Constructing Meaning from Literature: Examining Discourse in Departmentalized, Multidisciplinary, and Interdisciplinary Contexts

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This naturalistic study examines the literary discourse which occurred in a sixth-grade language arts classroom within a departmentalized, a multidisciplinary, and then an interdisciplinary context. Audio tapes and accompanying field notes of all literature discussions surrounding three novels served as the primary data source. Secondary data sources included informal and formal interviews with the participants. Using a constant-comparative approach we identified elements of discourse and organized these elements into the following broad themes: 1) the text and the story world; 2) the reader and the story world; and 3) discipline knowledge and the story world. The literary discussions within the three contexts differed in terms of the overall approaches used, the elements which were emphasized, and the students' processes of constructing meaning. In particular the findings raised new questions regarding the use of literature within interdisciplinary units. Integration across the curriculum has often been seen as crucial in helping students overcome the fragmentation that is pervasive in schooling. However, we saw that when the unit topic becomes the force of attention, the literary experience itself can become fragmented. Thus as teachers move to interdisciplinary perspectives, they may wish to monitor their own use of literature and the role literature is to play in the unit.

In *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, the Carnegie Task Force (1989) calls for a movement toward interdisciplinary curriculum approaches. Arguing against traditional

departmentalized approaches, the committee contends approaching information subject by subject results in a "... fragmented array [which] does not allow students to connect new and old ideas or to construct their own meaning of the information" (p. 43). Instead, students should confront themes across clusters of subjects, thus allowing for inquiry, associations, and synthesis across content areas.

Such thematic or unit planning, then, is a primary curricular consideration of junior high schools in evolution to a middle school philosophy. Drake (1991) describes three stages a faculty goes through as they struggle to move to a more integrated curriculum. Most faculties begin in a departmentalized or discipline based (Jacobs, 1989) structure in which content subjects are taught in isolation with little or no deliberate attempts to show relationships among the fields of study. Initial collaborative efforts result in multidisciplinary approaches. Within this framework the entire school staff focuses on a theme or topic. Each teacher plans activities that address that theme. At the next phase, teachers coordinate units using an interdisciplinary approach, with learning experiences correlated across subjects. Content begins to overlap with less distinction between subject areas. In the final phase, described as transdisciplinary, teachers use block time and/or self-contained classes. Content and theme are fused, driving the entire curriculum, with no real division into subject areas.

Middle school educators are not alone in voicing support for an integrated approach to teaching. Language and literacy educators have emphasized the value of involving children with literature through an integrated approach (Norton, 1991; Pappas, Kiefer, and Levstik, 1990). Research has also underscored the importance of intertextual connections in the meaning making process (Beach, 1990; Rowe, 1987; Short, 1987). Little is known, however, about how students' construction of literary meaning might differ in these diverse organizational contexts. This naturalistic study examined the literary discourse in a language arts classroom within a departmentalized, a multidisciplinary, and then an interdisciplinary situation.

Method
The School

This study took place in a sixth-grade reading/language arts class-room in a middle school. The school serves a racially mixed population of white, black, and Hispanic students of primarily low to middle socioe-conomic status. Traditionally the school used a departmentalized ap-proach to the curriculum. However, as part of a collaborative teacher preparation project with a local university, the sixth-grade teachers planned and taught a six-week thematic unit. Finally, as part of a block of field-based teacher preparation courses, preservice teachers working with the sixth-grade teachers and the university faculty prepared and taught an in-terdisciplinary unit.

The Participants

A mentor teacher, Mrs. H., 19 sixth-grade students, four preservice teachers, and two university researchers were involved in this study. Mrs. H., the third author, is an experienced language art's teacher who uses a lit-erature-based approach to reading and English instruction. The sixth-grade students (37% white, 37% black, 19% Hispanic; heterogeneously grouped) were assigned to Mrs. H. for a two period reading/English block. The four preservice teachers were students involved in the block of field-based methods courses. The first author was responsible for the language arts component of the middle school block and the second author was a doctoral student studying language, literacy, and culture.

Data Collection and Analysis

Audio tapes and field notes of discussions surrounding the three novels served as the primary data source. These were collected by the uni-versity researchers using participant observation techniques. Secondary data sources include informal and formal interviews with the participants; dialogue journals among the first author, Mrs. H., and the preservice teachers; and photocopies of students' written work about the novels. Phase I data collection occurred across a two-week period before the sixth-grade teachers began their thematic unit. Thus the literary discourse

surrounding the first novel, *Stuart Little*, was set within a departmentalized context.

Phase 2 data collection occurred during the teachers thematic unit. According to the teachers and professors involved in the project, this unit would best be described as multidisciplinary. All subject areas focused on a common theme (oceanography) but little coordination existed across the learning experiences in the content areas. Data was collected in Mrs. H.'s room as she focused on a condensed version of *Treasure Island.*

Phase 3 data collection occurred at the end of the semester when Mrs. H.'s preservice teachers taught their thematic unit, which focused on environmental issues related to the students' selves and their world. The preservice teachers correlated learning experiences with preservice teachers in the other subject areas in an interdisciplinary approach. Two literary works were used during this unit, *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack* and *The Talking Earth.* Students were allowed to choose the book they wished to read and discuss. All whole class literature discussions and the small group discussions surrounding the novel, *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack* were recorded.

Data analysis was ongoing during the data collection using methods recommended by Bogdan and Bilken (1982). Preliminary perceptions were often discussed between the university researchers and the classroom teacher at the end of a day's data collection. Audio tapes were transcribed and analyzed by the two researchers. To triangulate data analysis, initial assertions were discussed after each unit with Mrs. H., the sixth-grade student key informants, and the preservice teachers.

Transcripts of literature discussions were divided and cut into segments of one or more teacher or student turns relating to the same purpose. A data-driven categorizing system was generated through a recursive process, moving from transcript segments to research examining literature discussions (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Marshall, 1989; Rowe, 1987), research examining content area discourse (Alvermann and Hayes, 1989),

and writings on general classroom discourse (Stubbs, 1983; Dillon, 1984). Final categories were the result of a search for disconfirming evidence and a rechecking of meaning of unique incidents. Secondary data sources were used to corroborate or contrast trends found in the data. Peer debriefing also occurred throughout the study with a colleague in language and literacy.

Elements of discourse were organized into the following broad themes: 1) the text and the story world; 2) the reader and the story world; and 3) discipline knowledge and the story world (see Table 1). The categories within each theme were similar in the source of information (text, reader, discipline knowledge) which was prevalent as meaning was constructed. In the following sections we summarize the teachers' approaches, describe the patterns that emerged, and discuss the meaning construction during each phase.

Approaches, Patterns and Discussions
Phase 1

<u>Approach to the novel</u>. A consistent approach was evident each day in Mrs. H.'s approach to the Phase I novel, *Stuart Little*. This novel focuses on the adventures of Stuart, a two-inch tall mouse, who is the son of an otherwise normal American family. The novel was read orally by the students and teacher with discussion occurring after each reading segment. According to Mrs. H., while some of her other classes preferred individual silent reading, this class enjoyed oral reading and she believed these students would not read the book independently (Interview notes, Jan. 7). On most days attentiveness was apparent and students actively volunteered to read (Field notes, Jan. 6, 7, 10— second half of class, 13, 14). When attention did wane during the reading (Field notes, Jan. 8, 10 — first half of class), Mrs. H. would walk around the class, call on non-volunteers, and read segments herself with dramatic expression. After finishing a chapter, students discussed a series of questions, usually writing answers as they were discussed. After writing, students were often asked to share their individual responses. Only one lesson (on action and auxiliary verbs) unrelated to the novel was conducted.

Table 1

<u>The Major Themes and Categories of Elements of Discourse</u>

The Text and the Story World
  What the story is about
  Vocabulary
  Paraphrasing
  Connections within the text
  Understanding character emotions/motives

The Reading and the Story World
  Predictions within the story world
  Evaluating/judging
  Self in character's shoes
  Using life experiences to understand the text
  Text to life connections

Discipline Content and the Story World
  Literary elements
  Text as a springboard for literacy activities
  Subject matter connections
  Intertextual connections

<u>The pattern of meaning construction.</u> In discussing *Stuart Little* Mrs. H. and her students worked to build a threshold of understanding and to move from that threshold to entertain complexities of the story world. Discourse within the categories of what the story was about, paraphrasing, and vocabulary played a crucial role in the construction of meaning. Discussion of what the story was about often took place at the beginning of a class as the students and teacher reconstructed what had happened thus far in the story. To further their basic understanding, Mrs. H. encouraged students to imagine what had just happened or to describe characters or locations in the story. During reading, exchanges often focused on paraphrasing and on vocabulary to clarify textual information. Paraphrasing also served as an opportunity for Mrs. H. to model reactions to aspects of text by using voice intonation as she elaborated, thus alerting students to key points and to possible affective responses. At the end of a chapter, Mrs. H. again encouraged reiteration of the basic story events,

helping students to develop their own sense of what the text had to offer to their understanding of the story world.

Students used the shared knowledge gained from discourse related to paraphrasing, vocabulary, and what the story was about as a threshold from which they explored and made judgments regarding the story world. After summarizing chapter events, students reflected on character's motives and emotions. The focus in these segments was the textual evidence that supported the inferences; however, divergent answers were both accepted and invited. Occasionally, students were also asked to draw from their personal views to judge character's behavior or events (as right or wrong, logical or illogical, an advantage or disadvantage, etc.). Although not a common focus, this discourse allowed students to exercise their evaluative skills as they considered their own opinions.

Finally, students also gained a more complex understanding of the literary world by making intratextual connections across events in the novel. Such connections allowed students to explore character growth and development, to make valid predictions, and to view new events as understandable or important through comparison with past events. Consequently, these exchanges aided students' syntheses across chapters and helped them to reflect on the novel as a coherent whole.

A second thread was the major role student predictions played in the discourse. When discussing predictions, the focus was on the reader's imaginative construction of what might happen in the story world. Predictions occurred before reading a chapter (with predictions motivated by the chapter's title), during reading, and after reading. After reading predictions often led to writing activities with readers describing what might happen next in the story, posing alternative solutions to characters' problems, and composing alternative endings to the story. Students shared their written predictions and often worked together through peer conferencing and collaborative authoring. A high degree of student participation was evident in prediction segments (Field notes, Jan. 7, 13) and these

segments were often more lengthy than discussion focusing on other categories.

A third major thread that emerged daily in the discussion was an emphasis on making associations between the students' lives and the story. By asking students to "put themselves in the story," Mrs. H. involved the students in the literary work. Within these segments, students frequently commented or reacted to what other classmates said. Similarly, the discussion segments in "using life experience to understand the text" engaged students in drawing on general knowledge gained from life experiences. Such discourse, particularly the connections to similar events individuals had encountered, aided the students in personalizing the story experience. For example, in the following excerpt Mrs. H. tries to have Edward draw on his own experiences in explaining why someone might run away: (Student and teacher turns not separated by spaces were said at the same time. An "S" is used when the identity of the speaker could not be determined.)

Edward:	He might be bored.
Mrs. H.:	Is that a reason to leave home?
S:	(softly — at the same time) yea
Mrs. H.:	Have you ever been bored?
Edward:	Yeah
Mrs. H.:	Did you run away?
Edward:	Almost
SS:	(Short laugh)
Mrs. H.:	Honestly? (pause) Where would you go if you decided to run away?
Edward:	To my friend's house
S:	I wouldn't
Jerry:	I'd go far out of state
Zerrick:	You're stupid. You wouldn't go to your friend's house or your mama woulda called there and bring you home.

Thus, Mrs. H. used personal ideas from the readers to aid the students in their construction of the secondary world of the story. In a related category of discourse, "text to life connections" students were asked to take information from the text and to relate it to their own world. For many elements within this category, specific characters or events were

simply transposed into the children's world (e.g., What problems would Stuart face in your house early in the morning?). However, a less frequent but potentially important emphasis within this category occurred when students were asked to construct generalizations from the story that could be applied to their own lives. Focusing on issues such as rules of conduct, advise vs. law, or what is important in life, these discussions addressed themes that extended beyond the boundaries of the book to the students' lives.

Two threads from the theme, discipline knowledge and the story world, were woven consistently throughout the discussion. These segments, focusing on discussion of literary elements and on intertextual connections, were present on regular occasions but were not as frequent as other segments.

References to literary elements, such as personification, understatement, the author's use of descriptive language, and comparisons between fantasy and fiction, were interspersed throughout the discussions. Seldom was a topic mentioned only once, instead, references to these elements occurred repeatedly across consecutive days. Important in this discourse was the emphasis on understanding a given technique or style of writing in order to better understand and to enjoy the secondary world of the story. Thus, by calling attention to the use of elements such as understatement (Transcripts Jan. 6, pp. 10, 3, 37, 52; Jan. 8, pp. 6, 6, 9; Jan. 10, p. 23), Mrs. H. helped her students appreciate the humor in the language of the text and increase their aesthetic experience of the literary work.

Intertextual references included connections to other literary works, newspapers, and TV shows. References were made to other works by E.B. White to draw similarities between characters and stories. Students were also encouraged to make connections between events in *Stuart Little* and other works shared in class or previously read. The benefits of making such connections differed with respect to how successful students ere at moving beyond a recognition of surface similarities. The importance of the meaningfulness of connections is questioned by a student, Zerrick, in

the following excerpt. After reading about Stuart Little going down a drain pipe, Mrs. H. brought up an article in the morning newspaper about a baby who had fallen down a chimney. A student in the class, Joleen, is telling about what happened.

Joleen: … and the boy thought he'd play Santa Claus and jump down the chimney so he jumped down into the fireplace and uh and, her aunt saw. Uh, his mom calling 911. People started, started telling them come get her baby and she was saying, "Where do you live? Where do you live? Where do you live? You need to be calmer so we can come get him." And the mama said, "Come get my baby, come get my baby!"

Mrs. H.: She was so excited she didn't know her address?

Joleen: Unh uh. So then after he got out of the hospital and they went home she said did you have fun, and he said he said, "yeah!" "Do you want to do it again?" "No!" And she said you only had bruise right here and right here (gesturing) and that was all.

Mrs. H.: What I want to know is how in the world did the child get on top of the house to get down the chimney in the first place?

Joleen: I guess he climbed up a tree.

Mrs. H.: A two year old?!

Zerrick: Huh unh.

Mrs. H.: That is terrible, its in the front page of the paper Zerrick. I know I read it this morning.

Zerrick: But what's the point?

Mrs. H.: Uh, well, this is something going down the drain kind of like the drain where Mrs. Little's ring was lost.

Zerrick: Oh!

Zerrick's insistence of clarification of the point illustrates the key factor in whether or not intertextual connections actually enhanced the students' construction of meaning. Segments focusing on intertextual connections ranged from comments which simply listed related texts to a few in-depth conversations in which the meaningfulness of such connec-tions was made explicit.

Discussion: Phase I. Taken as a whole, the pattern that emerged in Phase I indicated the guiding purpose was teacher determined and was in-tended, for the most part, to involve students in a personal understanding

of the literary work. Discourse in the theme, the text and the story world, provided a threshold of basic understanding of the text and its complexities, while conversation related to the reader and the story world enhanced the students' involvement in the literary work. Intertextual connections and references to literary elements were also used to increase students' understanding.

Such an emphasis in literary discourse can be described as aesthetic in that the ultimate focus is on enabling students to experience the literary work (Rosenblatt, 1985). Many researchers and theorists have stressed the importance of having students enter aesthetic transactions with literature (Cox and Many, 1992; Kelly and Farnan, 1991; Many, Gerla, Wiseman, and Ellis, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1985); however, at first glance many aspects of the approach to reading and discussion and the resulting pattern for Phase I discourse could seem at odds with earlier research.

In Phase I, Mrs. H. employed quite a traditional, teacher-dominated discussion approach. Research in classroom discourse has emphasized and often been critical of teacher dominance in the classroom (Dillon, 1984; Mehan, 1979; Marshall, 1989). Indeed, when the first author first began data collection, the traditional nature of the question-answer discussion, sometimes instigated by questions on worksheets, was alarming. Doubts were raised whether to continue the study because surely students could not be actively involved in constructing meaning under such circumstances. However, through the extensive examination of the transcripts and discussions with the students and teachers, it became clearer that the students were engaged in the texts, and were finding personal aesthetic experiences in the literature.

The students' engagement in the literary world began with daily recapping of what had happened previously, thus grounding the students in the environment of the story world (Langer, 1991). When Mrs. H. detected a discrepancy between the abilities of her students and the abilities of the reader the author had in mind when the text was written (Booth, 1961; Iser, 1980), she used paraphrasing and discussions of vocabulary to

bridge this gap. Finally as Mrs. H. encouraged students to consider the complexities in the story world, to make predictions, and to relate person-ally to the story, she accepted diversity while asking for clarification of personal perspectives. Just as Cochran-Smith's (1984) story reader guided the flow of conversation and yet encouraged active negotiation of story meaning, so did this teacher open avenues of consideration for her readers as she worked with them to negotiate meaning.

This interaction pattern can be conceived as a type of scaffolding, in which Mrs. H. the more proficient reader, provides a framework for meaning construction for the students. Cazden (1990) draws comparisons between the type of scaffolding used in classroom lessons and scaffolding used by adults when interacting with young children. Adults supply a framework for conversation and the child is encouraged to participate in discourse through prompts in which the adult supplies missing informa-tion. In classroom lessons the initiation-reply-evaluation sequence mimics this pattern. However, Cazden also stresses that classroom lessons are less responsive to the growing competence of the student. The structure often remains the same across grades and students seldom get a chance to take over the adult role of initiator. In general, this might indeed, be the case. While there were some student initiated exchanges, unarguably, the teacher question - student answer pattern dominated the discourse in Phase I. However, in contrast to the classroom lessons and adult/child interactions Cazden compared, in Phase I discourse - the adult did not always know the answers to the questions she was posing. For instance, in exchanges related to the reader and the story world, the horizons of possibilities was left open and the conversation was rich in terms of authentic teacher/student dia-logue. The existence of such reader-based threads provided evidence that, while there was teacher-directed scaffolding, the presence of the individual reader in the reader/text transaction was not forgotten and students were involved in constructing their own personal meaning from the literary work.

A second major point to be underscored for Phase I was the role discussion in the categories: 1) self in the story world; 2) using life

experiences to understand the text; and 3) text to life connections played in facilitating students' engagement in *Stuart Little.* The increased participation and the kinesthetic and spontaneous responses evident during these exchanges (Field notes, Jan. 6, 13, 16) indicated these personal associations sparked interest and generated a high level of reader involvement. This finding is consistent with earlier research linking readers' ability to make personal connections and their engagement in a story (Beach, 1990; Tierney and Gee, 1990).

Phase II

Approach to the novel. Discourse for the Phase II occurred during the first week of the multidisciplinary unit on oceanography and focused on a condensed version of *Treasure Island.* Students helped in decorating the room with ocean scenes and the students and teachers were excited over the prospect of studying the same topic in all classes (Student interviews, Jan. 14).

The basic approach to the novel consisted of oral reading frequently interrupted by lengthy segments of discourse. Only ten copies of the novel made it necessary for students to share books while reading. Four to five students showed involvement across the week, volunteering to read and spontaneously reacting to the discussions, while others were consistently less attentive or disruptive (Field notes Jan. 21, 22, 23, 24, 27). The oral reading was generally followed by additional discussion guided by focused questions and by creative writing activities.

The pattern of meaning construction. The first thread of the Phase II pattern was the daily struggle to construct a basic understanding of the condensed version of the novel. Much conversation was a result of the inferencing required because the novel lacked explicit descriptions. Secondly, Mrs. H. and, after a while, the students were not content to construct the secondary world using only the information from the condensed text. Instead, they tried to reconstruct a story world similar to the one that Mrs. H. had experienced when she read the original version. As a result, the primary emphasis focused on building a threshold of understanding

through an emphasis on two categories: what the story was about and paraphrasing.

Discussion of what the story was about followed the reading of short sections of text. In these lengthy discussions of basic story events, participants reiterated who the characters were or what was going in the story. As shown in the following excerpt, these discussions often required the students to make inferences.

T: ... Does that mean that he is a part of their group?
           Christie?
Christie: Not really.
T: Does that mean that he is a spy?
S: No.
T: No. What does it mean?
S: He's scared of the pirates.
T: It means he's scared of the pirates but he's coming and
           taking care of them.
S: Yeah, if he don't come he'll get hurt.
T: How?
Jeremy: They'll kill him.
T: I'm not sure I understand your logic. Can you explain it
           Jeremy?
Jeremy: He's fixing them so that the pirates don't get any worse
           then they'd be madder at them than they already are. So
           they help, maybe the pirates will come to like them.
T: Okay, so he's keeping their good graces by taking care of
           the medical.

In such a way thinking was probed so that the inferencing process could be modeled for the community of readers. The emphasis here was not as much on the imaginative powers of the reader, as on the textual cues that alerted the reader to make certain inferences and thus to come to an understanding of the meaning behind surface events.

The use of paraphrasing between the reading of short segments of text also played a major role in building a threshold of understanding. Phase II paraphrasing went beyond simple clarification of what was in the text; instead, on numerous occasions Mrs. H. explicitly related information from the original version that could help students understand the story (Field notes, Jan. 21; Transcripts: Jan. 21: pp. 8, 10, 11; Jan. 22: pp. 6, 7;

Jan. 24: p. 36). The focus of the paraphrasing segments was overwhelm-
ing on understanding basic events, rather than on clarifying character's
emotions or on modeling how a reader might respond to events. Mrs. H.'s
additional information often generated increased student interest.

A second thread, which also seemed to have been affected by the
condensed version, was the focus on having students make judgments or
evaluations. Within this category, only a few segments judged the appro-
priateness of character behavior or events. Instead, most of the segments
focused on evaluating the merit of the novel as a literary work as a whole
(Transcripts: Jan. 22: p. 6; Jan. 24: pp. 3, 9; Jan. 27: p. 28) with one
point of consideration the comparison of the condensed version vs. the
original (Jan. 24: pp. 7, 9). Thus this evaluative discourse indicated the
students had stepped out of the story world and were objectively analyzing
the novel as a creation.

Discourse drawing on the reader to construct the story world was
related to only one major thread, student predictions. The prediction dis-
course segments occurred primarily during the reading of the text, with
readers asked to predict solutions to specific problems or to hypothesize
the results of specific actions. Thus constrained predictions were not as
open ended as when predictions are made before reading based on chapter
titles, or when alternative solutions are posed in contrast to ones suggested
in the text, or when story sequels are written. Still, the focus in the predic-
tion exchanges was on the reader's ability to imagine possibilities rather
than textual authority. For example:

T:	And here he is floating out in the water between the island, hopefully between the island and the ship. He's not anchored anywhere. Christy.
Christie:	He could uh (inaudible) on the boat.
T:	How?
S:	Like this.
S:	A shark!
T:	Are you trying to be reasonable or are you just making things up? Just making things up. Jeremy?
Jeremy:	He could drift away.
T:	He could drift away. John?
John:	Um, I have two things.

T: Two things.
John: One, Long John Silver could get them and hold them as hostage.
T: How could they get them there on their own island?
John: Well got on the boat and ...
T: Well they don't have a boat. They don't have access to it.
S: Well they can swim out to the boat from the shore.
T: (Laughing) It's a long way.
S: And also uh, he'd be out where the base is and they might think it is another crew.
T: You just never know, well he can't if its been dismantled. Hasn't it?
S: Well I mean something else could.
T: Oh and what else could it be?
S: I don't know ... something.
T: (laughing) It is hard to predict isn't it?

Overall, the prediction exchanges for Phase II contrasted sharply with discourse falling into other categories in that exchanges were longer and involved greater numbers of students participating. Also, student turns were frequently more lengthy than the teacher's turns. Mrs. H. generally responded by reacting to students' suggestions, by paraphrasing when students spoke so the rest of the class could hear the remark, and by inviting clarification or suggestions. Thus prediction discourse gave students opportunities to take imaginative forays into the story world and the result was increased enthusiasm and involvement.

The final thread emerging on a regular basis for Phase II consisted of discourse focusing on literary elements. In the initial mention of a specific literary element, conversation often did not involve an in-depth examination of the literary device. For example, during the first references to point of view, discussion did not move beyond the definition of there term or the recognition of the type of point of view in the work or in previous works (Transcripts Jan. 12, pp. 7, 21, 28, 36-37; Jan. 13, p. 15). When considered in isolation such segments seemed to do little to further the students' personal construction of the story world. However, these references to point of view were followed by a subsequent discussion (Transcript Jan. 17, pp. 24-25) where students considered how the story would have been different had it been told from the parrot's point of view.

The following excerpt begins halfway through the segment, as the teacher works to develop students' understanding that not only would a different character (the parrot) be telling the story but that the parrot would have quite a different perspective of what was happening:

S:	He probably would have said: "The pirates are coming, look out.":
T:	"The pirates are coming?" Well, he belongs to those pirates. Do you think he would have said that? ... How would he have told the story?
Jolene:	I ... He would have...
T:	Jolene?
Jolene:	He would have said like ... he ... I think he would have said like Jim Hawkins would have been the bad guy and the pirates were the good guy.
T:	Okay. So he would have turned it around from a different point of view and he would have been telling what was he thought about that was good that they did.

Different students then continued, attempting to tell the story in the parrot's words. Finally one student brought up the story of the three little pigs told from the wolf's point of view (making the wolf seem not to be bad) and analogizes that from the parrot's point of view the pirates would not have been "bad" at all.

Rarely were references made to literary elements merely to reinforce students' understanding of the terms. The majority of the time such references were made in order to immediately enhance the students' construction of or appreciation for the literary world (e.g., alerting the students to elements of foreshadowing; Transcripts Jan. 12, pp. 23-24; Jan. 13, p. 3) or to build a groundwork for later discussion of the technique's impact on the story.

The discourse surrounding *Treasure Island* took place during a multidisciplinary unit focusing on oceanography. Surprising, references to the other subject areas or to the overall oceanography theme did not play a role in the pattern of discussion; in fact, only one reference explicitly linked the story to the overall oceanography theme. The subject matter references that did occur called attention to the social studies concepts

of latitude and longitude. The teacher commented that she probably would have made these connections whether or not the work was taught in the context of the multidisciplinary unit because she "taught social studies previously and [she tends] to work off the kids." (Interview, March 6).

In terms of the degree to which students made connections to other literature they were reading, the discussion of *Treasure Island* seemed unaffected by the fact that it occurred during the multidisciplinary unit. Although intertextual connections were an infrequent focus of attention, Mrs. H. noted that as the students became exposed to additional works containing similar settings, more associations were possible (*Treasure Island* was discussed the first week of the unit). This perception was corroborated by other six-grade language arts teachers (Interviews, March 6). Students were more likely to remark that they had made connections across books studied in language arts during the oceanography unit than they were to note connections between language arts and other subject areas (Students interviews, March 5).

Discussion: Phase II. The pattern that emerged for Phase II indicated the guiding purpose was to construct, at the least, an ongoing understanding of the basic events occurring in the story world. Thus students were primarily involved in what Langer (1991) has described as stepping into and moving through an envisionment of the story. To achieve this envisionment was difficult at times with tension felt between what the original version had to offer in contrast with the condensed version. This also resulted in some discussion that was not focused on the events occurring within the secondary world at all; instead, from time to time Mrs. H. and the students stood apart from their envisionment and critiqued the text itself. For the participants, stepping back and objectifying the literary experience (Langer, 1991) emerged regularly as students and teacher encountered frustration with their ability to create the desired experience.

Discourse in Phase II indicated that students actively worked to envision *Treasure Island.* Considering their enthusiasm for making

predictions it seems that they took interest in the events that were occurring or that they imagined could occur in the world of their creation. However, discourse focusing on personal associations played only a minor role in the discussions and lacked enthusiasm. Thus, while students were constructing the world of the novel, this was not accompanied by putting themselves in the story experience, evoking similar life experiences, or taking away information from the text and applying it to their own lives.

In examining the lack of enthusiasm in discourse related to personal associations, an interesting observation appears. Two additional topics that played minor roles in Phase II discourse were the categories: 1) character motives and emotions and 2) intratextual connections (in which character growth over time can become apparent). Beach (1990) has noted that across a series of texts, readers' initial connections between works and their own experiences are most often to feelings, settings, violations of behavior norms or conventions, and characters. Of these, three obviously deal directly with characters, their emotions, and their behaviors, topics that were not consistently the focus of the discussion of *Treasure Island*. Consequently, attention to characters may contribute to the degree to which readers can relate to literary works.

Phase III

Approach to the novel. Discussion of the third novel occurred at the end of the semester when the preservice teachers taught their three-week interdisciplinary unit focusing on environmental issues related to the students' selves and their world. After a brief introduction to novels, *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack* and *The Talking Earth*, the students were allowed to choose a group to join based on which of two novels they wished to read. *Dinky Hocker*, a complex novel, focuses on conflicts between a compulsively overweight teenager and a self-righteous mother who is so immersed in her volunteer work with teenage drug addicts that she grossly ignores her daughter. The novel was linked to the environmental theme through 1) references to the body as an environment and 2) recognition of compulsive eating and drug abuse as pollutants. The second novel describes the struggle of a modern Native American girl to recognize the value of

her tribal traditions considering the pollution threatening their environment. Often both novel groups joined for whole class discussions and activities.

Ten students choose to read the novel *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack.* The six girls who chose this group cited an interest in the communication problems between the mother and daughter as the basis for their decision, while three of the four boys were drawn to the topic of drugs. Nine of the students were friends sitting in close proximity. One student was assigned to the group by the classroom teacher to separate him from members in other book group (Field notes, April 13).

Approaches to the book varied greatly from day to day. Many times students were asked to read silently or with partners and then the reading was discussed. On other days the book was read orally by the preservice teacher and by volunteers with little discussion until the end of the chapters. Occasionally students went outside on the schoolyard or in an adjacent, empty room to read. Four girls were consistently active participants in the reading and discussions but the remaining students were often inattentive or refrained from actively participating in discussions (Field notes: April 14, 15, 16, 27, 28, 29). Half way through the unit, students were allowed to read at their own paces and three of the young people chose to read independently and subsequently completed the book by the beginning of the third week. The remaining students were often reluctant to read and consequently were usually brought together in a small group and the book was read orally.

Throughout the unit, collaborative groups worked on related activities some of which extended across more than one day. These activities seemed to generate a high level of student interest and participation (Field notes: April 13, 16, 21). Besides activities related to the novels, students created a magazine related to the overall environmental theme. Picture books, rap music, poetry, and videos were also shared to reinforce the environmental theme. This resulted in the novel being read intermittently across the three-week period rather than on a daily basis. During the last

week the final chapters of the novels were abandoned to allow students to complete the magazine before the end of the preservice teachers' field-based experience (Preservice teachers' interviews, April 29).

The *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack* small group discussions and the whole group discussions related to both novels revealed an interesting pattern of meaning construction for Phase III. The major threads comprising that pattern are described below.

The pattern of meaning construction. The first obvious thread to emerge both was the manner in which students were asked to make connections between the literature and the overall interdisciplinary theme. This focus, persistently addressed by the preservice teachers, was integrated across categories focusing on the following areas: what the story was about (which included basic character descriptions), evaluations and judgments of characters and events, the literary elements of integral and backdrop setting, text to life connections, and intertextual connections.

Environmental references occurred almost entirely at the beginning and end of class when the two small novel groups joined for discussion and activities. On the rare occasion when an environmental reference was brought up in the small group as the participants were reading Dinky Hocker, the connection and resulting conversations seemed forced, for example:

PT: Was she eating allot again?
S: (inaudible)
PT: What kind of pollution was taking place there then?
S: She's not supposed to be eating out.
PT: Oh, she not supposed to, okay.

As illustrated, attempts to connect to the environmental theme during reading seemed at times irrelevant to the construction of the secondary world. To answer the preservice teacher's question regarding the type of pollution taking place, a reader would have to step back from the events of the story to make connections to the environmental theme. Within the context of the events of the story, the type of pollution that was occurring

did not matter. Indeed the responding student ignored the question, focusing instead on judging the character's behavior within the framework of the story as it was unfolding.

In contrast, in whole class sessions students developed a basic understanding of concepts involving the environmental unit itself. In such discussions, preservice teachers attempted to have students understand what the story was saying in relatlion to environmental issues (Transcripts: April 14, pp. 1, 3, 4, 17, 19; April 15, pp. 17, 18, 19, 20; April 16, pp. 1, 11, 13, 14-16; April 21, p. 9). Through these discussions students expanded their notion of an environment to encompass the body as an environment and their understanding of the types of pollution to include drug abuse and compulsive eating. For example:

PT:	What did you write Zerrick [with respect to how the novels were similar in terms of dealing with environmental issues]?
Zerrick:	They both didn't care. They both are not into their environment.
PT:	They didn't really, didn't really get into it. What does that mean? Fred? (pause)
PT:	How did she not really get into her environment?
S:	Oh ...
S:	She kept on eating.
PT:	Right, she kept on eating and not caring about it.
PT:	- and not caring about her (pause)?
S:	Weight.
PT:	That's right. It's possible she gained a lot of weight because she was, I mean she had no concern for her environment, her personal environment, where as Billy Wind, how did she feel about her environment?
S:	Uh, she, I had it in my mind.
S:	She, she didn't care about the uhm, environment cause she, she said that she didn't believe that -uh-
S:	Oh, yeah
PT:	She didn't believe what?
S:	That, uh
PT:	She didn't believe in her environment.
S:	Yeah
PT:	So, so neither one really had faith in their environment really.
S:	On, uh, *Dinky Hocker*, Dinky Hocker had bad self esteem.

PT: Right. That's very good. [That] had a lot to do with why
           she polluted her body -
PT: - the way she did.
PT: So she ate. She really didn't feel good about herself and
           she had low self esteem and she didn't care about it ...

In this exchange, and in other segments similarly focused, the pre-service teachers encouraged students to work at an abstract level rather than at a surface level. Also, although preservice-teacher turns were pre-dominant and more lengthy than student turns, these segments did contain evidence of authentic student reaction to the unit topic something that was rare in other segments in Phase III.

Preservice teachers' references to the environment were their at-tempts to use the content of the novel to aid in the student's understanding of the interdisciplinary unit (Preservice teachers' cadre meeting April 14; Interdisciplinary unit plans; Preservice teachers' debriefing: August 11). They also were more likely to probe students for elaboration in these ex-changes, in an attempt to uncover additional information connecting the novel with the environmental theme. Consequently, these exchanges often consisted of greater turn taking than other segments.

A second major thread of emphasis for Phase III could be described as a consistent but not quite a successful attempt to build a threshold of understanding for the novel. These exchanges focused on "what the story was about." This discourse emphasis was commonly introduced because of a preservice teacher question and consisted predominantly of long teacher turns. The majority occurred after reading extended sections of text (no such segments occurred at the introduction of each day's activity) and focused on what was occurring at a particular point in the story.

The lack of success at building a threshold of understanding was apparent from the beginning of the unit. Several times entries were made regarding the fact that the students did not seem to grasp what was goin on (Field notes: April 14, 16, 27, 28, 29) and discussions with the preservice teachers and their written reflections in their teaching journals

corroborated this impression by the researchers. Examination of transcript segments led to several hypotheses about why, throughout Phase III discourse, there was little indication that the plot was being understood.

Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack is a complex work that requires that readers infer a great deal of information from events to understand the psychological conflicts occurring in the story. Although preservice teachers attempted to have students explain specific events, students often responded in a nonsensical manner. Students rarely gave elaboration on the textual information or modeled thought processes that led to a particular belief. Consequently, although references to what was going on in the story was a common focus, the resulting interactions seemed to do little to aid students' in understanding what was happening behind the scenes.

Secondly, often students in the small *Dinky Hocker* group and their preservice teachers were working at cross purposes (Transcripts: April 16, p. 19, 20, 21-22; April 27, pp. 4, 15, 16, 18; April 28, pp. 5, 6-7, 10). One ongoing word game between the male students was related to the title of the book. As demonstrated in the following excerpt, students continually responded to questions by irrelevantly bringing up that Dinky, the main character, took smack, even through this did not occur in the book.

PT:	What is it saying about Natalia?
S:	Taking smack. She started taking smack.
PT:	Natalia taking smack? We haven't read anything about Natalia ...
S:	No, not Natalia, but ... um Dinky shoots, takes smack.
PT:	We haven't seen Dinky shoot smack.
S:	No. There ain't no pictures. I know. Yeah, but she says ...
PT:	We don't have any conclusions ... (inaudible)
S:	Uh huh.
T:	Can (inaudible) judge everything by the cover of the book?
S:	No. Yeah, but (inaudible) said Dinky offered me smack.
T:	Oaky, quiet, ya'll quiet.
S:	I need smack.

Student's responses to literature in such interactions were driven not by a desire to respond to the preservice teacher probe nor by an authentic

response to the world of the text, instead, students' interactions seemed to be influenced by a need to be a part of a peer group community that was not actively involved in constructing meaning.

A third thread within the pattern of meaning construction for Phase III was an emphasis on characters. This strand consisted of discourse focusing on character motivates and emotions and on having students put themselves in a character's shoes. Discussion related to character emotions and motives made up the second largest category of emphasis in the theme, the text and the story world. Many segments within this category occurred on the last day of group discussion of the novel, in the third week of the unit. The preservice teachers had grown increasingly concerned over the students' lack of understanding and lack of interest in the novel (Preservice teacher-teaching journals), and after consulting with their cadre (Cadre meeting: April 28) had devised an activity in which each participant would be assigned a character in the story and would talka bout what their character was feeling and how he or she was relating to the other characters. As illustrated below, some resulting exchanges seemed to enable more complex understandings of the intricacies of character relationships. The students are discussing the reaction of Natalia, an emotionally disturbed girl, to a gift of balloons given to her by a young boy and the resulting suspicions of Dinky's mother, Mrs. Parker, with whom Natalia is staying.

PT:	... and no one really understood their little secret, the little conversations that they had. So, um, how did that make Natalia feel? Who's got Natalia? (refers to student assigned to Natalia's character) How did you feel about Mrs. Parker's suspicion?
S:	How did Natalia feel about what?
PT:	Fred?
Fred:	(inaudible)
PT:	You know what happened.
S:	Oh I know what happened.
PT:	What?
S:	She mixed ah, something up, salad with chili and gave it to Nader.
PT:	She started mixing things up, and she started mixing up the food. What do you think she was feeling when she did that?

Fred:	Sad. (mumbles) No.
PT:	What?
S:	She was thinking, uh ...
PT:	Thinking about what?
S:	In Renaissance [the mental facility she had been in].
PT:	The times when she was in the hospital?
S:	Yeah.

In such ways students recreated not only what the characters might have been feeling but also constructed a sense of what might have been going on in the character's heads. Such discourse uncovered the rationale and importance behind character actions and active processing of information was evident (Field notes, April 29). Segments with this focus were prevalent during the character activity occurring on the last day of discussion of the novel, and exchanges were often longer and involved multiple students. In contrast the character motivates and emotions segments which were interspersed in the intermittent discussions occurring during the reading consisted of short exchanges with superficial labels for what a character might have been feeling (e.g., "Um, she's feeling sad.").

A closely related activity had occurred during the second week of the unit when students put themselves in the characters' shoes by role playing scenes from the story. Working in small groups, students dramatized a scene from the story and then remained in character to respond to questions. Unlike discourse focusing on characters' motive and emotions, the discussion following the role playing did not emphasize the text as referent. Students were asked to act out scenes and to draw on their own feelings as they experienced the scene to describe the characters' feelings. Drama was motivational for the students and increased student participation (Preservice teacher — teaching journal, April 21).

Finally, a thread very important in the pattern of meaning making for Phase III was a result of the heavy emphasis placed on making intertextual connections. Such a focus surfaced naturally during whole class discussions as students from the two small novel groups were brought together. In addition, because literature was integrated into all subject areas in the environmental unit, references were also often made to picture

books, videos, or songs incorporated in science, social studies, or math classes. Intertextual segments focused primarily on three areas — characters, settings, and environmental aspects.

Contrasting characters occurred on the day when students were asked to compare the characters from the two novels using a Venn diagram. Few of the connections seem to go beyond a superficial level (character size, liking animals) although some connections were made with respect to the problems each was having concerning her environment. Making intertextual connections to understand characters occurred primarily within the context of this specific activity.

Similarly, comparison and contrast of settings were made about the two main novels and occurred in all but one instance within the context of a single lesson focusing on integral vs. backdrop settings. Preservice teachers chose this element because it was a requirement in the state curriculum guide and because it would allow for references to the unit theme (Unit plans). Discussions concentrated on having students understand the terms, with references to the two novels used to illustrate the differences between the terms. This knowledge did not seem to enhance the students' construction of the story world and the subject of setting was only referred to on one other occasion after the introductory activity.

In contrast, intertextual connections focusing on the environmental theme occurred across the unit (Transcripts: April 14, pp. 3, 17, 19; April 15, pp. 3, 10-11; April 16, pp. 14, 15, 15-16; April 28, pp. 1, 2). In the following excerpt, students drew on information that was read in a book in social studies class.

PT1:	Did ya'll have Mrs. H. yesterday? ... and what did you read in there?
S:	Greenel.
S:	Greynel.
PT1:	So, like there's a pollution going on in their story like it's going on there.
S:	Air pollution.
S:	The, uh, factories.

PT: The air pollution going on in the factories, and it's sort of
         like what they were talking about in The Talking Earth
         whenever the father tells Billy Wind about the pollution
         that's happening in our world that we need to take care of
         and stuff. And, uh Derrick, I mean Sirquence.
Sirquence: They were like, in the woods and he had, they s
         tarted drilling before. They had drilled and what they had
         done was messing up the [environment].
T: So you think that maybe Billy Wind's dad was worried
         about that happening again?
S: Yeah (inaudible)
S: Cause he said they might have to move.
PT: Isn't that what happened in Greynel, people wanted to
         move because of their land?
S: Yeah

Interestingly, intertextual connections to literary works were the only specific references made to content addressed in other subject areas during the unit. All of the intertextual connections were made to fictional litera-ture that focused on some form of environmental abuse. Although subject area lessons were correlated during the interdisciplinary unit, students did not make any connections to expository texts nor did they discuss any of the information learned in science, social studies, or math.

<u>Discussion: Phase III</u>. In Phase III preservice teachers juggled two purposes; one, to have students recognize aspects of the novel that could relate to the theme of the interdisciplinary unit and two, to encourage stu-dents to become involved in the literary work. In correlation, the pattern of meaning making for Phase III seems to show students fluctuated in at-tentiveness during the reading of the novel and many constructed only fragmented glimpses of the world of the story.

Attention to characters, through empathetically role playing or by examining the text to understand character motives and emotions better, seemed to increase students' involvement in the story world. It was during exchanges with such focuses that students' psychic distance (Benton, 1992) to the secondary world seemed to move from a near detachment to greater personal involvement. However, with respect to Benton's concept of psy-chic process (the process of understanding the flow of time from

beginning of the secondary world to the end), students' inability to build an understanding of the conflicts underlying the plot meant that students had little concept of the relationship between events.   Thus their involvement in the story world might best be described as an interest in snapshots of characters rather than in an unfolding story.

The dual purposes driving discourse segments in Phase III may have played a role in students' tendency to disengage from the story world. Discourse was driven not only by an interest in students' experiencing the world of the story, but also by an allegiance to making connections to an overall unit topic.   Consequently, substantial amounts of discussion focused students' attention on analyzing the text as an object in order to relate the work to the environmental theme.   Such discourse required that students assume an efferent stance toward the literary work (Zarrillo and Cox, 1992; Rosenblatt, 1985).   Rosenblatt and others (Cox and Many, 1992; Many, et.al., 1995; Purves, 1991) have stressed that in any reading event attention will fluctuate between efferent and aesthetic focuses. Rosenblatt (1991) stresses, however, that the appropriate stance when encountering literature is aesthetic and that teachers must keep their overall purpose clear.   While analysis of a text can be driven by an aesthetic purpose and can contribute to students' construction of the story, the efferent purpose driving the environmental references may have contributed to the fragmentation evident across the Phase III discussion.

In Retrospect
The preceding sections have described our interpretation of the patterns of discussions of three literary works occurring within different organizational contexts.   Two of these situations involved the same teacher and similar overall approaches, although very different texts.   The third context involved inexperienced preservice teachers, a variety of approaches to reading and discussion, and comparisons across multiple texts.   We have not attempted to control any factors concerning readers, texts, or teachers across these situations but only to offer three scenes of the meaning-making processes within each situation.   From these literature discussions within these three contexts (with their unique transactions of texts, teachers,

and students), individual readers will best decide what might inform their own situations.

Through this study we developed a new appreciation for the importance of the purpose underlying a teacher's approach to literature. In some discussions, teacher-directed activities that might seem reflective of a new critical, text-oriented approach were used to enable personal constructions of literary works. Similarly, references to literary analysis have often been assumed to result in an efferent stance, and yet we saw examples of how references to the author's craft could be used to enhance and support aesthetic experiences with texts. Thus as researchers and teachers we build bridges of understanding and a new found respect for each others ideas and preferences and closed our own gap between theory and practice.

In addition, we raised new questions for ourselves regarding literature within interdisciplinary units. Integration across the curriculum has often been seen as crucial in helping students overcome the fragmentation that is pervasive in schooling. However, we saw that when the unit topic become the force of attention, the literary experience itself can become fragmented. Thus as teachers move to interdisciplinary perspectives, they may wish to monitor their own use of literature and the role literature is to play in the unit. Our own concern to ensure that learning in one subject was correlated to information from a different subject area during the interdisciplinary unit worked at cross purposes with our desire for students to engage in the literary work. In retrospect, we feel that activities and discussions related to a literary work must ultimately be responsive to the needs of the children as they work to construct the story world. Once such literary worlds have been envisioned and experienced, students can weave understandings of the larger thematic relationships between books and interdisciplinary units in more meaningful ways.

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