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## **Developing a Sense of Audience: An Examination of One School's Instructional Contexts**

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*The purpose of this naturalistic study was to extend our understanding of the ways in which consideration of audience may be salient in diverse students' and teachers' approaches to literacy. Data related to literacy interactions in one school were collected from the preschool class and three multiage elementary classrooms. Findings indicated that the school's curriculum was developed through a socio-cultural approach with the students involved in constructing meaning of their world through interaction with others, through dialogue about texts, and through involvement in the arts. Within these experiences, students developed a sense of audience awareness and participated as audience members. In the upper grades, two specific instructional contexts, literature circles and project work, involved students in preparing for and communicating to (or communicating with) an audience.*

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT having an audience has an impact on the literacy development and literacy learning of students (Bloodgood, 1995; Dyson, 1991, 2004; Rowe, 1989; Wollman-Bonilla, 2001). Often, students find an audience in the teacher, peers, or other parents/adults in the room. Such individuals can become a source of inspiration and motivation for students' writing (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975; Rowe, 1989) and their reading (Dixon-Krauss, 1995). The importance of developing a sense of audience and providing an audience for students is grounded in the recognition of the role social interactions play in literacy learning. Social interactions are viewed as an integral part of the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978) and thus help define literacy concepts (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Dixon-Krauss, 1995; Rowe, 1989). Through social contexts in which literacy experiences such as reading and writing occur, students develop richer understandings of literacy processes which may be reflected in future reading and writing opportunities.

The importance of helping students develop a sense of audience has been stressed primarily in the area of writing. Britton (1975) and his colleagues define sense of audience as "the manner in which the writer expresses a relationship with the reader in respect to the writer's understanding" (pp.65-66). In order to facilitate students' growth as writers, teachers have been encouraged to insure that students have a specific audience for whom they are writing (Barr & Johnson, 1997; Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995).

The majority of studies focusing on student authors' sense of audience have been at the college and high school levels (Wollman-Bonilla, 2001). However, researchers have begun to turn their attention to the preschool and elementary levels to increase our understanding of children's awareness of or consideration of audience in the early years and to explore instructional approaches which may develop a sense of audience. Research documents that even preschool children can demonstrate audience awareness (Cox, 1994; Rowe, 1989). Rowe's study focusing on 3, 4, and 5-year-olds described various social interactions involving authors and audiences, with students and their teachers assuming both roles. Rowe's work also noted that specific

literacy outcomes are associated with participation in audience/author interactions. Similarly, Wollman-Bonilla's (2001) research found that first-grade students who received authentic responses from their audiences increased their use of rhetorical moves that indicated audience awareness. In addition, in an inquiry examining partner reading experiences, Dixon-Krauss (1995) noted that peer dialogue supported students' reading and writing development and their sense of audience. In these studies, students' social interactions with their immediate audience contributed to their growing sensitivity to and consideration of audience. Research focusing on older children found that some 10- and 11-year-old Scottish students imagined an audience as they researched and wrote both informational reports (Many, Fyfe, Lewis, & Mitchell, 2004) and historical fiction stories (Many & Diehl, 1997). These students planned their reports and/or stories and revised their drafts in light of the implied readers for whom they were writing.

The purpose of this study was to extend our understanding of the ways in which consideration of audience may be salient in diverse students' and teachers' approaches to literacy. Data related to literacy interactions in one small school were collected and analyzed through two naturalistic inquiries. One study focused on the preschool class and the second study concentrated on instructional conversations in the three multiage elementary classrooms. Themes emerged in both data sets related to the importance this school places on the presence of an audience and on developing students' awareness of audience. Consequently, we carried out specific analyses to explore the ways in which audience was salient in the literacy interactions occurring in this school.

### Methodology

The context for this study was a small private school in a large urban city in the Southeast. At the time of data collection, the school served approximately 50 pupils, from age 3 to grade 6. An active scholarship program insured the student population was culturally and socio-economically diverse. Approximately 30 percent of the student body received scholarship assistance.

The school was founded on the principles of the importance of student-centered learning and of the integration of the arts into the curriculum. Classes were structured in multi-age groups consisting of a 3- to 5-year-olds class and 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes. The teachers advocated multi-age interactions not only within classes but also through the integration of learning experiences extending across class boundaries (e.g., reading-writing workshops involving multiple classes, weekly school-wide community meetings, sharing of literacy events).

Participants for this study were the teachers and students in all four classes of the school. Pseudonyms have been given to the students. The teachers, who chose to have their actual names used in this article, have been actively involved in formal and informal teacher-research projects. Informal discussions of findings and manuscript drafts were reviewed with all of the teachers. In addition, the preschool teacher and 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher read and analyzed data from the preschool classroom.

The primary data source for this analysis included fieldnotes and audio and videotapes of classroom discussions. Secondary sources were student and teacher interviews and copies of student artifacts. Data collection and analyses occurred across a period of three years. Research began in the first year with a focus on the literacy interactions in the 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old classroom. Data were collected in this preschool class by author Henderson. Henderson was also the 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at this school. Data analysis and interpretation proceeded throughout the second year. In the third year, data analysis continued in the preschool context and additional investigation was undertaken by author Many in the 1st - 2nd, 3rd - 4th, and 5th - 6th grade classrooms.

During data collection for both initial studies, working hypotheses had emerged regarding the ways the teachers and students' conversations and/or the instructional contexts underscored a sense of audience. Consequently, the analysis for this inquiry began with the identification of all data excerpts from the preschool classroom and the 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes in which audience was salient. Next, we created data reduction charts (Huberman & Miles, 1993) based on this

data to allow initial categories to be developed. We worked back and forth from the data to the categories emerging on the charts using a constant-comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, we worked to describe and understand the ways in which teachers and students attended to audience, for what purpose, and with what outcomes. The data reduction charts and resulting categories were reviewed by the participating teachers/researchers. Interpretations were verified through triangulation (a) of data collected across time, (b) across data from multiple classrooms, and (c) through comparisons of researchers' and teachers' perspectives.

### Results and Discussion

In Table 1 we illustrate the major instructional contexts in this school in which attention to audience was evident. Across all grade levels, the school's curriculum was developed through a socio-cultural approach with the students involved in constructing meaning of their world through interaction with others, through dialogue about texts, and through involvement in the arts. Within these experiences, we identified a variety of ways in which students were developing a sense of audience awareness or were participating as an audience. In the upper grades, two specific instructional contexts, literature circles and project work, were also identified as regularly involving students in preparing for and communicating to (or communicating with) an audience. In the sections that follow, we will describe the ways in which we noted children attending to audience in these instructional contexts and we will work to build a grounded theory of how the experiences in this school developed the students' sense of audience.

#### Salience Of Audience Throughout The Curriculum

Students at this school participated in experiences grounded in a socio-cultural approach to literacy. The student-centered curriculum involved students in actively constructing meaning of their world through authentic reading, writing, and artistic activities. The multi-age groupings and the focus on collaborative approaches to learning insured ongoing conversations among peers and others. Throughout the grades,

we noted instructional contexts which involved students in developing an awareness of audience or a participation as an audience in the following ways: (a) sharing with an implied audience, (b) sharing with an immediate audience, and (c) choosing to be an audience. While these themes were evident across the grades, the purposes and/or outcomes associated with involvement in these audience-related experiences seemed to vary across the grade levels.

Table 1

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 Instructional Contexts Involving a Sense of Audience
 

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Contexts	Instructional Approaches	Themes Evident
Across the Curriculum in all Grades	Audience Awareness and Participation through a Socio-cultural Approach	Sharing with an implied audience
		Sharing with an immediate audience
		Choosing to be an audience
Specific Instructional Contexts in the Upper Grades	Literature Circles	Communicating with an audience
		Communicating with an audience
	Project Work	Communicating specific information to an audience

Sharing with an implied audience. In this school, sharing with an implied audience was most evident in the creation and display of artistic artifacts. In the preschool class, as children completed their work, the teacher regularly reminded them to sign the author's/artist's/illustrator's

name. For example, "...H. P. [the preschool teacher] calls Aline back over to read the sentence and explain her illustration. H. P. then says the illustrator's name needs to be on the picture so Aline writes her name" (Fieldnotes, Jan. 31). In another example, "...When Alvia is finished, H. P. asks her, 'Have you signed the artists' name?' When Alvia says, 'No,' H. P. asks her, 'Will you sign the artists' name?' Alvia says, 'Yes' and writes her name on her work" (Fieldnotes, April 14). While the term audience was not explicitly discussed, the teacher's insistence that the children sign the "artist's" name created an early awareness of creating work for sharing with others.

The importance of displaying and sharing texts (both artistic and literary) was woven into the learning environment throughout the grade levels. Children's work was regularly hung on walls, on bulletin boards, and displayed on tables in the school's foyer. In these instances, the audience who would view the work was not specifically identified, but the students did recognize that the pieces would be shared with people coming into the school. For example,

"...Jennifer, [1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher], wants them to draw some scenes from [IMAX movie on climbing Mount Everest] to put on the board. She hands out the paper and asks them to do some scenes that they could use on the room bulletin board. The kids grab paper and begin" (Fieldnotes, Sept. 21).

Teachers across the grades also encouraged such sharing as a way of providing practice and encouraging repeated readings to develop fluency. This was the case in the following excerpt from fieldnotes taken in the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade class:

"... Joy [the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher] is talking to the group about Sarah, Plain and Tall. She wants each person to go back and reread Sarah, Plain and Tall. She tells them they can read it to another person, to mom and dad, or to someone in Jennifer's [the 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher's] class" (Fieldnotes, Sept. 28).



As indicated in Joy's encouragement that students read to children in Jennifer's class, visitations to other classrooms for the purpose of sharing with an immediate audience were common in this school. Sharing activities such as this teacher-encouraged event, and the spontaneous ones illustrated in the data excerpts quoted from the fieldnotes below, were daily occurrences.

- "Marie [a 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> grade student] comes down from her class to show H. P. her cursive writing. H. P. writes praise on her paper as Walton watches" (Fieldnotes, Feb. 6).
- "Justin [a 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade student] comes down from Jennifer's class to read his jazz musician report to H. P. Aline, his sister, goes over to stand beside him to listen. H. P. says, 'Wow! That's a wonderful report! Thanks for reading it to me!' Aline hugs Justin. H. P. asks Justin, 'Do you want a star?' H. P. writes on the star, 'Star Reader and Writer' and pins the star on Justin" (Fieldnotes, Feb. 27).
- "Gabriella [a preschool student] finished tracing over her page of the story and H. P. asks her to come over and read with her. Gabriella reads and then H. P. says she can go read to Joy" (Fieldnotes, April 1).
- "At that moment, Richard [a preschool student] comes down from reading for Joy [3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher] and announces, 'She was so proud of me! She said, 'What a great reader you are!' Alex shows H. P. the star on his hand that Joy had drawn" (Fieldnotes, Feb. 6).

In this school, sharing with an immediate audience was not only teacher-initiated as students themselves often searched out others to be an audience for their work. For example, as Henderson (the teacher/researcher who collected data in the preschool class) sat on the floor taking fieldnotes, children often joined her to share their reading, writing, and art-related accomplishments. This was the case surrounding the following notation:

“Alvia comes to read her writing to me [(Henderson)]: ‘Me and Yasmine are playing the cat and the owner. My favorite part was being the cat. By Alvia’ (Fieldnotes, April 14). In addition, Frank walks by and tells me to look at what he has built. I ask him how many blocks he used to build it, and he counts up to 10. (I know that he had been counting with H. P.). He comes over and gives me ‘high five’ and is very happy” (Fieldnotes, April 1).

Students not only chose teachers as their audience; they also sought out each other as audience members. In the upper grades, the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade class and 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade class often joined across rooms for reading-writing workshop and independent reading time. During these times, students regularly invited friends to share their excitement about texts. One student’s engagement often drew others into the reading of the same text. For instance:

“... Justin looks over at Leon and asks him a question about an Animorphs book that Justin is holding. Leon rearranges himself so that his head is close to Justin and then Leon takes the book and begins reading. Justin leans over as he reads - Leon begins reading orally...Now Justin is taking a turn reading - Leon scoots close when Justin stumbles over a word and he offers help. Leon follows with his eyes as Justin reads. When Justin is finished with the page he gives the book to Leon as if it is his turn. They flip through the pages making the figure on the corner of the pages ‘morph’ and they grin. Then Leon finds their place and begins reading again” (Fieldnotes, Sept. 28).

In the elementary grades, teachers also involved students in sharing with an immediate audience through sharing written texts. Children were regularly encouraged to collaborate with one another and to use each other as resources for information or ideas. This can be seen in the area

of reading information when researching a specific topic. In the 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, the teacher offers advice to two of her students about finding the best articles on their topic: "...Then if you can't decide, you could go to someone else and ask them what they think" (Fieldnotes, Feb. 17). Also, in the 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade class during literature circles, one student is investigating igloos, a subject another student is researching extensively for a separate assignment. The following occurs: "...a student shows a picture of an igloo. Henderson, researcher/author, asks him to share that with Rita because she is studying igloos [for a social studies project]" (Fieldnotes, Oct. 21).

Students often read all other students' stories and responses to literature and commented on each other's work. For instance, in the following excerpts from a 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>- and 6<sup>th</sup>-grade literature circle activity, students read classmates' written responses. Through this activity, they grew in their understanding of both the story and the ways in which one might respond to a piece of literature:

"... Henderson has the students give their papers to the person on their right - read what that person wrote and make comments...she explains each write a response to what the first person wrote. They all read the papers - the attention on the reading is strong - they are interested in seeing what their friends wrote... As the pages go back to the original person - they begin to laugh and talk. I (Many, researcher/author) can read over Amber's shoulder and the comments on her paper are positive and constructive - they tell her she did a good job but also ask her to tell who she thought has the most courage.... Amber underscores the value of the activity saying, 'Now that I have read other people's papers I could write a decent paper - I didn't know what to write - I just wrote'" (Fieldnotes, Sept 21).

In summary, the activities associated with the category of "sharing with an immediate audience" were often spontaneous and were student-initiated as well as teacher-initiated. In the preschool classroom, this

sharing seemed to be tied closely to a sense of celebration as students were often praised for their accomplishments after sharing. Increasingly across the age of the students, this sharing also served the purpose of providing practice in literacy behaviors (i.e., reading aloud stories to peers) and of sharing information related to processes as well as content.

Choosing to be an audience. A third category of student-initiated behaviors that cut across all grade levels can be described as “choosing to be an audience.” In these instances, students elected to become an audience and to listen to a story, to view an art project, or to read/listen to a student-authored text. For instance:

- Gabriella comes in from playing house to stand beside H. P. to listen to the story (Preschool class, Feb. 21).
- Josh comes in from his class to read. H. P. asks Walton to go over and listen to Josh’s story, so he comes over and listens. Paul and Kofa also come over to listen, but they were not asked by H. P. (Preschool class, Feb. 28).
- Richard wanted to hear Paul read but H. P. told him he had to finish his work first. After finishing, Richard comes over to listen to the story (Preschool class, April 1).
- Joy stops by Clyde and he reads his [student-authored] book to her. As Clyde reads, Joy and the others at the table laugh in response to a number of the things he has included. Joy tells him she likes the way he is editing as he goes (3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade class, Oct. 27).
- June and Rita find a cute picture of lemmings and everyone turns to see it...Dakita turns back to the screen and begins scrolling down - but then she turns around again to the book June and Rita are reading - the girls coo over the pictures of the penguins and other animals (5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade class, Sept. 2).

These data indicated that students at this school leave their respective activities and independently choose to become an audience by listening to a story being read by the teacher or another student or by interacting with peers. Often these events were motivated by a desire to become engaged in a story world or an interest in information.

In addition to these instances where audience was salient, in the upper grades, two specific instructional contexts were particularly important in developing students' awareness of audience. These instructional contexts will be discussed below.

#### Preparing for and Working With an Audience During Literature Circles

In addition to the reading children did during reading/writing workshop and during independent reading with their regular teachers, Henderson (the 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher) called together twelve 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade children twice a week for "literature circles." The primary focus of literature circles was preparation for and participation in discussions of novels. The group of twelve students was typically split into two or three smaller groups for the student-led discussions, but whole group activities also provided opportunities for wrap up critiques. Occasionally, at the beginning or the end of literature circle time, Henderson also shared a related novel orally with the children.

Texts for the literature circles were related to the themes under study. At the beginning of the year, all of the children read the same novels. Later, Henderson did book talks on two or three selections and children chose which book they wanted to read. The reading of the novels for the literature discussions was done outside of class. Students typically completed some preparation for the group discussions outside of class as well.

In literature circles, the interaction among participants was typically driven by a different purpose than was seen in the data related to "sharing with an immediate audience" that was described earlier. We called this new category "communicating with an identified audience." In these literacy experiences, a presenter/author/reader had specific

information or a story to be related and audience members were expected to actively participate in constructing meaning. Interaction between the presenter and the audience created a shared understanding. To illustrate how this theme developed, in the sections that follow we share and discuss snippets from various activities that occurred in the literature discussions.

“...On September 28, Henderson took out Baree: The Story of a Wolf Dog [(Curwood, 1990)] and began reading. As she read, the kids quieted down and listened. Most rested their heads on the table and stared into space – seemingly visualizing the story. Occasionally they look up at Henderson. She reads with expression – occasionally glancing up at the students and making eye contact with those who were looking at her. Alexander is sitting and leaning back in his chair – listening attentively. When Henderson gets to the sentence, ‘He had never known what it meant to be really hungry,’ she stops and says, ‘Who does that remind you of?’ Some students make instant connections to the literature circle text, Julie of the Wolves [(George, 1972)]. Alexander also mentions another character in the book. A couple of kids mention themselves – right now. Henderson draws attention to the level of hunger Julie felt – really desperately hungry. Amber notes that it is different when you are hungry but you know that you will be able to eat again. Henderson then goes back to reading the book.”

As shown in this excerpt, oral read alouds in the literature circle time were done with the expectation that audience members were constructing a rich understanding of the story. In read aloud situations, Henderson drew the students into the story with her expressive reading and eye contact. She also facilitated their active meaning making by probing for connections to other literature or to their personal lives or by using a cloze procedure to have students make predictions about key terminology. These oral readings were done frequently during literature

circles at the beginning of the year and seemed to lay the groundwork for the active role expected of audience members during small group literature discussions.

A large focus of the literature circle time centered on preparing for the student-led discussions. Initially, students were expected to prepare for the discussions by crafting questions that might be asked of group members. Students were encouraged to ask questions to which were open-ended and would insure rich discussions. By October, Henderson introduced roles (Daniels, 1994) such as “travel tracer,” “vocabulary enricher,” and “discussion facilitator.” Students who were assigned similar roles met together during class time. Through these in-class opportunities for preparing for the student-led discussions, children considered their work with the prospect of sharing their information and thoughts with the audience of their peers (Fieldnotes: Sept. 14, 28, Oct. 12, 14, 21, Nov. 9, Feb. 1). For instance, on October 12, two girls, who were serving as the vocabulary enrichers for their respective groups, worked together to prepare for their group discussions.

“...Tori [4<sup>th</sup> grade] and Cassie [5<sup>th</sup> grade] come in and get a dictionary from Henderson’s room and then go back into the computer room. Henderson follows them into the computer room and tells them they might use notepaper and staple it onto the sheet. Henderson comes out and I go into the computer room and sit on the floor. The girls are at the table working on their vocabulary enricher sheets. Cassie is saying what she is writing. Tori explains that she is not writing everything down – she is just putting down the page number. Cassie is unsure about not putting down the complete sentences and the definitions but Tori stresses, ‘Don’t write the sentence – just tell them where the sentence is and they can read it out of their books’ (Fieldnotes, Oct. 12).

This excerpt illustrates that as students prepared for literature circles, they did so with a clear sense that the audience of their work was not solely themselves nor was it their teacher. Instead, they worked with an awareness of the future conversations which would occur within the

student-led discussion groups. In the conversation which occurred as Tori and Cassie discussed how to prepare, Cassie noted that if “you write it down then you don’t have to look it up.” However, Tori continued to think of the assignment in light of their role as facilitating the understanding of the audience members, insisting, “But they will have their books.”

After students had prepared specific information to share, students split in groups of 3-5 members for their literature circle discussions. In these discussions, facilitators and audience members were expected to work together to develop a shared understanding of the story or content being addressed. For instance, while reading the book, Julie of the Wolves (George, 1972), the students had prepared for literature discussions by creating questions to ask each other. The following transcript/fieldnotes excerpt provides a feeling for the collaborative interpretation that resulted from a fourth-grade facilitator’s question.

- Tori: Why did she say daylight is spelled ‘A M Y?’
- Alexander: Because she was kind of looking at her life as darkness and she was thinking about San Francisco as lightness.
- Dakita: Her life was all dark and then when she heard about Amy being her pen pal and she wanted her to go to San Francisco. It was like all light.

(Tori noted that she wanted to say her example.)

- Tori: She was like in a dark, dark tunnel and then somebody walks up behind her with a lantern and that was Amy.
- Alexander: Oh so it is like a metaphor!

(Someone asks Tori where it said that. Tori had them turn to page 88. She reads a sentence in the letter and the answer where Julie says, ‘...daylight is spelled AMY.’ Tori asks if anyone needs help finding it. Many of the kids look at the passage and reread it) (Fieldnotes, Sept. 2).



Such collaborative interpretation, where presenters and audience members worked together to create a shared understanding, was common in the literature circles. Presenters took their roles seriously and audience members were expected to be actively involved and to be learning during the discussions. This was particularly evident in the following description from the field notes where the 6<sup>th</sup> grade vocabulary enricher (Rita) worked to insure that her group members understood the vocabulary terms she had chosen to highlight:

“... Rita was vocabulary enricher. The word is semi-arctic. She has them turn to the word, saying they don't have to circle it but she does want them to find it. I can see that Cassie doesn't have her book with her – Rita asks her if she does or not. Glenda says she can't find it and Rita goes to her and helps her find it. Henderson [the teacher] is out of the room for a moment checking on the other group. Rita gives Cassie her [Rita's] book and tells her to find it although she doesn't have to circle it. Greg has found it. When everyone has found it Rita says, 'the meaning is half/arctic.' Glenda asks what that means. Cassie says, 'Half arctic and half ...' She hesitates for a moment – stuck – and doesn't continue. Rita reads the sentence from the book and substitutes 'half' in it. Glenda says she still doesn't get it. Rita says it is like it is not fully arctic – it is like half arctic night (Fieldnotes, October 26).

As can be seen in the above description, discussions during literature circles were conducted with the expectation that audience members would come away with an understanding of the information shared by the facilitator. Through these experiences, presenters grew in their ability to undertake preparation in light of the needs of an identifiable audience and, as members of the group, all class members developed a rich sense of the active role expected by audience members.

Often Henderson or class members made comments that underscored the expectations of the roles of both presenters and group

members. For instance, on October 12, shortly after the groups had begun to use the role assignments to prepare for their group discussions, a sixth grader, Glenda, asked if they were to write down information in literature circles. The following discussion illustrates the importance placed both on presenting effectively and on learning as an audience member:

“...Henderson said they might write down the words. Glenda says she wants to write it all down. Rita then asks Cassie about the definitions and page number of another word. Alexander and Curtis are not writing but Rita and Glenda are. Glenda asks Cassie about the page and paragraph. She is trying to follow up on the page/paragraph that Cassie is saying where the words are found. Henderson explains to Cassie that she needs to take the role seriously and help people find words as she goes. Rita says she can't hear her and Henderson encourages Rita to ask Cassie questions.”

These expectations of audience members and presenters were further developed through follow-up discussions of the quality of the literature discussions. As shown below, through these discussions Henderson led the students in considering elements that contributed to the success or challenges faced during the circle conversations.

Both groups came back into Henderson's room. Henderson began, 'How did you feel about your Chapter 2 discussion?' Tori said, 'Our group was puny.' Amber agreed adding that was because they only had three people. Alexander countered that he thought three people made it better because there was less noise and everybody focuses on what others are saying.' Amber agreed but noted they didn't have a discussion director. ... Henderson asked if they liked it with small groups better than having one large group with the whole class. ... Cassie said, 'I like two groups because you can pay attention more easily and it doesn't take as long.' She thinks that even five people are too many.

In summary, through the activities associated with literature circles, students learned to prepare information for a specific audience. Both presenters and audience members then learned to collaborate together to develop a shared understanding of story information or of literacy processes. These data suggested that through read aloud activities, the literature discussions, and the follow up critiques, the students developed an understanding that the role of audience members is to actively construct meaning in collaboration with the presenter and that the presenter's/facilitator's role is to insure the audience's understanding. These expectations were further developed through a second instructional context at this school, the use of project work.

### Communicating With or To an Audience Through Project Work

The bulk of the curriculum in the elementary grades was focused around project work. Project work involved the in-depth study of a theme or topic through shared readings, multi-age activities, guest speakers, field trips, art projects, and independent or collaborative research. A major component of this approach in the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade class and the 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade class involved the preparation of individual and group projects which were presented to both classes and often to members of other classes.

Themes in the data collected during the general project activities were consistent with those associated with the socio-cultural approach used at this school. Students constructed art projects to be displayed and shared with implied audiences of schoolmates and visitors, they shared with immediate audiences of their peers during their study of informational and literary texts related to the topics, and they often chose to listen to each other share information they had found.

The unique emphases that emerged in the data related to the upper elementary grades' project work were related to two categories, "communicating with an identified audience" and "communicating to an identified audience." In both of these categories, an author/presenter was involved in preparing specific information for a known audience. This audience typically included the student's peers in both the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade

class and the 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade class. On some occasions, the audience also included students from the 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class and parents.

In the sections below, we will illustrate the ways in which teachers provided support as students worked to communicate with audience members about their topic. As can be seen in the fieldnotes, care was taken that audience members developed an understanding of the information presented. When students demonstrated proficiency in providing information that met their audience's needs, less teacher assistance and less audience participation was required. Consequently, proficient students were more likely to be involved in "communicating to" their audience as opposed to jointly constructing meaning with the assistance of their audience.

In the first presentation described below, the 1<sup>st</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade students had been involved in a four-week study of pop art, a project that coincided with an exhibit at a local museum. At the conclusion of the unit, the three elementary classes convened in the main upstairs room for project presentations. Two third-grade girls, Carly and Laurie, chose to do a project on Coca-Cola. After a somewhat hesitant beginning, the teacher worked with the presenters to help them convey a sense of what they had learned.

Laurie: 'We're doing a project on Coca-Cola. ... Because I really don't have a reason but I wanted to do it.' 'Do you like Coke?' someone asks. Laurie says 'Yes.' Joy [the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher]: 'What does it have to do with pop art?'

Laurie: 'Because back then they made advertisements for Coke?'

Joy: 'Coke was a popular image with people - people were doing pop art with Coke because everyone knew what it meant. If she didn't have this on there [pointing to the Coke logo] would you know what this is?' The group responds 'yes' and Laurie adds: 'Would you

know what it was if it wasn't round like a Coke can?' (Fieldnotes, Feb. 3).

The two girls then continued their presentation by telling about the process they went through to gather information. Again, Joy used her questions to help the presenters focus on important information they had learned that they could now share with the class:

"... and we put these calendars on and...[Carly hesitates unsure what else to say]. Joy, 'When were these calendars made?' Laurie replied, 'Around 1900.' Joy agreed underscoring, 'around the turn of the century.' Joy asks her when Coke was made and Laurie was not sure. Joy notes that it has been a long time since Laurie researched this information and that it was around the 1880's. Laurie then jumps in and says, '1886!'"

In this way, Joy worked with the two girls to help them remember and then share the information they had learned in preparation of their project. Because the teachers monitored the individual and group research projects on a regular basis throughout the unit, they were well informed about what children had learned and the types of things the students should be able to share during their presentations. Thus, the teachers served as a bridge to insure the information learned by the researchers/presenters was effectively conveyed to the audience members. This was particularly beneficial for the shyer and less expressive members of the classes.

While the teacher was there to assist students as needed, discussion with audience members also served to draw out additional information. As in the discussions with literature circles, audience members were encouraged to ask questions of the presenter to insure their own understanding of the information presented. Often when a student's presentation was brief, the follow-up questions and discussions with audience members led to greater elaboration by the presenter. For instance, notice the information that emerged about the sport of cricket

as Leon, a fourth-grader, presented his project from the Caribbean unit and answered questions from children in the upper elementary classes:

“Mary asked, ‘Why did you do this?’ Leon replied, ‘I wanted to do sports in the Caribbean and Joy suggested cricket.’ Joy explained that they looked up sports and decided to do something ‘that wasn’t like one of the sports that you play here so that you would learn something new from his project.’ After Leon tells about the cricket paddle and the size of the paddle, the kids begin to ask questions again.”

Walton: ‘When you get out does the pitcher block the ball?’

Leon: ‘The object is for [indistinguishable] to block the ball and hit one of he sticks.’

Gabriella: ‘We could play this at school.’

At this point, the kids talk about what they could bring to substitute the equipment they have for the equipment used in cricket.

Henderson: ‘Did you find out how long a game or match could last?’

Leon: ‘Could last about 2 ½ hours.’

Henderson: ‘I heard that they might stop and have tea and come back the next day.’

Leon: ‘Yes, because behind the field is a clubhouse.’

Joy: ‘If it is played mostly in England, how did it get to the Caribbean?’

Leon wasn’t sure and so Joy had him call on other people in the class. As 5-6 kids shared their ideas, the idea that the British had colonized the area and brought it with them was established (Fieldnotes, March 8).

Through presentations such as these, students shared the results of their research, and the classes developed a breadth of knowledge about

the topic understudy. Often, an artistic project was accompanied by an oral discussion of information learned. Sharing information about the process of researching and completing the project was viewed as equally important as the content.

In these presentations, student presenters and audience members collaboratively constructed a shared understanding of information. In contrast, in other presentations, student presenters relayed their information to their audience without assistance from peers or the teacher. We described such an approach as “communicating to a specific audience.” This was evident in the following presentation by 4<sup>th</sup>-grade Tori. During a two-month unit on pioneers, Tori had read both Sarah, Plain and Tall (MacLachlan, 1985) and the sequel, Skylark (MacLachlan, 1994). For her presentation, she had made a paper-mache version of the house on the prairie and had dressed up as “Anna” (the main character’s stepdaughter) to tell about her journey to visit her stepmother’s home in the East:

...Tori is called to come in and present next. She is dressed in costume and has been pacing in the hall. The group is waiting for her and is anxious to see what she looks like. She seldom wears dresses and she feels funny about coming out. Henderson goes out to get her to come in. When she finally walks in, she has on an old fashioned dress that hangs to her ankles. She has pushed her bonnet back off her head. Curtis exclaims, ‘Oh my god – a dress!’ She goes to stand by Joy who is holding the paper mache house Tori had made. She begins to talk, ‘Hi. I’m Anna and I’m from Sarah, Plain and Tall and Skylark. My mom died when my brother Caleb was born.’ (The group laughs a bit because Tori’s own brother’s name is Kaleb.) ‘You know how most stepmothers are really mean but mine is really nice and I like her. One summer something terrible happened – there was a drought and everyone else was moving away and my papa didn’t want to. My papa went outside and there was a fire and before we had put it out it had

ruined most of the wheat and most of the animals. Sarah said it was dangerous for us to stay so we rode on the train to Maine where her aunt - aunt lives' (she pronounces this "ant" first and then "auunt") (Fieldnotes, Feb. 3).

When Tori finishes, Joy tells the class, "If you have a question for Tori say "Tori," and if you have a question for Anna say "Anna." Dakita asked Tori if she thought she had done a good job and Tori responded, "Yes, but my speech was in my back pack and got torn up and this was off the top of my head." Henderson asked Anna what the sea was like and without hesitation Tori responded about how she (Anna) got seasick. Tori easily alternated from one persona to the other answering questions about the content of the books, how she went about doing her project, and her feelings about her presentation.

As illustrated in Tori's presentation, some students "communicated to" their audience without guidance or assistance. These students seemed to be consciously supplying the information they felt their audience would need to understand their topic. Although such student presentations were always followed by an open discussion, these follow-up discussions were more focused on discussions of the research or artistic processes involved rather than efforts to help the presenter explain the content in a way that better met the audience's needs.

### Developing a Sense of Audience

Examination of our data from across the grade levels indicated that developing a sense of audience begins with signing the artist's name, participation as an audience, and sharing with an audience. Like the 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds in Rowe's study (1989), students and teachers alternated roles as presenters and audience members. The teachers within this school valued these interactions. They encouraged students to share with an audience, and as an institution, this school endorsed the practice of spontaneously sharing literacy accomplishments with students across the grade levels. Participation as a presenter in such events encouraged a sense of accomplishment as children celebrated



their budding literacy strategies and artistic endeavors with one another and received praise for their work. Increasingly across the grade levels, sharing with audience members became a more integral part of the curriculum and provided opportunities for practice and language expansion.

In the upper grades, students also began to undertake literacy projects and assignments where they prepared specific information with the notion that their work would then be shared with their peers. Unlike authors who write for an implied reader (Booth, 1961; Iser, 1980), or the students described in previous research who wrote for imagined audiences of particular age levels (Many & Diehl, 1997; Many, Fyfe, Lewis, & Mitchell, 2004) these audience-related literacy experiences focused on communicating with and communicating to identified audiences. More importantly, these activities led to products that were then discussed with the audience members during or after the presentation. The scaffolding that occurred in the conversations among authors (faciliators/presenters) and audience members seem to shape the students' sense of audience.

In light of previous research (Rowe,1989; Wollman-Bonilla, 2001) and our own data, we suggest that a dialogic stance between authors/presenters and audience members may be a valuable link to helping students learn to consider audience needs. Through working with audience members to construct a shared understanding in the literature circle discussions and project presentations, these students developed an awareness of the types of information, explanations, visual aides, and other content which was typically expected and valued by audience members. Follow-up critiques of the effectiveness of literature discussions and project presentations served to further solidify students' sense of audience. We feel such interactions have the potential to help the writer/reader move learning from inter-psychological to intra-psychological (Bruner, 1986) and ultimately such interactions can assist students in shifting from working for an audience of themselves to consideration of how to meet the needs of an audience of others.

As we analyzed our data, a number of questions for future research emerged. First, we wonder how being part of an audience, where the participant is involved in constructing meaning, may relate to a student's understanding of his/her role while reading an author's text. Certainly these students demonstrated awareness that as audience members they were expected to take an active role in constructing a personal understanding. Similarly, transactional views of the reading process underscore the active role readers take in creating meaning from the marks on the page (Iser, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1978). At the same time, reader-response research indicates that less proficient readers often take a passive role while reading (see Many, 1996). Expecting the text to do the work for them, such readers often leave the reading event dissatisfied (Earthman, 1992; Garrison & Hynds, 1991; Smith, 1992). Further inquiry is warranted to understand how active participation as an audience member in the types of events described at this school may relate to students' views of their roles as readers.

The second question that remains for us relates to how children move from working for an immediate and identifiable audience to writing for an implied reader. In this school, sharing with an implied audience occurred with art projects displayed in the environment. In contrast, students' writing that accompanied literature circles or project work was typically done for an identified audience and was discussed with audience members before or after presenting. On only one occasion in the preschool class and two in the elementary classes (when students wrote letters to identifiable audiences) was dialogue with the audience not a planned follow-up to an audience-related writing activity. Other writing experiences included daily journal writing and the writing of stories, but in both of these occasions, the student himself or herself was typically considered the audience of the writing. More information is needed to understand how students who have developed a sense of audience in the context of oral presentations may draw on these notions as they move to writing for implied readers.

In conclusion, the importance of this study lies in the investigation of the relatively unexplored theme of audience in reading, in oral presentations, and in visual products and of the description of the

importance of dialoguing with an identifiable audience. The outcomes in this study indicate involving students in consideration of audience encourages the students to become thoughtful and appreciative of what they are doing and learning. Through this examination of the literacy interactions of 3-year-olds through 6<sup>th</sup> graders, we hope to provide a greater understanding of how instruction throughout the preschool and elementary years can help students develop a sense of audience.

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