher initiation into literacy based discussions, (2) experiential and personal child connections, and (3) teacher response to children’s literacy connections. Chapter 5 will connect the findings with past research and discuss implications for educational practice, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Developing competency in literacy is an important tool to master in elementary classrooms (Applebee, 1978; Cole, 1996; Johnson, 2010; Justice, 2006; Justice, et al., 2008, Rogoff, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986). In order to develop this competency, a child must have first mastered early emergent literacy skills, which is a predictor of later success in school (Guo, Justice, Kaderavek, McGinty, 2010). Emergent literacy may be associated with print awareness; this process usually begins before school starts (Applebee, 1978). For example, the first step in emergent literacy is that children begin developing an interest in books and having books read to them. The second step may entail children beginning to associate pictures with words. Lastly, children will begin decoding words through the use of phonics. These skills fostered in emergent literacy are critical for children to develop because it solidifies their literacy foundation and provides them with enough information to begin decoding stories (Applebee, 1978; Justice, 2006; Justice et al., 2008). In second grade classrooms, children begin to develop understanding of story themes such as setting, plot, and characters. In addition, children possess the ability to decode story information and to derive meaning from the context (Applebee, 1978; Roskos & Neuman, 2001). Moreover, children are able to connect literacy information with their own personal experiences to develop an enriched and sophisticated understanding of connections in literacy (Derewianka, 2012, Wang, 2007).
Since teaching practices employ a major influence over how students perceive learning, it is important to adapt practice to an approach that is beneficial to all students (Frey et al., 2005; Macqueen, 2010). Moreover, individuals have unique differences and when these qualities are respected, students are more likely to engage in the learning activity (Cole, 1996). As a consequence of learning, students develop literacy and their use of tools and social speech will become more sophisticated (Shotter, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986; Wells, 2007). Therefore, the current study observed teacher directed and learner-centered practices and how children learned literacy in each classroom. Focal students were observed and videotaped over the course of four literacy lessons from a teacher directed and a learner-centered classroom. By observing learning in two different classrooms, the present study was able to explore how students participated through shared experiences and how they transformed their content knowledge.

The present study explored two second-grade classrooms during their English literacy lessons. Classroom interactions were examined during literacy based discussions about setting, plot, and characters in a story. The way teachers initiated literacy discussions, the connections children made, and the response given to the child’s connections were explored. The following topics are discussed in the review of literature: Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory as the theoretical framework, literacy development, and teaching practices.
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the present study is Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory. Vygotsky’s theory addresses the relationships between the use of speech and tools. First, Vygotsky addresses a relationship between language development, cognitive development, and tool use. Vygotsky (1978; 1986) argues that as children’s use of speech develops, their use of tools becomes more sophisticated and they can solve problems in more complex ways. That is, tools are considered to be ways in which individuals communicate with one another such as through the use of speech and writing.

Second, Vygotsky’s theory addresses the significance of early informal learning for later school learning. Insofar as students learn, they have begun learning before setting foot inside a school (Vygotsky, 1978). Every student enters the learning environment with past experiences that will shape and guide their development in the years to come. Third, Vygotsky’s theory addresses the social interactional nature of learning. Furthermore, these individual differences promote a unique classroom culture and as a consequence, different competency levels are embodied in the classroom (Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, students enter the zone of proximal development at their actual developmental level with the opportunity to move toward their potential development level should a more competent peer contribute toward their learning. That is, learning occurs in the social context and when a more experienced peer
(either a teacher or student) facilitates their learning, they may understand the content at a more sophisticated level. As a consequence, children use social speech to guide their learning, relate to concepts, and make use of the tools presented to them.

The Importance of Learning

From the beginning of a child’s life to the end of adolescence, their main responsibility is to learn. In this context, learning is defined as the acquisition of knowledge through social interaction (Cole, 1996; Bolhuis, 2003; Ochs, 1988; Thooen, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma & Geijsel, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). Ochs (1988) argues that a child’s first caregiver (typically a parent) provides them with opportunities to learn about the word in which they live. Moreover, as the child grows older, they begin to learn in a variety of contexts, including the classroom. Kyprianidou et al. (2012) found that when individuals were placed in a diverse group of learners, they were able to think of information in new ways and thus, move outside of their area of comfort.

Children have a variety of different intelligences and possess a desire to express these abilities (Gardner, 1983). Stepping away from a traditional approach such as a teacher directed classroom empowers children with different learning styles to flourish in the classroom (Roberson & Woody, 2012). There are many different existing definitions for what a learning style is. A learning style is defined as a consistent pattern in the way an individual learns (Kyprianidou, et al., 2012). Although learning styles are typically stable, they can change depending on different experiences and new information
(Vermunt, 1996). Moreover, when teachers become aware of different learning styles, they can contribute to individualized learning.

Individual learning differences are supported within a learner-centered classroom where the focus is on collaborating information together (Roberson & Woody, 2012; Wang, 2007). According to Wang (2007), a collaborative learning environment fosters the development of literacy and exposed children to a variety of different learning strategies and tools. These strategies and tools may enable children to explore different ideas about literacy. For instance, if a group of children are learning about plot, setting, and characters in a story, they are more likely to conceptualize their ideas if they have the opportunity to talk them out (e.g., say their ideas out loud for others to hear) and listen to the ideas of others. Teachers can provide ample opportunity for children to develop their thoughts through social interaction during collaborative small group learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wang, 2007). The following sections will discuss the importance of using Vygotsky’s framework when addressing learning in the classroom. First, the use of tools and signs will be discussed. Second, teaching practices used as tools to guide literacy development will be discussed. Third, learning as a process, rather than a product will be addressed.

**The use of tools and signs.** Teaching practices promote the use of tools and social speech in the classroom (Rogoff, 1994; Wang, 2007). Speech and writing are two tools specifically promoted in the classroom environment (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986; Wang, 2007). Since learning is social in nature, children are more likely to develop literacy under a style of practice that promotes learning as a social process.
(Rogoff, 1994; Wang, 2007). That is, in a classroom where learning is facilitated toward the individual learner inside a learning community, uniqueness and critical thinking skills are developed (Frey et al., 2005; Lau et al., 2009). When learning is viewed as a constructive process, children may learn content in a way that is meaningful to them and use the knowledge toward skills that will make them successful in the future (Cropley, 2001; Frisby, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, as children develop literacy under teaching practice, they may employ themselves with a refined set of skills that will enable them to have successful interpersonal relationships, understanding of cause and effect, and understand the consequences of their actions (Cropley, 2001; Johnson, 2010). Further, becoming literate is an important thing to master; this process is completed through the use of writing and speech tools (Vygotsky, 1978). Ultimately, teachers are preparing their students for the future. By providing students with a practice that suits their developmental needs, teachers foster the development of literacy and furthermore, turn their students into high functioning members of their society (Cropley, 2001).

Vygotsky (1978) acknowledged that learning may occur when differences in experiences are attuned to. That is, differences in background (e.g., culture, social, socio-economic status, cognitive characteristics) contribute to the learning environment because each individual brings different experiences, and levels of knowledge and understanding to the classroom. Through Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, an opportunity is present for teachers to promote student learning by moving students from their potential development and supplementing them with relatable experiences. Moreover, when
teachers differ in their practices, they are supporting differences in learning among their students (Cropley, 2001).

Further, Novak (2010) elaborated that children learned best when presented with challenging but achievable material. That is, when children immerse themselves in learning, they provide themselves with the opportunity to learn hands-on, and construct knowledge that is meaningful to them. This may become a highly useful tool in the process of learning because it facilitates life-long learning. As children are learning, teachers have the opportunity to track development among their students and help fill in the gaps of knowledge (Novak). Thus, when teachers facilitate learning through the zone of proximal development, they are promoting children to be active members in the construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986).

Teaching Practices Used as a Tool to Guide Literacy Development. Vygotsky’s (1978) perspective also claims that children learn in the class through a variety of methods: whole class discussions, small group work, worksheets, and activities to name a few. This places a critical responsibility on teachers to use appropriate practices to foster learning in the classroom. The development of literacy is no exception. Rogoff (1994) found that learning best occurs during the social process. That is, children who are placed in learner-centered classrooms may achieve more sophisticated levels of learning and furthermore, have their individual learning styles supported. Since not all children learn the same way, a learner-centered approach includes a variety of different methods
utilized by teachers to help children gain competency in literacy (Gardner, 2010; Gibbons, 2006; Jones, 2010; Myhill, 2006).

Shirakawa and Iwahama (2009) found that children learned literacy in different ways and using oracy as a tool was found to be supportive of advancing literacy development. Oracy is defined as oral stories and storytelling activities told by both teachers and students. Since children learn through social interactions, it is important for teachers to pay attention to different styles of learning. Furthermore, the zone of proximal development in literacy is different among individuals; teachers need to become aware of these learning differences. For instance, a child may learn about syllables by completing a worksheet and listening to a lecture. However, not all children learn the same way and this approach may not work for all children. That is, some children may learn syllables by reading poems, listening to a teacher’s explanation, or by collaborating in a large group discussion where the teacher and children work together to make meaning of a topic. Vygotsky (1978) argues that when individuals build and construct knowledge together, they are learning through social interaction. A teacher who utilizes a learner-centered practice encourages children to construct knowledge through classroom discussions. By using this approach, children possess the ability to gain ownership of information because not only do they share their ideas, but also collaborate their ideas with others (Wang, 2007). This enables children to engage in meaning making (Carlson, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986). When children link literacy information with their own personal experiences, they may be more likely to retain this information because it makes sense to them.
Wang (2007) further argues that learning best occurs when individuals can collaborate together. This type of learning typically occurs in a learner-centered classroom because there is ample time to think about thinking and to negotiate information through discussions (Carlson, 2010; Roberson & Woody, 2012; Stone, Underwood, & Hotchkiss, 2012). When teachers understand where children are developmentally, they can aim to help children grow and construct their own knowledge (Wang, 2007). This applies to literacy lessons as well. When teachers understand where a child’s development is in literacy, they can figure out what tools to utilize to help a child move toward their potential development within their zone of proximal development. Thus, when teachers utilize the zone of proximal development, they allow more instances for children to enter into intersubjectivity with their peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Another benefit to using a learner-centered approach is that there may be more instances of teachers and children entering into intersubjectivity together. Intersubjectivity is generally viewed as a “communicative mechanism that fosters learning and developments as individuals negotiate a shared understanding of their social, emotional, cognitive and cultural world” (Stone, Underwood, & Hotchkiss, p. 65, 2012). When two individuals negotiate and share information with each other, they enable themselves to develop a higher and more sophisticated understanding of a particular topic (Carlson, 2010). For instance, students who clarify information with a teacher are negotiating meanings and building a shared understanding, thus resulting in intersubjectivity. Therefore, intersubjectivity is a critical component within the
classroom because it enables individuals to not only negotiate information, but create a shared meaning about new information that is shared among all participating members in the classroom (Stone et al., 2012). This is a valuable tool that can be nurtured during literary based discussions.

Learning as a Process Rather than a Product

Cropley (2001) further explains that learning is simply not about the product, but the process. That is, opportunities for learning exist in many different contexts (e.g., school, home) and much of this learning occurs as the result of social phenomena (Bolhuis, 2003). When children choose to learn, they are engaging in meaningful learning processes (Novak, 2010). Incorporating learning into collaborative environments (e.g., classroom) may encourage children to learn content material in ways that make sense to them. Insofar as students learn, when they can construct information in a way that is both meaningful and valuable to them, students are more likely to hold on to that information (Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, in order for children to learn, they must (1) possess the desire to learn, (2) be exposed to a collaborative learning environment, and (3) have ample opportunity to construct information in a way that is meaningful to them (Novak, 2010). Vygotsky (1978) further elaborates that children who learn literacy successfully command the desire to learn and understand how to make use of tools made available to them by their teachers.
**Literacy Development**

**Literacy Development: Ages and Stages**

A child begins learning literacy during infancy and develops increasingly complex literacy tools throughout their education (Applebee, 1978; Guo, Justice, Kaderavek, & McGinty, 2010; Justice, 2006; Justice et al., 2008; Trelease, 2006). Literacy is developed in a series of stages; these stages correspond with a child’s age. At 6-12 months, a child is in the Read Aloud stage (Applebee, 1978). A child will pay close attention to pictures, will touch pictures, and will try to turn the pages in a book. At 12-18 months, a child remains in the Read Aloud stage and begins to enter the expressive vocabulary stage. At this age, a child’s first words will develop, they will ask for books to be read aloud, and will point to familiar names and pictures (Justice, 2006). Moreover, emergent literacy involves learning the social, everyday purposes of literacy all while refining an individual’s set of tools (Christie & Enz, 1992; Guo, et al., 2010).

Children acquire emergent literacy skills during the early childhood years. They develop an interest in print, phonological awareness, expanding vocabularies, and first letter recognition. Many of these skills are developed in childcare settings and home environments where stories are often read. Developing emergent literacy skills help prepare children for more advanced reading and comprehension (Giroloametto et al., 2012; Justice, 2006). Through this process, children move toward reading proficiency and become equipped with the necessary literacy tools to help them become successful in

Writing and spelling begins in the 18-24 months age range. Children will begin to scribble on paper and will have 20-100 words in their vocabulary. Parts of favorite stories may be memorized and children will “read” them and fill in blanks when an adult pauses when reading out loud (Applebee, 1978; Giroloametto, Weitzman, & Greenberg, 2012; Trelease, 2006).

When children approach 24-36 months, they begin narrative development and can sequence information in stories. That is, they understand a main character, setting, or topic in a book. At this stage, children have a vocabulary of 300 words, begin understanding plot, and get upset when an adult reads a word in a favorite story incorrectly. At 3-4 years, children begin producing rhymes, write individual letters, have 900 words in their vocabulary, and begin recognizing their first letter (Phillips, Clancy-Menchetti, & Lonigan, 2008). When children reach 4-5 years, they begin to count syllables in a word, have a 2500 word vocabulary, and learn how to write their own name. During years 5-7, children begin reading independently, decipher beginning, middle, and ending sounds in a word, and spell phonetically. When children approach 9 years and older, they begin to think abstractly and may begin understanding another individual’s point of view (Applebee, 1978; Giroloametto et al., 2012; Trelease, 2006).
English Language Arts Development in Second Grade Curriculum

The California Department of Education (2009) indicates that children develop many literacy competences during their English Language Arts lessons by the time they reach second grade. In this grade level, children are expected to decode and recognize words, and be able to explain word meanings. Students are also expected to comprehend second grade level texts and utilize the index to locate specific pieces of information in a book. Moreover, second graders are expected to understand characters, setting, and plot within a story and compare and contrast these items among different stories. They are also required to comprehend topic sentences and to write paragraphs that exemplify a central idea and should also be able to contribute thoughts based upon their own personal experiences and to link them to readings and discussions. Second grade children should also be able to identify the different parts of a sentence and possess the ability to write a friendly letter, speak clearly, and present their ideas in a logical manner. Finally, students should also be able to report information to the classroom from a variety of sources (e.g., books, classmates) and include a sequence of events (California Department of Education, 2009).

Teaching of Literacy

Vygotksy (1978) argues that learning occurs through social processes where a more competent peer is present and guides a child’s learning toward more sophisticated understanding. The more competent peer, often times a teacher, can guide children’s emergent literacy through verbal and nonverbal skills. Justice and Ezell (2004) found
that when preschool teachers discussed letters and sounds and related them to print, children were more likely to decode and make meaning out of the words.

Feedback is another useful tool utilized by teachers to foster emergent literacy. When teachers respond to a child’s request to decode a word and help facilitate the learning process, children are more likely to retain the information. Giroloametto et al., (2012) argued that when teachers provide feedback and maintain opportunities to discuss pictures and words in stories, children are more likely to make meaning out of the text and decode the information. When teachers utilize these tools, children may begin to develop a primitive understanding of plot, setting, and characters in a story. This skill is critical for success in second grade literacy lessons.

**Word Decoding and Meaning Making**

Word decoding is a critical tool required for the success of early reading comprehension and phonological understanding (Applebee, 1978). Verhoeven and van Leeuwe (2009) argue that early word decoding strategies become more sophisticated as children become older, but having a solid foundation in mapping graphemes and phonemes early on constitutes later success in reading comprehension and phonological understanding. Providing students with resources and discussions that enable them to practice decoding will facilitate their understanding of words and later on foster their ability to recognize concepts within a story (Giroloametto et al., 2012; Justice & Kaderavek, 2004; Justice & Pullen, 2003; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).
Another critical component of developing literacy is the ability to make meaning out of words. McCutchen, Logan, and Biangardi-Orpe (2009) found that when children were prompted with words that were morphologically similar to target words, they were more likely to understand the meaning. Priming children with morphologically similar words is an increasingly important practice because it may provide them with sensitivity to word sound and increase in reading comprehension level. Moreover, the development of these skills provides children with a solid foundation in understanding familiar and unfamiliar words, a critical concept in emergent literacy practices (Applebee, 1978). Thus, when children master emergent literacy practices, they are able to decode stories for plot, setting, and characters, and to relate stories to their own personal experiences (Applebee, 1978; Giroloametto et al., 2012; Justice & Kaderavek, 2004; Justice & Pullen, 2003; McCutchen, et al., 2009; Rogoff, 1990; Trelease, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

**Importance of Literacy**

One of the most important outcomes of learning is the development of literacy (Cole, 1996; Frey et al., 2005; Macqueen, 2010; Vygotsky; 1978; Vygotsky, 1986). Not only does literacy include the ability to read and write, it also encourages the development of many skills that will become useful to one’s life in the future (Johnson, 2010). For example, literacy promotes the ability to paraphrase, develop interpersonal social relationships, understand cause and effect, and apply these skills to real life experiences (Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986). Without literacy,
individuals may be equipped with a less sophisticated set of skills and tools and as a consequence, make decisions without understanding potential consequences. For example, Cole (1996) argued that individuals who are literate are equipped with a set of tools that enable them to question information. This enables individuals to negotiate information, ask questions, and collaborate with one another.

Providing children with the most optimal learning environment will promote effective literacy development (Frey et al., 2005; Macqueen, 2010). For example, Dahl and Freppon (1995) argue that students who are placed in learner-centered practices consider themselves learners of literacy and show evidence of determination, persistence, and positive attitudes toward their own learning and development. Thus, teaching practices play a critical role in children’s learning.

Moreover, literacy based discussions are best promoted through learner-centered approaches (Bansberg, 2003). That is, when teachers promote a facilitating position among students, their students may be encouraged to help lead discussions and contribute their ideas. When students can build upon classroom discussions, these conversations may lead to formulating new ideas; therefore, moving the learning process toward the different needs of learners in the classroom. Focusing on discussions can help students connect information from previous content (e.g., lessons, discussions, homework assignments) and apply it to the current topic. In addition, students may begin to learn new content information at different levels. That is, they are able to understand information as it relates to the lesson, personal experience, and from the perspective of
Inclusion of a learner-centered approach enables more student needs to be met and furthermore, expands the amount of lessons that are suitable to more styles of learning (Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986).

Some lines are blurred when it comes to teaching practices. Both styles of teaching practices promote the goal of learning, developing literacy, and retaining information. These styles are focused for the learner to achieve and educational tools are used in both classrooms. However, the main difference lies in how learning occurs in the classroom. How is learning facilitated in each classroom? A teacher directed approach sets clear goals and expectations for students to achieve. Lectures are frequently used to explain new information, and a reward and consequence system is implemented into the lessons (Frisby, 1998). Mastery of skills is required before moving students on to a more complicated skill. This basic pedagogical approach is commonly used and has shown to be widely successful within teaching practices (Frisby, 1998; Jacobson et al., 2010).

However, as classrooms encompass a wide variety of individuals from various backgrounds, not one approach will work for all students (Cropley, 2001; Bolhuis, 2003). A teacher must now take into account their students’ backgrounds, experiences, exceptions, and challenges and create lessons suitable to all students. As this is no easy task, mixing up the lessons to work for different learners enables the needs of more students to be met. Encouraging students to become facilitators in discussion, provide verbal feedback to their counterparts, and question content information will enable students to retain information because they have put it into practice (Cole, 1996). Therefore, when students engage in the learning process, they are developing literacy
through discussion and are gaining ownership to the content information. That is, when students are able to put information into their own words, they are more likely to have gained an understanding of the topic and retain it for further use.

Justice and Kaderavek (2004) note that many studies have explored how children learn literacy under a teacher directed or learner-centered approach. Consequently, they argue that a combination of the two approaches best meets the demands of today’s children. Therefore, this study explored two classrooms under different styles of teaching practice during literacy lessons in order to examine how children acquire literary skills.

In order to meet the demands of today’s fast pace and quickly changing society, a higher demand is placed upon teachers to utilize varying strategies of teaching to promote highly efficient and educated individuals. Cropley (2001) argued that teachers cannot simply use traditional pedagogical practices to create the learning environment. Rather, they must employ varying strategies to effectively help students become competent life long learners. Moreover, learning literacy is critical for children’s development because it enables them to think critically, read, write, and communicative effectively; these skills are imperative to obtain in order to be successful in the workforce during their adult years (Bolhuis, 2003; Cropley, 2001; Frisby, 1998; Johnson, 2010; Roberson & Woody, 2012).
Importance of Teachers and Teaching Practices

Teaching practices exert a large influence over how students perceive learning (Frisby, 1998; Roberson & Woody, 2012). Teachers who employ a teacher directed practice provide students with access to content knowledge and view learning from a traditional approach (Frisby, 1998; Roberson & Woody, 2012). A teacher directed practice is comprised utilizing traditional pedagogical roots where the teacher acts as the sole source of knowledge and independent learning is fostered. That is, independent learning focuses on the achievement of individual students.

A learner-centered teaching approach utilizes the teacher as a facilitator of knowledge in discussions (Frisby, 1998). These classrooms are more fluid and allow for discussions and meaning making processes. Moreover, an egalitarian relationship is developed and supported. That is, children are active participants in the learning process and contribute to learning alongside a teacher (Carlson, 2010; Cole, 1996; Dahl & Freppon, 1995; Frisby, 1998; Roberson & Woody, 2012; Rogoff, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986).
Teacher Directed Practices

A teacher directed practice utilizes traditional pedagogical strategies and provides students with clear and concise information. For example, Frisby (1998) argues that when teachers present information in a clear manner, check for understanding through clarification, and provide correct feedback, independent student learning is supported. As a consequence, learning becomes the main focus within a teacher directed practice. Moreover, Jacobson et al., (2010) explain that use of a traditional pedagogical approach is found to be useful when teaching children math or science where there is only one answer and less space for interpretations.

One major benefit to teacher-directed practice is that it ensures students have a strong foundation of a concept before moving on to the next one (Jacobson et al., 2010). For example, a teacher would not teach calculus to students who do not have a solid base of algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. Instead, a teacher would create a solid mastery of the foundation before moving on to more complex material. Moreover, as students become more literate in a content area, they are able to begin solving more complicated and sophisticated problems (Frisby, 1998). A teacher-directed approach provides students with a solid step-by-step approach that enables them to master content. Teachers who employ this approach create tools that will help students become successful (e.g., worksheets, activities, and reward systems). The use of these tools supplement the development of literacy and furthermore, enable teachers to provide feedback based on the performance expectations of these tools. Additionally, teacher-
directed approaches can promote positive expectations for students and clear expectations for their students on what they want them to achieve (Frisby, 1998; Roberson & Woody, 2012).

Further, Gettinger (1985) found that children who are poor spellers struggled under a teacher directed approach. That is, when teachers did not provide feedback to their students’ performance, children averaged between only 1 to 2.5 words correctly. However, when students directed their learning (under a learner centered approach), they were more successful at producing correct spelling words. Therefore, when students experience a learner-centered approach, they are equal partners to the construction of their own knowledge and hence, are more likely to retain material from literacy lessons (Frisby, 1998; Roberson & Woody, 2012).

Moreover, this form of practice signifies a performance-based approach and therefore instruction becomes more explicit in how content is introduced (Frisby, 1998; Rogoff, 1994). Content may be delivered in a lecturing format where a teacher presents information to their students without discussion of the concepts (Jacobson, So, Teo, Pathak, & Lossman, 2010; Roberson & Woody, 2012). While providing lectures is critical for students to gain literacy (i.e., students will not be experts with new information so it is important to provide them with the knowledge and definitions), it does not provide students with all the tools they need to retain the information and put it into practice.
Learner-Centered Practice

Although performance in student learning is valued in the education system, moving the focus toward the learner is important (Justice & Kaderavek, 2004; Roberson & Woody, 2012). A learner-centered practice uses an embedded approach and is promoted through social interaction (e.g., play with educational materials, discussion with peers) and occurs within the classroom environment (Jackson, Larzelere, St. Clair, Corr, Fichter, & Egertson, 2006; Roberson & Woody, 2012). For example, Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) argue that a single style of teaching is not always the most beneficial for students because of individual differences. This is because students enter the classroom with past experiences that influence their learning and development and thus, need different types of instruction that will both support and extend their ways of participation (Frisby, 1998; Kozulin, 2003; Lambert & McCombs, 1998; Lau et al., 2009; Macqueen, 2010; Rogoff 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). As classrooms become more diverse, more forms of activities are needed to support the growth and development of different types of learners.

Studies suggest that learning occurs best when teachers promote interest and enthusiasm and focus on academics, social relationships, and positive classroom culture; this is provided within the learner-centered practice (Cole, 1996; Frisby, 1998; Roberson & Woody, 2012). When teachers provide students with a learning centered approach, students are more likely to engage in the learning activity, and thus, their individual differences are respected and they begin to take on more responsibility for their learning
(Cole, 1996). Since learning is a constructive process, it is important to take into account unique differences in learners and provide them with content that is useful, meaningful, and relevant to them. For example, Lau, Singh, and Hwa (2009) argue that learners play a major role to the learning process and when content is studied under a learner centered approach, both active and passive learners become active participants in their own learning, thus supporting the importance and inclusion of meeting needs of individual learning differences. This model of practice places both the teacher and students as a facilitator of knowledge and demonstrates respect for individual differences, and as a consequence, enables fluidity within the classroom (Carlson, 2010; Frisby, 1998; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Lau et al., 2009; Rogoff, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978).

Moreover, the learner centered approach enables students to participate in unique ways and transform content knowledge through shared experiences. That is, learners can change their participation (active and passive) and can guide both their own understanding, and the understanding of other students (Vygotsky, 1978). Active learning is described as a student who is vocal in their participation; passive learning is described as a student who is quiet in their participation, but is still alert in their participation (e.g., listening, nodding head in agreement/disagreement) (Vygotsky, 1978). Not only does this include different styles of learning, it enables students to become competent peers and facilitators of their own knowledge and the knowledge of others. For example, Rogoff (1994) argues that within a classroom, there is an asymmetry of student participation and found that students may fluctuate being experts and apprentices in the
classroom depending on the content. However, some students are more knowledgeable than others in a particular content area. They may consequently help other students understand the content knowledge through observation, participation, and thus, serve as a form of inspiration to other students (Rogoff, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). Since education is social in nature, a sense of community is established within this process, and more learners are able to participate and contribute to the goal of learning (Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986).

In addition, teachers who ask open-ended questions enable students to respond in unique ways. By providing more than just questions that require yes or no responses, students can respond in ways that promote discussion and encourage critical thinking about the topic. Doyle (2008) suggested that when students do the learning work rather than the teacher, students receive more ownership of knowledge and gain understanding of the content. That is, when students share more of the responsibility of learning, they begin to teach each other the content and offer creative explanations to students who may be struggling. Moreover, if students are actively engaged in the learning process, they are not merely being passive learners, but active participants in their own learning (Vygotsky, 1978). That is, students learn to take risks during discussion and learn to not be afraid to disagree with a classmate or teacher’s opinion (e.g., students learn to provide constructive criticism to their peers). Furthermore, when teachers have students only listen to an explanation or lecture of content knowledge, students are not fully absorbing the information. By discussing content knowledge, questioning what it means, and
putting the information into practice, students gain ownership to the knowledge. Thus, the learner-centered teaching practice is highly beneficial to the development of literacy (Doyle, 2008; Jackson et al., 2006).

Exploring teaching practices is critical to understanding how children process information in the classroom (Doyle, 2008). That is, while outcome of learning is demonstrated on tests and homework assignments, the process in which learning occurred provides insight on how children build knowledge upon each other’s thinking. Teachers play a major role in facilitating and directing this process (Frisby, 1998). Through the use of their approaches, children will process learning in different ways and will arrive at literacy competency though the use of different tools and signs (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986). This study specifically explores literacy development under two styles of teaching practices and contributes to the study of literacy development and teaching practices. This study adds to prior research and will provide educators with a glimpse of how learning occurs and how literacy develops through classroom discourse. Moreover, this study aims to provide educators with diverse knowledge on teaching practices and how to successfully enter into literacy discussions that extend children’s thinking and learning about literacy.
Discourse analysis will be utilized throughout the analysis of the data. Discourse analysis provides an in-depth analysis of naturally occurring speech in classroom contexts. This type of analysis allows for the exploration of turn taking in speech and reframing information into relatable contexts. That is, by understanding the context of the data (e.g., current classroom lesson), the data is less likely to be misunderstood. Reframing is an important tool used to orient the reader into understanding the norms and values in a particular context and to develop a relationship to the material presented in the classroom English literacy lessons. Data will drive the research and produce exemplar data pieces of naturally occurring speech in two second-grade classrooms.
Chapter 3

METHODS

Research Design

The present study used qualitative video and audio classroom data in order to explore children’s literacy development in relation to two kinds of teaching approaches: (a) a teacher directed approach and (b) a learner-centered approach. First, two second grade teachers were interviewed about their teaching practices and observed during literacy lessons in order to identify their teaching approach as either teacher directed or learner centered. A teacher directed practice utilizes a traditional pedagogical approach with step-by-step instructions whereas a teacher using a learner-centered practice is in a egalitarian role and acts as the facilitator of knowledge. Next, the two teachers’ second-grade classrooms were observed during morning English lessons over the course of two months. More specifically, the researcher compared teacher centered and learner centered classrooms, exploring explored the following three questions:

1. How do the teachers initiate class discussions of literacy?
2. How do children make personal and experiential connections to literature?
3. How do the teachers respond to children’s contributions during literacy discussions?

The qualitative analysis approach for the study was to transcribe the classroom lessons and then code data into the three broad categories to answer the questions above.
Discourse analysis was used to explore naturally occurring speech and to reframe the data in order to orient the reader to the norms and values within the classroom.

**Recruitment Procedure**

**Recruiting schools and teachers.** First, principals at two elementary schools were contacted for participation in the current study. I attended a meeting with the principal of each school and received a letter of approval to conduct this study; this allowed for entrance into the school to recruit second grade teachers. These procedures were also approved by the California State University, Sacramento Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB). Second, once my study was approved by the IRB, I worked with the two principals to recruit second grade teachers from the two elementary schools. Three second-grade teachers initially responded with interest to my email contacts; but one declined to participate after a few e-mail exchanges. After the other two teachers agreed to participate, I supplied them with a packet that included an information sheet about the current study and a consent form. Both teachers returned the consent forms within one week and contacted me to set up a time to meet face to face.

The next step was to identify the teacher’s teaching practices. Once I had recruited two teachers, I interviewed them on their teaching practices and observed their classrooms twice. Interviews were used to learn about teacher backgrounds, experiences, and the strategies they use in their classrooms. Information was gathered on teachers’ perceived teaching practices to determine which teachers were invited to participate in
the study. After I interviewed the teachers, I observed their classrooms during English lessons.

Based on the classroom interactions I observed, I determined that one teacher utilized a teacher directed approach, the other a learner-centered approach. First, a teacher with a teacher directed teaching practice was chosen because when traditional pedagogical strategies are employed, students often master content very efficiently. Second, a teacher with a learner centered teaching practice was chosen because when teachers promote student interests, learning occurs in more social, collaborative, and meaningful ways (Frisby, 1998; Lau, Singh, and Hwa, 2009). These findings encouraged me to explore literacy development under these two styles of teaching practices. If both teachers had demonstrated the same approach, I would have recruited another teacher. Since both teachers used a different approach, I stopped teacher recruitment. Thus, purposeful sampling was used to identify teacher participants.

**Recruiting students.** I visited each teacher’s classroom before the start of data collection. During these visits, the teacher introduced me to her students. I introduced myself to each class, explained my study, and offered children the opportunity to participate in the study. Each child was provided with a manila envelope that included: a paragraph introducing myself, educational background, and research objectives, a cover letter introducing the study, a parental consent form, and an assent form for the child to sign. The cover letter explained the purpose of the study and instructions on how to complete the forms. Forms were returned to the teacher at the participant’s convenience.
Twelve students returned the permission slips in the teacher directed classroom; nine students did so in the learner-centered classroom. I focused on four students per class to explore the group’s dynamics and to explore how children discussed literacy together. Random sampling was used to choose four focal students from each classroom. These eight children became the focal students in the study. Focal students were given the opportunity to pick their own pseudonyms in order to protect their identity. Students and teachers were reminded that they could choose to decline their participation at anytime and that their participation was not mandatory. After all participants were selected, I observed each classroom during literacy lessons and wrote fieldnotes.

The School Sites

The two school sites were located in a large urban Northern California city. One of the schools was a large public elementary school, and the other was a small private elementary school. I collected classroom data at these two schools because I have professional ties to each of them. I am a teacher at the private school. However, I work in a different department than the participating teacher, and I had no prior connections to her. The private school also provided the connection to the public school: A parent of the school is the principal of the public school. Although I knew the parent, I had no former connection with the public school, staff, and children.
Wellington Elementary School

The public school. Wellington Elementary, is located on a busy street not far from houses and apartment complexes. Many of the students live near the school and can be seen walking to and from school, hand-in-hand with a parent. The school is settled in concrete surroundings and portable classrooms. It is pale in color and enclosed by chain link fences. A blue sign is placed near the entrance with the school’s name and important information for the week. Wellington Elementary prides itself on school performance and smaller class size ratios, which has resulted in higher than average test scores for its students. However, as of 2011, Wellington Elementary did not achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in regards to student performance and accountability as part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act.

The public school serves a culturally and socioeconomically diverse population of students at Wellington Elementary, located in Sacramento County. The majority of students who attend this school are of Euro-American (42%) and Hispanic American (23%) background. Thirteen percent of students were of African-American background and thirteen percent of students were of Asian American background. Sixty-four percent of students qualified for the free lunch program at the school. Though the majority of students in the second grade classroom of focus were of African-American and Asian American backgrounds; the classroom of focus had a higher population of these demographics compared to the school as a whole.

Many of the students are identified as English language learners. As part of the curriculum, one third of these students are required to attend intervention classes that help
them learn English. There are beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of intervention classes. Once children demonstrate competency in English, they are no longer required to attend intervention. The majority of students in attendance of intervention are Hispanic American, Asian American and Euro-American. Most of these children come from families where Spanish, Chinese, or Russian is the primary language spoken at home. Many children are also identified as GATE students and attend these classes while intervention hour takes place.

Middletown Elementary School

The private school, Middletown Elementary, serves families of mid to high SES and of Jewish heritage. Middletown Elementary strives to educate children on identifying with their Jewish heritage and desire to become lifelong learners. The school is located behind a black rode iron fence and automatic gate that is patrolled by a security officer. Beyond the parking lot, the school is divided into two sections: kindergarten through sixth grade and early childhood education. The elementary side is located in permanent buildings of a light tan color. The main entrance makes way to hallways of classrooms. The school is located in an urban low SES neighborhood. Children live all over the city as well as in surrounding cities. Most of these children come from highly affluent families. The private school is dedicated to academic excellence, social awareness, and personal growth.
The Teachers and Students

Wellington Elementary School Teacher and Teacher Strategies

One teacher and four children were observed at Wellington Elementary. Participating children sat together at the same table. Ms. Granada has been teaching for approximately 35 years and is from a Euro-American background. She holds a bachelor’s degree and multiple subjects credential and is compliant with No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In order to be NCLB complaint, a teacher must hold a bachelor’s degree and appropriate credential (e.g., multiple subjects for elementary, single subject for middle and high school) and demonstrate competence in a core subject area.

In addition, she has also completed some master degree level coursework. Ms. Granada has taught in three states, including Alaska and Kansas. She has also taught many different grade levels within the K-6th system and has helped English Language Learner (ELL) students through leveled academic intervention programs. These interventions provide ELL students with English language arts lessons that are developmentally appropriate.

Ms. Granada employs a variety of strategies to keep students focused and on task. These strategies include: an apple point system, chants and songs to bring students back to attention, movement activities that allow students to mingle about the classroom and discuss literacy information, and encouragement to be accountable for grading their own work.
The apple point system is similar to a card pulling behavior-monitoring system. Instead of students pulling different colored cards to display how they are behaving in class, they move apples up and down inside a multistoried house. All students start in the middle of the house at the beginning of the day. As the day progresses, Ms. Granada will inform individual or groups of students when they are in danger of their apples falling into basement, the lowest level in the house. When students’ apples reach the basement, they lose a privilege such as recess time. When students are having a great day their apples reach the attic; this is the highest level in the house. Students receive a reward such as free time if they reach the attic. The students are responsible for moving their apples accordingly under Ms. Granada’s instruction.

Ms. Granada encourages students to grade their own work and to be accountable for reporting their correct scores. This strategy teaches students to become accountable for not only grading their own work, but to understand why they have gained or lost points off their assignments. This is in contrast to the apple system, chants and songs, and mingles because Ms. Granada leads the activities. Moreover, student accountability within grading one’s own work enables students to make their own choices.

Ms. Granada approaches literacy with collaborative, small-group learning as well as large-group teacher directed activities. First, she introduces the area of study for the day and instructs students to begin working on their DLR worksheets. After students have several minutes to complete the worksheet, she uses songs and chants to bring the whole group back to focus. Students volunteer their answers for the DLR worksheet and Ms. Granada holds each student responsible for grading their own work.
A book is read at the beginning of the week and Ms. Granada discusses the characters, plot, and setting in the story. She prints sentences from the book onto sentence strips and passes them out to each student. Students use these sentence strips to participate in the mingle activity. During the mingle activity, students sing the mingle song and approach another student in the classroom; they are expected to discuss their sentence strips and determine if their sentence is about the characters, plot, or setting. After students mingle, they return to small groups. Roles are delegated out: each group will have a reporter, facilitator, and scribe. The reporter is responsible for sharing the groups’ ideas to the class, the facilitator keeps the discussion on topic, and the scribe writes down the ideas the group came up with.

Ms. Granada also utilizes large group activities. In language arts books, students read stories out loud and Ms. Granada pauses them to ask questions. She checks for their understanding by asking questions about the content and new vocabulary words. Anytime students approach a new word, they write it in their dictionaries and create their own sentences to describe the word. Ms. Granada is a very competent and engaged teacher. She demonstrates a wealth of knowledge in teaching strategies and is very experienced working with children of differing abilities.

**Wellington Elementary School Students**

Four students from this class were videotaped. Two children are identified as ELL students and one as a GATE student. These second grade students represent the cultural and linguistic diversity of the school.
Catwoman is a bright, curly haired girl who is considered a GATE student. She has a mixed ethnic background: African-American and Euro-American. She is very opinionated, outspoken, and social. Typically, she is quick to respond to questions raised by Ms. Granada and, on occasion, is allowed to add her own input during the videotaped sessions. Catwoman is seen typically leading small group discussions and acting as a reporter to Ms. Granada during large group activities. She often volunteers herself into the reporter position to share what ideas her small group came up with.

Rosie is a quiet, dark haired girl who is an ELL student. In addition to learning English, Rosie speaks Chinese fluently and is of Chinese-American decent. She has been identified as a GATE student and is no longer required to attend intervention classes. Although Rosie typically has correct answers on the plot, setting, and characters in a story, she is less inclined to shout out her responses like her peer, Catwoman. However, in small group discussions, Rosie flourishes and helps keep her peers on task. She promotes interesting ideas and is often seen engaging in conversation with Catwoman during the videotaped session.

Dan is a calm Chinese-American boy. He has short, thin, black hair that is about one inch long. Dan is an ELL student who speaks Chinese as his first language. Dan attends intervention classes, although Ms. Granada suggests that he may no longer need to attend much longer. Dan is quick to raise his hand, but seldom gets called on to share his response. He tends to joke around with Catwoman and Rosie at the table during literacy lessons. At times, he appears to enjoy repeating syllables to himself and making
rhythms with the different sounds. Dan tends to move the group more off task during small group discussions, but Rosie is quick to step in and refocus the group.

Alysa is a focused African-American girl. Ms. Granada suggests that she performs at the GATE level, although she has not been identified as GATE. She has long dark hair that is usually in many braids with different colored barrettes at the ends. She can typically be seen writing and drawing with her pencil and changing her eraser multiple times. Often times, she rests her head on her hand and remains focused on her literary assignments. During small group discussions, she shares her ideas with her group members and can clearly be heard when Ms. Granada asks students to repeat information after her.

**Middletown Private School Teacher and Teaching Strategies**

Ms. Burlingame has been teaching for approximately 25 years and is of Euro-American background. She holds a bachelor’s degree and multiple subjects credential. She is experienced in teaching mid to high SES children in private schools and has taught in California her entire career. In addition, Ms. Burlingame has taken on the role of computer teacher and helps foster children’s technological development through the use of computers. Ms. Burlingame employs a wide range of strategies to keep students engaged in literacy lessons including: keeping individual dictionaries and thesaurus, drawing character maps, reading aloud and holding class wide discussions, and relating the literacy material to student experiences.
Ms. Burlingame has high expectations for her students and encourages them to be helpers within the community. They have jobs assigned to them on a weekly basis such as bringing the attendance roll sheet into the office. Each morning, she asks them to open their homework binders and show evidence that a parent checked over their work. There is a sheet that is dated where parents sign as proof of checking over their child’s homework.

Ms. Burlingame approaches literacy with collaborative, small-group learning as well as large-group discussions where she begins the discussion with an open-ended question and facilitates the discussion between the students. Often times, she will ask students to answer open-ended questions in small group activities and report the information to the entire class. This approach tends to spark class-wide discussions where all students can be seen sharing their thoughts, ideas, and personal experiences.

She approaches the topic of a new book by having children look at the pictures on the cover and explain what they think is happening. They link the title of the book to the pictures and then read the back cover of the book. She has the children discuss the information and act as investigators. They decipher the information placed on the back of the book and predict what they believe will happen in the story. As the begin reading the story, she pauses students to think critically about the components of the story and to discuss what is occurring. Ms. Burlingame is a very competent teacher and acts as a facilitator of knowledge; she remains very engaged during this process.
Middletown Students

Four students from this class were videotaped. Two are ELL students that have demonstrated competency in English. All four students belong to the Jewish faith. They are representative of the student population of Middletown.

Leyah is a bright and knowledgeable girl. She has medium length, thick light brown hair and green eyes. She is tri-lingual, speaking English, Hebrew, and Yiddish. Leyah is Jewish-American and has family roots in Israel. Leyah typically adds her ideas into class discussions and includes her own experience as well. Leyah participates and responds in a mature and polite manner and is usually one of the first students to complete her work. After completing her work, she typically moves on to helping her neighboring peers and asks them if they have any questions.

Bounty is a dark haired boy who sometimes wiggles out of his chair. He is an ELL student with Hebrew being his first language. He is Jewish-American and first generation American. Bounty loves sharing his ideas with the class; many of his ideas appear to be very sophisticated. Although sometimes he appears to not be working on the current assignment, Bounty impresses Ms. Burlingame by making comments or responding to inquiries that demonstrate he is focused on the activity.

Addy is a boy who is an ELL student; he speaks Hebrew fluently. He is a first generation American, with a Jewish heritage. He has short, dark brown hair and large brown eyes. Addy tends to wear clothing that is tie-dye colored and appeared to be sick with a cold through most of the data collection process. He often enjoys participating in class discussions and seeking opinions on some of his thoughts. Addy tends to tie in his
own experiences with those of the main character in the books that are discussed in class. He is often seen playing with his pencil, looking through the inside of his desk, and glancing over in the direction where the researcher was sitting.

Camilia is a cheerful and focused dark haired girl. She is Euro-American with a strong Jewish background. She is quick to raise her hand and likes to share her ideas during the class discussions. Camilia is often seen asking Ms. Burlingame questions and checking in with her peer, David. She tends to rest her head on her hand and look around the room as she pauses from her work. Often, she is seen standing up and moving around the classroom. Camilia enjoys reading aloud during literacy lessons and making interpretations about characters based on their picture and the back of a book.

**Data Collection Procedures**

First, the two teachers were interviewed more in depth about their teaching practices and background information. Second, I observed each classroom during a literacy lesson and was introduced to the classroom by the teacher. This helped potential focal students become familiar with my presence. Third, in each second grade classroom, four focal children were video and audio taped over the course of two months.

**The Interviews**

The two teachers were interviewed individually in an informal and unstructured format. This included: years of teaching experience, grade levels taught, and educational
background. These interviews provided information on how the participating teachers perceived their teaching practices and allowed time for them to elaborate on their experiences. Participants were asked questions about their teaching practices, their teaching philosophies, literacy goals for their class, length of experience, and education levels. At the end of the interview, the participants were offered the opportunity to share any additional information and to ask questions they had in reference to the research. Interviews were approximately 30 minutes.

Pre-Study Classroom Visits

I attended each classroom twice to observe literacy lessons. This allowed me to familiarize myself with the teacher, students, and teaching practices used in the classroom. During this visit, I introduced myself to the students in the class and asked them if they had any questions. I responded to their questions, interest in my educational background, and teaching background. After this initial meeting with students, I sat at a desk located on the side of the classroom. I observed the classroom for one hour to become familiar with the classroom discourse, interactions, and teaching practices. Observing in the classroom also allowed students to become familiar and comfortable with me. During the next observation, I collected all of the consent forms and checked for completion. Focal students were chosen through random sampling during this meeting. I met with the student participants at their classroom table. First, I asked the students if they had any questions and told them what would happen and what to expect. Second, I showed them the equipment and taught them how to use the lapel microphones.
Third, I set up the classroom for a video and audio tape session. During the first session, equipment was set up but was turned off; this was done to desensitize the students to the novelty of the equipment and researcher.

**Data Collection**

During the next session, I set up the equipment to record data. Two high definition video cameras were used to video tape the classrooms during their literacy lessons. One camera was focused on the teacher; the other camera was focused on the four focal students. One wireless lapel microphone was provided to the teacher to wear during her lesson, and two wireless lapel microphones were provided to the focal students. Each microphone was equipped to pick up the sound of two students, totaling four focal students. A digital multi-track recorder was used to record all audio data; the teacher was set on track A, the students on track B. I monitored the video and audio equipment throughout the duration of recording in order to ensure that the equipment was functioning and focusing in on the focal students. This process was repeated for the second school. Four one-hour visits were completed to each school during the data collection phase. Eight hours of video and audio data were collected.
Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative Approaches to Analyzing Classroom Practices

The present study utilizes a qualitative approach that is embedded in grounded theory. Qualitative research methodologies provide the opportunity to expand on a particular phenomenon (e.g., children’s literacy development under teaching practice), though qualitative research continues to be limited on the present topic. That is, most studies exploring literacy development in classrooms are quantitative in their research methodologies. Moreover, Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain that these qualitative methodologies are particularly useful in documenting an in-depth look at a particular phenomenon. Insofar as teaching practices and literacy development have been studied, using a qualitative approach provides a detailed account for how literacy is achieved under two different styles of teaching practice. A qualitative approach provides a detailed way in which to explain data in a way that is familiar and understandable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, qualitative research allows for an emergent design in which the data drives the research and the researcher is able to act as the source of data collection (Hoepfl, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain that using a grounded theory approach helps derive theory and provides an in-depth understanding of the particular phenomenon. The present study will encompass the grounded theory approach and will describe the phenomenon in order to expand the literature on literacy and teaching practices.
**Transcription of Classroom Recordings**

All audio files of classroom interactions were transferred into wav files and were synced with the video recordings using Windows Movie Maker. Next, the synchronized audio and video file was transferred into the program Handbrake to transcode the video into MP4 or M4V, the format useable by Transana. Some sections of the audio required trimming because there was not an associated section of video. This typically occurred during the first 10 seconds of each video because the multi-track recorder was turned on first. The program Audacity was used to complete this process. In total, 8 hours of video and audio data were recorded (e.g., 4 hours per classroom).

The next step was to transcribe the video and audio data. First, 8 hours of video data were transcribed verbatim using Transana 2.0, an open source program. Transana 2.0 was developed at the University of Wisconsin in order to analyze qualitative data. The Transana program was developed by David Woods for researchers so they could analyze and code at a more conceptual level; this provides opportunities to highlight and organize clips of data for further analysis. Another tool within Transana is time coding. This is a tool that helps separate data and allows for data to be located by time and for data to be indexed. I used time coding at every other speaker; this allowed me to organize categories of patterns within the data. Jeffersonian coding conventions were used to describe inflection in vocal tonality and actions within the classroom in order to analyze speech differences throughout the data. Moreover, Jeffersonian coding
incorporates the actions that are occurring simultaneously with conversation. Excerpts of data were derived from this program and put into separate collections for coding.

**Open Coding**

Second, I began the open coding process by placing interesting pieces of data into collections concurrent with the transcription process. These collections were further elaborated on, and thus, initial ideas were developed and uncovered. Instances in the data in which children displayed interesting insights and responses to teacher questions/discussions (e.g., seeking answers, asking for elaboration) during literacy discussions were notated with descriptive codes. Moreover, additional codes were developed to indicate instances of encouraged and discouraged child participation. In parallel, the researcher wrote theoretical memos. These memos contain the evolving thoughts and ideas of the researcher throughout the transcription and coding process. Initially, these notes were very broad but became more focused as core themes were chosen.

**Axial Coding**

After open coding was complete, three main focal themes were identified and were analyzed at a deeper level. First, child connections to the literature were explored because this thesis explores the importance of literacy development. That is, it was assumed that children make connections to literature based on their own personal experiences. Second, teacher initiations into class discussions of literacy were also
explored because the way teachers discussed literacy differed between the two styles teaching practices. Third, teacher responses to children’s literacy discussion contributions was also explored because different styles of practice may promote a child’s individual interest and allow them to elaborate their thoughts more in depth during class discussions.

Next, axial coding was used to organize the data into the three identified themes: child literary interpretations, teacher discussions of literacy, teacher response to student contributions, and meaningful off-topic contributions emerged. Each piece of data was disaggregated and compared among similar pieces of data in each category. After this organization, some pieces of data were removed from the focal themes and further consideration for closer analysis.

**Closed Coding**

After deeper analysis and re-reading of the data, three themes emerged from the data. This was part of the closed coding analysis. First, teacher initiation into literacy discussion was focused upon. Teachers have the power to initiate literacy discussion among their students. Moreover, the way in which teachers introduce a new topic provokes the way in which children will respond and contribute to the topic. Next was a focus on teacher response to children’s contributions during discussion. Teachers can allow for children to demonstrate sophisticated interactions during a discussion by providing probing questions and encouragement, or end the discussion by discouraging the child’s response. Third, a focus on child personal and experiential connections during literacy discussion emerged. When teachers allow for children to elaborate, they are
providing their students with an opportunity to develop a sophisticated understanding of the topic and to provide new insights to their peers. The fourth category of off-topic contributions was removed due to irrelevancy. The two teachers will be compared in these areas because they had different teaching practices. One teacher had a teacher directed practice and the other had a learner-centered practice. These three themes will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

Qualitative analysis of synchronized classroom data revealed three major aspects of classroom interactions: (1) Teacher initiation into literacy discussion; (2) child personal and experiential connections during literacy lessons; and (3) teacher response to children’s contributions during literacy discussions. These three aspects occurred within multiple turn taking discussion during classroom discourse and were present in both teacher directed and learner-centered classrooms. The overall purpose of the study was to look for patterns in how these three aspects of classroom practice work together and to compare these aspects within the teacher directed and learner-centered teaching practices.

Classroom discourse encompasses many interactions through the learning environment. In order to decipher how children are developing literacy under two styles of teaching practice, conversations in the classroom have been broken down and analyzed in three parts. These three parts are: teacher initiation, child contribution, and child/teacher response to contributions. First, teacher initiation into literary discussions creates the learning environment for children to construct knowledge. Second, children built connections upon peer discussions (e.g., teacher input or child input) and constructed literary material in ways that made sense to them. Moreover, these connections provided children with ample opportunity to use each other as facilitators of knowledge and develop sophisticated understandings about the current subject matter. Third, teachers responded (e.g., provided feedback, constructive criticism, extending
learning, dismissing) to students’ understanding of the topic. These three themes will be explored throughout this chapter in two classrooms.

Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory will be used to analyze exemplar data excerpts. Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory focuses on the relationships between the use of speech and tools and how children learn under the zone of proximal development. How children learn literacy varies under two approaches of teaching practices. Though the outcome of literacy learning is consistent in both classrooms, the processes in which children gain competency in literacy varies, depending upon the approach. By closely examining the data under a socio-cultural lens, three aspects of classroom discourse will be explored. These aspects were identified as (a) teacher initiation into literary discussions; (b) child contributions to literary discussion; and (c) teacher/child response and feed to contributions. Discourse analysis was used to examine the three parts of conversation within classroom discussion and to explore how children made use of speech and tools to develop competency in literacy during English lessons.

The data and analysis are presented in the following ways: reporting overall results in both classrooms, identifying and discussing how the three major aspects of classroom discourse intermingle, and comparison of the three major aspects between the two classrooms. Data analysis also exposed the single pattern of the development of literacy under varying style of teaching practice found in this collection of data.
General Patterns

Wellington Teacher Introduction to Daily Literacy Topics

Ms. Granada is a second-grade teacher at Wellington Elementary School. She is a well educated, competent, and engaging teacher at Wellington Elementary. Through initial meetings and observations, I found her to meet the criteria of what a teacher directed practice looks like. However, I have discovered that Ms. Granada approaches teaching with a mixed method approach; she utilizes both teacher directed and learner-centered practices. On a typical day in second grade at Wellington Elementary, students begin their English lessons by taking out their homework and turning it in to Ms. Granada. They revisit the apple chart and place their apples inside the house; this system is very similar to the pulling card system often seen in elementary schools. By placing their apples inside the house, they begin their day off to a good start. For good and on-task behavior, students are allowed to move their apples up to the top level of the house; this level means that they are having an excellent day. However, if children in this class are off task, their apples “will fall all the way down into the basement” (as Ms. Granada states). Falling into the basement demonstrates that a particular child is having a rough day and will lose a privilege, such as recess.

After the daily administrative tasks are completed, the children begin work on a new DLR (Daily Language Review). DLR’s are worksheets that allow children to practice sentence structure, grammar, and correct spelling. Students are expected to locate the errors in the sentences and to correct them. For example, one sentence
described a child going to the park to play with three friends. The children’s names were not separated by commas or capitalized; students corrected these errors and re-wrote the sentence. During this time, Ms. Granada prepares the learning environment with her lessons for the day. She allows the children to work on this assignment for several minutes. The students are instructed to work on this assignment individually, though some can be seen whispering to a child sitting nearby. Ms. Granada asks the classroom for her attention and passes out red pens for the children to correct their DLR’s. She fluctuates between calling on children to share answers to looking for quiet hands; she calls on children with quiet hands to share their answers. Ms. Granada holds the children in her class responsible for correcting their own work and to be honest during this process. The children are required report their scores to Ms. Granada.

When DLR’s are complete, the focus is shifted into dictionaries and thesauruses; each child in the class keeps a personal dictionary and thesaurus. Ms. Granada introduces a word to the class and they write it into their dictionary. During one lesson, they focus on the word “serve.” Ms. Granada initiates the discussion of the word and asks questions such as, “What does it mean to serve?” And, “What are similar words?” Children are allowed to “shout out” their responses when Ms. Granada asks for a shout out. The students attempt to define the word and find words that are similar. When a consensus is reached among the class, Ms. Granada introduces more complex words that she calls “college words.” The children add these words to their thesaurus and write a sentence with the target word “serve” in the sentence. Ms. Granada asks for “righteous hands”
(e.g., another way of asking for quiet hands), and children share their newly created sentences.

Ms. Granada demonstrates a structured, yet engaging way of introducing the topic of literacy to her second grade students. She begins the lesson with a structured task, such as the completion of DLR worksheets. She moves on to introducing new words such as the word “serve” and engages students in becoming active participants in learning the new word. By using a self-created thesaurus, children are making meaning to the word “serve” in ways that make sense to them. One child related the word “serve” to the word “help.” By constructing this bridge between the two words, this child has demonstrated a newer understanding of the target word; the information is negotiated in a way that made sense to him. Yet, Ms. Granada prepared the classroom environment for this negotiation of information and explicitly and implicitly mediated the child to reach this understanding. In explicit terms, the child understood the word and that developing competency in the word was an expectation. In implicit terms, the children connected the two words through decoding the word and translated into a word that made sense to him. Through these sophisticated processes, Ms. Granada guided the child from their actual to their potential development of the word “serve” within the zone of proximal development; with the children thus entering into intersubjectivity with Ms. Granada.

**Middletown Teacher Introduction to Daily Literacy Topics**

Ms. Burlingame, a teacher at Middletown Elementary, was initially identified as teacher with a learner-centered approach. She is a very engaging and competent
facilitator of knowledge. Through my initial meetings and observations, I found her to demonstrate a learner-centered approach. During the analysis process, I found her to typically utilize a learner-centered approach, although she did include instances of a teacher directed approach. On a typical day at Middletown Elementary, the students arrive and take out their spelling words. Similar to Ms. Granada’s DLR assignments, the children at this school explore a list of spelling words. Ms. Burlingame initiates the discussion about spelling words, features of the spelling words, and why it is important to learn them. She instructs students to pull out their words and to sort them. Each child has written the spelling words on an individual small piece of paper. Children scatter around the classroom to find an open space on the floor and begin sorting words based on the feature of the word. In one lesson, children sort words based upon the feature “igh.” Children can be heard whispering homophones of similar words. Any word that contains the feature is placed in one pile; the other words are placed in a secondary pile. After sorting is complete, the children return to their desks with the sorted words in hand.

Ms. Burlingame introduces the discussion on word features. Children demonstrate their competency by accurately identifying what words belong in what pile. All participating students give accurate answers and begin contributing to the teacher-initiated discussion. Many students respond to Ms. Burlingame’s open-ended questions with contributions such as, “Spelling correctly means you can communicate with others” and “It helps for you to learn more words.” These responses demonstrate children’s understanding of why it is important to be literate. Ms. Burlingame has efficiently explicitly and implicitly mediated her students in a short time to develop comprehension
of new spelling words, sort them based on features, and to demonstrate why it is important to spell words correctly.

Recording words in a dictionary and thesaurus is the next step; this is similar to Ms. Granada’s approach. Children place “new words” (e.g., words that were previously unfamiliar the class as a whole) in their personal dictionary. They create similar words in their thesaurus. During one lesson, they discuss the differences between the words “there”, “their”, and “they’re” and add the different meanings to their personal dictionary. In contrast to Ms. Granada’s approach, Ms. Burlingame does not introduce college words. Instead she asks her students to write a “personal” word in their dictionary and to develop a sentence for it. One restriction that Ms. Burlingame places on her students is that the word must have been a word previously unfamiliar to them.

Ms. Burlingame demonstrates a flexible and guided approach when she introduces literacy. Students begin to work independently by sorting the spelling words according to certain features. This provides students the opportunity to master information and gain an understanding of the word features and demonstrates her use of explicitly mediating students to gain competency in correct spelling. During the classroom wide discussion of spelling words, Ms. Burlingame introduces the topic with an open-ended question about why learning spelling words is important. By including open-ended questions, children have the opportunity to participate in unstructured responses and to build knowledge upon each other’s thoughts. There are no incorrect responses; rather, children have an opportunity to construct meaning together. Ms. Burlingame implicitly mediates her students through new and personal word entries in
their dictionaries. Students demonstrate responsibilities for learning by including words they believe are important to know in the classroom. By learning words that are considered important to themselves and their teacher, they enter into intersubjectivity with Ms. Burlingame.

The way the teachers approached the topic of literacy retained some similarity among classrooms. Both teachers utilize personal dictionaries and thesauruses to guide children’s learning and development of literacy. These tools provide students with tangible information to enable them to expand their vocabulary and to effectively communicate in the classroom. Not one approach is more beneficial than the other, literacy competency is being achieved in both classrooms through teacher initiations and use of literary materials such as personal dictionaries and thesauruses.

**Wellington Children’s Personal and Experiential Connections**

At Wellington Elementary, children demonstrated meaning making processes through participation in both small group and large group activities and discussions. A variety of strategies were utilized in Ms. Granada’s classroom. She carefully chose activities for the children to participate in to learn literacy.

One activity that Ms. Granada utilized was the “mingle” activity. Children walked around the classroom while singing the mingle song. When the song ended, they had to find a partner from a different table. They had to “put their heads together” and discuss what they thought the story was about and what were the characters, plot, and setting. Each child had a piece of paper with a sentence from a story that either described
the characters, setting, or plot. This activity went through several partners and then they reunited as a group. Children in this class typically read the sentence to their partner and told them what aspect of the story they thought it was. The other children had to agree or disagree and explain why. Discussing characters, setting, and plot is a sophisticated process for second grade children to engage in; they were identifying parts of a story successfully.

After discussing information with individual partners, the students were placed into three large groups based on their sentence strips. There was a character, setting, and plot group. The children in these groups were responsible for sharing their sentence and explaining to the group why they believed their sentence described characters, setting, or the plot. The group “put their heads together” and thought critically about the sentence and as a group, decided if that sentence belonged with the others. Most students participated with the right group; a few students were seen switching groups to be with the right sentence structure group.

Ms. Granada asked for her students to “bring it back” (a saying she used to call attention back to her) and they returned to their desks. She initiated a discussion with students about characters, setting, and plot. Children raised “righteous hands” and demonstrated their knowledge of the sentence strips. One child responded, “Mine is about the characters because it talks about the man.” Another responded, “My sentence is about the plot because there is action.” These children demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of indentifying three key parts of a story. Children in this class also backed up their contributions with evidence. That is, instead of stating their sentence was
about a character, they explained why it was about a character. Ms. Granada often responded to her students by commending them for thinking critically about the sentence and providing evidence to back up their information. In these instances, she is supporting their development of identifying story elements, ability to think critically about information, and to provide support for their conclusions.

**Middletown Children’s Personal and Experiential Connections**

At Middletown Elementary, Ms. Burlingame also discussed characters, setting, and plot with her second grade students. During one visit, Ms. Burlingame introduced the book *Molly’s Pilgrim* to the class. She began this exercise by having the class look at the picture on the cover of the book. She initiated the discussion by asking them what they saw and what they thought the story would be about. Ms. Burlingame provided her students with a character map that included a person stick figure and lines to write story information. A few students share their ideas without raising their hands; this is something not always necessary in this classroom. One child states, “Based on the picture, I think she looks sad. Maybe her friends are mad at her.” This is a sophisticated response to the teacher’s open-ended question about what the book was about. Ms. Burlingame responds to the child’s contribution by saying, “It is very possible. Let’s read the back of the book to learn more information.” One child reads the back page out loud.

Children in the class share their thoughts on what the book is about. Ms. Burlingame mentions the new information that they have learned: The main character’s name, farming, Molly is sad, and Molly is a pilgrim. As a class, they read aloud the first
three pages of the book. Ms. Burlingame pauses them and asks the class what information they have learned about Molly. Many of the students respond to the question by stating how Molly feels and they relate it to a time they felt similar. Small groups are formed and the children discuss the different emotions Molly is experiencing as well as where they think Molly immigrated from. In one small group, the children come up with the word “irritated” and report to the class, “Molly feels bad and irritated and sad.” Ms. Burlingame commends her students on using a nice word. She extends their learning by asking them what another big word is that they learned in first grade. One child mentions, “Excluded. She feels excluded and that makes her feel sad.” The children in this classroom build knowledge upon each other’s statements and construct knowledge together. Ms. Burlingame acts as a facilitator of knowledge during English discussions and embodies her students with the ability to make connections to literature through their experiences.

Comparison of the Two Classrooms

In both classrooms, children make personal and experiential connections to literature. However, the way they do is significantly different. In Ms. Granada’s teacher-directed approach, multiple small group activities are conducted before attending a large group discussion. The children in this class are responsible for developing an understanding why a sentence from a story includes information about characters, setting, or plot. It is not enough to state what element of a story the sentence is from; they must back up their information by using critical thinking skills and explain why the sentence is
about a certain element. In this classroom, children make more experiential connections than in Ms. Burlingame’s classroom. That is, they contribute evidence-based responses. Therefore, the second graders in Ms. Granada’s class have developed a sophisticated set of tools to decode and make meaning out of a story through exercising the process. Thus, practice makes perfect; these students have become experts at decoding information.

In Ms. Burlingame’s learner-centered approach, children also elaborate characters, setting, and plot through a continuous and developing discussion. Contextual clues and decoding are utilized in order to make meaning out of the story. The approach is done with a book, discussion, and character web. Children add information about the main character to web as they discover it. Entire class and small group discussions are utilized and students share their thoughts about the setting, plot, and character; this is done intermingled. Often times, students in this class share information about the story and include all three elements about the story. For instance, one student responded, “Molly is sad because her friends are mean to her at school and don’t want to play with her.” This utterance includes all three components of decoding the story. Another student adds, “I was mad at my friend once and didn’t talk to her. I think Molly feels the same way.” This is an example of building knowledge through experiential and personal contributions. While Ms. Granada explicitly mediates her students to decipher different elements of a story, Ms. Burlingame implicitly mediates her students to decode the parts of the story by encompassing a variety of strategies. Thus, students in this class partake in highly sophisticated classroom discourse about a story and arrive at ideas about characters, setting, and plot. It is important to note that the students in both classes are
developing competency utilizing literary tools and are successful at decoding a story and making meaning out of the context. Though each teacher utilizes a different approach, children in both classes are demonstration competency in decoding and thus, entering into intersubjectivity with their teacher and class.

**Teacher/Child Responses to Children’s Contributions**

Ms. Granada and Ms. Burlingame both responded in engaging and supportive ways toward their students’ contributions whether they were personal or experiential. Their approaches differed slightly. Ms. Granada typically responded to her students through encouraging them to back up their information. It was an anomaly for a child to not back their information up. Thus, when this occurred, Ms. Granada would ask them to explain why. Children also responded to other children’s contributions in similar ways.

In Ms. Burlingame’s classroom, children were often commended for using big words or tying information together. Children often expanded upon each other’s contributions with either a personal connection, or critical thinking experience. They often finished each other’s contributions if one child struggled to formulate their idea. Similar to Ms. Granada’s classroom, children also responded to other children’s contributions in similar ways. Open-ended questions or personal experiences were exchanged when discussing the thoughts of others.
Excerpts

The following excerpts have been transcribed verbatim from qualitative classroom video and audio data. The individuals in the data consist of the teachers and focal students in whole class and small group discussions. Two excerpts are analyzed for all three aspects of classroom discourse: One excerpt from a teacher directed and one excerpt from a learner centered classroom. The excerpts will be compared and contrasted. The following excerpts serve as exemplars in the data and highlight teacher initiation into literary discussions, child contributions, and child/teacher response to contributions.

Excerpts and Analysis

Exemplar excerpts have been carefully chosen, discussed, and analyzed below. This section serves the purpose of exploring literacy-based discussions during second grade English Language Arts lessons and two schools. Two teaching approaches will be explored and the process of literacy developed will be discussed and analyzed below. Table 1 is placed below Excerpt 1 with a list of Jeffersonian convections used and descriptions of the speech markers (Jefferson, 1984).

Excerpt 1: Let’s Talk About Kindness (Teacher Directed Practice)

The students in Ms. Granada’s class are learning about three elements of a story. They just completed the “mingle” activity and decided what sentence strips discussed
characters, setting, and plot. The children have returned to their desks and are currently
participated in a small table group discussion. The four focal students Catwoman, Rosie,
Dan, and Alysa contribute their ideas about the story elements and things they have
learned today. Ms. Granada asks her class to “bring it back” and is calling on a reporter
from each small table group to share information about what they learned from the book.
The reporter is a member from each small table group. This group member is responsible
for making meaning out of the small group’s discussion and sharing what they learned
with the whole class. Table six is the next group to participate and Alysa, who is the
reporter, shares with the class what they learned.

Ms. Granada: and table six: (. ) what ↑ did you learn ↑
Celly: ↑ Alysa
Dan: ((Motions with his hands toward Alysa.))
Alysa: um we: (…) we learned about being ↑ kindness to ↓ um: other
people ↓
Ms. Granada ↑ so we learned a lot about being kind I'm really glad that
↑ SOMEBody remembered the plot and: characters cause what did we work on today ↑
Jamie: Hhhh
Ms. Granada plot ( . ) characters ( . ) and: : : [ setting ↓
Students: [ setting
Jamie: ↑ oh ↓ I know what we did today (. ) we did that party ↓
Ms. Granada: we did that party that we did too
### Table 1

**Identifying Jeffersonian Convention Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>: or :: or ...</td>
<td>Elongated sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>Inaudible speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[</td>
<td>Indicates overlapping speech between more than one person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↑ or ↓</td>
<td>Rising or falling intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPITAL</td>
<td>The capitalized speech is considerably louder than the surrounding sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(…) or (..) or (.)</td>
<td>Identifies a micro pause in speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Action.)</td>
<td>Notates a nonverbal gesture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hhhh</td>
<td>Aspiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;&gt; or &lt; &gt;</td>
<td>Slowed down or speeded up talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>Continuation of a person’s speech with interruption by another person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the above excerpt, Ms. Granada asks table six what they learned by stating, “And table six: (.) what↑ did you learn?“ (line 1). Another student, Celly, who is a member at the nearby table says, “↑Alysa” (line 2). In line 3, Dan motions to Alysa with his hands to share the group’s findings to Ms. Granada. In lines 4-5, Alysa states, “Um we: (…) we learned about being ↑kindness to ↓um: other peo:ple↓.” in response to Ms. Granada’s question in line 1. Ms. Granada extended Alysa’s thoughts and praised her by saying, “↑so we learned a lot about being ki::nd I'm really glad that ↑SOMEbody remembered the pl:ot and: char:acters cau:se what did we work on today↑” in lines 6-8. Toward the end of her sentence, she lowers the level of her voice and briefly pauses. Jamie, a student at the neighboring table makes and loud, audible breathing noise in line 9. In line 10, Ms. Granada continues her thought about what the class worked on today
by saying, “Plot(.) characters(..) and::: [setting↓” and at the same time, the majority of the class chimes in and says the word setting at the same time in line 11. Jamie added, “↑Oh↓ I know what we did today (. ) we did that party↓” to contribute to Ms. Granada’s comment about students remembering what they did earlier in class (line 12). In line 13, Ms. Granada confirms and acknowledges Jamie’s comment by saying, “We did that party that we did too.”

**Analysis of Excerpt 1**

Ms. Granada encourages collaborative small and large group discussions during literacy lessons. After a several minute long small group discussion, Ms. Granada calls on the reporter from each group one by one to contribute to the class discussion about what they learned from the book. In line 1, Ms. Granada calls on Alysa, the reporter from group six to share her small groups’ findings; group six is the focal group. Alysa shares with the group that they learned about kindness by stating, “Um we: (…) we learned about being ↑kindness to ↓um: other peo:ple↓” (lined 4-5). This utterance demonstrates Alysa’s understanding of the plot in the story. Ms. Granada further extends Alysa’s participation by saying to the class, “↑so we learned a lot about being ki::nd” (line 6). She explains that the class has learned a lot about being kind and the importance of being kind to other people. Ms. Granada further compliments Alysa in lines 6-7 by saying, “I’m really glad that ↑SOMEbody remembered the pl:ot and: char:acters” and reminds the class of what they focused on earlier during their mingle activity: plot,
characters, and setting. This emphasizes the importance of identifying the plot, characters, and setting within a story.

In line 7-8, Ms. Granada continues her sentence by stating, “cause what did we work on today↑” to encourage more participation from other students to share what the class worked on earlier. She briefly pauses, as if she awaits other students to participate but none immediately do. Ms. Granada continues her thought by saying, “Plot(.) characters(.) and::: [setting↓” to further emphasizes the importance of understanding and comprehending these three main aspects points in a story (line 10). She briefly pauses between identifying the key points, perhaps to encourage student participation to fill in the blanks. No students participate after she briefly pauses after saying plot or characters. Ms. Granada elongates the word and by saying, “and:::” in line 10 and awaits for students to participate with the answer “setting” as she concludes her thought. In line 11, many students do participate by saying setting at the same time as Ms. Granada, which demonstrates a moment of structured, teacher directed question with a specific answer already in mind. Rather than extend learning, Ms. Granada appears to be satisfied with this response and is ready to move on to the next group until Jamie participates in line 12. Jamie announces with an excited voice, “↑Oh↓ I know what we did today (. ) we did that party↓” in reference to the mingle activity that Ms. Granada had them do at the beginning of the lesson. The mingle activity encouraged the discussion of characters, setting, and plot and made decoding the story possible.

Through the use of different strategies, the students in this class were able to demonstrate their knowledge. Deciphering the plot and setting is an advanced concept
for second-graders. The mingle activity consisted of Ms. Granada passing out a slip of paper to each student with a sentence that was either about the characters, setting, or plot. As the class sang the mingle song, they walked around the room with the paper in hand. When the song ended, students had to meet with another child to discuss where their sentence belonged; these were actual sentences about characters, setting, and plots taken verbatim out of the book. In line 13, Ms. Granada confirms Jamie’s response by stating, “We did that party that we did too.” She acknowledges Jamie’s response, but does not further extend learning by linking it to the current literacy lesson.

Ms. Granada initiates the discussion of literacy by asking reporters to share their groups’ contributions about what they learned. Many students tend to implore they learned about people, but Alysa extends the discussion further by stating they learned about kindness. Ms. Granada indirectly praises Alysa for her response. Other students begin to participate and share activities that they did earlier in the lesson that was linked to the setting, characters, and plot. Ms. Granada acknowledges child experiential contributions and praises her students for linking information to the characters, setting, or plot. In this excerpt we see that a) the teacher initiates a literary discussion by asking groups to share what they learned b) children make experiential connections to the characters, setting, and plot in a story, and c) the teacher praises students for linking information to the setting and plot, two concepts which are sophisticated for second grade students.
Excerpt 2: What is Yiddish? (Learner-Centered Practice)

Ms. Burlingame introduced the book *Molly’s Pilgrim* to her students. They explore the cover, back, and beginning pages of the story to decode and predict what the story is about. While discussing the cover and back of the book, many students contribute to the discussion explaining that they think Molly might be sad, a pilgrim, a farmer, and that she may have immigrated from another country. There is a small group discussion about Molly’s feelings and potential experiences as an immigrant to New York City. After reading the first few pages of the book, the teacher and students discover that Molly speaks Yiddish. A class-wide discussion begins about what Yiddish is and Ms. Burlingame provides feedback to her students. Focal student Leyah participates in this interaction; Bounty, Addy and Camilia do not. Anton and Leyah share their interpretations and personal experiences regarding what Yiddish is.

Ms. Burlingame:  Now wait(…) what is Yiddish(…) what is it(…) Anton

Anton:  Yiddish is what the Hebrew nation people did: and they think of and they >the the< you know(…) they stay together in Yiddish so ( ) attack them they got captured and in Yiddish so no one could understand them=

Ms. Burlingame:  So it was a lan:guage that was invented: or created by the Jewish people (…) and >they spoke it< so no one else would know(…) what does the it mostly sound like: what does it ki:n::d of sound like

Leyah:  >I I know< how to speak it (((Rais es her hand.)))

Ms. Burlingame:  Um::: >Leyah has a nice quiet hand up< will you tell us more
about Yiddish?

Leyah: Um I really don't know what it is: but my grandfather used to sing it to me in a song:: something like (    ) Hanukah oh:
Han:ukah:: (    ) (...) ((Places hands on her face.)) I don't know why: (.) I can't remember right now

Ms. Burlingame: That's okay(..) Maybe you can practice it tonight and share the song with us tomorrow=

Leyah: ((Nods head.))

Ms. Burlingame: =Okay:: so: I just learned from the expert that Yiddish is a combination of German and Hebrew and it wasn't a written language (…) Just like what Anton said(..) they used this language so they didn't get captured(. It was a secret language

Leyah: I remember some of the words now (    )

Ms. Burlingame: so: it sounds similar

In lines 14, Ms. Burlingame initiates the literary discussion by asking her class what Yiddish is by saying, “Now wait(..) what is Yiddish(..) what is it(…) Anton.” She calls on Anton to share his ideas. Anton contributes, “Yiddish is what the Hebrew nation people did:” (line 15). He continues his thought in lines 15-17 by saying, “and they think of and they >the the< you know(..) they stay together in Yiddish so (   ).” Part of his speech is inaudible and therefore denoted as “(   )” in line 17. Anton further elaborates that Yiddish was a language that protected Jewish people by saying, “attack them they got captured and in Yiddish so no one could understand them=   ” (line 18). In lines 19-21, Ms. Burlingame responds to Anton’s literary contribution by saying, “So it was a
lan:guage that was invented: or created by the Jewish people (...) and >they spoke it< so no one else would know(…).” In this sentence, Ms. Burlingame acknowledges Anton’s contribution and clarifies his statement. She extends learning in lines 21-22 by asking what Yiddish sounds like by saying, “what does the it mostly sound like: what does it ki:n::d of sound like.” Leyah raises her hand, and says that she knows how to speak Yiddish in line 23 and Ms. Burlingame calls on her in line 24. In this utterance, Ms. Burlingame approaches Leyah’s raised hand in a facilitator role because she says, “will you tell us more about Yiddish? (line 24). In lines 25-28, Leyah contributes, “Um I really don't know what it is: but my grandfather used to sing it to me in a song:: something like ( ) Hanukah oh: Han:ukah:: ( ) (...).” She begins singing the song “Hanukah Oh Hanukah” in Yiddish; her voice decreases in volume very rapidly and therefore, she becomes inaudible. She pauses and places her hands on her face. She exclaims, “I don't know why: (.) I can't remember right now” (lines 28-29). Ms. Burlingame acknowledges Leyah’s frustration with not being able to remember the lyrics to the song and tells her she can practice and try it again tomorrow (lines 30-32). In lines 33-35, Ms. Burlingame continues her thought, “=Okay:: so: I just learned from the expert that Yiddish is a combination of German and Hebrew and it wasn't a written language (...)” and confirm Anton’s contribution that it was a secret language used so people would not get captured (lines 35-37). Leyah remembers some of the words to the song when she says, “I remember some of the words now ( )” and she begins singing the song in Yiddish (line 38). Similar to before, Leyah sings the song very quietly; the
microphone did not pick up her voice. In line 39, Ms. Burlingame responds to Leyah’s contribution by saying, “so: it sounds similar.”

**Analysis of Excerpt 2**

Ms. Burlingame initiates the discussion about the Yiddish language through a large group discussion. Yiddish was a word found in the book, *Molly’s Pilgrim*. Ms. Burlingame opened the discussion by pausing the reading and asking what Yiddish was. Her question was open ended and allowed for an elaborate response, rather than a yes or no response. Anton, a child sitting near the focal group raised his hand and contributed to the discussion by telling the class he knew what Yiddish was. He further explained that Yiddish was a secret language used by Jewish people when they were captured; this allowed for nobody to understand what they were saying. Anton’s contribution demonstrated his knowledge and expertise of Yiddish and made a well thought out contribution to the discussion. Ms. Burlingame responds in a positive manner and clarifies what Anton says by reiterating that it was a secret language that nobody else knew. Rather than moving on to the next topic, Ms. Burlingame acts as a facilitator of knowledge and extends learning by asking what Yiddish sounds like.

Leyah, a focal student, responds to Ms. Burlingame’s remark by saying she knows what Yiddish is. Ms. Burlingame responds in a facilitator role by saying, “will you tell us more about Yiddish.” This demonstrates her use of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development. In this instance, Ms. Burlingame allows the children in her class to be the more competent peers and share knowledge about a subject with not only her,
but also the entire class. The children who are knowledgeable about Yiddish also help to further extend Ms. Burlingame’s knowledge of the language (Ms. Burlingame does not speak Yiddish). Leyah explains that she did not know where this knowledge came from, but her grandfather used to sing to her in Yiddish. She begins singing the song, “Hanukah, Oh Hanukah” in Yiddish; her voice becomes inaudible and is not picked up by the microphone. She pauses and states that she forgot the words. Ms. Burlingame responds to her in a supportive manner and suggests that she practices the song tonight and tries to share it with the class again tomorrow. In this segment of data, Ms. Burlingame has allowed her students to act as experts of knowledge and extend the learning of all the peers in the class.

Ms. Burlingame relates back to Anton’s earlier comment about Yiddish being a secret language. She refers to him as an expert and elaborates that the language is a combination of Hebrew and German. Additionally, she mentions that it was a secret language. In this instance, she commends Anton’s knowledge about Yiddish and utilizes his expertise to guide the learning. Leyah raises her hand and mentions that she remembers some of the words to the song; she begins to sing in Yiddish. Ms. Burlingame mentions that it sounds similar (in reference to German and Hebrew). Through this classroom discourse, Ms. Burlingame and her students are actively building and constructing knowledge about Yiddish. Ms. Burlingame initiates the discussion and children draw on experiential and personal experiences to extend learning. Both Anton and Leyah contributed to the learning environment. Anton made use of experiential connections; this was information he already possessed. Leyah made use of personal
connections through memories with her grandfather. Both of these tools were present in
the learner-centered practice and contributed to extending learning.

Ms. Burlingame responds to her students’ connections in literature by facilitating
the discussion, and allowing for them to share information as experts. As a collaborative
unit, Ms. Burlingame, Anton, and Leyah share information and construct knowledge on
Yiddish. Therefore, as collaboration, they have moved the classroom’s understanding of
Yiddish from their actual development to their potential development within their zone of
proximal development.

Summary of the Two Teachers

In summary, both teachers initiated a literary discussion and allowed children to
make experiential and personal connections to the literature. The teacher from the
teacher-directed approach demonstrated a structured learning environment and discussed
the characters, setting, and plot of a story. The teacher from a learner-centered approach
demonstrated a fluid learning environment where she facilitated learning through the use
of more competent peers. In this classroom, children were able to share their connections
to literacy through experiential and personal connections. Both teachers responded to
these connections positively. The teacher in the teacher directed practice did not extend
learning through her responses. The teacher in the learner-centered classroom extended
the learning and clarified information. While students in both classrooms demonstrated
competency in their literacy lessons, the approach the teachers used were significantly
different. These findings will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Children have the ability to learn in a variety of ways; the classroom is one context children use to learn in (Frisby, 1998). Through social interactions, children have the ability to develop a strong foundation in literacy such that discussions with peers are a critical component in achieving this ability (Dickinson & Sprague, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). This study explored second grade children’s literacy development under two styles of teaching practices. Two classrooms were selected. Ms. Granada demonstrated a teacher directed approach with some collaborative activities that later demonstrated moments of a learner-centered practice. Ms. Burlingame demonstrated a learner-centered approach and acted as a facilitator of knowledge; she also allowed for her students to facilitate discussions as well. Literary competencies on the daily lessons were demonstrated in each classroom. However, the processes teachers and children used were significantly different under each teaching approach.

Teacher Initiation into Literary Discussion

Vygotsky (1978) argues that learning occurs through social interactions and children develop a sophisticated set of tools and signs that enable them to communicate effectively. Teachers promote this development by initiation literary discussions in the classroom; children gain the opportunity to practice communicating with one another.
Teachers introduced literacy discussions in the classroom through the use of different tools, signs, and strategy.

Ms. Granada utilized varying strategies including small group and large group collaborative activities to introduce the daily discussion on literacy. After the children discussed characters, setting, and plot in small group activities, she had one member from each small table group tell the class what they learned. Ms. Granada expressed interest in learning what did the children in her class learn during the lesson by explicitly asking. She also asked her class explicitly what did they work on today. Her students were responsive to her questions and answer them. Ms. Granada moves on to the next topic once these questions have been answered. Although Ms. Granada demonstrates a wide range of strategies to encourage literacy development in her students, she approaches whole class discussions in a structured and orderly way. She asks questions to her students and moves on to the next topic once answers have been provided. Ms. Granada’s initiations into literacy discussion demonstrate a teacher-directed approach and thus, learning is not extended. Extending learning occurs when teachers ask follow up questions or provide a different perspective to the discussion. Moreover, when teachers utilize this strategy, they are able to engage their students to think more in depth about the topic.

Ms. Burlingame initiates literary based discussions through acting in the role of a facilitator. She asks her students an open-ended question on what Yiddish is and allows her students to elaborate their thoughts. Once a student has shared information, she clarifies their response and asks questions that further extend learning in the classroom.
Through acting as a facilitator, Ms. Burlingame scaffolds children into the zone of proximal development, and as a collaborative unit, move from their actual development to their potential development (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, Bansberg (2003) argues that the development of sophisticated literary tools happens through a learner-centered approach. Ms. Burlingame emphasizes this through the use of open-ended questions and a flexible classroom discourse where students can contribute knowledge as experts. However, using open-ended questions can warrant off topic responses from students. Some children in this class contributed to classroom discussions but changed the topic. The new topic was typically discussed in several conversational turn-taking and the original topic did not immediately resurface. Typically, some effort was required by Ms. Burlingame to re-establish the original discussion about literacy.

**Child Experiential and Personal Connections to Literature**

Children learn literacy best when they are able to share their ideas and perspectives; their level of comprehension extends when they learn literacy under a teaching approach most suitable to them (Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986). In Ms. Granada’s classroom, children shared their experiential connections to literacy by explaining what they learned. For instance, Alysa, a focal student explains that they had learned about kindness. Kindness was the overarching theme in the story they had read. It is very sophisticated for second-graders to comprehend and discuss characters, setting, and plot. Ms. Granada encourages this through asking structured questions and enables
to refocus back on what they just learned. Additionally, students demonstrate their experiences to the whole class by sharing literary information that they just learned.

Children in Ms. Burlingame’s class responded differently and shared both experiential and personal connections to literature. The children in this class were able to contribute to the learning environment by acting as experts of knowledge. For instance, Anton shared experiential connections when he explained what Yiddish was and demonstrated his knowledge about it being a secret language. Leyah utilized personal connections to the Yiddish language and shared with the class that her grandfather sang to her in Yiddish; she shared an example with the class. The connections to literature in the class demonstrate that the children utilize varying tools and strategies to contribute to the learning environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Ms. Burlingame does not lead the discussion; instead she sets up the discussion and allows for her students to collaboratively come to a consensus about a literary topic. In this approach, the discussions are very fluid and flexible. Instead, Ms. Burlingame acts as a facilitator and equal in the construction knowledge during literary based discussions. Therefore, when individuals practice discussing literary information, they are actively developing negotiation and collaboration skills (Cole, 1996).

Teacher Response to Child Contributions

The way teachers respond to child contributions to can exert a lot of influence on how they perceive their ideas during discussions (Giroloametto et al., 2012). Thus, when
children participate in high quality discussions with their peers and receive positive feedback, children are more likely to increase their vocabularies and develop problem-solving strategy skills (Sylvester & Kragler, 2012). Ms. Granada responded to her students in a positive way and commended them for conceptualizing the characters, setting, and plot in a story. Understanding the components of a story, especially setting and plot is very sophisticated skill for a second-grader to master. When Alysa reported to the class that they learned about kindness and being kind to people, she demonstrated this literary competency. Moreover, Ms. Granada commends her and states that she was glad that someone was paying attention. After Ms. Granada responds, other children shout out things they learning and one processes they used to learn the information. This process was the “mingle song” activity where students shared sentence strips about characters, setting, and plot together. Although Ms. Granada’s response is commending to Alysa, she moves on to the next topic. Though her methods of developing literacy in her classroom vary, they are also very structured. That is, whole class discussions are structured and responded to in an AB pattern (e.g., teacher, child, teacher, child). This demonstrates a teacher directed teaching approach.

Responses to child literary contributions are flexible and extending in Ms. Burlingame’s classroom. After a child contributes to the discussion, the child is commended. Next, Ms. Burlingame clarifies, and extends learning by asking a more in depth question about the topic. For instance, after Anton explained what Yiddish was, Ms. Burlingame responded to him as an expert and asked what the language sounded like. Leyah shared a song in Yiddish, this allowed for the knowledge to become more
tangible to other students in the class. When children experience high quality interactions during classroom discussions, they are more likely to develop more sophisticated literary skills (Lewin, 2008; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). Thus, response and feedback to literary contributions is critical in cognitive development and gaining successful literary tools.

**Utilizing Different Teaching Approaches**

Ms. Granada and Ms. Burlingame utilized two different teaching approaches in the classroom. First, student demographics were likely to play a role in each teacher’s selection of teaching practices. When serving diverse populations, teachers must consider learning style differences, different SES levels, and English Language Learners. Ms. Granada may have utilized a more direct approach to make literacy information as clear and concise as possible. Similarly, student demographics were also likely to play a role in Ms. Burlingame’s choice of teaching practices. When serving a less diverse classroom, choices in teaching approaches are more flexible. Furthermore, when serving children of high SES populations, children are more likely to have a larger vocabulary and more experience participating in multiple turn taking literacy discussions.

Second, Ms. Granada’s classroom was located at a public school with a large student to teacher ratio and Ms. Burlingame’s classroom was located in a private school with a low student to teacher ratio. In Ms. Granada’s classroom, an open-ended approach would be more difficult to do with many students. It would be challenging to allow time for all children in the class to share their contributions. Open-ended questions were
easier to do in Ms. Burlingame’s classroom due to the small class size. There was ample time for all students to participate and build knowledge together.

Third, teachers’ beliefs and teaching experience are contributing factors as to why the teachers chose different approaches. Ms. Granada has an extensive background in education and has been teacher for a few decades. Moreover, she as taught in public schools her entire career and is used to high student to teacher ratios and rising expectations from public schools to meet different standards and test scores. Providing students with clear, concise, and direct information contributes to Ms. Granada’s teacher directed practice. Similarly, Ms. Burlingame has an extensive background in education and a couple decades of teaching experience. She has experience teaching in a private school where different school philosophies and incorporated into her beliefs. Ms. Burlingame must promote the school’s philosophy alongside her own personal beliefs on teaching. Serving a population of students from high SES families typically means higher expectations from families. This may contribute to her extensive use of open-ended questions and responding to children as equal parts in the learning process.

**Teaching Practices and Literacy Development**

Learning is the most important responsibility a child has and it occurs through social interaction (Cole, 1996; Bolhuis, 2003; Ochs, 1988; Thooen, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma & Geijsel, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). Literacy development is an important outcome for children to achieve. Teachers exert a lot of influence of their students; by
varying different styles of teaching practices, an optimal learning environment is established (Frey et al., 2005; Macqueen, 2010). While Ms. Granada and Ms. Burlingame utilized two different approaches, the outcome of learning literacy was still the same. Moreover, the process in which the second-grade children mastered literary material was different. While achieving a product is very desirable the process in which literacy is obtained is far more important (Cropley, 2001). That is, developing a competency in literacy is important.

Moreover, learning through social interaction equips students with sophisticated sets of tools as they utilize negotiation strategies, critical thinking skills, and extending questions (Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). The findings of this study suggest that a mixed method teaching approach is most desirable and effective in the retention of literacy knowledge. Insofar as students develop literacy, developing the teaching approach to a community of learners provides students with a structured environment, but the fluidity to share their connections to literature, experiential and personal. Thus, when elements of a teacher directed and learner-centered approach are combined, individual differences are attuned to (Wang, 2007). Therefore, when a collaborative set of learning tools are utilized, children can demonstrate their thoughts, ideas, and contributions through classroom discourse. Thus, they become active participations through collaborative learning and build and construct knowledge together (Rogoff, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986; Wang, 2007).
Implications for Teachers

This study provides teachers with a glimpse on how children learn literacy under two styles of teaching practice. It is important to note that not one approach is better than the other. Rather, a combination of both approaches encompasses a wide range of learning styles. Therefore, a mixed method approach enables students to gain literary competency through the use of different tools and signs.

Moreover, this study provides a critical insight on how the process of literacy occurs in second-grade classrooms during English Language Arts classrooms. In order for children to be successful at developing literacy competency, one must have mastered the foundation skills learned in the pre-literacy stages such as emergent literacy. Through mastering skills in each stage, children develop a competent set of tools and signs that contribute to effective communication and positive relationships later on in life. Finally, children who master literacy gain access to the tools needed to become an employable person in the workforce.

This study demonstrates how the process of literacy-based discussion occurs in second-grade classrooms. By exploring classroom discourse, the researcher has uncovered the process in which different types of literacy discussions develop. Depending on what approach a teacher may utilize, she may explore if her beliefs coincide with the actual practice, and consider her approach choices critically. Future teachers and teachers seeking professional growth could incorporate the strategies used by the teacher participants in their own practices.
Limitations and Future Research

This study demonstrated several strengths to current research. First, this study explored teaching practices under a qualitative lens utilizing discourse analysis. Using this time of analysis allowed for coding of three parts of a conversation during literacy discussions and furthermore, described the phenomena occurring in each classroom.

Second, this study explored how literacy was achieved in public and private second-grade classrooms during English Language Arts lessons. This study demonstrated teacher strengths in utilizing appropriate strategies in working with diverse and similar populations. Furthermore, this study demonstrated two very talented teachers and the use of collaborative learning in a teacher directed and a learner-centered classroom.

Third, this study explored the process of children learning literacy and the utilization of tools and signs during the process. Not only do we see children actively engaged in learning literacy, but children who are building and constructing knowledge upon teacher ideas and student ideas. Conversations on literacy are deeply analyzed and the different processes used by teachers and students are explored. While children in a teacher directed classroom utilize a direct approach, children in a learner-centered classroom draw from personal and experiential connections to make sense of literacy.

While there were several strengths to this study, some limitations were found. One limitation to this study was the length of data collection from each classroom; this
study only lasted two months. Future research should expand upon this study and collect data in two second-grade classrooms over the course of one school year. A more in depth picture of the classroom interactions would be established and well as the sophistication of knowledge from beginning to end of the school year. Moreover, a wide range of teaching strategies and tools could be explored if more days of data were collected. Some of these findings may contribute to collecting data in the fall when students and teachers are still familiarizing themselves with the classroom environment and their peers. Should data have been collected in the spring, children may have displayed more sophisticated connections to literacy and be more flexible and proactive in their conversational turn-taking skills.

The two classrooms were at different kinds of schools (e.g., public, private). This creates different limitations. First, class size ratios were significantly different. The public school had a large teacher to student ratio while the private school had a small student to teacher ratio. Each classroom also had different rules, regulations, and expectations. That is, each teacher created a different set of rules for her students to follow and is mandated by different school and district wide regulations. Moreover, each teacher had different expectations of her students. This is likely to be contributed to more expectations governed by attendance at a private school.

Moreover, the teachers in the study did not demonstrate a pure teacher directed or learner-centered approach. Both teachers demonstrated strategies utilized by both teaching practices. Additionally, both teachers used small groups and interactions in their approach. A teacher using purely teacher directed practice would utilize only lecture and
instruction as her medium of teaching. This creates a limitation to the study and an area for future research to explore.

Another limitation to the study was the lack of structured and video taped interviews with the teachers. While the researcher interviewed teachers, the prompts were more open-ended and were not video and audio taped. Therefore, the research could not utilize teacher response to teaching practices and could not analyze extensively on teacher beliefs. Should these interviews be transcribed, interview data could be analyzed for teacher beliefs on their teaching practices and actual approaches utilized. This would contribute to future research in exploring whether teacher beliefs match actual teaching practices.

Furthermore, utilizing structured interviews with teacher participants after classroom data collection could be beneficial. The researcher could choose classroom clips and show to the teacher to ask about her objectives, feelings, and understanding of the teaching strategies utilized.

Future research should examine literacy development and teaching practices through a mixed methods approach. That is, structured interviews should be utilized, videotaped, and transcribed. Student surveys should also be utilized to explore child’s literacy understanding. This could be compared with qualitative classroom data.
Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in research that will be conducted by Amanda M. Carlson, a student in Child Development at California State University, Sacramento.

The study will investigate teaching practices and children’s literacy learning in elementary classrooms.

If you consent to participate, you will first be interviewed about the perspectives you have on your employed teaching practices, the types of lessons you use, and what you think students gain and learn from them. You will be videotaped during 4 one hour literacy lessons over the course of two to three months (4 hours total). These literacy lessons will be provided to all children as part of the normal instruction of your class. You will be asked to wear a microphone during the videotaping sessions.

Some participants may feel uncomfortable at first being videotaped. If at any time you wish to no longer participate, you may decline to participate.

You may gain additional insight into factors that promote literacy learning, or you may not personally benefit from participating in this research. It is hoped that the findings from this study will be beneficial toward teachers who teach literacy and students who learn literacy.

Pseudonyms (pretend names) will be used for all participants in any documents made public. Transcripts, researcher papers, or research presentations will use pseudonyms. Videotapes will be kept in a secure location for seven years and will be separate from the participant list and consent forms. The videotapes will be digitized for analysis, but only myself and my supervisors at the university will have access to the physical tapes or digital copies. Videotapes will be kept in a secure location and will be separate from the participant list and consent forms. Access to the data will be limited to the researcher and thesis sponsor and second reader. Data will be stored in a password protected computer in a secure location for seven years then destroyed. Tapes will be destroyed after digitized.

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Amanda Carlson at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or by e-mail at xxxxxxx@xxxxxxxx.xxxxx.xxx, or you can call my research sponsor Dr. Christi Cervantes at (916) 278-3983 or by e-mail at ccervant@csus.edu.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.
Signature of Participant  Date

I give my permission to be audio-recorded throughout the course of the study.

Signature of Participant  Date
APPENDIX B

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to allow your child to participate in research that will be conducted by Amanda M. Carlson, a student in Child Development at California State University, Sacramento.

The study will investigate teaching practices and children’s literacy learning in elementary classrooms.

If you consent for your child to participate, your child will be videotaped during 4 one hour literacy lessons over the course of two to three months (4 hours total). These literacy lessons will be provided to all children as part of the normal instruction of your child’s class. Your child will be asked to wear a microphone during the videotaping sessions.

Some participants may feel uncomfortable at first being videotaped. If at any time you wish your child to no longer participate, you may decline your child to participate. Your child may also decline to participate or stop at anytime with no negative consequences.

You may gain additional insight into factors that promote literacy learning, or you may not personally benefit from participating in this research. It is hoped that the findings from this study will be beneficial toward teachers who teach literacy and students who learn literacy.

Pseudonyms (pretend names) will be used for all participants in any documents made public. Transcripts, researcher papers, or research presentations will use pseudonyms. Videotapes will be kept in a secure location and will be separate from the participant list and consent forms. The videotapes will be digitized for analysis, but only myself and my supervisors at the university will have access to the physical tapes or digital copies. Videotapes will be kept in a secure location and will be separate from the participant list and consent forms. Access to the data will be limited to the researcher and thesis sponsor and second reader. Data will be stored in a password protected computer in a secure location for seven years then destroyed. Tapes will be destroyed after digitized.

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study. A copy of the digitized video from their classroom will be provided to participating students and teachers.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Amanda Carlson at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or by e-mail at xxxxxx@xxxxxxxx.xxxx.xxx, or you can call my research sponsor Dr. Christi Cervantes at (916) 278-3983 or by e-mail at ccervant@csus.edu.

Your child’s participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to allow your child to participate in the research.

_______________________________
Child Participant

Parent Signature of Child Participant  Date

I give my permission for my child to be audio-recorded throughout the course of the study.

Parent Signature of Child Participant  Date
APPENDIX C

CHILD ASSENT FORM

Agreement to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in research that will be conducted by Amanda Carlson, a student in Child Development at California State University, Sacramento.

The study will look at how children learn to read and write with different ways of teaching.

If you agree to be in this study, I will set up a camera in your classroom and take videos you in your classroom. You don’t have to do anything special; I will just record what happens during your English language lessons. I will come with the camera 4 times over 2-3 months and tape for 1 hour each time I visit. You will be asked to wear a microphone during the videotaping sessions so I can record anything you say or ask during the lesson.

It feels weird for some children to be videotaped or watched. If at anytime you don’t like it and want to stop, you can ask me to turn off the video camera. You also can stop being in the project at any time and not be in trouble.

It is hoped that the findings from this study will help teachers learn new ways to teach reading and writing to their students.

Your name will be kept secret in the study. Pretend names (that you get to pick) will be used for everyone who is in the study in any papers I write or whenever I talk about the project to other people. Videotapes will be kept in a secure location and be kept separate from anything that has your name on it. I will keep the videos in physical form and digitally in my computer for 7 years so I can finish my assignment for school, then I will destroy them. While I have the videos no one will get to see them except you, the other kids who participate, your teacher, and my teachers at the university.

You will not receive any pay for participating in this study but I will give you a copy of the videotape I take of you.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Amanda Carlson at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or by e-mail at xxxxxxx@xxxxxxxx.xxxx.xxx, or you can call my research sponsor Dr. Christi Cervantes at (916) 278-3983 or by e-mail at ccervant@csus.edu.

Your parents have already given permission for you to be in this research, but you get to decide if you want to be in this study too. Writing your name below indicates that you have read this page and want to be in my study.

________________________________   ____________________
Name of Participant                      Date
Writing your name below indicates that you have given me permission audio-record your voice during your English lessons at school.

_____________________________  ___________________
Name of Participant           Date
REFERENCES


