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Power Through Voicing Others: Girls' Positioning of Boys in Literature Circle Discussions

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This qualitative study uses an analysis of literature circle discussions to illuminate larger issues of gender and social class for a group of fifth-grade students. By examining how four students were positioned and positioned themselves within these literature conversations, I demonstrate that the roles reproduced certain gender- and class-specific storylines. These storylines served to empower the girls' literacy development, while simultaneously disempowering the literacy development of the boys. I draw upon positioning (Davies & Harre, 1990), voicing (Bakhtin, 1986), and power (Foucault, 1977) as lenses to analyze the students' discussions of literature. I then connect these discussions to larger cultural storylines in order to demonstrate the connection between these small literature circles and greater gender and social class influences.

In an urban fifth-grade classroom, four students, Cassy, Dion, Tora, and Jack,¹ sat in a circle to discuss the book *Girl of Kosovo* (Mead, 2003). As the group began, Cassy asked her peers to read the questions about the book that they had written in their notebooks.

Cassy: Share your questions.

Dion: I ain't reading mine!

Tora: Here let me see. [grabs the notebook from Dion's hand]

Cassy: I'll read it. [tries to grab from Tora]

Tora: [reading from Dion's notebook] I like that she helped her mom around the house like— [pauses with confusion until she realizes she is reading the wrong section in his notebook]

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¹Names of the students, school, and community mentioned in this article are pseudonyms.

Tora: Oh—did you like when the dad and brother died? [Cassy grabs the notebook and Dion grabs it back]

Cassy: You read it! [to Dion]

Dion: Uh—

Cassy: [interrupting Dion] He's shy! [to the camera]

Upon Cassy's request to share, Dion stated that he did not want to read his question. Tora ignored this refusal and physically took Dion's notebook away from him. Then Cassy and Tora momentarily argued about who would read from Dion's notebook before Tora began reading it herself. Although initially confused, Tora eventually located Dion's questions and posed his first one to the group. At this point, Dion grabbed his notebook back, and Cassy told him to read it himself. Interestingly, Dion did not get to read it because Cassy interrupted him, stating to the video camera that he was shy.

As I watched these girls take Dion's notebook and speak for Dion, I began to think about some curious patterns that had emerged during this 5-week literature circle unit. The girls' practice of speaking for Dion did not match the findings of other studies that had found that girls were frequently marginalized and silenced in these groups (Cherland, 1994; Evans, 1996a, 1996b; Evans, Alvermann, & Anders, 1998; Hinchman & Peyton-Young, 2001; Marks, 1995; Phelps & Weaver, 1999). Even more intriguing, these findings did not match my own from the previous year with the same students as fourth graders (Clarke, 2004). In fourth grade, the boys engaged in assertive discursive practices such as using direct commands, insults, and challenges that rendered the girls as "victims of symbolic power" (Cherland, 1994, p. 41). Ironically, Cassy, who effortlessly spoke for Dion in fifth grade, was frequently insulted, interrupted, and stripped of her voice in the previous year's discussions. This reversal of interactional patterns caused me to wonder what was happening in these discussion groups. In fourth grade, the boys engaged in dominating discursive patterns that silenced and marginalized the girls, but in fifth grade, the girls broke this tradition and used this space to empower themselves while simultaneously disempowering the boys.

Although in this class, literature circles (Daniels, 2002) provided an opportunity for meaningful discussions (Evans, 2001) and grand conversations (Eeds & Wells, 1989), this practice also opened a space to make visible the process of social reproduction. For these fifth graders, a second year in a literature circle curriculum revealed how this instructional space illuminated larger issues of gender and social class as it pertained to literacy.

The purpose of this research was to investigate how gender, as it intersects with social class, influences the way students discuss texts in literature circles. Data come from the second year of a longitudinal qualitative research investigation as I followed the same group of students from fourth to fifth grade. As I observed the emergence of these fifth graders' interactional patterns, I wondered what these new

findings were telling me about larger issues of literacy for these particular students. How were the boys positioned by the girls in this group? How did the girls position themselves? Why was there a change in interactional patterns from the previous year? What does this positioning tell us about literacy engagement for these students?

In this article, I begin by explaining how I use the constructs of positioning, voicing, and power as it relates to literature discussion groups. I also draw upon earlier research to demonstrate how this study counters previous notions of gender as it affects student-led discussion. I elaborate on the context because it is necessary to understand the students' cultural location in order to link their current discursive productions to larger cultural storylines. Then, I describe pieces of conversations that show how the girls in these discussions positioned Dion and Jack, as well as how they positioned themselves in powerful roles. Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), I demonstrate the link between these conversations and larger storylines of class-specific gender roles for these students as they pertain to literacy engagement. The boys, with the help of the girls, were finding ways to access power outside of school-sanctioned literacy events and thus conformed to larger working-class masculine narratives that aligned them with manual labor. The girls, on the other hand, aligned themselves with power through literacy practices, better preparing them for the changing workforce. Through this analysis, I will explore both the local context and larger cultural context to consider the external influences that shape these discussions. Finally, I explore implications for educators and researchers as to how this understanding can affect classroom instruction.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Freire and Macedo (1987), "language should never be understood as a mere tool of communication. Language is packed with ideology" (p. 128). The language these students used in literature circles was connected to their class- and gender-specific identities, therefore affecting their discursive interactions.

Positioning

According to Davies and Harre (1990), the positions we occupy within a discursive event are similar to roles played by actors. Engaging in a discussion is akin to a performance in which different speakers occupy different positions. Often these positions are taken up, as Lewis (2001) claimed, "in relation to the expectations of others and the social codes and discourses available within a given context" (p. 13). However, unlike actors who frequently change roles, these recurring discursive positions affect how we experience our identity (Davies & Harre, 1990). Therefore,

the way we are continually positioned within a literature discussion contributes not only to how our literacy identity is shaped, but also to how we interact in future discussions. Repeatedly taking up a certain position can be explained by past experiences, both personal and cultural, which speakers draw upon to position themselves in the present moment.

Davies and Harre established two types of positioning that could occur within a discursive event: interactive and reflexive. *Interactive* positioning is when one person positions another; *reflexive* positioning is when one positions oneself within a conversation. It is through these positions that we make certain storylines relevant. A *storyline* is part of one's autobiography and is elicited through both past personal experiences and larger cultural narratives. For this article, I highlight how the students engaged in both interactive and reflective positioning. I then connect this to larger cultural storylines to explain why students occupied various positions within these groups.

Voicing

To analyze the students' discourse, I draw upon a Bakhtinian notion that "there can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 84). Everything we say is infused with others' words, thereby making our speech an assimilation of others' voices and previous words. For Bakhtin, "each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of communication" (p. 91). Considering these reverberations allows an examination of discourse in these literature circles to connect to macro themes or larger cultural storylines that exist within and beyond the classroom.

Wortham (2001) related Bakhtin's notion of an utterance to positionality. He believed that a particular utterance could position its speaker in a particular way: "Every utterance contains two texts—not just the content of the speech but also the position taken by the speaker in saying what he/she says" (p. 21). In this analysis, I look at both what students say and how their utterances enable them to position themselves and each other within this context. Through these various positions, students are able to access power differently.

Wortham (2001) also explored Bakhtin's notion of voice. Bakhtin (1986) used voicing in his discussion of narration, stating, "when narrators put words into a character's mouth it gives them the opportunity to index a certain voice for that character" (p. 39). In these discussion groups, I examine how students "voice" each other, which is similar to Bakhtin's explanation of how narrators presuppose the voices of others. By voicing another, an individual not only positions the other, but also engages in a process of self-definition in which he or she has the power to position someone else. Thus, voicing can be an index of power relations.

Power

Fairclough (1995) asserted that we cannot look at discourse without looking at power relations, as power is central to all language interactions. By examining power from a localized perspective rather than from the top down, Foucault (1977) showed how micro examples of power could be used to understand how power exists in a more global sense. This is the lens I employ in examining these literature circles. I believe that we can understand how power operates in the world of these fifth graders by looking at a small example of how it operates within a peer-led discussion group.

Foucault (1977) advocated that there is no single source of power but rather dynamic and shifting power relations. As a result, we need to focus on the multiple power relationships in which we are engaged. In a net-like web, power can be circulated in many different ways according to the many different positions that we occupy throughout our lives. For this study, I analyzed one set of relationships in which these fifth-grade students were engaged. For these students, a literature circle is an illustrative case in which power is circulating and can be seen through discourse. Fairclough (2001) asserted that one way we can see how power relations shape discourse is through examining who has access to discursive power and who has the power to impose and enforce constraints on this access.

SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON TEXT-BASED SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Previous researchers have used literature circles as a lens to investigate larger social practices and have found that gender influences these discussions. However, fewer studies have examined the intersection of gender and social class in this setting, and even fewer have examined this practice over time. My longitudinal study adds to the literature supporting the impact of gender on these discussions. By complicating previous findings, as well as including a social class analysis, my work adds to the research on gender and social class as seen through the lens of a literature circle discussion.

Literature Circles as Illustrative Cases

Literature circles initially gained momentum in classrooms as an instructional practice that facilitated a transactional experience (Rosenblatt, 1978), moved away from teacher-centered discourse (Cazden, 2001), and increased substantive engagement (Nystrand, Gamoran, & Heck, 1993). Gambrell (2004) asserted that interest in this discussion practice has increased over the past three decades, as

evidenced by the increase in the number of journal articles and conference papers on the topic.

Although some researchers demonstrated this practice's ability to increase engagement (Almasi, 1995), promote higher level thinking (Eeds & Wells, 1989), and improve comprehension (Sweigart, 1991), others began to view these groups more critically. Alvermann et al. (1996) first investigated relationships among students in this context. Their multicase study focused on students' perceptions of how they experienced these text-based discussions. Although they found that students were aware of the conditions necessary for good discussion, that they saw discussion as helpful to understanding, and that teachers' structure influenced their conversations, Alvermann et al. also discovered that the students focused more on their relations with each other than on the text itself. As a result of this study, researchers began to focus not only on the textual content of these discussions, but on what else was happening in these groups. What first appeared as transactional, engaging, and democratic spaces for student discussion were now being analyzed for their complicated sociocultural influences (Cherland, 1994; Dutro, 2003; Evans, 1996a, 1996b, 2002; Evans et al., 1998; Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995; Hinchman & Peyton-Young, 2001; Lewis, 1998, 2001).

Literature circles provide a unique opportunity to investigate sociocultural influences because they open up a classroom space in which peer interaction is unmediated by the teacher's direct influence. Like Alvermann et al. (1996), Lewis (1998) asserted that, without the presence of the teacher, the students' discussions had more to do with interpreting sociocultural roles than the text. Lewis believed that students used this space to reenact the culture of the classroom and beyond: "The heteroglossic nature of these peer-led groups brought to the surface the competing identities students must address within themselves and others, the multiple roles they play within the social networks of their classrooms, their families, and their communities" (p. 22). I use this lens of literature circles when looking at the discussion of the four students in this study.

Literature Circles and the Influence of Gender

Gender shapes the interactional patterns in literature circle discussion groups. Many studies have focused on how girls in particular are marginalized in these settings (Cherland, 1994; Evans, 1996a, 1996b; Evans et al., 1998; Hinchman & Peyton-Young, 2001; Marks, 1995; Phelps & Weaver, 1999).

In an early study, Cherland (1994) examined literature response groups with sixth-grade students. She found that, in every mixed-gender group, the boys spoke for longer turns, engaged in more teasing of the girls, and displayed more contradictions. These discursive practices enabled the boys to achieve symbolic power in these groups. Cherland defined symbolic power as "an instrument of domination, one brought into existence by discourse" (p. 41). She found that, in these groups,

the cultural discourses that were enacted by the boys contributed to the girls becoming the “victims” of this symbolic power.

Evans et al. (1998) also explored how gender influenced the ways in which students participated in discussions of literature. Similar to Cherland’s (1994) boys, the boys in the Evans et al. study also used teasing and challenging to relegate the girls to powerless positions. Furthermore, Evans et al. found that “the talk during peer-led literature discussion often reinforces sexist stereotypes that the discussions are designed to interrupt” (p. 117).

Evans (1996a, 1996b, 2002) further probed this notion of the influence of gender on student discussions. In one article (Evans, 1996b), she investigated how gender influenced the way students positioned themselves in these groups. Evans again demonstrated how “the boys consistently positioned themselves as powerful members who had the right to tease and belittle the girls, an action which simultaneously positioned the girls as powerless members who were expected to accept such treatment” (p. 200). In another study (Evans, 2002), she found that students used gender as a social marker affecting how they interacted in groups. She found that, in this context, girls and boys often physically isolated themselves and frequently broke off into homogenous subgroups.

Literature Circles and Social Class

No studies have directly used a social class analysis to understand how class affiliation affects positioning within literature circle discussions. Yet, social class has proven to be an important influence on students’ education. Anyon’s (1980) cross-class study demonstrated how schooling varied as a result of the income levels of school districts. She asserted that the received curriculum and instructional tasks caused students to develop a relationship with the economy in order to prepare them for future careers in the workforce. Willis (1977) also explored the influence of social class on school interactions, although he asserted that it is not necessarily the structure of the school that perpetuates inequities, but rather the strength of a community-specific discourse. For the boys in his study, this dominant working-class ethos was tied to the real world of labor and masculinity.

Heath’s (1983) cross-cultural ethnography of how children are indoctrinated into community language practices also has strong implications for a social class analysis. Like Willis (1977), who documented the strength of a community’s discourse, Heath advocated that culture is a learned behavior and that language habits are part of the shared learning experiences of a community. Although many of her comparative examples occurred along racial divisions, she also used social class to compare the two mill towns to the middle-class townspeople. Payne-Bourcy and Chandler-Olcott (2003) also examined how social class affected adolescent language practices in their long-term ethnographic study of a girl from the working class. They found that social class affected her literacy learning as she struggled

between the language practices of her community and those of school. This became more pronounced as she left her working-class neighborhood and ventured into a university setting, where the stakes were higher and the gap between her class background and the discourse of the school widened.

In this study, social class is the cultural location that provides an understanding of the literature discussions. I assert that the context, an urban working-class environment, influences the ways students discuss in these groups. In a previous study, I compared these students' discussions with those of students in a middle-class school. I found that the ways boys and girls discussed in these groups differed as a result of social class (Clarke, 2004).

Although many of these studies have contributed to our understanding of the way social class and gender influence students' discursive practices, none has followed participants beyond a single school year. In my first year's data, I found that the girls were marginalized, similar to these previous studies. However, by staying with the same group and continuing to use literature circles through a second year, I provide a longitudinal approach to examining this intersection of gender with social class that I hope will contribute to our further understanding of student discussions and literacy.

METHOD

This study used CDA to investigate these literature discussions. One of the primary characteristics of CDA is that it examines discourse in light of its situational, institutional, and societal influences. Therefore, to understand my students' discursive productions, I first examined the cultural location that affected the lived world of these students. Social class shaped this lived world. According to Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody (2001), the influence of social class is subtle and complex. Social class cannot be defined as purely an economic category, but rather it is "at once profoundly social and profoundly emotional and lived in its specificity in particular cultural and geographic locations" (p. 53). The community from which these students come is traditionally working class; however, this neighborhood might now be more accurately be described as "working poor." However, I will use the term *working class* not only because it has been commonly used in the literature on social class, but also because I believe that historical working-class ideologies have been passed down to this group of students.

Context

Classroom. This research project took place in the second year of a 3-year longitudinal study on the sociocultural influences on student discussions in literature circles. During the first year, I followed two groups of fourth graders as they

discussed literature. In the present study, I followed one of the same classes of students to fifth grade, where again I served as consultant and researcher as the teacher used literature circles as a foundation of the literacy curriculum. The teacher in this classroom was new to both the school and to teaching language arts; therefore, in exchange for continuing my research with these students, I served as a mentor. I spent the first half of the year leading the class as I modeled lessons, organized the curriculum, and engaged with the students on a daily basis. As the year progressed, I pulled away from this responsibility, and the teacher assumed more control. This was the students' second year working in a literature circle format for literacy instruction. The first year, the teacher modeled how to productively interact and discuss within this context. Because the students were accustomed to this routine, I did not do as much direct instruction on group process techniques but instead offered periodic minilessons on topics such as such as turn taking, good participation, equitable sharing of roles, job sheets, responding to the text, and group responsibilities. The students and I constructed charts with these themes that were hung around the room as reminders.

The students ran these literature circle groups based on one of two formats. The first format was facilitator directed. The teacher assigned one student the role of the group leader, and this student held flip-card prompts to lead the group in a discussion of the book. Each student came to this meeting with two responses and two questions written in his or her literature circle notebook to share with the group. The facilitator's job was to read the flip cards and elicit participation, as well as to direct the group members in sharing their responses and questions. The other type of literature circle that the students used was open formatted. Here, each student had a prepared job to share with the group (based on Daniels's, 2002, role sheets). In this format, no one student officially occupied a more powerful position as each had a job to share. The students were familiar with these two formats as they had been modeled and practiced in depth in fourth grade and as a review in fifth. Although these different styles of literature circles resulted in different types of power dynamics, I observed similar power negotiation regardless of how the groups were set up.

School. The students attended Millcreek School, a huge three-story brick building built in 1850, which is located in the center of Lower Cobb's Hill. With 560 students, the school has become the focal point of this community's life. Although the neighborhood's racial population is 94% Caucasian and 4% African American, the school's population is 51% Caucasian students and 44% African American students. Busing into this community has changed the school makeup over the years and has led to some tension in the neighborhood. The class that I followed had 10 African American students and 12 Caucasian students. The class was also almost evenly split between girls (10) and boys (12).

The school has been designated an Academic Watch school; passage of state-mandated fourth- and sixth-grade proficiency tests hover at 48%. Ninety-two percent of students in the school are labeled as economically disadvantaged and receive free lunch. As a result of poor test scores, the principal and staff undertook a schoolwide effort to increase reading achievement. In part, they sought to create classroom literacy instruction that connected students' community discourses with that of the mainstream school discourse. Literature circles are one way to do this.

Community. Millcreek School is located in a disadvantaged neighborhood within a large midwestern urban school district. Known citywide as Lower Cobb's Hill, a viaduct above a once busy railroad isolates the community from downtown. Formerly a bustling industrial district, today it is mostly abandoned, full of burned-out buildings, boarded-up homes, and other familiar signs of urban blight and poverty. With the loss of manufacturing jobs, Lower Cobb's Hill's median income now barely reaches above the poverty level, hovering around \$12,000, and many families live below the poverty level. The adults in the neighborhood represent the city's largest adult population with less than a 12th-grade education and the second highest rate of functional illiteracy (measured by less than an eighth-grade education). The community has a 72% to 73% dropout rate after the eighth grade (Wagner, 2000). The students living in this community not only face some bleak statistics regarding literacy but also face problems of street drug use—OxyContin and heroin are pervasive—as well as the health threats of HIV and hepatitis C (Hicks, 2004). The neighborhood is the frequent subject of news stories about polluted air and odorous emissions from illegal dumping.

Data Collection

I collected data for a whole school year in order to explore the gendered discursive practices in this setting. Qualitative findings can come out of three types of data collection—observations, interviews, and documents (Patton, 2002). I used all three in constructing my analysis. Observations were my focal point, as I audiotaped and videotaped student literature circle discussions. Because I was studying student discussion, it was necessary to use audiotape, but I found that adding videotape allowed me to transcribe in more detail and enabled me to watch the videos with students in order to get their perspectives on the discussions. I was strictly an observer in the students' peer-led meetings. I sat behind the group and monitored the audio- and videotaping. I took field notes on these discussions as they occurred but did not evaluate students; the head teacher took that responsibility. In addition, I had been audiotaping and videotaping these students for 2 years, so although my presence may have had an effect on their interactions, by this point in the research, the students had become fairly oblivious to me.

Although this article focuses on the nine discussion groups generated during one 5-week unit, I transcribed over 20 discussions over the period of the year. I also triangulated these data by conducting individual interviews with eight key students to collect data about the classroom, school, and community. In addition, I met with a focus group, made up of nine boys and girls, once a week for 6 weeks during lunch to explore issues surrounding literature circles, as well as to discuss their participation and views about literacy events both in school and beyond. These focus groups started out as semistructured interviews, as I had intended to use prompts for each meeting, but as the meetings progressed, the students began generating their own topics. I also presented transcripts of previous meetings to prompt more in-depth conversations. In addition, I collected documents, which included reading surveys, student work samples, and observer field notes on students' literacy practices and classroom engagement outside of these discussion groups.

This analysis focuses on one group that discussed the book *Girl of Kosovo* (Mead, 2003). This book is based on the true story of an 11-year-old ethnic Albanian girl who lived through the Serbian-Albanian war in Kosovo. As she endured a bomb blast that killed her father and brother, suffered a life-threatening injury, and experienced the devastation of her normal life, the narrator maintained a voice of strength and the ability to find hope in even the grimmest circumstances. This book was chosen as part of a realistic fiction unit focusing on strength and survival.

I decided to concentrate on this slice of data because the students in this literature circle group were a good representation of the classroom at large: two boys and two girls of similar socioeconomic class status. It was also evenly balanced racially with a Caucasian boy and girl and an African American boy and girl. These students were reading one grade level below their fifth-grade placement. Although this analysis focuses on this one group, I observed similar patterns in my other groups as well. Furthermore, I did not find any contradictory evidence from the other groups or the class at large that would negate my conclusions.

For analysis, I drew upon Fairclough's (1995) three-tiered framework of description, interpretation, and explanation. Like Fairclough, my starting point was the text, the actual literature circle discussions. These conversations provided the center from which my analysis emanated. In description, I used textual analysis to present some emerging themes. Fairclough (2001) saw this first level as the place in which "a close analysis of texts in terms of such features can contribute to our understanding of power relations and ideological process in discourse" (p. 91).

From this textual description, analysis moved outwards to interpretation. For Fairclough (2001), this is where one examines the relationship between the text and larger discourse processes. I used the localized texts to present larger discursive themes. By connecting themes to greater discourse practices, I began to understand the local conversations. For example, one way to examine unequal power relations is through looking at turn-taking systems, so I looked to answer Fairclough's questions, "What interactional conventions are used and are there ways in which one par-

participant controls the turns of others?" (p. 93). In a conversation in which all people held equal power status, turn-taking opportunities would be distributed equally. Therefore, through examining patterns of turn taking, we can observe how power is distributed among the participants in a discussion. The final level of this framework, explanation, involves exploring the relationship of the text within the social context in which it is embedded. For me, widening out to this layer placed the text and discursive productions within larger situational, institutional, and societal influences. I began to explore how and why these texts were produced. I used data from other sources to assist me in explanation. Field notes reflecting larger classroom interactions, interviews, focus groups with students, and work samples helped me understand how the local classroom environment influenced these texts. Finally, to widen this explanation to societal influence, I also drew upon data gathered through others' research to explain how these isolated texts fit into greater ideological conversations.

This heuristic also organized my results and discussion. I first descriptively present snippets of group conversations. I then investigate the context of this group to shed light on my initial questions about how the students engaged in positioning and why this changed over time.

Finally, I provide an explanation that goes beyond the context to consider the storylines that influenced the boys and girls, as well as to consider what this tells us about literacy engagement for these students. Fairclough (1995) believed that this move from micro (the text) to macro (larger explanation) must be recursive, where each layer is in ongoing dialogue. Although I engaged in this recursive movement through my analysis, in my discussion this layering appears linear. It is very difficult to represent a circular process in a one-dimensional text. Like Fairclough, my aim was to use this three-dimensional framework to map these layers of analysis onto one another. However, unlike Fairclough, my description of this process may at times seem separate. This decision of representation was not only one of ease, but also one of clarity. I hoped that, through portraying this outward movement of analysis, others can see the connections between the micro level of the text and macro levels of influence.

LIMITATIONS

Although I believe that much can be learned through this micro to macro approach, I also realize that there are inherent limitations involved in this type of analysis. With this in mind, I triangulate these discussions with other data collected from multiple sources and use other researchers to support my claims. However, basing my research in one setting does limit its ability to be generalized. This study does not aim to generalize to other settings; instead, I hope to present an analysis that will be informative for others. The intention of this article is to illustrate how gender, class, and literacy are inherently interwoven in important ways that affect liter-

acy learning and instruction. I recognize that others from various hermeneutic traditions may come to different conclusions, and I hope that by providing this frame, I will encourage others to examine their research from their perspectives as well.

FINDINGS

Dion and Jack: “Being Voiced”—Victims of Interactive Positioning

As Bakhtin (1986) asserted, when we speak we are taking on the voices of others. For the most part, this goes unnoticed as we unconsciously take up another’s voice or position. In these literature circles, however, by “voicing another” the boys became disempowered as the girls actively took over their voices. By literally speaking for the boys, as well as not allowing the boys to voice themselves, these girls put constraints on the boys’ access to discursive power. In all of their interactions, the boys attempted only twice to resist being voiced, and for the most part the boys acquiesced to the girls’ positioning.

“You all not going to let me talk or something—ahh.” In the *Girl of Kosovo* group, Dion suffered the most from being voiced by the girls. This happened often as Cassy and Tora frequently took away his notebook and tried to answer for him, thereby literally inserting their voices in place of his. This voicing was evident the very first time the group met.

Cassy: But why was she bleeding so bad?

Dion: When?

Cassy: [ignores Dion] ‘Cause she got her leg cut off and there is a lot of blood. Here—I’ll read yours. [grabs Dion’s notebook]

In this example, Cassy asked a question of the group. She ignored Dion’s request for further information and moved on and answered it herself. She then took Dion’s notebook away to read his answer for him. By taking his notebook and reading for Dion, Cassy imposed a constraint on Dion’s ability to voice himself in this conversation. Not only was Dion’s request for more information ignored, but he was unable to ask his own question.

This happened again to Dion the second time the group met. This time, each student was supposed to come with a prepared job sheet. The students had been assigned their respective jobs the day before and had time in class to prepare. Dion was assigned the connector role, which involved making connections between the book and the world beyond the text. In this situation, Cassy again interactively positioned Dion without access to discursive power.

- Cassy: He got the connector [about Dion]—He said he is the connector and what he connects in this story is what about the village because his—what’s it called? [she has Dion’s notebook and is reading from it]
- Dion: [starts to answer]
- Tora: She keeps going—I think? [takes notebook from Cassy]
- Dion: *WHAT?* I got nothing right there!
- Tora: [to Cassy] Don’t he got something down right there?
- Cassy: Oh—he said his village is sort of connected to his friend—
- Dion: [cuts her off and adds] my neighborhood ’cause it got a lot of crime—and I do too in my neighborhood—
- Cassy: [laughs]
- Tora: No, you don’t!

Cassy told the group what Dion’s job was and started to give his answer. When he tried to interject, Tora took his book and also tried to read his answer. In response, Dion countered that he did not write anything, but Tora checked this with Cassy. Dion had in fact written something. When Cassy began to read from Dion’s notebook, he cut her off and added to what he wrote down. Cassy and Tora were again able to voice Dion and hence position him in a powerless role by not allowing him to read his own connections. Even when he attempted to assert himself, the girls laughed and disagreed with him. Once more, the girls were voicing Dion. At a later point in the group, Dion tried to resist being positioned by saying, “You all not going to let me talk or something—ahh.”

“Go—Jack—man you don’t say nothing!” Jack suffered a similar fate. Unlike Dion, however, the girls voiced Jack not by taking his notebook and reading his words, but instead by taking his turn and his role.

- Cassy: What do you think is going to happen next? Jack, go—
- Tora: Me—go Jack.
- Jack: [silence]
- Cassy: [little wait time] *OK*, go Tora.
- Tora: I think that her mother is going to die and she is going to help take care of her little sister—and her brother and they are going to be in the house by themselves and maybe KLA is going to come and gonna kidnap them—and stuff like that—
- Cassy: Your turn Jack—
- Jack: [silence]
- Cassy: [almost immediately] *OK*—I think what is going to happen next is everybody is going to die in her family—except well her mother and baby—and because they’re going to die of a disease and I think she is going to be like that girl named Jessie in that other book that has to find her way out to get to a different place.
- Tora: Go—Jack—man you don’t say nothing!—*OK*, I got another one.

In this exchange, Cassy exerted her authority by maintaining a fast pace in the group. When she asked Jack to answer her prompt, he responded with silence. Cassy quickly continued by asking Tora to respond, which she did. Then Cassy again tried to get Jack to participate, but before he could respond, she stated her prediction. At this point, Tora recognized that Jack had not participated, but again she gave him no opportunity to respond to this accusation. Jack was given very little wait time between the requests for him to speak until the girls took his turn and spoke for him. When the girls maintained this power in the group, Jack had little opportunity to take it away from them. In this example, by not allowing Jack to voice himself, the girls again engaged in interactive positioning by defining the boys' role as one without power to control the direction or the pace of the conversation. Controlling the topic allowed a more powerful participant to maintain unequal relations of power (Fairclough, 2001). By not responding to this control, Jack displayed discursive acquiescence to the dominant turn-taking system wielded by the girls.

Jack was stripped again of his power in a different meeting. In this group, the teacher specifically gave Jack the position of facilitator. He had the flip cards and read the prompts. He only read two of the cards before Tora physically took them from him and read them herself.

Cassy: Right, right we are against the Iraq and *OK*—

Tora: The next question. [takes it from Jack] What do you think will happen next?

By this action, Tora voiced Jack through his job and thereby prevented him from maintaining the role of power that was initially given to him in his group. Tora's utterance served the purpose of positioning herself as the leader and again put a constraint on Jack's ability to access power.

Dion and Jack: Resisting Being Voiced

According to Foucault (1977), "there are no relations of power without resistances" (p. 142). For the boys in this group, however, resistance did not result in a significant shift in discursive power away from the girls. Dion attempted to resist the girls' active voicing of him a couple of times. Unfortunately, these attempts seemed to go unnoticed as the girls continued to render Dion powerless. One time, Cassy took Dion's notebook away. He grabbed it back and then proceeded to read his own answers aloud. However, he was less successful on many more occasions. The third time that this group met, Dion resisted cooperating with the group, while Cassy and Tora positioned themselves as members who could make Dion participate by giving him a voice.

Jack: Anybody else?

Dion: I'm not going.

Cassy: [giggling]

Tora: Man just read—you never read yours.

Dion: I'm not doing it.

Cassy: [takes Dion's notebook]

Dion: No—didn't I just say no—*GET* out girl!

Cassy: [Cassy reads his response] *OK*—I like when Lena left the house.

Tora: [takes the notebook from Cassy and reads from Dion's notebook] I disliked the opening-open— [not able to read anymore]

When Dion said that he was not going to read his response, Tora confronted him by accusing that he never read his work. Cassy took his notebook away from him. Dion tried to protest, but Cassy started to read his answers anyway. Then, Tora took his notebook from Cassy and also began to read his words, which she had difficulty understanding. Again, Dion did not have a chance to voice himself. Even after he protested, the girls continued to read his response and voice his words.

Cassy and Tora: “Voicing Themselves”—Power Through Reflexive Positioning

While voicing Dion and Jack, Cassy and Tora simultaneously positioned themselves as members who controlled the group's functioning. Through reflexive positioning, these girls placed themselves in leadership positions, which enabled them to achieve power through this literacy event. One of the main ways that Cassy and Tora indexed these powerful roles was to engage in teacher-like behaviors. By keeping the group on task and holding other members accountable, the girls accessed power by becoming subteachers for these groups.

“You can read yours.” The girls enacted teacher-like behaviors to make sure the group stayed on task. During one meeting, the teacher asked Dion, who had the role of facilitator, to lead the group. When he got to the prompt to share responses, he hesitated. Cassy quickly assumed the leadership position.

Cassy: You can read yours. [to Dion]

Dion: I like how the girl helped her mom around the house like going outside to get water and firewood.

Cassy: Next one— [to Dion] You read your next one. [to Dion]

Dion: I didn't like that her dad died.

Cassy: Because it was very sad.

In this example, Cassy directed Dion to read his first response. When he finished, she commanded him to read his next one. She replicated a very teacher-like IRE (Cazden, 2001) discourse pattern of initiation (“You can read yours”), re-

sponse (by Dion) and evaluation (when she tells him to move to the next one). According to Cazden, the structure of the IRE sequence enables the teacher to control the flow of information. By engaging in this type of discursive structure, Cassy replicated this control. She also elaborated for Dion when she explained that it was very sad when the dad died. By building on Dion's response, Cassy positioned Dion as one whose response could be elaborated on, while simultaneously positioning herself as the one to do it.

This happened in another meeting where Dion was again the facilitator.

Dion: Which one do I do now?

Cassy: The next one. [to Dion]

Dion: Share responses? [to Cassy]

In this example, Dion requested help fulfilling his job responsibility and Cassy eagerly told him to turn to the next flip card to proceed with the discussion. Again, through self-definition, Cassy positioned herself as the member to assist others and thereby became the true group leader even though the leadership position of facilitator was officially assigned to Dion.

Keeping the group on track and controlling the pace enabled Cassy to maintain power. This was seen twice more when Jack was the facilitator.

Cassy: OK, now read. [to Jack]

Jack: What happened in this part of the story?

Cassy: Me. [raising her hand] That's so sweet.—And that's all—OK—next one. [to Jack]

Jack: If you were reading this to a small child is there something they might not understand?

In this group, Cassy continually directed Jack to read the next flip-card prompt. After instructing Jack to read, she immediately raised her hand and directed the attention back to her. In both instances, Cassy maintained power by telling Jack what to do and when to do it. Cassy was again able to enhance her own position in the group by acting in a teacher-like manner that kept the group functioning.

"Go—You suppose to write something!" Tora also enacted subteacher behaviors that enabled her to access power in her group. One way that Tora positioned herself as powerful was to hold the others (namely the boys) accountable in these discussions. For example, in one group, Tora established herself as the leader and commanded Jack to fulfill his job's responsibilities.

Tora: Jack— [pause] *Come on* Jack—

Cassy: OK, Jack go—

Jack: I was the summarizer and I had to write what happened in the story—

- Tora: [interrupting] I know—I think that—
 Cassy: *No*, he's supposed to do it—
 Tora: [interrupting] I think that her mother is going to get killed—by the KLA—
 Cassy: He didn't write nothing—
 Tora: Go— [to Jack] you suppose to write something!
 Cassy: He didn't write nothing? Why didn't you write nothing?

Tora directed Jack to share his job of summarizer for the group. When he started, however, Tora interrupted him to assert what she thought had happened. Although Cassy tried to keep the group on track by telling Tora that this was Jack's job, it soon became clear that Jack did not complete the assigned task. Tora reprimanded Jack for not completing his job. Interestingly, both Tora and Cassy displayed teacher-like displeasure when realizing that Jack did not complete his work.

Tora again exerted her teacher-like role when she got frustrated with Jack's slowness in fulfilling his responsibilities as facilitator.

- Cassy: Right—we are against the Iraq. [answering Dion's previous question]
 Tora: The next question. [pauses and looks at Jack]
 Jack: [silence]
 Tora: [grabs the cards away from Jack and huffs] What do you think will happen next?

When Jack did not flip the cards fast enough, Tora took over this job for Jack by grabbing the flip cards out of his hands and reading the next prompt to the group. Tora took it upon herself to shift the power from his given job to herself. In doing so, she again engaged in reflexive positioning where, like a teacher, she had the power to direct others' responses.

DISCUSSION: INVESTIGATING THE CONTEXT

To understand how these students were positioned in these discussions, we must consider how these small book groups illuminated larger literacy practices in this classroom. According to Foucault (1977), by examining a micro interaction, we can understand more global relations of power that existed for these students.

These fifth graders' positions may have reflected certain gendered cultural storylines about the ways that working-class boys and girls engage in school-based literacy. The boys were being positioned outside of this school-sanctioned literacy activity. By voicing the boys, the girls were contributing to this alienation by positioning them in less powerful roles, thereby replicating a working-class storyline, which confirms boys' school disengagement (Weis, 1990; Willis, 1977). However,

the girls were finding ways to get power through engaging in school-like literacy practices, which enabled them to “do school” in a more productive way. By gaining access to institutional power, the girls also replicated certain cultural storylines that place females in line with literacy and hence school success (Walkerline, 1990; Weis, 1990).

As Davies and Harre (1990) suggested, the way people position themselves and others is based on larger storylines that are relevant to their lives. To explain how these students engaged in positioning, I will examine these storylines. I will first explore the local interactions by reflecting upon the students’ classroom, school, and community. It is at this level that I draw upon my field notes, interviews, focus groups, and artifacts that were collected throughout the school year. I will then widen this lens by considering larger gender and class narratives so that we can make sense of the reverberations of the students’ discourse in these literature circles.

Why Were the Boys Positioned by the Girls?

Unlike the boys’ dominating discursive practices as fourth graders, a second year in literature circles found them positioned without this discursive power. Although this appeared strange on the surface, as I widened my lens I discovered that these discussions were just one of many contexts in which the boys were being positioned outside of school learning experiences. Two things appeared to be happening to the boys as they moved from fourth to fifth grade. First, they were not gaining power through sanctioned literacy activities. As a result, the boys were accessing a different type of power that resulted in their disengagement with school in general.

The boys were not just withdrawing in their discussion groups; my field notes indicated other examples of nonparticipation. For example, during daily silent reading time, it was difficult to find the boys sitting quietly and reading a book. In addition, the boys were more reluctant to engage in the writing workshop, and the teacher frequently badgered them to hand in writing assignments. When I interviewed some boys, a few recognized this nonparticipation, and two pointed specifically to the girls as a reason. Tom stated, “My group now there are some girls and they be talking too much.” Marshall agreed, “Like when you be trying to talk and then the girls they be talking too much and then they are like *very* annoying.”

Finding themselves positioned outside of sanctioned literacy practices, the boys in this class began to access a different type of power. In this classroom, suspension of boys had risen since the beginning of the year. In my focus group, when I asked who the powerful students in the class were, Alan was quickly identified. One boy said, “Alan is powerful because he always wants to get into a fight with somebody.” When I further probed into this use of force as accessing power, a student responded, “I think girls have power in their mouths and boys have power in their fists.” If this is how students view positions of power, then it makes sense that liter-

ature circles would privilege the “talkative” girls and leave the boys to find a different way to achieve power in the classroom. Through examining these classroom interactions as a whole, the way that Dion and Jack were positioned in their group made sense. Like the other boys in their class, they were located outside the power in the literature circles. However, the way the girls became more powerful within this context mirrored other school experiences.

Why Did the Girls Position Themselves?

As demonstrated through Cassy and Tora, a second year in literature circles actually reversed the way girls achieved power in this discursive context. This change in interactional patterns was also seen in other areas of the school day. The girls in this class were using school-based literacy to become empowered and to increase their engagement in school. For example, during silent reading time, the girls often sat and read as expected. One day when I was observing, Tiffany, Kelly, and Savannah were sitting on the back rug and all reading the same book aloud to each other. They each had their own copy and were reading it in a round-robin fashion. In addition, a group of girls started a lunchtime writing group in which they assisted each other with pieces that they were writing at home. Through their many literacy activities, they increased their ability to access power through school-based literacy. During a focus group when I asked some students to identify powerful people in their classroom, one boy identified Tiffany as a powerful person. When I asked him why, he responded, “Because she always pays attention, she always does her work, she never gets in fights, and never argues with the teacher.” The students recognized the school-like ways to get power in their classroom and also recognized that it was the girls, like Cassy and Tora, who were able to do this with greater success.

Why Did This Positioning Change Over Time?

When I examined this classroom over a 2-year period, I observed a shift in how gender influenced the interactions in these discussion groups. As fourth graders, the boys connected reading with the workplace as a way to situate themselves in positions of power. When asked as fourth graders who reads more, the boys responded that men do because “work and thick contracts need to be read” and “at work you have to read stuff and sign stuff.” They also engaged in many more school-based literacy activities. However, in fifth grade, these same boys withdrew from literacy practices. I wondered what caused this shift. Why in fourth grade did these boys actively position themselves as dominant members but in fifth grade withdraw from these same roles? I recognize that there are many possible explanations that could explain this shift. As I previously highlighted, power is not an easy construct to observe and explain as its relational influence can take many forms. Gender and social class discourses are also incredibly complex and nuanced and,

therefore, it is difficult to pin down a single cause. However, as I widened my data, I found one possible explanation.

I argue that these shifts are partly due to a change in preadolescent identity formation. For example, in fourth grade these boys seemed more willing to “do school” and seemed eager to please the teacher. I documented more examples of fourth-grade than fifth-grade boys engaging in reading and not actively resisting participation in literacy experiences. The girls’ engagement in literacy activities, on the other hand, increased over the 2-year period as observed by silent reading, in-class writing, and out-of-class reporting of literacy engagement. When I interviewed my focus group on this question, one response was that girls are smarter than boys because they are “preppy.” I further explored this issue and was told that being preppy meant doing your work, listening to the teacher, and being good in school. When I asked the group if boys could be preppy, they all adamantly responded, “No!” Interestingly, being preppy is a middle-class identity category. Weis (1990) discovered girls were much more willing to identify with this middle-class notion of school success, whereas boys subscribed to working-class values of masculinity and resistance to school. For my students, entering adolescence seemed to represent a shift in how identities were performed and how boys and girls created these identities around school and literacy. It was more acceptable for the girls to identify with this preppy image that resulted in school success; the boys were stigmatized for adhering to this standard.

Not only were these students concerned about their image around their peers, but as they got older, the reality of their place in the workforce was becoming stronger. My data provided examples of these gendered economic cultural messages beginning to penetrate. For example, one day when Steve was frustrated about an assignment, he huffed, “Man—I can’t wait until I’m out of here and working with my dad.” When I asked him to elaborate, he told me that his dad poured concrete and that he helped him on the weekends. For Steve, working with his dad clearly had more allure than being in school. Focus group transcripts provided many more examples of the girls talking about college and school and the boys speaking more of “going to work and make money.” This again is reminiscent of Weis’s (1990) study with working-class teenagers. Weis found that the girls placed wage labor and their careers above what she called the “domestic code” of having families. By attaching their identities to future employment and educational success, the girls were more active in breaking working-class barriers of staying in the same career as their parents (unlike Steve, who wants to grow up and pour concrete with his dad). With this in mind, I believe that longitudinal studies tracking students as they move into adolescence will help us to understand how gender and social class influence students’ identities as they mature. For these students, an extra year closer to adolescence caused a shift in how gender identities related to school activities. As peer pressure and the looming reality of the workplace became more salient, the way that these students performed their gendered identities also shifted.

EXPLANATION: GOING BEYOND THE CONTEXT

For Dion, Jack, Cassy, Tora, and the other students in this class, larger narratives of gender can also explain the ways they were positioned in relation to literacy as it intersected with social class. Before fifth grade, the boys found power through identifying with the male workers in their community. As they entered adolescence, however, they began to understand the contradiction in their community of aligning themselves with both school and labor. As a result, many chose to align power not with school, but with manual power found elsewhere (as in fights, sports, and noncompliance). On the other hand, the girls who struggled in these groups as fourth graders were now able to gain power through the exact situations that had marginalized them earlier. By exploring both working-class cultural storylines and local influences, we can make sense of this shift and what happened in the fifth grade.

Resistance for the Boys

As the boys aligned themselves with working-class masculine dominance, they in turn resisted power through literacy practices. This resistance to school is not uncommon in working-class culture. Willis (1977) clearly demonstrated this as his boys replicated the behaviors that would make them successful on the shop floor—not in school. Weis (1990) documented how boys resisted both overtly (noncompliance) and covertly (copying homework) and hence also rejected the ideology of school. Even in Heath's (1983) ethnography, the working-class men had less education and tended to shy away from schooling. These studies support Bourdieu's (1977) argument that working-class men have much to lose through educational success in a culture where manual labor, not mental labor, is associated with the social superiority of masculinity. By achieving power through nonliteracy events and physical force, the boys aligned themselves with the manual side of this divide. A literature circle discussion that privileges social relationships, intrinsic motivation, harmony, and equality runs counter to the desired skills of a manual culture. Hence, for Dion and Jack, being positioned as powerless was in line with the cultural storyline of working-class men finding success outside the school realm. Therefore, by being positioned without power in these discussion groups, power was not totally lost for these boys; instead, they sought powerful roles through different, but more traditionally accepted, venues.

Alignment for the Girls

For the girls, this connection to school-based literacy and access to power is in line with cultural expectations. Walkerdine (1990) found that girls as young as preschool age were able to align the mother figure with that of the teacher in order to create situations in which they could access power in the classroom. She found that girls created play situations that built upon their domestic identifica-

tion in order to control interactions with the boys in their class. Similarly, by engaging in behaviors such as being helpful, girls enacted a mothering identity and took up a subteacher role in order to achieve classroom success. Walkerdine found that “girls who are nice, kind, and helpful are guardians of the moral order, keepers of the rules” (p. 77). Cassy and Tora also accessed power through being keepers of the rules of the literature circle discussions. They became subteachers as they kept the group on track and held the boys accountable for both their jobs and assignments. It was also evident that the girls attached this subteacher role to domestic authority. Cassy commented in a focus group that “my mom gets listened to the most. My dad listens to her and he’ll get scared of her if my mom says no. My mom is the boss of the house.” It was through a second year in literature circles that these girls were able to connect to this mothering and teacher identity and transform this space to an opportunity for them to be the “boss of the house” for their groups.

In addition to getting power through the mothering and subteacher connection, these working-class girls are also gaining power through the shifts in the labor market and new economy. Economic circumstances have changed to privilege a more feminized workforce, with more jobs in the service sector than on the shop floor. Weis (2004) found that working-class girls and women were successful in remaking themselves in a different way than their working-class mothers. Although the girls in this study appeared to gain power through alignment with the mother/teacher, they also rejected the future replication of the domestic code—and, like Weis’s (1990) girls, they too desired independence from the family sphere. Unlike Willis’s (1977) boys, who actively constructed themselves to be like their fathers, my girls created new identities to give them access to the new global economy. Weis (2004) believed that this new envisionment entails school success as “these young women are desirous of continuing their schooling, not ensnared by its hegemonic working-class masculine coding as negative” (p. 114). The girls in this class can achieve power within this cultural storyline; it is in their best interest to be successful in school, given the changing economic requirements of the working class. I believe that, although this may have been the case in fourth grade as well, this alignment became clearer as the girls got closer to adolescence, and the boys began to more actively resist school.

What Does This Positioning Tell Us About Literacy Engagement?

By listening to the voices of these students, we get a better understanding of how power is negotiated through this literacy practice. The girls achieved powerful positions through connecting to the teacher’s role and aligning themselves with desirable skills for work in the new economy. For Cassy and Tora, a second year working in literature circles contributed to their ability to transform a previously oppressive space into an opportunity to enact powerful positions. Dion and Jack,

by being voiced by these girls, were positioned as more submissive participants. This was an important reversal from the gendered discursive practices found in fourth grade. This positioning did not just occur in these micro examples of peer-led discussions but was also reflected in how these students engaged in literacy as well as in school in general.

It is important for us to consider how this positioning relates to literacy engagement and hence school success, especially when this engagement could create disastrous future consequences—in particular, for working-class boys. As previously mentioned, working-class girls benefit from school success as the labor market has shifted to privilege a more feminized workforce. When we reflect upon Willis's (1977) boys of the 1970s, we see how their disengagement in school did not have dire consequences because they were able to successfully enter a manual labor economy. This economy has diminished, and today's boys are now socialized to be on the margins of the workforce. In their contemporary study of working-class boys' identities, Kenway and Kraack (2004) found that "the hegemonic working-class masculinity and its cross-generational reproduction have been profoundly destabilized" (p. 108) as a result of new labor demands. They stressed the urgency for young working-class boys to "re-inscribe themselves" (p. 98) as new workers. Weis (1990) also stressed the need to rework identities as she asserted that working-class male rejection of schooling no longer suits them in the new economy. However, creating new identities to be in line with the changing economy is not an easy task. As Weis (2004) pointed out in her follow-up study, although her working-class girls rejected the domestic code in high school, many of them fell prey to early marriage and children despite their career aspirations. This finding is congruent with Walkerdine et al. (2001) who also documented the pull of domesticity that constrained academic and career success for working-class girls. Weis (2004) also alluded to the domestic violence that permeated working-class girls' realities as they grew up. If boys as young as fifth graders are finding power through fists and toughness, then it is not surprising that this carries on as they enter future domestic relationships.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE

I believe literature circles are necessary not only to discuss books but also so students can learn about themselves and others. Further research on literature circles as a window to our understanding of how gender and social class affect students' discursive interactions will help us create crucial literacy instruction. In the second edition of her book on classroom discourse, Cazden (2001) stressed that literacy is even more important now due to the changing workforce than it was when she wrote the first edition. She cited educational economists' beliefs that today's chil-

dren will need to have “new basic skills” among which effective oral and written communication and the ability to work in groups are paramount. Literature circles can be effective to help students acquire these new basic skills, but we must also fully understand what is happening in these groups below the surface level of textual discussion.

As Foucault (1977) posited, when power is continually enacted in a certain way, it will then become normalized. This may also be true as students are repeatedly positioned in certain roles in discursive events. Teachers need to be careful in how they create situations in which power and positioning becomes normalized. They need to be aware of how Cassy and Tora occupied powerful positions in their groups and help Dion and Jack find ways to assert themselves and disrupt patterns of submission. It is important to help these working-class boys find new ways to position themselves in school literacy events. The girls also need to be aware of how they are contributing to the boys’ school failure. By better understanding positioning, teachers can facilitate opportunities to enable students to reposition themselves within cultural storylines and help them successfully acquire the new basic skills required for future success.

I believe that, in order to do this, teachers need to become more proactive in these discussion groups. One suggestion is to interact periodically with these groups to help students resist and create new positions. Teachers can also videotape discussions, watch them with students, and focus on repeated positioning. A fishbowl technique, in which one group discusses while the rest of the class observes, is another effective strategy. This could also help raise awareness of how the roles we take up in groups contribute to power relations and engagement. Through minilessons on group process and raising awareness through discussion, a teacher can assist the students in creating new and more empowering positions. Some researchers have even taught students how to engage in CDA to promote an awareness of how our language is tied to ideology and power (Janks, 2001).

Much can be learned, not only about students, but also about the greater sociocultural forces that influence our everyday discursive interactions through examining literature discussion groups. We should continue to use literature circles as a lens to illuminate how power is locally achieved in relation to wider cultural storylines of gender and social class.

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