Texts and Talk: A Close Look at Gender in Literature Discussion Groups.

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TEXTS AND TALK: A CLOSE LOOK AT GENDER IN LITERATURE DISCUSSION GROUPS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by

Peggy Sue Rice
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M.Ed., The University of Texas at El Paso, 1990
May 1998
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to

my daughter, Sarah,

whom I cherish

and

in memory of

Dr. Peter Soderbergh

for all that he was

and for all that he helped me become
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As with any dissertation, many people have contributed to the completion of this project. I wish to acknowledge and thank them.

I am indebted to the members of my dissertation committee, all of whom brought a wide range of professional experience and wisdom to my work. Dr. Ann Trousdale, Dr. James Catano, Dr. Wendy Kohli and Dr. Miles Richardson stimulated my professional interests when I took courses from them and have continued to be influential in my professional development. I appreciate their guidance and continual support. I owe a special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Ann Trousdale, who guided me through the morass of data, providing me with valuable insights while trusting my abilities. My committee was enhanced by the presence of Dr. Kathleen Perkins, the Dean's Representative. I have appreciated her expertise, as well as the warmth and respect that she has accorded me.

I would like to thank Miss Tyler, the classroom teacher, for allowing me to conduct the research in her classroom. She accommodated me fully. With her assistance and support, my data collection went smoothly.

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I am fortunate to have had the assistance of exceptional friends and family members. Their confidence in my ability to persevere and their prayers helped me stay focused. I am grateful to them all, especially my Mother and my sister, Ruth, who have encouraged me to pursue my dreams throughout my life with unwavering support.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of Gender Development</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gendered Ways of Talking</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Discourse</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader Response Theories</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertextuality and the Reader</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies Eliciting Response on an Individual Basis</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Social Context for Meaning Construction</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies Eliciting Response in Literature Discussion Groups</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Texts</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS OF ORAL RESPONSES</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Studies of the Discussions</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns Across Same-sex Discussions</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns Across Mixed-sex Discussions</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5 DATA ANALYSIS OF INTERTEXTUAL PATTERNS</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating Self to the Primary Action in the Story</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertext of Personal Life—People</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertext of Other Texts</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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LIST OF TABLES

3.1 Data Collection Schedule ......................................................... 40

5.1 Number of Episodes and the Average Number of Turns per Episode in
Same-sex Discussions ................................................................. 104

5.2 Number of Episodes Beginning with Questions and the Average Number
of Turns per Episode in Same-sex ................................................ 106

5.3 Number of Episodes Beginning with Statements and the Average Number
of Turns per Episode in Same-sex Discussions ............................ 107

5.4 Frequency of Types of Nonsentence Discourse in Same-sex Discussions . 114

5.5 Number of Episodes and the Average Number of Turns per Episode in
Mixed-sex Discussions ................................................................. 119

5.6 Number of Episodes Beginning with a Question and the Average Number
of Turns per Episode in Mixed-sex Discussions ............................ 123

5.7 Number of Episodes Beginning with a Statement and the Average Number
of Turns per Episode in Mixed-sex Discussions ............................ 123

5.8 Frequency of Types of Nonsentence Discourse in Mixed-sex Discussions . 128
ABSTRACT

This study investigated discourse according to gender-related patterns of eight sixth-grade students (four boys and four girls) as they discussed four realistic fiction short stories in peer-led discussion groups that alternated between same-sex and mixed-sex group compositions. Descriptive data were analyzed according to the constant comparative method of analysis. Quantitative analysis was used to determine discourse patterns in terms of frequency.

Data were analyzed to answer the following questions: (1) Will the discourse patterns vary when the students discuss their responses in same-sex groups and mixed-sex groups? If so, in what ways will they vary? (2) Will gender differences be apparent in the oral discussions? If so, what are the gender differences? (3) What texts or text elements will be woven into the students' oral discussions? Will the texts woven into the students' oral discussions reveal gender related patterns?

The results indicated differences for all three questions. In same-sex groups, the boys tended to use a personal frame of reference, to compare themselves to the action in the story with statements, and to include more off-focus comments, as well as motions or sounds; the girls tended to use a text-driven frame of reference, compare themselves to the action in the story with questions, and to include few off-focus comments, motions, or sounds. The mixed-sex groups were more like the girls’ same-sex discussions. The girls were not silenced in the mixed-sex groups. Other differences included an emphasis on physical action for the boys and an emphasis on relationships and emotions for the girls. There was a difference in the types of linking to other texts with the girls tending to make connections to elements of the short stories in the study,
while the boys tended to refer to extra-textual sources. All of the students interpreted the story based on the intertext of their lives. These findings suggest that gender differences do influence and can enhance mixed-sex literature discussion groups.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many educators are incorporating a literature-based approach to literacy instruction that includes a shift toward student-centered literacy tasks focused on students reading for personal interpretation while they participate in activities that are meaningful to them. One practice that educators have implemented is the use of literature discussion groups. Previous research has focused on the role of the teacher in these groups. Some educators believe that the teacher should be present in these groups in order to guide the students' discussions (Eeds & Peterson, 1995; Roser & Martinez, 1995). Others argue that the presence of the teacher has a negative influence, inhibiting the student's range of responses (Barnes, 1992; Bloome, 1987). Research pertaining to peer-led literature discussion groups has shown them to be an effective method for constructing meaning (Almasi, 1995; Kauffman, Short, Crawford, Kahn & Kaser, 1996).

Although research has indicated that peer-led discussion groups are an effective method for constructing meaning, few studies have focused on the influence of gender in these groups. Both Cherland (1992) and Evans (1996) analyzed the responses of boys and girls discussing literature in peer-led discussion groups finding similar results. The girls in these studies focused more on personal aspects of the books, such as emotions and family relationships while the boys tended to focus on seeking meaning in the plot and physical action, thus providing support for Tannen (1990) who documented the different conversational styles of men and women. These variations in discourse...
refer back to Gilligan's (1982) *web and hierarchy* theory of moral reasoning and Chodorow's (1978) reinterpretation of Freud's (1931/1967) psychoanalytic theory of gender development. Given that these discourse variations have been documented and that some educators are moving toward more student-centered literacy approaches, a need to more fully understand the influence of gender in peer-led literature discussion groups is apparent.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into the influence of gender in peer-led literature discussion groups through analyzing both sentence and nonsentence discourse of literature discussions that alternated between same-sex and mixed-sex group compositions. Previous research has not included observing the same children discussing literature in same-sex groups and mixed-sex groups. Tannen (1990) documented a male tendency to dominate small group discussions, and Evans (1993) suggested that this same pattern would have emerged had she followed the girls into discussion groups with boys. Although previous research has indicated differences in the types of talk in these discussions (Cherland, 1992; Evans, 1996), previous research has not focused on gender related patterns in terms of nonsentence discourse nor has it looked closely at intertextual gender patterns.

**Definition of Terms**

**Constant Comparison Method**

The constant comparison method is a form of data analysis. As incidents are coded, they are compared to other incidents and placed into categories that are both
descriptive and explanatory. The second step of the constant comparison method involves making the properties of the categories explicit. Properties within the categories will converge with each other and diverge from properties in other categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

**Discourse**

Discourse refers to the social activity of making meanings with language and other symbolic systems in some particular kind of setting or situation (Lemke, 1995, p. 6).

**Gender**

Gender refers to the social traits and characteristics commonly associated with each sex (Golombok & Fivush, 1996).

**Gender Identity**

Gender identity refers to an individual's concept of being male or female (Golombok & Fivush, 1996).

**Gender Role**

Gender role refers to attitudes and behaviors considered suitable for females or males in a particular culture (Golombok & Fivush, 1996).

**Intertextuality**

Intertextuality refers to the interconnectedness of texts within and between each other. All texts have intertexts that are utilized in order to make sense of the present text (Kristeva, 1986). “Texts refer to other texts and in fact rely on them for their meaning. All texts are interdependent” (Porter, 1986, p. 34).
Literature Discussion Groups

Literature discussion groups are groups of children discussing their responses to literature. In these groups, the role of the teacher is shifted from a lesson controller to a collaborator (Short, 1986). Literature discussion groups are sometimes called literature circles, literature response groups or grand conversations.

Reading

Reading is an active cognitive process that is an interaction of the visual (written) information and one’s prior knowledge (Bromley, 1992).

Realistic Fiction

In children’s literature, the term realistic fiction refers to stories in which the fictional characters are involved in situations that are within the realm of possibility for real people and animals (Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 1996).

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is a theory of meaning construction that views learning and language as a product of social collaboration.

Text

A text refers to any unit of meaning significant to a particular event or situation. Texts can be written, oral, or kinesthetic (Lemke, 1995).

Triangulation

Triangulation refers to using multiple methods to overcome any weaknesses or bias that exists in any single method of data analysis (Mitchell, 1986). There are two kinds of triangulation that are relevant in the current study.
Data triangulation. Data triangulation refers to the inclusion of multiple sources of data within the same study. The current study includes several individuals, groups, and different time periods (Mitchell, 1986).

Methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation refers to the inclusion of several different methods or procedures of data collection within a single study. The current study includes direct observation, audio and videotapes of discussion groups, and individual interviews (Mitchell, 1986).

Assumptions

The current research project includes three assumptions. Two of the assumptions pertain to the conveyance of the children's interpretations, while one of them pertains to issues of the credibility of the study.

First Assumption

The guided written responses that the children write after they finish reading the short stories will enable the students to reflect on the stories and to clarify their personal responses to the stories before discussing their responses in a small group. Reading response research supports the use of guided written responses to promote the critical thinking skills of analysis and evaluation (Kelly & Faman, 1991).

Second Assumption

Meanings will be constructed during the literature discussion groups. Literature discussion groups have been used to enable students to construct meaning in small groups among peers (Short, 1986; Evans, 1993). Almasi (1995) determined that
students in peer-led discussions are more active learners than students in teacher-led discussions.

**Third Assumption**

The use of videotaping and audio taping will not limit the credibility of the data. The setting will be perceived as a research setting. Consequently, the use of a tape recorder and camcorder will belong in the setting (Patton, 1990).

**Delimitations**

There are some delimitations in the study that eliminated variables extraneous to the focus of the study. Most of the delimitations focus on the respondents, while one focuses on the research setting.

The study was limited to students who had demonstrated a proficiency in reading and writing. Wollman-Bonilla (1994) found that students proficient in reading and writing were more able to participate collaboratively than students that were less proficient. The less able students in her study tended to be unable to construct meaning collaboratively without teacher-directed instruction. Also, by limiting the ability level to students that have demonstrated proficiency in reading and writing, the students' ability level was not a variable to consider.

The study was limited to white boys and girls from middle-and upper-middle-class backgrounds. These limitations narrowed the main differences between the students to sex. As a result, the influences of gender with this particular population of students were more clearly determined.
The study was not conducted in a natural classroom setting. By taking the students out of the classroom, I eliminated classroom distractions. I was also able to structure the activities according to my research purposes.

**Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to the limited body of knowledge about the effects of gender on literacy activities, providing additional insights into the construction of meaning in peer-led discussion groups according to gender-related patterns. In general, previous research in reader response theory has focused on students responding freely to their reading without analyzing gender trends in the responses (Beach, 1973; Marshall, 1987; Newell, Suszynski, & Weingart, 1989; Odell & Cooper, 1976; Purves & Rippere, 1968). A few researchers have analyzed gendered patterns of response. Analyses of gendered patterns of response in these studies have found that girls tend to focus on emotions and relationships, while boys tend to focus on plot and physical action (Bowman, 1992; Cherland, 1992; Evans, 1996; Gabriel, 1990).

The research pertaining to peer-led literature discussion groups has shown them to be an effective method for constructing meaning (Almasi, 1995) and that they encourage intertextual links (Short, 1986). These studies, however, have not generally focused on gender. The research focusing on the effects of gender in such groups has been limited (Cherland, 1992; Evans, 1996) and has not included alternating individuals into same-sex and opposite-sex groups in order to analyze the influence of the group's gender composition on students' discourse.
As teachers move away from using artificial texts featuring controlled vocabulary to developing authentic literacy experiences for students, a need exists to more fully understand meaning construction in peer-led literature discussion groups, in particular the influence of gender on meaning construction. Authentic literacy experiences encourage ownership of reading and writing activities and are important in creating communities of learners and developing lifetime readers and writers (Atwell, 1987). Consequently, it is important for educators to gain insights into the ways in which gender influences students' responses in these groups.

**Research Questions**

This study examined the discourse and response patterns according to gender-related patterns of eight sixth-grade students (four boys and four girls) as they discussed their responses to four realistic fiction short stories in peer-led discussion groups that alternated between same-sex and mixed-sex group compositions. The following questions were addressed:

1. Will gender differences be apparent in the oral discussions? If so, what are the gender differences?

2. Will the discourse patterns vary when the students discuss their responses in same-sex groups versus mixed-sex groups? If so, in what ways will they vary?

3. What texts or text elements will be woven into the students' oral discussions? Will texts woven into the students' oral discussions reveal gender-related patterns?
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The theoretical framework and review of literature for this study came from several areas. With a focus on gender, theories of gender development were especially pertinent, as was the work of sociolinguists who have focused on gender differences in the way males and females talk. In addition, research pertaining to classroom discourse has indicated gender differences. Reader response theories and intertextual perspectives that privilege the reader in meaning construction informed this study. As literature discussion groups create a social context for meaning construction, social constructivist theories and intertextual perspectives that emphasize the importance of the social context in meaning construction were relevant as was research pertaining to literature discussion groups.

Theories of Gender Development

Golombok and Fivush (1996) have organized theories of gender development to include psychoanalytic approaches and moral development, social learning theories, and cognitive developmental theories. Davies (1989) presents a poststructuralist theory of gender development that Beach (1993) classifies as a cultural theory. Psychoanalytic theories focus on a biological determination for gender differences while traditional social learning theory privileges the social. Both of these types of theories view individuals as passive agents in the construction of gender. On the other hand, both cognitive developmental theories and a poststructuralist theory of gender development view individuals as active agents. According to Golombok and Fivush (1996) the gap
between social learning theories and cognitive theories of gender development has narrowed. Contemporary social learning theorists believe that cognitive skills and social factors influence gender development. Several of these different types of gender theories have informed literacy research.

In the area of psychoanalytic approaches and moral development, the work of Chodorow (1978) has been relevant to literacy research. Chodorow's objects relations theory of gender development moves away from Freud's focus on the oedipus situation, focusing instead on pre-oedipal concerns. She attributes the differences of masculine and feminine personality and roles to the fact that early child care tends to be the responsibility of women. Because of this, identity formation is different for males and females. The nature of the girl's preoedipal attachment to the mother is different from the boy's, and is not given up in the oedipal stage. Mothers and daughters are identified as like each other so girls experience a continuation of attachment. On the other hand, boys view themselves as the other and experience separation. Thus, femininity is defined through attachment and masculinity through separation, resulting in female identity being threatened by separation while male gender identity is threatened by intimacy. Consequently, females tend to seek relationships and have difficulty with individuation while males tend to limit relationships and have difficulty establishing connections. This variation results in different social orientations. Women focus on the personal while men focus on positioning.

proposed that gender differences in moral reasoning are not ones in which women’s moral reasoning is inferior to men. According to her, *separation* is the basis for “male morality.” Separating the self from the immediate context, the individual judges situations based upon his perception of objective rules, rights, and moral imperatives. In other words, the world is viewed as a hierarchy, so an ethic of justice prevails. On the other hand, “female morality” is established in terms of the immediate context. A sense of *connectedness* causes empathy and concern that encourages dialogue and the establishment of networks of care and support. The world is viewed as a web of connections so an ethic of care prevails. Gilligan points out that these moralities are not opposites and one is not necessarily better than the other.

Gender schema theory, a cognitive developmental theory, was one of the first theories to guide reading research focusing on gender differences. Earlier reading research had focused on the importance of the reader’s schemata, i.e. knowledge already stored in memory. Bartlett (1932) and Anderson and Pearson (1984) both provide evidence that the reader’s schema affects both learning and remembering of the information and ideas in a text (i.e. readers construct meaning based on what they know). Gender schema theory presented by Bern (1983) places an emphasis on the derivation of sex typing (the acquisition of “sex-appropriate” attributes) by gender schematic processing, which she defined as “a readiness on the part of the individual to encode and to organize information, including information about the self, in terms of the cultural definitions of maleness and femaleness that constitute the society’s gender schema” (p. 369).
Crawford and Chaffin (1986) speculated:

Differences in background between women and men in our society, by themselves, lead to differences in the way women and men understand a wide variety of texts. The primacy and centrality of the gender schema should ensure differential encoding of experiences by men and women. (p. 23-24)

Focusing on subjectivity (the social construction of a sense of identity) in contrast to individuality (the product of nature or biology) Davies (1989) has developed a theory which focuses on the influence of discursive practices on one's gender positioning. In this theory, which Leach and Davies (1990) classify as feminist postmodern inquiry and Davies (1989) calls a poststructuralist theory, students are recognized as active agents interpreting their needs and making sense of the world. This theory also recognizes that most students develop ideas and skills according to the gendered world in which they live.

Individuals, through learning the discursive practices of a society are able to position themselves within those practices in multiple ways, and to develop subjectivities both in concert with and in opposition to the ways in which others choose to position them. (Davies, 1989, p. xi)

Davies (1989) developed her theory as she examined how discursive practices position young children through texts and talk. In particular, she examined why primary school children were unable to view Elizabeth, the heroine in the feminist literary fairytale, The Paper Bag Princess, (Munsch, 1980) as a heroine. She also examined the different "masculine" and "feminine" positionings which she observed in the preschool classroom. Later, Davies (1993) focused on children challenging traditional gender relations as they actively engaged in deconstructive readings.
Other researchers have also focused on the influence of discursive practices in literacy activities (Cherland, 1994; Christian-Smith, 1991; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991). Cherland (1994) and Christian-Smith (1991) documented gender differences in reading preferences with the girls focusing on popular fiction, especially romance fiction. Wanting to investigate possible influences of social and cultural experiences on the construction of romance readers, Gilbert and Taylor (1991) asked three girls ranging in age from 11 to 13 to read the Australian romance series, *Dolly Fiction*. The girls were all avid readers who came from middle-class homes, had parents with professional occupations, and aspired to be professionals themselves. The youngest girl enjoyed the books while the other two were critical of the literary value and framed them as “badly written, badly produced, boring and trite.” Gilbert determined that the social and cultural experiences of these girls had influenced them to devalue romance fiction.

Although this body of research does not focus directly on literature discussion groups, it suggests that literacy practices are a key site for the construction of gender in society and that widening the range of discourses available to both boys and girls is important to expanding the possibilities for how they construct their masculinity or femininity as there are “signs of struggle to deal with the dominant versions of masculinity and femininity” (Moss, 1989, p. 11). Beach (1993) categorizes such studies as stemming from cultural theories.

**Gendered Ways of Talking**

The work of sociolinguists who have focused on gender differences in the way males and females talk has also informed literacy research. These researchers have not
focused on literacy activities; however, the findings of their research provide support for literacy researchers who are noting gender differences in children's literature discussions identified by the sociolinguists.

The sociolinguistic work of Tannen (1990, 1994) has focused on discourse analysis of men and women's conversations. She has determined that men and women have different conversational styles which are "different but equally valid" (Tannen, 1990, p. 47). Because hierarchies for men tend to be ones of power and accomplishment and hierarchies for women tend to be more of friendship, independence is important for men while intimacy is important for women. Consequently, men tend to engage in conversations as negotiations of status and "jockey for position" while women view conversations as negotiations for closeness. Further, women tend to engage in conversation to create and sustain relationships while men tend to engage in conversations to complete tasks. More specifically, Tannen noted that women tended to be more tentative, more empathetic, and more questioning while men tended to be more assertive, direct, and focused on external details than on internalized feelings. Tannen has also noted that men tend to dominate mixed-sex discussions.

Tannen's discourse analysis of men and women's conversation has provided her with insights that have caused her to separate herself from others who contend that "men dominate women by interrupting them" (Tannen, 1994). She contends that her years of research focusing on conversations have shown her that "one cannot simply count overlaps in a conversation, call them interruptions, and assign blame to the speaker whose voice prevails" (Tannen, 1994, p. 54). More specifically, Tannen
viewed the conversational style of some New York Jewish speakers, noting a “high involvement style” of interaction that included “cooperative overlaps.” Tannen (1994) contends that this type of overlap in a conversation is not an attempt to dominate but rather “to show enthusiastic listenership and participation” (p. 53).

Other research has noted gender differences in children’s talk. Miller, Danahar, and Forbes (1986) and Leaper (1991) noted consistent findings in their research. Miller et al. (1986) examined over 1,000 quarrels by 24 racially and socioeconomically mixed five-to seven-year-old children. Leaper (1991) examined the conversations of 138 middle to upper-middle class four-to nine-year-old children. Findings in both studies revealed that boys used more controlling speech acts, defined as “direct” and “distancing” (e.g., insults, orders, refutations, and nonacceptance) while the girls used more collaborative speech acts, defined as “indirect” and “affiliative” (e.g., invitations to play, constructive offers, mutual affirmations). Tannen (1994) also notes these differences in terms of conflict, noting that men, who tend to be competitive and more likely to engage in conflict, are more likely to argue, issue commands, and take opposing positions, while women, who tend to be cooperative and more are likely to avoid conflict, tend to agree, support each other, and make suggestions.

Classroom Discourse

How does this “gendered talk” influence discourse in the classroom? Several researchers have observed the marginalization of females in the classroom. Spender (1992) noted that numerous research findings have indicated that girls don’t talk as much as boys in mixed-sex classrooms. As a middle school language arts teacher,
Barbieri (1995) also noted this "silencing" of the girls who were overpowered by boys demanding attention. Barbieri's solution to the problem was to rearrange the students' schedules (in cooperation with another teacher) so that her classrooms contained one sex. After she had worked with the students for several months, she recombined the sexes and noticed that many girls were more assertive and willing to challenge the boys.

To what extent do teachers perpetuate the "silencing of girls?" According to the American Association of University Women report (1992), teachers allow boys to talk more than girls in classroom discussions by calling on boys more frequently than girls. This report also contends that girls are rewarded more often for compliance than for critical thinking. These findings are in agreement with LaFrance (1991) who suggests that teachers may regard listening as more valuable for girls rather than verbal participation. Walkerdine (1990) also contends that girls are guided by the classroom discourse of good behavior and rule-following. Cazden (1988) has noted that most classrooms are guided by the IRE pattern of classroom discourse in which the teacher directs the discussion by initiating a response, allowing the student to respond, evaluating the response, and moving on to another student.

**Reader Response Theories**

The various theories of reader response inform literacy research, providing support for various interpretations of a text. All of these theories acknowledge that there is not one correct interpretation of a text, but that meaning resides in the reader (Bleich, 1975; Holland, 1968), as a transaction between the text and the reader (Iser
will provide an overview of these theories.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Holland (1975) contended that readers
possess identity themes that control their interpretations of text. He analyzed the
responses of five readers, noting more variations among the responses of different
individuals to the same text than among the responses of the same individuals to
different texts. He determined, "We DEFT the text, recreating our identities through
our own characteristic patterns of defense, expectation, fantasy, and transformation"
(Holland, 1975, p. 14).

In a more subjective paradigm, Bleich (1975) believed that the reader's feelings
cause a response to the text to emerge which is not controlled by the text:

The reading transaction is in fact conceived altogether as a relationship between
the reader and his feelings, a relationship that is regulated by the author, who
will either facilitate or prevent the reader from having a satisfactory experience
(p. 93).

He recommended that his students individually explore their feelings towards
literature and begin to share these feelings with other students in the class. Having
credited the reader as the constructor of meaning, he also discussed the influence of the
group as narrowing the individual's range of interpretation; "interpretation is always a
group activity, since the individual interpreter is creating his statement in large part
with an eye toward who is going to hear it" (p. 75).

contributing to the reader's interpretation. Rosenblatt viewed reading as a transaction, a
"coming together" of the reader and the text. Thus, neither the reader nor the text has greater importance. According to Rosenblatt (1985),

"context" takes on scope and importance from the transactional view of the reading event as a unique coming-together of a particular personality and a particular text at a particular time and place under particular circumstances" (p. 104).

When this transaction occurs, a "poem" is evoked which Rosenblatt (1978) defined as the reader's interpretation of his/her lived-through experience with the text. The text has acted as a stimulus that activated elements of the reader's past and as a blueprint for regulating what captures the reader's attention.

An important aspect of Rosenblatt's theory is the stance, or mental set, that the reader chooses during reading. This stance is determined by the reader's purpose for reading and influences the reader's transaction with the text. Rosenblatt perceived a continuum of responses that range from efferent to aesthetic. An efferent stance is characterized by the reader focusing on the public meaning that will be carried away from the reading, for example, concepts or directions. In contrast, the aesthetic stance focuses primarily on private elements, the "lived through" experience that occurs during reading--evocation of feelings, sensations, or memories. Rosenblatt (1994) rejected the stances as existing in an either/or opposition and views reading as being predominantly efferent or predominantly aesthetic. She also contended that the same text can be read either efferently or aesthetically, depending on the particular circumstances in which each reading occurs.

phenomenological approach views the reader as an active agent, a co-creator of the literary work who supplies what the author has implied but not written. By filling in the unwritten portions of the text (i.e. "gaps" or areas of "indeterminacy"), readers are able to construct unique interpretations of the text and read aesthetically as they take a "wandering" view of the text. Thus, there is no one "correct" meaning as readers fill in the "gaps" and create their own personal meaning according to their prior knowledge and metacognitive awareness.

One text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the 'gaps' in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities" (1972, p. 285).

Fish (1980), a social constructivist, viewed the context (groups of readers) as the determiner of meaning. He designated the social context "the interpretive community" and contended that learning to construct meaning is a function of interaction with others in one's "interpretive community." His theory is supported by an influential study that he included in Is There a Text in this Class?. In this study, Fish (1980) led his students to believe that a list of names left on the black board from a previous class was a poem that was relevant to them as students studying religious poetry of the 17th century. The following list was written vertically on the board: "Jacobs-Rosenbaum; Levin; Thorne; Hayes; Ohman (?)". Working as a group, the students discovered religious connections with all of the words in the "poem" as they explicated its meaning according to the meanings provided by their "interpretative community."
Intertextuality and the Reader

French poststructuralists and American constructivists have also focused on the importance of the reader in meaning construction. Although these researchers have not focused on the influence of gender per se, they do acknowledge that one’s “inner texts” based on one’s position in the discourse community and previous readings and experiences influence one’s interpretation.

For the most part, the French poststructuralists privileged the role of the text over the reader; however, there was some reference to the reader. According to Barthes (1974), a writerly text is open to numerous interpretations. Later, Barthes (1977) declared the death of the Author and the birth of the reader:

... a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. (p. 148)

Riffaterre (1980), thought that intertextuality was the major characteristic of (literary) reading. He perceived a dialectic between the reader and the text. According to him, ‘ungrammaticalities’ in the text are perceived by the reader and are integrated into another system defined as semiosis in which the reader is able to discover the intertexts. Riffaterre perceived the intertext as being the collection of texts that a reader could connect with the one being read. He distinguished between two types of intertextuality: aleatory intertextuality and obligatory intertextuality. Aleatory intertextuality allows the reader to make connections to an unrestricted range of texts.
that are familiar to him/her, while obligatory intertextuality imposes limits on the connections that the reader can make based on a trace that the reader is able to perceive.

American researchers have extended the work of the French poststructuralists to include more specific information about the role of the reader in determining intertextual relations. From the perspective of a social semiotician, Lemke (1992) contended:

The meanings we make through texts, and the ways we make them, always depend on the currency in our communities of other texts we recognize as having certain definite kinds of relationships with one another. (p. 257)

Lemke identified three linguistic patterns that cue the reader into making intertextual connections: thematic (connections due to thematic patterns), orientational (connections due to social viewpoint), and organizational (connections due to genre structure).

Studies Eliciting Response on an Individual Basis

A great deal of reader response research has been conducted collecting responses on an individual basis. Such studies can inform investigations of responses in socially interactive situations. Included here are some studies that have focused on gender-related patterns in individual responses, and the intertextual links that readers included in their individual responses to their reading. Some of the gender-related studies included a focus on the role portrayal of the characters (traditional versus nontraditional) while others did not.

Some research focusing on individual’s responses has indicated that the sex of the reader influences the response of the individual. Bowman (1992), Cherland (1992), and Gabriel (1990) analyzed trends in boys’ and girls’ responses to stories and found...
the same gender differentiations. The girls’ responses, which focused on emotions and relationships, consistently reflected nurturing, sharing individuals; whereas, the boys’ responses, which focused on plot and physical action, consistently reflected practical, judgmental individuals. Similarly, Barrow, Broaddus, and Crook (1995) found that most middle school girls in their study made personal connections to Susan Cooper’s retelling of a Scottish tale, *The Selkie Girl* (Cooper, 1986), while most middle school boys did not make any type of personal connection.

The studies cited above did not consider children’s responses to traditional versus nontraditional character roles; the following studies did take that aspect into consideration. Trousdale conducted case studies of young girls responding to traditional fairy tales (1987, 1989) and “feminist” fairy tales (1995). The girls responding to the traditional fairy tales conveyed interpretations that were individualized according to their personal experiences, personal focus, and inner needs; for example Carey’s responses reflected the sibling rivalry that existed between her younger sister and her. Their responses also did not necessarily reflect those that adults tend to project. In a later study, Trousdale (1995) concentrated on one girl’s responses to three “feminist” tales. This child admired the courage, strength, and independence of the strong female protagonists but did not want to be like them. Due to the child’s strong attraction to the “unconventional heroines,” Trousdale suggested that further exposure to these types of role models (both literary and real) could enable her “to negotiate greater freedom for herself in the world” (Trousdale, 1995, p. 180).
Anderson and Many (1992) analyzed freewriting responses to two books each of which contained a protagonist (male in one; female in the other) in non-traditional roles. The children's responses were analyzed by gender in terms of being negative, positive, descriptive/evaluative, or connecting (to one's own life). The majority of the children did not respond to the nontraditional role, focusing instead on descriptive or evaluative comments. However, males tended to be more likely to react negatively and less likely to react positively to the nontraditional role than did girls, especially to the male in the nontraditional role. The children's real life experiences seemed to be the key factor for acceptance or rejection of the nontraditional role.

Some research based on reader-response theory focuses on understanding intertextual links that individuals make in private response to written texts (Beach, Appleman & Dorsey, 1994; Many & Anderson, 1992). Although these studies did not focus on gender, the study by Beach et al. (1994) does indicate that the readers used the linguistic patterns that Lemke (1992) identified as providing cues for readers to make intertextual connections: thematic, orientational, and organizational. The study by Many and Anderson (1992) indicates that children make intertextual connections to prior reading and media use.

Beach, Appleman and Dorsey (1994) investigated the types of intertextual links that students made with texts that they were reading. Comparing less able readers and more able readers, they determined intertextual links that 20 high school juniors made about some core literature books used in their college preparatory English class. Their
results indicated that more able students constructed intertextual connections in terms of themes and genre while less able students tended to make autobiographical associations.

Many and Anderson (1992) also focused on students’ intertextual links. They analyzed fourth, sixth and eighth grade students’ free writing responses to three realistic short stories and answers to probe questions to discover intertextual links. Their results showed more intertextual links to television shows than to literature.

**Importance of Social Context for Meaning Construction**

Along with the shift of interest towards reader response theories and away from the text as the determiner of meaning, there has been a developing focus on the importance of the social context in meaning construction with regards to literacy activities. Social constructivists focus on the meaning construction of a group, community, or culture. Fish’s (1980) reader response theory discussed previously in this paper is a social constructivist theory in which he designates the social context as “the interpretive community.”

Theoretical support for literature discussion groups was found in the social constructivist theory of Vygotsky (1986/1996). Vygotsky determined that language is used instrumentally in that conversation is internalized as thought after tasks have been “talked through” with another. He proposed that interacting with adults or “more capable peers” enables one to learn concepts or gain insights that would not be possible without such interaction. He called this area of learning the zone of proximal development. For example, a child working alone is not able to perform tasks beyond his/her mental development; however, with an adult or a “more capable peer” the child
is able to perform tasks that are beyond his/her mental development in his/her zone of proximal development.

Research pertaining to intertextuality has also focused on the importance of the context for meaning construction and includes the work of social constructivists, sociolinguists, and social semioticians. Some of this work focused on the influence of the culture and society (Lemke, 1985; Lemke, 1989; Lemke, 1995; Porter, 1986) while other work focused on intertextuality in small groups (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Cairney & Langbien, 1989; Rowe, 1987; Short, 1992). None of this research has focused on gender-related patterns.

Lemke (1995) focused on the importance of the cultural context in determining one’s construction of meaning. "Our meanings shape and are shaped by our social relationships, both as individuals and as members of social groups" (p. 1). He defined discourse as "the social activity of making meanings with language and other symbolic systems in some particular kind of situation or setting" (p. 6) and used the term social semiotics as a reminder that "all meanings are made within communities and that the analysis of meaning should not be separated from the social, historical, cultural and political dimensions of these communities" (p. 9). He also contended that a community determines which texts go together and how they go together.

Similarly, Porter (1986) discussed the importance of one’s “discourse community” and defined discourse community as “a group of individuals bound by a common interest who communicate through approved channels and whose discourse is
regulated” (p. 39). Thus, one writes with the intention of acceptance by his/her discourse community.

From a socio-linguistic perspective, Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) contended that intertextuality is a social construction: “People, interacting with each other, construct intertextual relationships by the ways they act and react to each other. An intertextual relationship is proposed, is recognized, is acknowledged, and has social significance” (p. 311). Sociolinguists have conducted microanalyses of classroom reading and/or writing lessons in order to determine the influence of the group on the construction of meaning (Bloome, 1989; Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993). In addition to focusing on the influence of the immediate context, sociolinguists have also investigated how meaning-building in literacy activities is influenced by a student’s home and community (Bloome, 1989; Bloome & Green, 1984).

Research by Cairney (1992), Rowe (1987), and Short (1992) focused on the literacy activities of young children in classroom communities of learners. These researchers located intertextuality in the social interactions of these children as they discussed texts that they had heard, read and/or written.

The work by sociolinguists, social constructivists, and social semioticians has provided insights into the importance of the context in determining the types of intertextual connections that are made. Social, cultural, and historical beliefs strongly determine, “what texts may be juxtaposed and how those texts might be juxtaposed, by whom, where, and when” (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, p. 330).
Studies Eliciting Response in Literature Discussion Groups

In literature discussion groups (sometimes called literature circles or literature response groups), the role of the teacher is shifted from a lesson controller to a collaborator (Short, 1986) as individual responses and questions are encouraged and shared. Sometimes the teacher participates as a member of the discussion group while at other times the groups are peer-led. Research pertaining to literature discussion groups has focused primarily on the effectiveness of these groups for constructing meaning. Only a few studies have focused on gender-related patterns of response in these groups.

Some studies support the use of literature study groups as an effective method for constructing meaning (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Hanssen, 1992; Short, 1986) while other studies raise concerns about the context and procedures (Evans, 1996; Raphael & Goatley, 1992). In a study in which teachers-in-training were group leaders encouraged to participate with the students, Eeds and Wells (1989) discovered that children of varying ability levels participated in “grand conversations” (literature discussion groups) about the books that they read. The students participated as active learners, shared personal stories related to the reading, and articulated their interpretations. Similar success in literature discussion groups was experienced by the students participating in studies by Hanssen (1992) and Watson and Davis (1988).

Focusing on sociocognitive conflicts, Almasi (1995) compared peer-led and teacher-led literature discussions. The results of her study indicated that the students in the peer-led discussions were more active learners than students in teacher-led
discussions: the language was more elaborate and complex; the students asked significantly more questions; and more alternate interpretations were presented. Students in the peer-led discussions were also better able to identify and resolve sociocognitive conflicts.

Some research of peer-led literature discussions has shown a need for teachers to model to students how to discuss literature and how to articulate positions (McMahon, 1992; Raphael & Goatley, 1992; Willert, 1993; Wollman-Bonilla, 1994). The students in the peer-led discussion groups in the McMahon (1992) and Raphael and Goatley (1992) studies tended to conduct their discussions in a manner similar to their experiences with whole class teacher directed instruction. Willert (1993) discovered that the discussions tended to focus on the surface level of meaning, for example comprehension and engagement. Wollman-Bonilla (1994) discovered that a group of less able readers was unable to collaboratively construct meaning.

Although the influence of gender in literature discussion groups is seldom addressed, a few studies have indicated gender differences (Cherland, 1992; Evans, 1996). Cherland (1992) compared the discussion of 11- or 12-year-old children in seven all-girl groups, two all-boy groups and five mixed-gender groups. She found that the girls focused on more personal aspects of the book, such as emotions and the family relationships (discourse of feeling) while the boys tended to focus on seeking meaning in the plot and physical action (discourse of action). Evans (1996) found similar results in her study with fifth graders. A weakness of Evans's study is that different types of books were read: the group of girls read the realistic fiction story Homecoming by
Cynthia Voight, which concerns family relationships, while the group of boys read the historical fiction story, *The Perilous Road* by William Steele, a book about a boy's experiences during the Civil War. The stories are of two different genres and are too dissimilar to attribute the differences in responses to gender alone, since the subject matter contributes to different foci.

**Summary**

Previous research has indicated gender differences in boys' and girls' discourse (Leaper, 1991; Miller, et al., 1986; Tannen, 1990). Gender differences have been noted in classroom discourse (Barbieri, 1995; Spender, 1992), individual responses to literature (Bowman, 1992; Gabriel, 1990), and in responses to literature in groups (Cherland, 1992; Evans, 1996). With the movement towards student-centered literacy learning tasks, there is a need to more fully understand the influence of gender in peer-led discussion groups. It is in this area that research is the most limited. Will the girls be silenced in mixed-sex groups? Can gender differences enhance mixed-sex discussions? If so, in what way? A major contribution of this project is that it takes a close look at discourse and response patterns of the same individuals discussing literature in same-sex groups and mixed-sex groups.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research model guided the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data in this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990), supplemented by some quantitative analysis of discourse patterns. This study was not attempting to prove or disprove a theory, but was an investigation of gender in terms of the discourse and responses of the children as they discussed these realistic fiction short stories in peer-led discussion groups consisting of alternating same-sex and mixed-sex group compositions. Consequently, qualitative methodologies were appropriate. Quantitative methods were necessary in terms of determining the frequency of episodes, the average number of turns per episode, and percentages of the types of discourse sentences.

Setting

The study was conducted at the laboratory school on the campus of a large Southern state university. The school is a kindergarten through twelfth grade school which has been in operation for approximately 100 years. It is classified as part public and part private as the school receives some state funding; however, parents pay tuition. Enrollment into the school is selective. For example, in a typical year there would be over 800 applicants for the kindergarten class and only 52 would be selected (The admission policy requires having a 30% minority inclusion).

Most of the students attending the school are from middle class, upper-middle class or upper-class backgrounds; however, a few students come from low socio-
economic backgrounds. Many of the students have been together since kindergarten. However, every year four additional students are admitted between fourth and fifth grade and 10 more between fifth and sixth grade.

The school building consists of two connecting wings which are referred to as the high school wing (old building) and the elementary wing (new building). Most of the middle school classrooms are in the high school wing.

Participants

The sampling for this study was purposive as students who met specific criteria pertaining to age, sex, ethnicity and reading capability were selected for in-depth investigation (Neuman, 1997). The students in this study were from a sixth grade reading/social studies class taught by Miss Tyler. I chose sixth graders, because I had taught sixth grade, thoroughly enjoying the developmental stage of this age group.

Throughout my doctoral program, I had been conducting my research at this laboratory school, because I was familiar with the administration, faculty and students. I had worked there for two years prior to beginning my Ph.D. program. I used students from Miss Tyler’s class, because I knew her well and respected her professionally. She was my friend as well as a former colleague and was always willing to accommodate me for research purposes. I had successfully conducted two smaller research projects with students from her classroom in previous years. Also, the students in her classroom had previous experience discussing literature in peer-led literature discussion groups.

I selected eight students to participate in this study. Researchers have found that groups of four or five generate good literature discussions (Evans, 1993; Short, 1986).
wanted two groups of four, so that the group compositions could be evenly alternated between same-sex and mixed-sex group compositions. All of the participants I selected were white and came from mid-to-high socio-economic backgrounds. As this study focused on gender, I wanted to eliminate racial and class differences as factors among the participants. I am aware of my own cultural limitations as a member of white, middle-class society and know that I am best qualified to understand discourse communities similar to my own. Consequently, I chose this particular population.

Before selecting the eight students who participated in this study, I spent two weeks in the classroom observing all of the children. I had asked Miss Tyler to recommend all of the students in her class that she believed would be good participants. I kept her recommendations in mind as I observed the children. She had 26 students in her class and had recommended 17 students.

The students I chose for this study were Bob, Joe, Marty, George, Lena, Ginger, Nikki, and Isabelle. I chose these students because from my observations I knew they would not have difficulty discussing these stories. These eight students consistently participated in whole-class discussions. I was impressed with the comments and questions that they contributed to these discussions. It was apparent to me that they had definite opinions and were willing to express them.

These students consistently engaged in the various learning activities that Miss Tyler incorporated into her curriculum. During the time that they had to complete individual reading tasks, all of them focused on completing the tasks. I could tell that
all of these students were avid readers, because they immediately began to read books that they had brought to class during their daily sustained silent reading time.

After I selected the students that I wanted to participate in the study, I asked each one for an individual interview. The purposes of the interview were: (a) to explain the study to them in more detail; (b) to invite them to participate; and, (c) to find out more about them. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions, using a general interview guide approach (Patton, 1990). (See Appendix A)

All of the students who participated in my study said that education was a priority in their home. Six of the eight students had at least one parent who was a university professor. (Two of them had both parents who were professors.) One girl’s parents were both lawyers while another girl’s father was a CPA, and her mother was a university program director. All of the children except Isabelle told me that “getting good grades” was important to them. Isabelle stated, “School is important. Just learning. I don’t think that grades matter, what letter you get on your paper. I think it matters if you really learned it, because some people can’t really take tests very well like me.” Marty was adamant about the importance of school, “School’s gonna affect me for the rest of my life, like how well I do in school is gonna affect like what kind of job I get. So, I have to really work. I really have to work hard on that.” All of the children had career aspirations of their own. For example, Lena’s goal was to be a marine biologist, and Nikki’s goal was to be a dermatologist.

As I had concluded from my observations of these students during sustained silent reading time, they were all avid readers. Reading was a part of their daily lives at
home. They all talked about how they would spend time reading before they went to sleep. This aspect was important to me. Reading ability influences students' responses in literature discussion groups (Wollman-Bonilla, 1994), and I wanted capable readers who enjoyed reading to participate in this study.

The students were excited that I had asked them to participate in this study. Each of them enthusiastically signed the student consent form (See Appendix D) and had already returned the parent consent form (See Appendix C). They also readily gave me a pseudonym.

Literary Texts

I used realistic short stories whose target audience was middle school students for the study. I selected realistic fiction short stories, because previous research has indicated that realistic fiction evokes more identification responses (Golden, 1978) and more analytical responses (Galda, 1990) in children in this developmental category (9 to 13) than other genres.

All of the short stories were by Gary Soto. Gary Soto is a notable author of children's books who writes stories that do not have obvious sex bias (Huck, Hepler, Hickman, & Kiefer, 1997; Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 1996). Baseball in April and Other Stories (1990) and Local News (1987), the anthologies from which the short stories for this study were selected, are “inspired collections of short stories that depict a variety of Hispanic children in daily life” (Huck, et al., 1997, p. 486). According to Huck, et al., (1997) these stories contain universal themes common to children of any ethnicity in the 9-14 age group and are accessible to children regardless of gender.
Huck, et al. (1997) recommends that schools provide opportunities for children to share their responses to these stories with their peer group.

"Trick-or-Treating," "Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride," and "First Job" were from Local News while "La Bamba" was from Baseball in April and Other Stories. Two of the stories involved female protagonists while two involved male protagonists. All of the stories were told from a limited omniscient point of view. The stories are summarized below.

"Trick-or-Treating"

"Trick-or-Treating" focuses on 13-year-old Alma's trick-or-treating experiences. Alma decided to dress up as a football player using one of her brother's old football uniforms. Alma becomes annoyed at the slow, little kids until she encounters a candy snatcher in an L.A. Raiders jacket taking advantage of a little Ninja Turtle. Alma intervenes and gives the youngster some of her candy before she leaves. Her desire to trick-or-treat has faded, so she decides to visit her friend Sara's house before she goes home. When she stops, she realizes that her friend is having a Halloween party and many of the kids from school are there. They think that Alma is a boy until she identifies herself. Alma feels bad about not being invited, but decides to eat some pizza before she leaves. While she is eating, she notices the boy who was the candy-snatcher that she had beat up. He looks at her with hatred in his eyes, and Alma remembers the scariness of Halloween night.
"Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride"

"Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride" focuses on a 12-year-old girl, Araceli, who dreams of flying in an airplane. She becomes excited when she reads in the newspaper about an opportunity sponsored by the American Legion to take a plane ride for a nickel-a-pound. She convinces her father to take her to the event. The day of the rides is stormy with heavy rain and winds, but Araceli is determined to fly anyway. As they are waiting in line, Araceli’s friend Carolina exits the plane and looks ill. That does not damper Araceli’s excitement. Araceli boards the plane and does not enjoy the ride at all. She does not admit it though. After the flight, when she sees her father she tells him that she loved flying and she tells her mother the same thing when she arrives home. That night when she goes to bed she begins to cry as she remembers Carolina’s eyes and admits to herself that “Flying was not fun at all.”

"First Job"

"First Job" focuses on a boy named Alex and the events that occur during his first job. Alex has to stay home and take care of his six-year-old brother while his mother and other siblings work. He is bored and decides to rake and burn the leaves for Mrs. Martinez who lives across the street. She has offered to pay him one dollar for doing it. Alex raked the leaves into a pile (finding a quarter while raking), set it on fire, and walked back across the street. Alex wakes up Jaime who notices that Mrs. Martinez is burning something. Alex runs back across the street and discovers that the fire has spread. A neighbor helps to put out the fire. Instead of earning a dollar, Alex’s
dad has to give Mrs. Martinez ten dollars to rebuild her fence and Alex has to help her rebuild it.

"La Bamba"

"La Bamba" focuses on Manuel’s experiences at the school talent show. Wanting attention, Manuel had volunteered to sing La Bamba at the talent show. After volunteering, he has serious doubts. During rehearsal, Manuel cannot practice because the record player is broken but all of the other students do well. Manuel envisions his parents being proud and his siblings being jealous. During his performance the next day, Manuel’s record gets stuck and he has to sing Para bailar la bamba repeatedly. Manuel is embarrassed. However, during the curtain call, Manuel receives a loud burst of applause. Later, people congratulate him on being so funny and his proud father asks him how he managed to make the song stick on Para bailar la bamba. Manuel uses some scientific jargon which pleases his dad. As he crawls into bed, Manuel feels happy and tells himself that next year he won’t raise his hand--probably.

Procedures

Method of Obtaining Data

A pull-out design was used for three main reasons. First of all, by removing the students from the regular classroom they were able to focus on reading the short stories, and discussing them without distractions. Secondly, by pulling them out of the regular classroom I avoided time constraints that would have been in place in the regular classroom. Finally, although this study is not an ethnographic study, it does employ ethnographic principles and techniques. In order to see the development of cultural
knowledge in a classroom, such as discourse patterns, one must view this development from its inception (Zaharlick & Green, 1991). This project had its own beginning, middle, and ending within the beginning-middle-end structure of the school year and the reading classroom. Thus, one can understand texts and context within its lifetime (Bradley, 1994).

Both the beginning and ending of my project included observing the students in their regular classroom and taking fieldnotes. I observed the students for two weeks prior to beginning the study and for seven weeks after they completed their discussions for me. By doing this, I was able to view the students' behavior in this larger context both before and after my project. Consequently, I could determine how the context of my project "fit in" with the larger context.

I met with the students daily for four consecutive days to read and discuss the short stories. In order to focus my observations on the group interactions, I met with one group of four students at 10:00 a.m. (the beginning of their first class period with Miss Tyler) and the other group of four students at 11:30 a.m. (after their lunch break). We met in a small room that was adjacent to their regular classroom. The students sat at a table that easily accommodated a group of four, with two people sitting on each side facing each other. The students read silently a realistic short story. Immediately upon finishing, they wrote a guided response (See Appendix B). The guided responses were used to enable the students to reflect on the story and to clarify their personal responses to the story before discussing them in the small group. Previous research has shown that the use of reader response cues can promote the critical thinking skills of
analysis and evaluation (Kelly & Farnan 1991). The guided responses were not analyzed for my dissertation.

I provided each student with some blank paper on which they could “doodle” until everyone had finished writing their written responses. When everyone had finished their written responses, I collected both their written responses and their “doodle” sheets. Then, they discussed the short stories. I gave them the following directions: “You have just read a short story and written your individual response to it. In your discussion group, I would like for you to discuss your personal responses to the story, sharing your thoughts about the events in the story, the characters, and your overall reaction to the story.” I told them to choose a “gatekeeper” before they began their literature discussions. The “gatekeeper” was in charge of directing the discussion. Then, I observed the students’ discussions as a nonparticipant.

Each day, the same procedure was followed until the four short stories had been read and discussed. Each group of four students met for approximately an hour as they read the short story, responded to it in writing, and discussed it in the discussion group. The only difference in this daily procedure was alternating the group compositions. The students alternated being in same-sex and mixed-sex (two boys and two girls) groups as illustrated in the table on the following page.

Before beginning the actual study, I had the students meet and participate in the activities outlined above, following the same procedures. The students read and discussed “The Squirrels,” a short story by Gary Soto that is included in Local News. This story is similar to the stories that the students read for the study. I used this pilot
story so that I would know that the students understood the guidelines for reading, responding, and discussing. The participants discussed “The Squirrels” in same-sex groups with the boys meeting at 10:00 and the girls meeting at 11:30.

Table 3.1
Data Collection Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>“Trick-or-Treating”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:00-11:00</td>
<td>Joe, Bob, George, Marty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30-12:30</td>
<td>Lena, Nikki, Isabelle, Ginger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>“La Bamba”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00-11:00</td>
<td>George, Marty, Lena, Nikki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30-12:30</td>
<td>Joe, Bob, Isabelle, Ginger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>“First Job”</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00-11:00</td>
<td>Joe, Bob, George, Marty</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30-12:30</td>
<td>Lena, Nikki, Isabelle, Ginger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>“Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride”</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00-11:00</td>
<td>George, Marty, Lena, Nikki</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30-12:00</td>
<td>Joe, Bob, Isabelle, Ginger</td>
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After the students completed all of their short story discussions, I observed them in their regular reading/social studies classroom for seven weeks. By returning to the classroom with them, I was able to compare their behaviors in the smaller context of my research project with their behaviors in the larger context of their classroom. During this time, I observed these eight students participating in literature discussion groups in the classroom with the same group compositions that were used in this study. I also observed them participating in a variety of learning activities. I observed them working.
with a partner assigned by the teacher, working in peer groups of their own selection, working in peer groups selected by the teacher, and participating in whole class discussions that were not always directed by the teacher.

Sources of Data

Data were collected from several sources: field notes from observations; audio and videotaped literature discussions; four guided interviews with the students; and one guided interview with their teacher, Miss Tyler. By using a variety of sources, I was able to determine themes and patterns in terms of gender. This data and methodological triangulation approach increased the credibility of the data (Patton, 1990).

I recorded descriptive fieldnotes during all of the sessions that the students met to read and discuss the short stories. Due to the nature of the research, I was a passive participant (Spradley, 1980) and did not interact with the students during their discussions. I also recorded descriptive fieldnotes during my periods of observation in the classroom. In the classroom, I was a moderate participant as I “sought to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider” (Spradley, 1980, p. 60). As recommended by Patton (1990) and Bodgan and Biklen (1992), the field notes included details of the setting, people, observed behavior, and talk. A separate aspect of the field notes was reflective, a personal journal, consisting of personal feelings, reactions, and ideas (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992). As Patton (1990) noted, the field notes did permit me “to return to the observations later during analysis” and will “permit the reader of the study findings to experience the activity observed through the research report” (Patton, 1990, p. 239).
The literature discussion groups were audio taped and videotaped. Their usage enabled future detailed analyses of the students' discourse and response patterns as they constructed meaning in these groups. In order to minimize their intrusiveness, the tape recorder and video camera were set up in advance as part of the environment in the room where the students were meeting to participate in the study.

**Data Analysis**

During the first reading of the discussion transcripts, I focused on identifying the oral discourse boundaries (Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, 1995). Marshall et al. (1995) identified both turns and episodes as boundaries in oral discourse, with a turn consisting of an uninterrupted sequence of comments by one speaker and an episode consisting of "a sequence of speaker turns on a single, identifiable topic" (p. 10). For the purpose of this study, I decided to identify an episode as an interchange about a single identifiable topic that included at least two speaker turns.

After identifying the episodes, I used the constant comparative method of data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to code categories of the types of sentences according to emerging patterns. I did not use preexisting category systems as I didn't want to be "looking" for particular categories.

Once I had coded the types of sentences that were used to initiate episodes, I created discourse maps of the discussions. These discourse maps included the type of sentence used to initiate each episode, the number of speakers participating in each episode, and the number of turns. The discourse maps were then used to create tables showing the type and frequency of episodes, the average number of turns after each
type of initiation, and percentages of the types of discourse sentences. As I was focusing on gender-related patterns, I identified both questions and statements and also created tables that pertained to questions only and to statements only. I also identified and counted types of nonsentence discourse: motions, sounds, individual laughter, group laughter, interruptions, and overlaps.

In addition to the discourse analysis described above, I used the constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to determine patterns of response within and across the single-sex and mixed-sex discussions. This process was inductive as I constantly reexamined and resorted the data in order to discover the categories of response and relationships among them.

Summary

In order to describe the discourse and responses according to gender patterns in the literature discussions of these sixth grade boys and girls, I incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. A quantitative analysis was used for the discourse analysis in terms of determining frequency of episodes, the average number of turns per episode, and percentages of the types of discourse sentences, while a qualitative analysis was used to determine the types of sentences and patterns of response across and within the single-sex and mixed-sex discussions. Multiple data sources and multiple methods of analyzing data were included to contribute to the methodological rigor (Sandelowski, 1986) of this study. The various data sources were field notes, audio and videotaped literature discussions, and guided interviews. The methods of analyzing the data were the constant comparative method and visual
devices, such as tables created primarily from a quantitative analysis. The results of the
discourse and response analyses of the literature discussions are presented in the next
three chapters. My discussion section will be amplified by the inclusion of my analyses
of field notes and the guided interviews.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS OF ORAL RESPONSES

Several aspects regarding response patterns that emerged in the students’ discussions of their stories will be presented in this section. First, I shall present case studies of the individual discussions, first the two same-sex discussions and then the two mixed-sex discussions. Next, I shall discuss patterns that emerged across the same-sex discussions. Finally, I shall discuss patterns that emerged across the mixed-sex discussions.

The response patterns were analyzed according to the type of sentence that was used to initiate an episode. For the purpose of this study an episode was defined as an initiation and at least one response from a group member. The main types of sentences discussed in this chapter were either text-based (focusing on an aspect of the story) or personal (personal experiences, comparing themselves to the action in the story or using experiences from their own life to interpret/clarify the story). I shall define all of the sentences types that emerged in Chapter Five. In this chapter, I will provide examples in narrative form.

Case Studies of the Discussions

“Trick-or-Treating”

“Trick or Treating” focused on the trick-or-treating experiences of 13-year-old Alma. The children discussed this story with members of the same sex.

Tone of the boys’ discussion. The tone of the boys’ discussion was one of comraderie as the boys shared their personal experiences. Laughter accompanied the
stories along with comments such as, “That was funny.” or “That’s great!” Also, the boys enhanced their storytelling with actions. For example, when Bob suggested handcuffing the “dummy” to the chair, both Joe and he made motions as if they were handcuffing someone. Marty imitated “jumping out” to scare little kids while wearing his “cool” Psycho mask, and George imitated sitting stiffly in a chair pretending to be a “dummy” when he shared his story about his twin brother being mistaken for a “dummy.”

Bob was the gatekeeper and he asked the other boys for comments. However, many of the refocus comments such as, “What else do we have here?” “Let’s get back to the subject, people.” or “Ok, now, Any other questions? Any other comments?” were from George who guided the discussion as much as Bob even though he wasn’t the gatekeeper.

**Primary episodic focus of the boys’ discussion.** The boys concentrated not on the story so much as on their own experiences trick-or-treating. Twenty-two of the episodes (an initiation and at least one response from a group member) pertained to this topic in a personal sense as the boys shared personal experiences, compared themselves to the action in the story and/or used experiences from their own lives to interpret the actions in the story. Most of these episodes (16) focused on specific incidents that occurred while trick-or-treating.

The boys began talking about times when they had scared younger children with their costumes after Bob stated that the reason he goes trick-or-treating is “good food” and to “scare little kids.” Marty commented, “Last year I went trick-or-treating and I
had this cool mask. Awesome. It was called, ‘Psycho.’ His eyes were bulging. One was going in and one was going out. I jumped out [pretends to jump out] at this group of little kids and they started screaming.” George remarked, “I’ve got a werewolf mask and Ken [his twin brother] was wearing this Garfield thing that my grandmother had made for him. We went over to a little kid. It was like he liked the little werewolf mask, but he was afraid of the Garfield mask!” Bob stated that he doesn’t use masks and added, “I use this thing called FX gel. My face looked like it was rotting. And I had this cut right here [motions to show a cut down his right cheek]. It was really deep, and it looked like it was rotting. And it was like all bloody and it had like gangerine. It’s just like this side of my face [gestures to right side of face] was completely messed up. I went up to little kids and went, ‘Ahhhhhhhh!’” [puts hands out as if grab someone].

They briefly discussed times when they were scared personally by a person in a costume who was pretending to be a “dummy” or when they thought a “dummy” was a real person. For example, Joe remarked, “They did that one time [person pretending to be a ‘dummy’] and we were like, ‘You go first.’ ‘No, you go first.’ Kind of arguing who’d go first. One of us pushed someone, and we like tripped over each other and fell down the stairs!” Marty responded, “That freaks me out.” The boys spent a great deal of time (three episodes at three different points in the discussion), discussing how to “outsmart” a “dummy” that had been rigged, so that trick-or-treaters would take one piece of candy. Joe initiated this topic the first time by sharing an experience he had, “Well, at this house they had, ‘Take only one,’ and they had rigged up uh, some kind of
tape player or something to the candy so if you took more than one it’d start playing. I took two and it was like, ‘You have taken more than one. Now, you shall pay the consequences.’ And I looked behind the chair and there was [chuckles] this little tape player... I rewound it and pressed record, and then I said, ‘You have insulted the Mighty Master. I will now kill you!’ That was funny.” Later in the discussion, Bob returned to the topic by commenting, “You know what you do? You bring handcuffs up. You handcuff the scarecrow to the chair [makes motions to handcuff] and then you take as many as you want!” Later on, Joe returned to the topic stating, “You just hold the weight... Yeah, you take all of the candy out and replace it with rocks.”

The boys also discussed treats they had received which they considered unusual. Marty talked about a “nasty” lemon-lime drink that someone had given him as a treat adding, “I put it in somebody’s mailbox.” George commented, “I’ve always seen like there’s one psycho guy every time I go that passes out something like an apple [laughs] walnuts or something.” Joe added, “You know one guy, one guy gave me out a toothbrush!”

Tone of the girls’ discussion. Unlike the boys’ tone of comraderie, the tone of the girls’ discussion was one of acceptance of one another’s views and was characterized by orderliness. The girls discussed guidelines at the beginning and followed through with Nikki’s suggestion:

You don’t have to go in like an order, we can just like open a topic, like ask a question, and then don’t and if you have a question to ask and you’re still in the
middle of the topic, don’t say it until everybody is done with the topic and don’t interrupt people and don’t like say stuff that’s not on the topic.

Consequently, the girls’ episodes tended to include comments like the following: “Is it time to talk about a new subject now?” “I also had another question if this topic is over.” “Do you want to address this topic anymore?” As the gatekeeper, Ginger took charge of the discussion, cautioning the others when a comment was “off topic” and making sure that everyone had an opportunity to express their thoughts about the topic being discussed.

Primary episodic focus of the girls’ discussion. In contrast to the boys’ focus on personal connections, the girls’ discussion of “Trick-or-Treating” consisted primarily of text-driven episodes (42). In most of these episodes the girls evaluated the elements of the story and provided their subjective responses to them. The girls focused primarily on the characters (26 episodes). They shared their interpretations of Alma, the protagonist, and sought clarification on aspects of her family, and her socio-economic status. They also discussed other characters.

The girls discussed the number of people in Alma’s family and tried to determine her birth order several times. Ginger determined that there were four children in Alma’s family after she read, “The next day one of the bananas was sliced thin, so it could be shared by four children.” Since only two brothers had been mentioned in the story, Nikki suggested, “Maybe they had cousins, or some or relatives over there.” Ginger countered that with, “Maybe they had another baby that they didn’t
talk about after she was born.” Isabelle disagreed with Ginger stating, “No, ’cause they said she was the youngest. They probably had a brother that died.”

Later in the discussion, Ginger returned to the topic by asking, “Where does it say she’s the youngest?” The girls couldn’t locate that statement in the story, so Ginger continued to believe that Alma had a younger sibling, “It’s a younger sister.” However, when Nikki suggested that she had an older sister instead, Ginger agreed adding, “An older sister who has another family and lives away.’

Another topic of discussion was Alma’s ethnicity. Nikki initiated one episode of this kind by asking, “Are all people in these stories Spanish, because they keep using like in italicized words, they have like Spanish words?” The girls agreed that they thought the characters were Spanish. Later on Ginger changed her mind, “But no. I think they’re like kinda Mexican or something.” Nikki suggested, “Maybe they were Spanish and they moved to America or something.” At this, Isabelle announced, “They’re immigrants.” The rest of the girls agreed and Ginger closed the subject, “That subject is closed!”

The girls decided that Alma was a tomboy after Nikki read, “She didn’t envy her friends on Halloween, after all her fingernails were stubs and she hated boys and stuff.” Lena added, “She also seemed like one of those really individual people who doesn’t care really about what other people say. Kind of like, you know just, just different.”

They agreed that Alma was violent. Isabelle stated, “Alma was violent.” Nikki responded, “Yeah, Alma is very violent. She’s aggressive.” “She’s like, I think I’ll tackle you for this bag of candy,” added Isabelle.
The question of Alma’s socio-economic status was first initiated by Lena who asked, “Why would they split one banana between four people? Isabelle suggested, “Maybe they were poor.” Ginger agreed with her. At another point in the discussion, Ginger determined, ‘...they didn’t really care about grammar” after she read from the story, “You gettin’ so big.” Isabelle tied it back to the family’s SES by responding, “No, that they weren’t very well educated, because they didn’t have any money.”

In other episodes, the girls shared their reactions to characters. The girls empathized with Alma for not being invited to the Halloween party, and Nikki commented, “She was sort of left out.” Nikki felt sorry for a minor character who had only two front teeth, “because it sounded like he got in a fight earlier.” The girls agreed that all of the characters were mean, such as Sarah for not inviting Alma to her party and the little Ninja turtle for “snatching her candy away greedily.”

“First Job”

“First Job” focused on 13-year-old Alex’s experiences with his first job raking and burning leaves for his neighbor, Mrs. Martinez. The children discussed this story with members of the same sex.

Tone of the boys’ discussion. The tone of this discussion was primarily argumentative instead of one of comradeship as in their previous discussion of “Trick-or-Treating.” This argumentative tone began with George, the discussion director, telling the rest of the group the guidelines: “I’ll be gatekeeper. Now here’s what we’re gonna do.... I, I’m gonna point at one person. If other people talk, I’m gonna tell them they’re supposed to be quiet.” The rest of the boys took offense at his directness as reflected in
Bob's overlapping response, "George, you're not the dictator!" The arguing surfaced throughout the discussion with the rest of the boys "siding" against George. For example, during one episode, Marty stated that Mrs. Martinez "warmed her car for half hour before backing out." George responded that it said one hour, to which Marty and Bob both said, "Half an hour." The following episode portion also reflects the argumentative tone:

Bob: It snows in New Mexico.
George: It doesn't snow in New Mexico!
Bob: You wanna bet?
Joe: Yes, it does.
Marty: Yes, it does. [Chuckles]

The boys were also aggressive towards each other physically as well as verbally. For example, Bob hit Joe when Joe stated that Bob did not read the story. Later on, Marty hit Joe when Joe began arguing with Bob that he was not making comments that were "off subject." Later on, George hit Bob and threatened to hit him harder when Bob agreed with Joe that a comment that George was making was "off subject."

**Primary episodic focus of the boys' discussion.** Unlike their previous discussion which focused on personal connections, most of the episodes in the boys' discussion of "First Job" were text-driven (29) and the majority of these episodes (24) focused on interpreting characters' traits through their actions. Some episodes began with one of the participants sharing his interpretation of a character. For example, Marty opened
the discussion by commenting, "That kid was mean. He was like not very disciplined, 'cause like he took a tomato out of her yard and just like stole it and he threw a ma--he burned a match and threw it at her chickens." Later in the discussion, Marty stated that Mrs. Martinez was a demanding person. "She like handed him the rake, he like didn't volunteer anything. She goes, 'You rake the part over there.'" In other episodes, Bob suggested that Mrs. Martinez was "kinda crazy," because she told Alex she was looking for the fireman. George commented that he thought she was not a very "cleanly" person, because of the bathtub leaning against the shed outside her house.

Other episodes typically began with a question involving a character's action and would lead to someone sharing his interpretation of the character's trait based on that behavior. For example, Bob initiated an episode by asking, "Why would he burn, light the match against a wooden fence?" Both Marty and George responded that they thought he was stupid. In fact, at different points in the discussion "Why?" questions pertaining to the characters' behavior were asked by each of the boys and initiated conversational episodes. For example, Bob asked, "Why didn't he have to pay for the rake?" Marty asked, "Why is there Spanish in every one of these stories?" Bob asked, "Why were they watching a game show?" Joe asked, "Why would they speak Spanish?" Marty asked, "Why would they be fixing eggnog in the summer?" Bob asked, "Why do you think he said Mr. Martinez, Mr or Miss Martinez don't call the fireman?" George asked, "Why does she have chickens in her yard?"

**Tone of the girls' discussion.** The overall tone of the girls' discussion was, again, one of acceptance of one another's views, characterized by orderliness. The girls
tended to take turns, even raising their hands at times, and listened to the comments and questions that others made. This can be seen in the following episode:

Ginger: Okay. So ended Alex’s first summer job. I thought that was sad. And he didn’t even earn a dollar.

Isabelle: ’Cause he burned the lady’s fence.

Lena: I think he probably would have been disappointed to think a first job would have been so great and then it ended up like that.

Nikki: I think he deserved it, man. He should have watched his brother...

Exceptions to this tone of acceptance occurred as a result of Isabelle’s “jockeying for position,” because she was the gatekeeper and felt ignored—especially by Ginger. For example, at the beginning of the discussion Isabelle asked, “What kind of person did you think Jaime was?” The girls began sharing their interpretations of Alex, because he was the protagonist. Isabelle insisted, “We’re talking about Jaime,” adding, “We’re talking about my topic. I’m the gatekeeper.” The girls discussed Jaime for a few minutes then returned to a focus on Alex. When this happened Isabelle commented, “Well, I thought the gatekeeper was supposed to bring up a question.” Later in the discussion, after Ginger had made several consecutive statements about the plot, Isabelle remarked in an irritated voice, “Remember me?” adding, “Ginger! Ginger! Ginger! You were the gatekeeper yesterday. I’m the gatekeeper!” Still later in the discussion, the girls began giggling when Isabelle stated, “Okay, Patricia and
Bernardo were his brother and sister.” In response to the laughter, Isabelle stated, “You all think this is hilarious that I’m trying to be the gatekeeper.”

**Primary episodic focus of the girls’ discussion.** As in their previous discussion, the majority of the episodes in the girls’ discussion were text-driven (54). These episodes focused primarily on the elements of the story itself and reflected their interpretations as well as their subjective responses to them. The girls focused on the characters more than the other elements, discussing them in 26 episodes. Primarily, the girls debated their socio-economic status of the characters, focused on the physical appearance of the characters, and discussed the family relationships.

The question of the characters’ socioeconomic status was the focus of nine episodes. In the first of these episodes, Ginger stated that there were several things from which one could tell that the family was poor, such as “their mother’s only cookbook,” and the fact that “the children had to work.” She added, “I know that when you spill something you lick it and everything, but it was like a routine or something with them.” [group laughter] Her comment stimulated discussion about why the mother might have had only one cookbook. For example, Lena suggested, “The reason why her mother, their mother might have only had one cookbook was because she didn’t cook.” Nikki added, “She might have ordered out. She might have lived right by MacDonalds.”

As the socio-economic status of the characters continued to be discussed, Ginger later changed her mind and decided, “I don’t think he was poor.... He picked up a tennis ball and began smacking it against the side of the house.... They have enough money to
buy tennis stuff.” The rest of the girls disagreed with her agreeing with Lena’s comment, “Dogs drop ‘em [tennis balls] around the yard.” This socio-economic debate was never settled. In fact, Isabelle ended the discussion by stating, “We keep repeating the rich or poor thing.”

The physical appearance of the characters was a topic that the girls kept returning to in their discussion as well. Isabelle initiated the first episode by commenting, “They kinda concentrate on details about like what a person looks like in there. But, they didn’t concentrate on details like their last names or what kind of person they were, but they did like nasty details... They kept talking about flub.” [group laughter] Ginger agreed. “They [the author] talked about the outside and not the inside.” Later on, Isabelle added, “They talked more about physical detail and like nasty stuff like that more than what the person was really like inside,” explaining the “nasty stuff,” as “the guy with the stomach,” “the woman with the arm flub,” and “the little thirteen-year-old kid belching” who was “probably some pot-bellied thirteen-year-old.” The topic of “nasty stuff” surfaced throughout the discussion with the girls laughing and commenting on the “grossness” of the belching and how the author must have been “obsessed with fat.”

The girls also discussed Alex’s family relationships. At three different times in the discussion, they discussed the fact that his parents were not in the story. Isabelle suggested, “Maybe Alex didn’t have any parents.” This was countered by the rest of the girls as Nikki pointed out, “He [the dad] had to pay ten dollars.” Isabelle mentioned Patricia and Bernardo who were Alex’s older siblings. The girls also discussed Alex’s
relationship with Jaime, his younger brother. Ginger commented, "It was nice of Alex to say that Jaime looks like an angel." Later, Isabelle commented, "His little brother was mean, because he woke up and he goes, 'Did you drink some of my eggnog?'"

This led the girls to focus on birth order with Isabelle commenting, "It's tough being the little one." Lena added, "Older sisters or brothers are mean." Amanda responded, "But Alex wasn't just an older brother. He was a younger brother."

"La Bamba"

"La Bamba" focused on Manuel's experience performing in the school talent show in order to impress Petra Lopez, a girl in his class that he liked. This story was discussed in mixed-sex groups.

**Tone of Group One's discussion** The participants in Group One were Lena, Nikki, Marty, and George. The tone of their discussion can best be described as nervous and tentative, unlike the same-sex discussions in which the students were relaxed. The boys appeared more uncomfortable than the girls. When George entered the room he commented, "Do we have to discuss with the girls?" When Marty sat down at the table his face was red, and he sat down facing me rather than the girls who were both sitting across the table from him. I had to ask him to put his feet under the table so that he would not have his back to anybody. The children spoke so softly that their voices were sometimes inaudible on the videotape. Nervous giggling occurred throughout the discussion, especially by Marty, Lena, and Nikki. There were four noticeable pauses in the conversation. Three of them were ended by George who was the gatekeeper.
Instead of relaxing and sharing all of their thoughts about a topic, the participants touched upon the various topics only briefly. Some topics were returned to later for further discussion. This tentativeness is reflected in the primary episodic focus in which the children kept returning to their overall evaluation of the story and extending previous comments.

**Primary episodic focus of Group One's discussion.** As with all of the mixed-sex discussions, the episodes in this discussion were primarily text-driven. Sixteen of these episodes were initiated by the boys and 11 of them were initiated by the girls. The text-driven episodes in this discussion focused primarily on the main character, Manuel (10 episodes) and the plot (9 episodes).

Ten episodes focused on Manuel. In these episodes, the children shared their interpretations of Manuel’s personality and his feelings. Lena initiated an episode by suggesting, “He lets things get to him too easily.” The others agreed. Nikkie responded, “He was like about to cry,” and Marty added, “He did cry.” George stated, “I don’t think he’s very confident.” In another episode, George commented that he thought Manuel was nervous. “It seems like he was just nervous about it even though he had everything planned over. I think that’s normal, but you’d like practice enough to not be nervous, I think.” Later, Marty initiated an episode by stating, “It looks like he [Manuel] was jealous of Bennie [a classmate] ’cause he [Benny] didn’t mess up.” The children discussed how “way too average” Manuel was as reflected in the following comment by George, “He doesn’t have any special things. He’s just average! Completely!” The children also discussed the size of his family. Nikki stated, “He had
a lot of brothers and sisters. It said he was the fourth of seven children,” and Lena commented, “He doesn’t even seem to get annoyed by his sister or brothers.” The children agreed that they didn’t know enough about him and Nikki commented, “They should have told you more about him.”

Nine episodes focused on the plot. These episodes were somewhat repetitious as the children basically restated their overall evaluation of the story that they shared in the first episode of the discussion, clarifying it with specific evaluative comments. For example, in the first episode Lena said that she thought the story was “kind of boring.” Later on she clarified that comment, “It was boring, ’cause you knew exactly what was gonna happen.... I was glad when it stopped, that it stopped.” George agreed with Lena and clarified his evaluation later, “It was just like one of those average little stories, that you read and you forget.... This story was one to get quick to the plot and finish itself quickly.” Nikki also thought the story was kind of boring. “I understood what happened in it.” She also commented that the talent show “sounded sort of lame” and that there were some unimportant details in the story, such as Manuel’s experience with the wire battery when he was in first grade. The rest of the children agreed. Marty said that the story was realistic, but didn’t explain.

**Tone of Group Two’s discussion.** The participants in Group Two were Ginger, Isabelle, Bob, and Joe. The overall tone of this discussion was serious. The students in this group were not as nervous as the students in Group One. There was some nervous giggling at the beginning of the discussion; however, the children relaxed after several
minutes. Ginger, as gatekeeper, refocused the discussion when necessary and asked questions or made comments to keep the conversation flowing.

The children took turns, primarily without raising their hands; however, Bob raised his hand a couple of times and waited for permission to speak. The children did not focus on sharing personal experiences. Instead, they shared their thoughts about various aspects of the story and/or listened to the thoughts of others. In fact, most of the episodes begin with, “What do you think...?” or “I thought....”

**Primary episodic focus of Group Two’s discussion.** Like the girls’ same-sex discussions, the episodes in this discussion were primarily text-driven (37 episodes) with a primary focus on characterization (25 episodes). Nine of the text-driven episodes were initiated by the boys and 26 of them were initiated by the girls. In most of these episodes (17), the children discussed Manuel’s behavior (his performance in the talent show and his past experience with the science project) and shared their interpretations of it, including their perceptions of his motive for entering the talent show as well as his thoughts and feelings about being in it.

Ginger initiated a lengthy episode by asking, “Did he [Manuel] actually sing?” The students read excerpts from the story and discussed the passages as they tried to determine whether he was actually singing or was lip syncing. For example, Ginger read, “He was stuck dancing and moving his lips to the same words.” Bob added, “It’s kind of hard to dance and sing at the same time.” Then Ginger read, “Moving his lips, so he didn’t say singing, so he probably wasn’t.” Joe countered, “He probably was singing it.” Eventually, the children decided that he was lip syncing and the discussion
ended with Isabelle commenting, "And besides, why would you sing with someone who's already singing?"

The children discussed Manuel's motive for entering the talent show, agreeing that he wanted fame and attention. Isabelle added, "I think he cared too much about what people thought of him." The children "put themselves in Manuel's shoes" as they discussed their thoughts about what he was feeling about entering the talent show, what he was thinking after the talent show and whether they (as Manuel) would enter the talent show next year. The boys both said that they would enter the talent show next year and Joe commented "I'd do it, because I'd think that everybody'd laugh at me again and I'd get all that fame again and that'd be cool. On the other hand, the girls said they wouldn't. Isabelle was adamant and commented loudly, "He made a fooool of himself!"

In eight of these episodes the students evaluated the author's character description, focusing on what the author did and did not include. For example, Isabelle noted, "They didn't elaborate on the characters.... They just kind of introduced them.... They don't even tell about his parents." Joe added, "They don't even tell his last name." Ginger shared, "I'm glad that they gave a description of him....Like Manuel was the fourth...and looked like a lot of kids in his neighborhood, black hair, brown face and skinny legs." This led into a debate about whether he was Italian or Mexican.

The students also sought clarification on some aspects of Manuel's life using their own experiences to provide clarification. For example, the students debated whether Manuel was in the fifth or sixth grade. Ginger commented, "Just say fifth."
Joe questioned her statement, “If it’s in the fifth, how come they have this girl taken?” Isabelle added, “I know. ’Cause we didn’t do stuff like that.” Joe responded, “Now, we are.” Isabelle remarked, “Yeah, but in sixth grade,” and concluded, “I think he’s in sixth grade.”

The students also debated whether Manuel was popular or not. Ginger commented, “He has like low self-esteem. He wants to be popular.” Later Ginger pointed out, “His [Manuel’s] friend was Ernie, and he [Ernie] had the prettiest girl in the class.” Isabelle responded, “He [Manuel] kept saying about how the popular people never gave him the time of day.... Some dork isn’t going to be going out with the most popular girl in the whole class.” Bob remarked, “He’d [Ernie] be a popular person.” Isabelle asked, “Yeah, so wouldn’t he [Ernie] have popular friends?” Ginger initially agreed, “Yeah,” adding, “I don’t know. It [the story] doesn’t really make the connection.” Isabelle and Bob agreed.

“Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride”

“Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride” focused on twelve-year-old Araceli’s first plane ride—a brief flight in a small plane as part of a fund-raiser for charity. This story was discussed in mixed-sex groups.

Tone of Group One’s discussion. The participants in Group One were Nikki, Lena, Marty, and George. Although the students did not appear to be as nervous as they were in their first mixed-sex discussion, the tone of this discussion was subdued. The children spoke softly and took turns speaking without raising their hands. Nikki agreed to be gatekeeper, because no one else wanted to do it. She kept the discussion going by
asking response-oriented questions such as, "What were you all's thoughts about the characters? Did you all like the story? Does anybody have like questions?" She also returned to previous topics later in the discussion, "Do you have anything else to say about the characters? Since you all didn't like the story, what'd you all not like about it?" Despite her efforts the conversation lagged and there were two long pauses. The subdued tone of the discussion was apparent to the children, and George made two comments at separate times that reflected this: "This story is so dreary. There's not much to talk about it," and later, "Is it just you or does everyone sound like they're half dead? It's like we're sitting here going. 'Uh, that's how it goes.'"

Primary episodic focus of Group One's discussion. As with Group Two's discussions, the episodes in this discussion were primarily text-driven [30 episodes] with a main focus on characterization [17 episodes]. Similar to their previous discussion, this group evaluated the plot in eight episodes. Nine of the text-driven episodes in this discussion were initiated by the boys and 26 of them were initiated by the girls. Nikki was the gatekeeper. In two of the episodes the children discussed their evaluation of the author's method of presenting the characters which they held in common as Nikki pointed out both times, "They didn't really tell you much about the other characters except for the main character." This evaluation led the children into their interpretations of the main character, Araceli, and their personal reactions to her.

Araceli was the focus of nine of the 17 episodes focusing on character. In some of these episodes, the children interpreted Araceli's character traits through her actions. For example, George commented, "She shot a rubber band at her own cat," and Nikki
replied, “She was mean.” The children also interpreted Araceli’s feelings. For example, George commented, “She seems like she’s jealous of everybody in her family that’s taken a plane ride.” And Nikki responded, “Yeah...she was like comparing everybody else to herself and saying that they’d all gone up in an airplane.”

In other episodes, the children discussed how to pronounce her name, and her appearance. These episodes indicated a lack of identification on the part of the children. For example, Nikki initiated an episode focusing on her name by asking, “How do you say her name?” Without attempting a pronunciation, the rest of the children commented that they didn’t know. Lena added, “I remember that. It was weird.” The students also discussed the fact that “she could wriggle a little of her tongue through the gap between her front teeth.” Interpreting that to mean that she was missing some teeth Nikki exclaimed, “She’s still losing front teeth, and she’s twelve!” Lena responded, “I know. Doesn’t it seem strange?”

In five of the episodes that focused on characters, the children discussed three of the minor characters. Two of the episodes focused on Araceli’s brother, Eddie, as George initiated an episode by asking, “What was the brother’s name?” and Nikki initiated one by asking, “What happened to her brother? Where was her brother in this whole story?” The children discussed the behavior of Araceli’s father in two of the episodes as Nikki and Lena expressed their surprise in separate episodes that he immediately agreed to let Araceli take the plane ride. Lena commented, “Real parents aren’t like that.... It takes them forever.” In one episode, Nikki remarked that Araceli’s friend, Carolina, “didn’t have a point to the story,” and the rest of the children agreed.
Tone of Group Two’s discussion. The participants in Group Two were Ginger, Isabelle, Joe, and Bob. As with their previous discussion, the students were serious as the discussion began, although they relaxed and began to speak louder and laugh during the last fourth of the discussion. The overall tone of this discussion was calm and polite. At Isabelle’s suggestion, this group selected a discussion director (Isabelle) and a gatekeeper (Joe). This suggestion worked well as the children followed Isabelle’s suggestion, “The gatekeeper’s supposed to make sure that we don’t get off topic, and the discussion director makes sure that everybody has something to say.”

The children took turns speaking and looked at the speaker. Bob raised his hand three times while Ginger raised hers once. Joe and Isabelle did not raise their hands but tended to not interrupt or overlap another’s conversation.

Isabelle guided the discussion by asking a blanket question such as, “What was everybody’s overall reaction?” Then, she asked the individual group members to share their response, allowing time for others to comment on the response after it was shared. When Joe began to make comments that were “off subject,” Isabelle suggested that Ginger should be the new gatekeeper. The rest of the group agreed.

Primary episodic focus of Group Two’s discussion. As in their previous discussion, the majority of the episodes in Group Two’s discussion were text-driven (41). Five of these episodes were initiated by the boys and 36 of them were initiated by the girls. The children discussed the plot, setting, and author’s style in several episodes as they shared their interpretations, evaluations and personal reactions to these elements or sought clarification; however, their primary focus was on characterization.
The children focused on the characters in 19 of the episodes. In 12 of these episodes they discussed the main character, Araceli. They shared their personal reactions to her behavior and their interpretations of her traits based on her actions. Both Ginger and Isabelle agreed that she was “babyish” for a twelve-year-old because she hugged her mother, then she hugged her father. The girls thought she was bossy for telling the pilot, “Hey pilot! Go over to that blue patch in the sky.” They thought she was conceited for saying, “I’m not fat!”

In terms of personal responses to Araceli’s behavior, Ginger thought it was “neat” that, “she made a cross every time she was worried.” Bob and Ginger both thought it was sad that she hadn’t flown before. All of the children reacted negatively to the fact that she put coffee on her cornflakes. In Isabelle’s words, “That’s nasty!”

Like Group One, the students discussed how to pronounce Araceli’s name. Ginger asked, “How do you pronounce the character?” The children’s responses reflected their unfamiliarity with Hispanic names. Isabelle attempted to pronounce it, “Arackalle.” Joe’s pronunciation was, “Arakeele.” Bob’s pronunciation was, “Ascerella.” After these attempts, Isabelle decided to call her “Arachne,” while Bob and Joe decided on “Aphrodite.”

The children commented briefly on the minor characters in the story, such as Araceli’s father, mother, friend, Carolina, and brother. Araceli’s father was the focus of four episodes as the children sought to determine what he was doing while Araceli was on the plane ride as well as the reason why he didn’t go. Ginger also expressed her surprise that he automatically agreed to let her go on the plane without finding out
anything about the airplane first, "Her father didn't find anything out about this airplane, that it was safe. They were just, 'Okay! Let's go!' and they went." The girls discussed Araceli's mother's behavior in two episodes as they tried to determine the socioeconomic status of the family. In particular, they discussed the fact that she went on a retreat and that she did aerobics in the living room, as if the fact that the mother did these things was an indication of having money. Isabelle determined that Carolina was "kind of a baby, too," because she cried. Bob thought it was "cool" that Araceli's brother went to the Macy's parade.

Patterns Across Same-sex Discussions

Discussion Length

The length of the discussions varied between the two sexes. The boys' discussions each lasted 25 minutes. The boys tended to "get down to business" and share their foremost thoughts which tended to be personal in nature. Then they were through, but would search through the story and think of other topics to discuss in order to extend the conversation. The end of the sharing of initial thoughts was always characterized by a comment like this one that Bob made during the discussion of "Trick-or-Treating," "And um, we're not done yet. We're not done yet." Or this one that he made during "First Job" when he asked for a moment of silence, "It's to think of more questions. A moment of silence."

On the other hand, the girls' discussions lasted longer with no breaks in the discussion of topics. Their discussion of "Trick-or-Treating" lasted 29 minutes and their discussion of "First Job" lasted 36 minutes. I had to stop their discussion of
“Trick-or-Treating,” because of the time. (I had kept them 10 minutes into their math class and did not have the permission of the instructor.) Their discussion of “First Job” was terminated at the insistence of Isabelle, the gatekeeper who said, “’Cause we keep repeating the rich or poor.” Nikki and Ginger were reluctant to stop.

Boys’ Talk vs. Girls’ Talk

Emphasis on physical action. The boys’ discussions were characterized by an emphasis on physical action, whether it was interpreting the characters’ traits based on their physical actions, sharing personal stories, or comparing one’s self to the physical action in the story. In their discussion of “First Job,” the boys primarily interpreted the characters based on their physical actions. For example, Bob stated, “He [Alex] was kinda stupid. Why would he light the match against a wooden fence?” George replied, “I think he’s stupid.” Marty commented that Alex was not very disciplined, “’cause like he took a tomato out of her yard and just like stole it and he...burned a match and threw it at her chickens.” At another point in the discussion, Marty stated, “That lady he worked for must have been really weird, because she swept leaves into a cardboard box.” Later, Joe remarked, “That older kid is strange like, taking out old junk and selling it and getting $15.00 a day.”

The personal experiences that the boys shared were also focused on physical action. During their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” all of the boys shared “scaring little kid” stories. For example, Joe remarked, “Oh yeah, that was funny. I was wearing my uh, costume mask and all these little, this group of little kids saw me and they were like ‘Ahhhh!’ and they started running away.” The boys also discussed restrictions on
their behavior in terms of how long they trick-or-treat. This episode began when Marty commented, “I usually stay out until ten on week nights. On weekend nights, I stay out until like eleven trick-or-treating.” The boys spent a great deal of time discussing how to take as much candy as possible from, “a fake person that’s just a dummy.” At one point Joe commented, “Yeah, you take all the candy out and replace it with rocks. It’s like take one rock.” In their discussion of “First Job” personal experiences focused on making money. Bob initiated an episode by asking, “This is on the subject with making money and stuff....Do you get an allowance? How much?” Later on George initiated an episode by asking, “What was your first job like?”

Episodes in which the boys focused on comparing themselves to the physical action in the story were always action-oriented. In “Trick-or-Treating,” Marty initiated an episode by stating, “I just wouldn’t go trick-or-treating when I was 13.” George initiated several episodes: “Yeah! She doesn’t prepare her Halloween costumes very clearly. Like I usually start in like November. October.” “Ummm. They were getting in her way. She was like. I always get annoyed with the little children. It’s like they always seem to be there right before you get there.” “I’ve never seen a kid get taken down by some meaner, older kid.” George also initiated a couple of episodes in the boys’ discussion of “First Job” by comparing himself to the action in the story. He initiated one episode by stating, “…I would have like um, told her to light the thing herself, so I didn’t get in trouble instead of me lighting the thing.” He initiated a second episode by remarking, “…I wouldn’t agree to work for a dollar. [Chuckles] I mean, that’s such a little bit of um, money.”
Some of the episodes in the "Trick-or-Treating" discussion contained violence. For example, when discussing whether Alma should have tackled the boy who stole the little kid's candy, Joe said, "I would like break his neck. I'd just grab his head and pull it open." Bob and George began discussing the dangers of approaching someone "like that," focusing on the fact that they might belong to a gang and carry a gun or a knife. This led Bob to enact a gang fight with shooting. During another episode, George suggested that the next time he sees somebody who is "not supposed to be out there," he'd "grab a chain saw." In a different episode, Joe commented that the "Raider's guy" is "probably gonna smash the little Ninja turtle guy."

**Emphasis on relationships and feelings.** The girls' discussions were characterized by a willingness to discuss their feelings about the events in the story and the characters as well as trying to understand the feelings and relationships of the characters in respect to action in the story. For example, in their discussion of "Trick-or-Treating" Ginger asked, "How would you feel if one of your best friends threw a party and didn't invite you?" Nikki responded by asking, "How do you know it was one of her best friends?" Ginger read from the story, "Al-Alma or whatever didn't envy her friends on Halloween...Alma was glad when Sarah's house came into view." and the episode continued:

Nikki: Look, it says, 'She headed towards Sarah's house two blocks away. She would surprise her.' Oh yeah, that's her friend. But you know, maybe people didn't really like her 'cause she was
sort of like a tomboy, but she tried to have friends, but she didn’t really. She was sort of left out.

Lena: I wouldn’t think of Sarah as a friend anymore.

Megan: I thought she was nicer than the rest of them, cause she was like, ‘Oh, I’m sorry I didn’t invite you.’ Maybe she just forgot about her.

Ginger: I think she was meaner.

Nikki: Yeah, ‘cause she didn’t invite her.

Lena: She sounds like a person who lies, but speaks to your face.

Later on, the girls once again returned to discussing the relationship between Sarah and Alma:

Nikki: I thought Sarah kind of sounded like, you know, one of the popular people, ‘cause she was having like a party and she was like, ‘Oh, I’m sorry I didn’t invite you.’ You know. And um, she sounded like, you know, she was having a party on Halloween night and stuff.

Ginger: And also Alma lied to her saying, ‘Oh, I was with some friends.’ Tryin’ to make it sound like it was okay.

Nikki: Yeah, but it sounded like she was kind of a pop—, like that’s what popular girls do.

Isabelle: I think that’s stupid!
The girls also tried to determine the relationship between the boy who frightened Alma and the rest of the children at the party. Ginger commented, “It names off a lot of kids from school—Michael, Jessie, Julia, and Rolf. So we know that that boy who came out of the bathroom wasn’t in this list.” The girls decided that this boy did not go to school with Alma. Isabelle ended this episode by saying, “You know maybe one of the boys. You know how the boys at our school have boys from other schools on their sports teams? Maybe one of those boys had met him then and so brought him to the party. Sarah didn’t care.”

In both of their discussions, the girls discussed the family relationships of the main character. In “Trick-or-Treating,” they tried to determine how many children were in Alma’s family, whether Alma was the youngest child, and if she had an older sister. Ginger suggested that she had an older, married sister who lives “away.” Isabelle countered that with, “But if she had an older sister, she’d have less of a chance of becoming a tomboy.”

In their discussion of “First Job,” they discussed Alex’s family, including the fact that his older brother and sister worked, but he had to take care of his little brother. They discussed how they thought this affected him. Lena initiated an episode by asking, “Why do you think he was so anxious to get his first job?” Isabelle responded, “Because he’s jealous.” Later on, in an episode focusing on Alex’s relationship with his little brother. Lena commented, “Older sisters or brothers are mean.” Ginger added, “But Alex wasn’t just an older brother. He was a younger brother.” Isabelle responded, “He was very angry inside, like he had a lot of repressed anger.”
**Directness vs. inquiry.** When relating one's self to the action in the story, the boys tended to initiate an episode by stating what they would do. On the other hand, the girls tended to initiate episodes in which they related themselves to the action in the story with a question. This difference resulted in the boys either agreeing or disagreeing with the opening comment (taking a position) while the girls tended to share their thoughts without taking a position against someone else in the group. For example, in the boys' discussion of "Trick-or-Treating" Marty began an episode with, "I just wouldn't go trick-or-treating when I was 13." In opposition to this, the rest of the boys stated that they would, to which Marty defended his position by saying, "What if your friends saw you out there though and thought you were a baby or something?"

In the girls' discussion, Ginger began an episode by asking, "What would you do if you were in the house and these people had little pointed feet and you were scared?" Each of the girls shared what they would do. Nikki said, "I would have left." Lena responded, "I would have just stayed for a while and if they seemed weird I would have left." Isabelle stated, "I would have screamed!"

Another example is from the discussions of "First Job." In the boys' discussion, George began an episode with, "I wouldn't agree to work for a dollar." Marty countered him with the comment, "Maybe that was like way back when a dollar was like a whole lot." Bob agreed with Marty, and George sarcastically replied, "All right, a dollar! I can buy a pack of gum!" In the girls' discussion, Lena referred to the major mistake that Alex made during his first job which caused a fence to burn and asked,
“Have you ever um, have you ever made a mistake like that on somebody else’s like thing?” The rest of the girls responded that they had not.

**Patterns Across Mixed-sex Discussions**

**Discussion Length**

Group One’s discussions were shorter than Group Two’s discussions. Group One’s discussions lasted 20 minutes for “La Bamba” and 22 minutes for “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride.” On the other hand, Group Two’s discussions lasted 23 minutes for “La Bamba” and 29 minutes for “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride.” The combination of children within each group was the primary reason. When I placed the children in the groups, I made my decisions based on my observations of their behavior in the classroom. I also showed my grouping to the classroom teacher and asked for her input. She thought my decisions were good. Both Marty and Lena [Group One] were self-conscious around members of the opposite sex, a factor they revealed to me in my follow-up interviews. The combination of personalities in Group One contributed to their stilted discussions. The conversations in the Group Two discussions flowed more naturally. However, children in each of these discussion groups commented on the fact that the mixed-sex discussions were “quieter” than the same-sex discussions.

**Boys’ Talk and Girls’ Talk**

**Physical action.** Like the boys’ same-sex discussions, the mixed-sex discussions included episodes that focused on physical action. In the mixed-sex discussions these episodes focused primarily on evaluating the action in the story. Sometimes the students related themselves to the action in these episodes. Even though the focus was
the focus was on the physical action, the students’ underlying feelings about that action were apparent. During Group One’s discussion of “La Bamba,” the students discussed the acts in the talent show throughout the discussion. For example, George initiated an episode by stating, “Anyway, they’ve got, ‘Brush, brush, brush. Floss, floss, floss, Gargle the germs away. Hey! Hey! Hey!’ And then they run around the stage.” The episode continued:

Marty: I would not do that.

Nikki: It’s kind of strange.

George: I don’t think that would happen in real life.

Later, Nikki commented, “It has some weird things in the talent show.” The students discussed the skits and Marty said, “It had one funny part where the dirty tooth answered, ‘Ask my dentist’ when he fell off the stage.”

Group One also discussed Manuel’s previous experience making a flashlight. George remarked, “[H]e’d made a flashlight. He discovered how a flashlight worked. He practiced for hours pressing the light to the battery. Now, there’s something you can do.” Lena replied, “I used to do it in fourth grade. I was like obsessed with making a lightbulb work.

During their discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride,” Group One questioned the action in the story. As the gatekeeper, Nikki initiated these episodes. For example, she initiated an episode by stating, “I didn’t understand. They go out into a plane to raise money. That didn’t really make much sense.” George replied, “I’d rather go in a hot air balloon ride.” Later, Nikki asked, “Why were they getting wet? Weren’t they
like inside somewhere?” At another point in the discussion she stated, “I don’t understand why they would sit out there for so long to get into a plane that’s not going anywhere.”

Group Two’s discussions included few episodes that were focused only on physical action. In their discussion of “La Bamba” they used the physical action to help them determine the setting of the story. For example, Isabelle initiated an episode by stating, “I think it was the 80’s, ’cause they did have records in the 80’s.” In this episode, the students discussed what Manuel would have sung if it was the 70’s. Bob commented, “He’d sing YMCA or something.” Later in the discussion, Ginger initiated an episode by stating, “Well, you know what? Listen to this,’Manuel walked to school in the frosty morning.’ Frosty morning. That means they didn’t live in Mexico ’cause Mexico is hot.”

Ginger asked for clarification on the action in the story two times. The first time she asked, “What about the record player being broken?” The second time, she asked, “Did he [Manuel] actually sing?”

As in their discussion of “La Bamba,” Group Two’s discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride,” contained few episodes that were focused only on physical action. They did evaluate the action in the story at the beginning of the story in the following episode:

Joe: First of all, why would they charge a nickel a pound just to go flying? That’s kind of cheap.
Isabelle: I guess it was just because they wanted something for charity and they didn’t wanna tell people, ‘Okay. You must give $100.00 in order to go flying in this little plane for five minutes.’

Bob: ’Cause with a nickel more people would come, so it’d probably even out.

Isabelle: There’s a lot of obese people in the world, so that would make a lot.

Bob: And also this is kind of uh old now, the story. I think flying is really, ‘Hey, I get to fly.’ And a nickel’s worth a lot.

The students in Group Two also used the physical action in the story to determine the socioeconomic status of the characters. For example, Isabelle commented. “Her brother went to the Macy’s parade.” Later in the discussion she remarked, “Her mother went on a retreat, and she did aerobics in the living room.” The students decided that since the characters participated in these activities, they were “not poor.”

Relationships and feelings. The mixed-sex discussions were more like the girls’ same-sex discussions in that both the boys and the girls in the mixed-sex discussions were willing to discuss their feelings about the events in the story. The students were also willing to share their interpretations of the characters’ feelings and discuss the relationships of the characters in respect to the action in the story.

For example, in Group One’s discussion of “La Bamba,” Lena shared her feelings about the plot, “I didn’t like it.” George and Marty both commented on their
interpretations of Manuel’s feelings. George stated, “It seems like he [Manuel] was just nervous about it [the talent show] even though he had everything planned over.” Later in the discussion, Marty remarked, “It looks like he is jealous of Benny [a classmate], because he [Benny] didn’t mess up.” Lena focused on her own feelings, “I’d be embarrassed to go in a talent show.”

Group One also discussed Manuel’s family and his relationship with them as evidenced in the following episode:

Nikki: He had a lot of brothers and sisters. It said he was fourth of seven children.

Marty: Seven.

Lena: I’d hate to have seven, six people.

Nikki: So would I. One brother is enough for me.

George: Yeah.

Lena: One sister’s enough. She’s so mean. He [Manuel] doesn’t even seem to get annoyed by his sister, I mean brothers.

Nikki: I know. He said that his little brother wore his shirt or something.

Group One’s discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride” also contained episodes pertaining to Araceli’s feelings. For example, Marty commented, “I bet he’s [Araceli’s dad] scared of a plane.” Later in the discussion, George remarked, “She seems like she’s jealous of everybody in her family that’s taken a plane ride.” The students also discussed how Araceli felt about the plane ride. Lena commented that she
thought the story was “kind of boring,” adding “I wanted something to happen when she was up in the plane. It would have been a lot better.” The episode continued:

Nikki: “Yeah, I wanted it, too. She [Araceli] would have been excited if something would have happened.”

Marty: What she did was like, read a newspaper article about it, go fly in a plane, land, get all wet. That’s the end.

Lena: And she didn’t like it when she got up in it.

George: It’s one of those depressing little stories.

Marty: Yeah.

Nikki: Yeah. For her it was kind of depressing.

Like Group One, the students in Group Two were willing to discuss their feelings about the story. The students were also willing to share their interpretations of the characters’ feelings and discuss the relationships of the characters in respect to the action in the story. For example, in their discussion of “La Bamba,” Bob commented, “I liked how kinda they, instead of just concentrating on his, they told you what everyone else was doing in the play.” Ginger shared what she liked about the story, “What I like is he [Manuel] says, ‘I used laser tracking with high optics and low functional decibels per channel,’” and later, “Well, um, I like when they described him [Manuel]...” Everyone shared their overall feelings about the story in the following episode:

Bob: Wait, let me think. How did you like the story?

Isabelle I didn’t like it. It was empty.
Ginger: I like it. Yeah.

Joe: I like it. It was pretty cool. I liked that La Bamba thing.

The students referred to Manuel's feelings and how they would feel if they were him in a couple of ways. Isabelle asked everyone to think about Manuel's feelings when she asked, "What did you think he was feeling about why he entered the talent show?" Ginger wanted to know how everyone would feel about having a family the size of Manuel's family. She asked, "How'd you feel if you had six brothers?"

The students shared their feelings about the size of Manuel's family in the following episode:

Ginger: Manuel was the fourth. Manuel was the fourth of seven children.

Joe: Okay. Ahhhhhhh!

Isabelle: God! I feel sorry for his mother! [Ginger laughs]

Joe: I feel sorry for him! [Group laughter]

Rather than discussing Manuel's relationship with his family members, the students in Group Two focused on his relationship with his peers. In the following episode the students attempt to determine if Manuel is popular:

Ginger: His [Manuel's] friend was Ernie, and he [Ernie] had the prettiest girl in the class.

Bob: He'd [Ernie] be the popular person.

Isabelle: Yeah, so wouldn't he have popular friends?

Ginger: Yeah. I don't know.
Isabelle: Some dork isn’t going to be going out with the most popular girl in the whole class.

Ginger: It [the story] doesn’t really make the connection.”

Isabelle: Yeah.

Bob: Yeah.

During their discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride,” most of the students shared their feelings about the plot. Joe commented, “I didn’t really like it. The story had a lot of holes in it if you get what I mean.” Isabelle agreed with him, “I liked it okay…. It did have a lot of holes in it.” Ginger included Araceli’s feelings about the plane ride in her response, “The thing I don’t like about it is it had like um climax ending. It was working up about this plane, and she was so excited. Then, she starts crying ’cause she thought the plane ride wasn’t that fun.” Later, Ginger asked everyone to share their feelings about an aspect of the plane ride:

Ginger: If you were riding a plane ride with obese people sitting next to you, would you like it?

Joe: No.

Bob: Not really. [Chuckles]

Isabelle: I don’t like it…. I always feel so bad…. It just makes you wanna stare. [Begins laughing] It looks so funny.

The students discussed Araceli’s feelings at other points in the discussion. For example, Ginger discussed Araceli’s feelings when she explained why the story reminded her of a party hat, “You wear the hat to celebrate. Like she was flying,
because she was so happy, but then the elastic band hurts your neck.... And you’re mad and you’re sad and so at the end of the story she was sad.” Later Joe commented, “She [Araceli] was so scared....”

Rather than discussing the relationships of the characters in the story, the students in Group Two shared their feelings about a “blind love” relationship when Isabelle stated that the story reminded her of “blind love.” Isabelle explained “blind love” as, “You know when you like somebody and you think, ‘Oh, this person is wonderful.... Oohh! I could not want anything more.’ Then, um, you like get together with this person and you find out that they’re not so great after all and then you like get hurt or something and it seems so terrible.... In the end it wasn’t as fun as you thought it was gonna be.” Both Ginger and Bob agreed with Isabelle. Ginger asked Bob to explain why he agreed. He responded, “Uh, well, it’s kinda, ’cause you’re like really happy and so forth, but you’ve never met the person and you finally get together with them.... And like, then you get to know ‘em and then you like think, you don’t think they’re the right person for you. So, it kind of makes you feel sad. I think.” [The children were referring to the fact that Araceli had been excited about flying, but was disappointed about the actual experience.]

Directness and inquiry. The mixed-sex discussions were different from the same-sex discussions in regards to the students comparing themselves to the action in the story. In the mixed-sex discussions, there were fewer of these episodes than in the same-sex discussions. Also, the boys and girls in Group One used both statements and questions, rather than the boys using only statements and the girls only questions. For
example, in Group One’s discussion of “La Bamba” George asked, “Lip syncing Para la Bamba. Um. That’s interesting. Would you do that?” Later, Lena commented, “If I was him…. I would have stopped singing and everything when it broke and stuff and everybody was laughing....” At another point in the discussion George asked, “What would you do if you wanted to impress somebody? ’Cause this guy was trying to impress people.” In their discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride,” George stated, “Hmmm. I’d rather go in a hot air balloon ride.” Later Lena remarked, “If I was dying just to go on a plane ride, I would bring a friend.”

In Group Two’s discussions, the students related themselves to the action in the story only three times. Twice during their discussion of “La Bamba” and once during their discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride.” All of these episodes were initiated by Ginger asking a question. For example, in their discussion of “La Bamba” Ginger asked, “If it was next year, would you raise your hand for the talent show?” Later in the discussion she asked, “How’d you feel if you had six brothers?” In their discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride,” the only episode in which the students related themselves to the action in the story was initiated by Ginger, “If you were riding a plane ride with obese people sitting next to you, would you like it?”

**Summary**

The composition of the groups influenced both the type of responses shared and the length of the discussions. The boys were more inclined to share personal stories, focus on physical action, and argue. On the other hand, the girls focused more on sharing their interpretations and personal reactions to the literary elements. The girls
incorporated an emphasis on relationships and feelings in their discussions. They also were more cooperative than the boys and tended to take turns. When comparing one's self to the action in the story, the boys tended to initiate an episode with a statement while the girls initiated these episodes with a question. The length of the same-sex discussions varied with the boys' discussions being briefer than the girls' discussions.

When the children participated in mixed-sex discussion groups, several differences emerged from the same-sex discussions. The girls brought their focus on the literary elements into the discussions. This resulted in a change in focus on the part of the boys. The focus on physical action tended to be linked to the text in terms of evaluating the action in the story. Also, the mixed-sex discussions included numerous episodes in which both boys and girls focused on relationships and feelings. A difference emerged in how the students' compared themselves to the action in the story. In Group One's discussions, both girls and boys initiated these episodes with both statements and questions. Group Two's discussions included few of these types of episodes. All of them were initiated by Ginger in the form of a question. Finally, the mixed-sex discussions tended to be shorter than the same-sex discussions and were characterized by turn-taking.
CHAPTER 5
DATA ANALYSIS OF INTERTEXTUAL PATTERNS

Several intertextual patterns emerged across all four of the short story discussions. The students consistently related their personal lives to aspects of the stories by relating their selves to the action in the story. In addition, they clarified aspects of the story through connections to their own lives, either in terms of people in their personal lives or to texts, such as movies, books, music or television shows. The students also made connections between the short stories that they read for this study. There is some overlap between my discussion here and previous sections, because intertextuality was a primary aspect of the students’ discussions.

Relating Self to the Primary Action in the Story

A primary intertextual link that the children made was to compare themselves and experiences in their lives to the central action in the stories. Most of the time, these connections were between similar kinds of actions. Overall, this type of intertextual link was more prevalent in the boys’ discussions than the girls, but it was a part of all of the discussions. I will discuss this intertextual link as it occurred in each of the discussions, beginning with the same-sex discussions.

In their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” the boys shared many stories about their own personal experiences trick-or-treating which I included in my discussion of their primary episodic focus. For example, they described the costumes they wore and shared their “scaring little kid” stories. Marty opened up several episodes by stating his position on events in the story which led the boys into making intertextual connections.
with their own lives. For example, at the beginning of the boys’ discussion Marty stated, “I just wouldn’t go trick-or-treating when I was 13.” Later on he commented, “We don’t even have parties on Halloween night like that.” He initiated another episode by stating, “I wouldn’t have been a football player.”

In their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” the girls initiated episodes in which they related themselves to the action in the story by asking questions. For example, Ginger asked, “What would you do if you were in the house and these people had little, pointed feet and you were scared?” Ginger initiated another episode by asking, “How would you feel if one of your best friends threw a party and didn’t invite you?” Lena also asked two of these types of questions: “What do you think’s gonna happen to you if you go trick-or-treating when you’re 13?” and “People, wouldn’t you have found a friend to go trick-or-treating with?”

In the “First Job” discussions, both groups discussed their own first jobs. In the boys’ discussion this happened twice, once when George began an episode by asking, “What was your first job like?” and again when Marty asked, “What do you think of when you think of the story?” [The boys all thought about their first jobs.] The boys also compared themselves to the pay scale in the story when George stated, “I wouldn’t agree to work for a dollar.” The girls discussed their first jobs when Lena asked, “What was your first job and were you anxious for it?”

When discussing “La Bamba,” Group One discussed talent shows and whether they would sing a song like Manuel did. They discussed their previous experience with talent shows when Lena asked, “What was the first thing that came to your mind?”
Both Marty and Lena had participated in talent shows at schools they had attended. Marty responded, “Talent show at my old school, although we didn’t have somebody miming some weird song and doing karate.” Lena remarked, “We did this dance from ‘West Side Story,’ and we thought we were gonna be like really bad, but we won first place.”

Group Two “put themselves in Manuel’s shoes” when Ginger asked, “If it was next year would you raise your hand for the talent show?” Isabelle added, “If you were Manuel and you were exactly like him.” No one in this group had participated in a talent show, so their connections varied. Joe commented that Manuel “doing the talent show” reminded him of “that Santa Claus thing”—when he was Santa Claus in a skit. Bob commented, “I’ve never been to a talent show. It reminded me of when I was a judge, and I messed up a lot of times.”

When Group One discussed “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride,” the boys related themselves to the action in the story by sharing a personal experience flying. For example, at the beginning of their discussion, George commented, “Like this person thinks that if she goes in an airplane that flies around, she’s gonna like profoundly effect her whole life, but I’ve had these six-hour flights that I’ve been on and it never really got me much more interested or changed my life much at all. Later on, Marty stated, “Real flights aren’t like that. Although my uncle in his plane, he did stuff like that. He did 180’s and hit air pockets.”

Group Two also made personal connections to their first plane rides in their discussion and began sharing their experiences. Joe opened the episode, “This sort of
reminds me of my first plane ride. I got freaked out that we were gonna crash or something.” Ginger commented, “My first plane ride...I was going to Disney World, and I fell asleep in the aisle and the [group laughter] flight attendant had to move me.” Isabelle followed with her memory, “My first flight was when I was in my mother’s stomach, so I don’t remember it. [Ginger giggles.] They flew to the Olympics. Bob shared his first plane ride experience last, “I don’t remember my first flight, but I’m trying to remember. I kind of remember I was scared, ’cause um, I went to New York and on the way back, like two days before I left the plane crashed and killed half its people on the same runway I was going on. That wasn’t very reassuring.” When the children were discussing Araceli’s flight on a single engine plane, Isabelle commented, “It’s probably like flying with the people on my daddy’s other plane when it was full.”

In the discussions of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride” all of the girls connected the central action of the story (Araceli’s first plane ride) to other experiences in their lives. None of the boys made this type of connection. During Group One’s discussion, Nikki was reminded of “...when you get wet.... When you’re going out shopping or something or when you go to a party and it’s raining and you get all wet.” Lena said it reminded her of “chocolate cake.... Because once I went to this restaurant, and I got chocolate cake, and it looked really good but it was really gross.” During Group Two’s discussion, Ginger said that it reminded her of a party hat. “You wear the hat to celebrate. Like she was flying, because she was so happy, but then the elastic band hurts your neck.... And it pops and it breaks and you’re mad and you’re sad and so at the end of the story she was sad.” Isabelle said that the story reminded her of love.
“You know when you like somebody and you think, ‘Oh this person is wonderful.’
....And like, then you get to know ‘em and then you like think, you don’t think they’re
the right person for you. So, it kind of makes you feel sad.”

Intertext of Personal Life—People

Throughout the discussions the children frequently clarified aspects of the story
or extended their responses to include the actions of people from their lives. Sometimes
these connections would be to family members and sometimes they would involve
school friends. These types of intertextual connections indicated the influence of the
texts of the childrens’ lives on their interpretations. Three of these types of connections
involved the names of the characters in the stories. Both the boys and the girls
discussed this intertextual link during their discussions of “First Job.” For example, in
the boys’ discussion Bob asked, “Why was his friend’s name Jesus?” George
responded, “Just some kid. I mean, they call people Moses, Abraham. I don’t know. I
know some people. It’s not that different.” In the girls’ discussion, Ginger asked,
“How do you pronounce, is it /Jemi/ or /Jem/?” Isabelle responded, “/Jemi/. That’s a
way to spell /Jemi/. My cousin’s boyfriend spells it like that. That is how, one of the
ways you spell Jaime.” In Group Two’s discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride”
Ginger commented, “Did you notice that Carolina is spelled with an ‘a’ though?”
Isabelle responded, “Cause that, it’s Spanish, and it’s Norwegian, and that’s how you
spell it in Spanish.” (They were referring to a classmate from Norway whose name is
pronounced Carolina, but it is spelled Caroline.)
In all of the discussions except one (Group Two’s discussion of “La Bamba”), the girls extended their responses to the story to include references to other people in their lives. For example, during their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating” when they were discussing the fact that Alma dressed as a football player, Isabelle commented, “When my mother was four, she wanted to be a football player when she grew up.” Also, when the girls were discussing the fact that Alma’s family cut one banana to feed four people Isabelle commented, “Our neighbor has a banana tree.” During this same discussion when the girls were discussing the characters and decided that the characters were immigrants, Lena commented, “My mommy’s an immigrant.”

During the girls’ discussion of “First Job,” Lena made several of these personal connections to other people in her life. For example, when the girls were trying to understand the meaning of “Hauled junk that was not really junk,” [They were referring to Alex’s brother’s job of collecting “tossed stuff” and selling it.] Lena commented, “My dad said in Japan they did that, like for all the little electronic thingies. They would just, if there was just one little thing wrong with it, they’d throw it out.” Later on when the girls were discussing the socioeconomic status of the characters, Lena stated, “In kindergarten, I had this friend, and she was poor. She had like ten beds in one room until her grandfather died.” Still later in the discussion when the girls were discussing whether it was legal to burn leaves Lena said, “My mom burns them in our yard.” Also, during this discussion all of the girls made connections to their relationships with their siblings when they discussed how Alex was mean to his little brother, Jaime. For example, Isabelle commented, “I have a big sister that accuses me of that, though.”
During Group One’s discussion of “La Bamba” Nikki and Lena made connections to both siblings and classmates. They mentioned their siblings again when they were discussing Manuel’s family. Nikki commented, “One brother is enough for me.” Lena added, “One sister’s enough. She’s so mean.” As discussed previously, this group related Manuel’s actions to those of a classmate. Lena initiated this episode by stating, “He’s kind of like Joe.” When George stated that he didn’t think that the events in the story would happen in real life, Lena made a connection with one of the girls in the study, “It’d be like Ginger tryin’ to teach little kids about that.”

During their discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride,” Lena made a personal connection to the story in terms of comparing the action in the story to the action of someone in their lives. When the group was discussing how readily Araceli’s dad agreed to let her fly on the plane, Lena commented, “Real parents aren’t always like that. It takes mine forever. It takes them forever just to straighten out something.”

During Group Two’s discussion both girls made personal connections to people in their lives. For example, after Isabelle commented that Araceli’s brother had gone to the Macy’s parade Ginger responded, “Yeah. I know people who’ve been.” Later on in the discussion when the group was discussing the meaning of “wheedled” Isabelle imitated wheedling to her dad as she mimicked in a high-pitched tone, “Daaa-deeee,” then added, “My dad always goes, [gruff voice] ‘What do you want?’” [Group laughter]

Intertext of Other Texts

The children also made intertextual connections to their knowledge base of reading, watching movies, listening to music, and watching television. The boys
especially used this knowledge base to clarify points. For example, during their
discussion of "Trick-or-Treating" Marty referred to television news when he asked,
"You ever heard of gang wars?" In their discussion of "First Job" when the boys were
discussing the value of a coin minted in 1959, Bob stated that the age of a coin was not
the only thing that determined its value adding, "Because bar dollars, they're not very
old, and they're worth more than a dollar.... I read about it in Zillions." [Consumer
Reports magazine for children]. Still later in the discussion, Joe commented that he
understood when Alex "could feel the lick of a belt across his legs." Bob responded,
"That's called child abuse." Then he added, "I saw an old movie yesterday. They'd get
this little kid to go down [on all fours]. Then, they laid another kid across his back, and
they had like this little switch. You know the things you hit, bop horses with? They'd
go, 'Wham!'"

The girls tended not to refer to other texts such as movies or books to clarify
points; however, two of the girls did during their discussion of "Trick-or-Treating." For
example, when Nikki expressed her opinion that the story "seemed not finished,"
Ginger sought to provide Nikki with clarification, "Have you ever read scary stories,
sleep-over scary stories? That's like these stories are. They finish. They don't exactly
finish, but they let your mind wander." Later on Ginger asked for some clarification,
"What was she talking about [laughing] pointy-feeted?" Isabelle connected it to a
movie she had seen, "It's like the guy in 'The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.' Have
you ever seen that movie? Those little dolfits or whatever his name was. He had little,
tiny pointy feet, and he looked like a devil."
During Group Two’s discussions intertextual links to television shows, a Nintendo game, and other stories the children had read emerged as the children discussed the names of the characters. For example, during their discussion of “La Bamba” as they discussed Manual’s friends, Bennie and Ernie, Joe commented, “Bert and Ernie--Sesame Street!” Later on, after Ginger mentioned the names of two other students who were in the talent show, Mario and Ricardo, Bob responded “Ricky Ricardo!” while Joe replied, “Mario Brothers.” Still later in the discussion Joe commented that Ricardo was a strange name, and Bob responded, “That’s from ‘I Love Lucy.’ Joe.” During their discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride,” the students were having difficulty pronouncing Araceli’s name. After some unsuccessful tries such as “Arsheila,” “Aracella,” and “Ascrella,” Isabelle decided to call her “Arachne,” while Bob and Joe decided to call her “Aphrodite.” The students were studying the Greek gods and goddesses at that time in their social studies class and had been reading myths.

Intertext of Short Stories

Intertextual links to the other short stories in this study were a part of all of the discussions which included girls. These intertextual links increased in number as the children read and discussed more stories. These links focused on the literary elements, especially characterization and plot.

Most of the intertextual links that the girls made to the other stories focused on their evaluation and interpretation of the characters. I have already discussed many of these links. For example, the girls tended to focus on the fact that there were overweight characters in all the stories. In the girls’ discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,”
Ginger commented, “Isn’t it weird that both stories have a fat man [group laughter] in it?... The fat man shows up everywhere.” In their discussion of “First Job,” the final same-sex discussion, the girls commented on this intertextual link several times. Isabelle made the first comment, “All of these stories that we’ve read are kinda revolting.... They’re talking about this nasty stuff, like the guy with the stomach and the little thirteen-year-old belching, and then the woman with the arm flub.” [starts laughing uncontrollably] Later in the discussion, Isabelle asked if they were supposed to make connections between all the stories. After Ginger responded, “Yeah,” Isabelle added, “I didn’t mean to be silly when I was talkin’ about that fat thing. Because the author didn’t concentrate on like what this person’s name was or anything important, like um, their parents. But they kept... They were kinda obsessed with fat!” Much later in the discussion Nikki commented, “There was a fat man in every story so far.”

The linkage of overweight characters in the stories continued through the final discussion with both discussion groups. Lena initiated the episode during Group One’s discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride” by commenting, “I don’t like how they always describe people. It’s just like in the story they tell a little bit. They don’t describe people that are, you know, ’cause in all of these stories they describe so much about the fat people.” The rest of the group agreed with her. When Group Two was discussing “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride, the girls began laughing loudly when Bob commented, “They focused on that little family of chubby people.” Isabelle stated, “We were talking about how they keep focusing on fat yesterday,” and Ginger added, “They
always have a fat person.” Later on, Isabelle remarked, “I think this person is obsessed with obese people.”

Another focus of the girls was discussing the socioeconomic status of the characters in the stories. This focus was viewed intertextually in the final discussion (“Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride”) when Isabelle commented, “These people seem to have more money than all the people in the other stories.”

The ethnicity of the characters in the stories was also discussed intertextually and was usually discussed along with the setting as reflected in the following episode from the girls’ discussion of “Trick-or-Treating:”

Nikki: Are all people in these stories Spanish, because they keep using like in italicized words, they have like Spanish words?

Ginger: I think they are.

Nikki: I think they’re Spanish.

Lena: That’s like yesterday’s story.

Ginger: .... They’re like on the border of Mexico or something and so they talk Spanish.

This same intertextual link was made in the boys’ discussion of “First Job” when Marty asked, “Why, why is there Spanish in every one of these stories?” Bob responded, “’Cause they’re in Spain!” Group Two made this intertextual link as they discussed the setting and ethnicity of the characters during their discussion of “La Bamba” as seen in the following episode:

Bob: I think they’re in Spain or Mexico.
Isabelle: They’re probably in America. They’re just Spanish.

Ginger: Oh.

Joe: Spanish Americans.

Isabelle: Like the other ones. Immigrants.

Noticing the inclusion of Spanish words and phrases in all of the short stories also led the children to think about the ethnicity of the author. This is reflected in the following episode from the girls’ discussion of “First Job:”

Lena: Why are they all in the short stories Mexican?

Isabelle: Spanish.

Ginger: Same author.

Isabelle: They’re Spanish, not Mexican.

Nikki: Maybe the author was Spanish.

In both a single-sex discussion (the girls’ discussion of “Trick-or-Treating”) and a mixed-sex discussion (Group One’s discussion of La Bamba), Lena initiated episodes connecting the use of Spanish with the author. For example, in the discussion of “Trick-or-Treating” she commented, “It kind of seems like the author would be Mexican, ’cause both of those stories are like written by the same person, both have Mexican in them. I don’t know why. It just kind of seems like it. Seems like she’s writing about her people or his.” In the discussion of “La Bamba” she stated, “It seems like it’s all by the same author.... It’s just because they’re all Spanish.”

As the children read the short stories they noted two aspects of character development in short stories and began to view these aspects intertextually. A comment
that was stated in most of the discussions was, "There wasn’t enough about the characters." The episode below from Group Two’s discussion of “La Bamba” reflects the children viewing this aspect intertextually:

Isabelle: They didn’t really elaborate on the characters.
Bob: Yeah.
Joe: Yeah.
Bob: They just kind of introduced them and then.
Isabelle: In none of these stories, do they elaborate on the characters.
Ginger: I know. Well, what happens is, I think we’re used to reading books.
Bob: Yeah.

Another intertextual evaluation of the characterization was discussed by Group Two during their discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride” when Ginger commented, “All of the stories are kind of the same. They have one main person and a little person that’s off. Not really main.”

The girls also expressed a desire for the characters in the short stories to be connected. This desire was expressed in both of the same-sex discussions and is reflected in the following episode from their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating:”

Ginger: I wish they would have connected these stories.
Isabelle: You all, they should have.
Ginger: They should have had Elizabeth being Alma’s best friend or being Alma’s cousin or something.

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Nikki: Or Alma came and chased the squirrels out of the house. You know?

Ginger: Yeah, and the fat kid. I mean the fat, [giggles] the roll-out man was the same man.

Nikki: And he was related to the man with the tattoos.

Ginger: Oh, he was the same man as the tattooed man.

The students also made intertextual connections to the other stories when discussing their evaluation of a story’s plot. These connections were made during the girls’ same-sex discussions and during three of the mixed-sex discussions. The girls tended to make these connections. For example, during the girls’ discussion of “Trick-or-Treating” Nikki commented, “Both of these stories, they seemed not finished.” (She was comparing “Trick-or-Treating” to “The Squirrels” which was a pilot story.) Later on when Lena commented that she liked the ending, “’cause you didn’t expect that at all,” Ginger responded, “Yeah, it’s better than “The Squirrels.”

When the girls were evaluating the plot of “First Job” Ginger stated, “This one actually had a point. He was trying to find a job. The other ones [stories] didn’t have a point.” Later on, Lena commented, “All of these have like a beginning that makes no sense to the rest of the story.”

During Group One’s discussion of “La Bamba” Nikki commented, “I thought this one was better than the other ones.” George responded that he thought, “...this one was worse than the other ones really,” and Marty commented, “This one was more
realistic.” Later on in the discussion after Lena commented that she found the story boring, Nikki stated, “At least this one kind of finished. The other ones didn’t finish.”

During Group One’s discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride” Marty stated, “It was more realistic than some of the others, like the family. They talked more about the home than it did other places like at school like the other thing did.” Later on, Lena commented, “It was different and more realistic than the others.”

Group Two evaluated the plot intertextually with the other short stories after Isabelle asked, “Did anybody make any connections or find any differences between this story and all the other ones?” Ginger responded, “I thought it was kind of worse than the other stories. I liked it at the beginning. I was like, ‘Hey! I like this story.’ and then it lost me.” When Isabelle asked Bob for his opinion of the story, Bob provided an intertextual response, “Um, it’s just as good as all the other ones pretty much.”

**Summary**

As the children discussed their interpretations and responses to the short stories, several types of intertextual connections were common threads throughout the discussions. The students consistently related the primary action of the main character to themselves, either in terms of past experiences or hypothetically. The students clarified situations in the story by relating them to texts with which they were familiar. More specifically, the boys tended to make personal intertextual connections based on personal actions while the girls tended to make these types of connections to other people in their lives and events associated with other people. Also, the boys made more
intertextual connections to texts such as movies, television shows, etc., bringing in knowledge from other sources. At the same time, the girls tended to make intertextual links between the short stories that were used in this study, primarily in terms of the literary elements (characterization and plot), sometimes focusing on the construction of a short story.
CHAPTER 6
DATA ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE PATTERNS

I found several interesting differences in the discussion patterns between the single-sex groups and the mixed-sex groups. In the following section, I will discuss the discourse patterns that emerged in these groups. I will begin with the same-sex discussions sharing the patterns that emerged according to the frames of reference, sentence types, and nonsentence discourse. Then, I will discuss these same patterns in terms of the mixed-sex discussions.

Same-sex Discussions

The total number of episodes (an initiation and at least one response from a group member) for the same-sex discussions was 258. The boys' discussions included 122 episodes, while the girls' discussions included 136 episodes. My analysis of the types of sentences used to initiate episodes revealed the following categories:

1. Personal Experience: Topic (Statement)--Relating personal experiences to the main topic of the short story.
   Example: Oh yeah. That was funny. I was wearing my costume mask and all these little, this group of little kids saw me and they were like, ‘Ahh!’ and they started running away.

2. Personal Experience: Topic (Question)--Eliciting personal experiences to the main topic of the short story.
   Example: What were you this year? [Referring to Halloween costume]
3. Action to Self (Statement)--Comparing or evaluating characters’ actions to own values or experiences.
   Example: I just wouldn’t go trick-or-treating when I was 13.

4. Action to Self (Question)--A question that would initiate a comparison or evaluation of the characters’ actions to own values or experiences.
   Example: What would you do if you were in the house, and these people had little, pointed feet and you were scared?

5. Interpret/Clarify From Life (Statement)--Drawing from life experiences to interpret the story or to clarify the discussion.
   Example: You know that Chevy Nova she has? Her dad might be saving it because it might be a collector’s item. They have like collector’s items, like Sam’s dad, the Stingray.

6. Interpret/Clarify From Life (Question)--A question that would initiate someone drawing from life experiences to interpret or to clarify the discussion.
   Example: You ever heard of gang wars?

7. Text-Driven (Statement)--Sharing a comment about an element of the story being discussed or any of the short stories read and discussed in this study.
   Examples: She sounded like a tomboy to me.
   All of these stories that we’ve read are kinda revolting. They all, they’re talking about this nasty stuff like the guy with the stomach and the little thirteen year old kid belching....
8. Text-Driven (Question)--Asking a question about an element of the story being discussed or any of the short stories read and discussed in this study.

Examples: What time, what year do you think this is?
Did anybody make any connections or find any differences between this story and all the other ones?

Table 5.1 on page 104 (created from the discourse maps) shows the type and frequency of episodes, the average number of turns after each type of initiation, and percentages of the types of discourse sentences. In the columns, the number before the slash indicates the number of episodes of that type and the number after the slash is the average number of turns in those episodes, indicating the average length of the episodes.

Frames of Reference

The primary frame of reference varied between the boys' and girls' discussions. The first eight categories indicate the frames of reference which the participants used in discussing the texts. Overall, the boys initiated 36 episodes in the categories that reflected a personal frame of reference (personal experience, action to self, interpret/clarify from life). This accounted for 30% of the total number of episodes in their discussions. At the same time, the boys initiated 47 episodes with text-driven sentences which accounted for 39% of their episodes. However, the boys tended to divert an episode that began with a text-driven sentence into a personal frame of reference. For example, in the episode following Table 5.1, Joe initiated it by
evaluating a character's action. Bob responded by clarifying the character's action with an experience from his own life.

Table 5.1
Number of Episodes and the Average Number of Turns per Episode in Same-sex Discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Discourse Sentences</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per. Exp. Topic (S)</td>
<td>9 15</td>
<td>0 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. Exp. Topic (Q)</td>
<td>2 14</td>
<td>2 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action to Self (S)</td>
<td>8 12</td>
<td>2 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action to Self (Q)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter. Clar. Fr. Life (S)</td>
<td>1 18</td>
<td>5 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter Clar. Fr. Life (Q)</td>
<td>2 14</td>
<td>5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text-Driven (S)</td>
<td>1 4</td>
<td>1 4 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text-Driven (Q)</td>
<td>12 12</td>
<td>1 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-focus (S)</td>
<td>2 4</td>
<td>1 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-focus (Q)</td>
<td>1 4</td>
<td>1 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con. Maint. (S)</td>
<td>5 4</td>
<td>1 8 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con. Maint. (Q)</td>
<td>3 6</td>
<td>1 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31 71</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Joe: That older kid is strange like, taking out old junk and selling it and getting 15 dollars a day.

Bob: Um, Joe. He makes good money off it. It's called antiques.
Marty: That's a good way to make money.

Bob: Antiques are worth a lot. Some Macdonald's toys are worth like three dollars. I've got Macdonald's. I went to an antique store and they had like an entire section full of Macdonald's toys.

On the other hand, the girls' frame of reference was primarily text-driven. Overall, the girls initiated 76 episodes with text-driven sentences which accounted for 56% of their episodes. Only 14 episodes reflecting a personal frame of reference were initiated, accounting for 10% of their total initiations. The girls' discussions tended to flow from one text-driven topic to another. A person would make a comment or ask a question about the story and the entire episode would be text-driven. In the episode below which is from the girls' discussion of "Trick-or-Treating," Ginger asked for the identification of Roger Craig who was mentioned in the story when Alma was trick-or-treating. Other members of the group answered her question, then the topic was closed and the girls moved on to another topic.

Ginger: Who was Roger Craig?
Nikki: Roger Craig?
Isabelle: A famous 80's football player.
Nikki: You know?
Isabelle: Uh huh
Nikki: Oh... Oh. Then, that (the story) is from the 80's then.
Ginger: Ok. And I have another thing. Isn't it weird that both stories have a fat man in it?
Types of Sentences

There were several differences in the usage of questions and statements for episode initiations. Following, Table 5.2 shows the number of episodes beginning with questions and the average number of turns per episode while Table 5.3 on page 107 shows the number of episodes beginning with statements and the average number of turns per episode.

Table 5.2
Number of Episodes Beginning with Questions and the Average Number of Turns per Episode in Same-sex Discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Same-sex Discussions</th>
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<td>25</td>
<td>4 9</td>
<td>1 4</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inter Clar Fr Life (Q)</td>
<td>2 14</td>
<td>5 6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 5</td>
<td>2 7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Text-Driven (Q)</td>
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<td>15 6</td>
<td>27 61</td>
<td>16:11</td>
<td>31 7</td>
<td>47 71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Off-focus (Q)</td>
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<td>1 19</td>
<td>2 5</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Con. Maint. (Q)</td>
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<td>1 9</td>
<td>4 9</td>
<td>3 5</td>
<td>7 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20 24</td>
<td>44 42</td>
<td>66 66</td>
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Overall, the boys began 78 episodes with statements (64%) and 44 episodes with questions (36%). A difference emerged in the focus of the statements in comparison to the focus of the questions. A greater proportion of the statements reflected a personal frame of reference, accounting for 32 percent. An example is George's comment during the boys' discussion of "First Job," "I wouldn't agree to work for a dollar."
[Chuckles] That's such a little bit of money.” Twenty-six percent of the statements were text-driven. An example is Marty’s comment during their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” “The last part of the story was freaky.”

Table 5.3
Number of Episodes Beginning with Statements and the Average Number of Turns per Episode in Same-sex Discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Same-sex Discussions</th>
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<td>Text-Driven (S)</td>
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<td>78</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>70</td>
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</table>

On the other hand, a greater proportion of the boys’ questions (61%) were text-driven. An example is George’s question during their discussion of “La Bamba,” “Okay! Don’t these people have any education like computer programming or something?” Twenty-five percent of the questions reflected a personal frame of reference. An example is Bob’s question during the boys’ discussion of “First Job,” “This is on the subject with making money and stuff. Do you get an allowance?”

The girls began 70 episodes with statements (51%) and 66 episodes with questions (49%). The primary focus of both their statements and questions was the text
under discussion. Forty-one percent of the statements were text-driven. An example is Nikki’s statement during their discussion of “First Job,” “Um, it seemed like all of the people that were around her were sort of mean.” Only seven percent of the statements reflected a personal frame of reference. An example is Ginger’s comment during their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” “All the stories, they don’t really know their neighbors as well as we do. ‘Cause they walk up to people just a few houses down and they do not know who they are.” At the same time, 71% of the episodes that began with a question were text-driven. An example is Lena’s question during their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” “One thing I don’t get. Where’s the pants?” Only 14% of the episodes that began with a question reflected a personal frame of reference. An example is Ginger’s question during the girls’ discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” “What would you do if you were in the house, Sarah’s [giggles] and these people had little pointed feet and you were scared?”

There was a difference in the manner in which the boys and girls initiated episodes where they compared themselves to the action in the story. The boys tended to initiate these episodes with a statement while the girls initiated these types of episodes with a question. In particular, the boys initiated a total of ten episodes in which they compared themselves to the action in the story, and all ten of these episodes began with a statement. For example, in their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” George initiated an episode with the statement, “She doesn’t prepare her Halloween costumes very early. Like, I usually start in like November. October!” Also in their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” Marty initiated an episode with the statement, “I wouldn’t have
been a football player. That’s stupid!” Later on in that same discussion, George initiated another episode by commenting, “They were getting in her way. She was like okay. I always get annoyed with the little children.”

On the other hand, five of the six episodes initiated by the girls in which they compared themselves to the action in the story were initiated with a question. For example, in the girls’ discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” Ginger initiated an episode with the question: “How would you feel if one of your best friends threw a party and didn’t invite you?” In that same discussion, Lena initiated three separate episodes at different times in the discussion by asking, “People, wouldn’t you have found a friend to go trick-or-treating with?” “What do you think’s gonna happen to you if you go trick-or-treating when you’re thirteen?” And, “Would you think like what happened to her would happen to you?”

Other Episode Types

Even though the majority of episodes in the discussions were either viewing the story through a personal frame of reference or were text-driven, episodes were also initiated through an off-focus sentence or through a conversation maintenance sentence. These categories were defined as follows:

9. Off-focus (Statement)—A statement that is unrelated to the focus of the story.
   Example: Surf’s up, Dude!

10. Off-focus (Question)—A question that is unrelated to the focus of the story.
   Example: Anybody for roast chicken?
11. Conversation Maintenance Statement—Comments that keep the conversation focused and continuing.

Example: Okay. We’re getting off the subject.

12. Conversation Maintenance Question—A question that would keep the discussion flowing.

Example: Does anybody have anything else to say about this topic?

Overall, 12 of the boys’ episodes were off-focus (10%) (See Table 5.1, p. 104).

Three of these episodes were due to a focus on the time and began with the direct question, “What time is it?” The rest of the off-focus episodes tended to be initiated primarily by Joe and tended to be related to a comment in a previous episode. The episode below, from their discussion of “First Job,” follows an episode in which the boys had been discussing their overall response to the story. In that episode, Marty had commented, “I was expecting the chickens to jump on the fire.” Later in the discussion, Joe referred back to Marty’s comment:

Joe: Anybody for roast chicken?

George: Joe!

Bob: Baked.

Joe: Whatever.

Bob: Oh yeah, roasted. I think so.

George: I think it’s fried. Uh, anyway.

Joe: Kentucky fried chicken!
Joe also tended to insert off-focus comments into episodes that were otherwise focused on the story. Many times the boys would redirect him. For example, in an episode discussing the characters’ lack of education, George suggested, “It’s got to be a third world country.” Bob added, “It’s a long time ago probably.” Joe’s response was, “In a galaxy far, far away.” Bob redirected him with, “That’s off subject.”

Although conversation maintenance sentences were sometimes embedded in episodes, the boys’ discussions did contain episodes that focused on maintaining the conversation. Twenty-seven episodes (22%) were in this category. Each of the discussions began with a conversation maintenance episode as the boys decided on the gatekeeper. After that, these episodes surfaced in the boys’ discussions either after an off-focus comment/episode or as a way to regroup when there was a lull in the conversation. For example, during the discussion of “First Job” Bob asked for a moment of silence, “It’s to think of more questions. A moment of silence.”

The girls’ discussions included few off-focus episodes. Only three of their episodes were off-focus (2%) and they tended to be brief (an average of four turns). All three of these episodes were initiated by Isabelle and reflected her desire to end the conversation, “This conversation is over,” or “We’re finished,” or “It’s 12:10.” Typically, the rest of the girls countered her comments with such a rejoinder as, “It’s not over for me.”

A large number of the girls’ episodes focused on maintaining the conversation. Forty-three of their episodes (32%) were in this category. Like the boys, each of their discussions began with a conversation maintenance episode as they decided on the
gatekeeper and their “rules” for discussion. After that, these episodes were primarily transitions between episodes that focused on discussing the story, as can be seen in the following example:

Ginger: Ok. I have a new question. Does anybody else have any comments?
Nikki: No.
Lena: No, ma’am.
Ginger: Thank you. What time, what year do you think this is?

Conversation maintenance sentences were also embedded in the girls’ episodes. With the girls, anytime a comment was made in the middle of an episode that could have led the discussion away from the story, someone immediately redirected the conversation. For example, when the girls were trying to determine what year the story took place during their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” Ginger mentioned, “They got dimes. You don’t get dimes anymore.” Nikki countered that with, “Some people give like dimes like UNICEF money.” Isabelle asked, “What is UNICEF money? I read that in one book.” Ginger responded, “Shhhhhh.” Nikki added, “That’s off the topic though.”

Nonsentence Discourse

I also categorized nonsentence discourse such as motions, sounds, interruptions, overlaps, laughter, and group laughter. I defined these categories as follows:

1. Motions—Gesturing with one’s hands in order to emphasize what one is talking about.
Example: Then the little guy walks in the middle and, “Bam!” (Makes motions as if shooting a gun)

2. Sounds—Making sounds to emphasize what one is talking about.
   Example: Cause in the distance a firecracker or a gunshot comes through the air (makes shooting sounds).

3. Interruption—When someone silences the person talking, so they are able to speak and the other person is unable to finish what they were saying.
   Example: Speaker 1: Actually I get....
   Speaker 2: I hate football! I hate basketball!

4. Overlaps—When someone begins to speak before the current speaker finishes, but both people are able to finish speaking.
   Example: Speaker 1: Man, she’s [strange.]
   Speaker 2: [She’s] a scardy cat.

Several differences between the boys’ discussions and the girls’ discussions emerged. Table 5.4 on page 114 shows the frequency of the types of nonsentence discourse. I will discuss my results in the order that they appear in the table.

At times, the boys enhanced their contributions to the discussions with both motions and sounds. I counted 17 motions and 19 sounds in their discussions. For example, when the boys were discussing “Trick-or-Treating,” Bob suggested handcuffing the “dummy” to the chair and both Joe and he made motions as if they were handcuffing someone. Also, Marty imitated “jumping out” to scare little kids while wearing his “cool” Psycho mask, and George imitated sitting stiffly in a chair.
pretending to be a "dummy when he shared his story about his twin brother being mistaken for a "dummy." Marty also imitated how people grab someone after they have pretended to be a "dummy." At times, sounds accompanied gestures, especially when someone imitated shooting a gun which happened five times.

Sometimes, sounds were used rather than gestures. For example, during the discussion of "Trick-or-Treating" when George commented, "And you like grab a chain saw, put on one of those masks and go, 'You have taken more than one candy,'" Joe responded by making chain saw sounds, "Caaaroom, varoom, varooom!"

On the other hand, the girls' discussions included very few motions and sounds. I counted only two motions and three sounds in their discussions. The motions both occurred during one episode in the discussion of "Trick-or-Treating." When the girls were discussing the year the story took place, Isabelle commented that the characters were dancing. Both Nikki and Isabelle made motions as if dancing. The sounds occurred during their discussion of "First Job." After she had stated that the chickens

<table>
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<th>Types of Nonsen. Discourse</th>
<th>Same-sex Discussions</th>
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<td>&quot;T or T&quot;</td>
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<td>272</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>384</td>
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</table>

Table 5.4
Frequency of Types of Nonsentence Discourse in Same-sex Discussions
were her favorite character, Nikki imitated talking like a chicken, “Bawk! Bawk! Bawk!” Later on, at two different times during an episode focusing on Alex being in a bad mood, Isabelle made a sound like a roar, “Rrraarrr!” to indicate his temper.

I also counted the laughter, both in terms of individuals and group laughter. Both the boys and girls laughed frequently in their discussions. In the boys’ discussions, I counted 64 instances of individual laughter and 27 instances of group laughter. The boys tended to laugh when they were sharing personal experiences that were viewed as funny, such as during their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating” when they were sharing thoughts about “taking more than one [piece of candy]” from a “dummy.” At times, they also laughed when they made comments about the characters’ actions. For example, all of the boys laughed during their discussion of “First Job” when Marty stated, “They must be like real klutzes, ’cause they just spilled the sugar.” Bob laughed as he commented, “They’re speaking Spanish.” Of all the boys, Joe laughed the most. He tended to laugh at all of his off-focus comments. Other boys would join him occasionally.

In terms of individual laughter, the girls laughed almost twice as much as the boys. I counted 126 instances of individual laughter in the girls’ discussions; however, there was not much difference in terms of group laughter. I counted 30 instances of group laughter in the girls’ discussions. The girls giggled frequently. They giggled sometimes when they were making a conversation maintenance remark, such as “That’s off topic.” They giggled a great deal when they were discussing someone’s physical appearance. For example, in their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” everybody
laughed when Ginger commented, “Isn’t it weird that both stories have a fat man?”

Later on in the same episode, there was uncontrollable laughter when Nikki said, “His belly jiggled.” They also giggled in the middle of a turn, as is apparent in the following quote by Ginger, “What was she talking about, [laughs] ‘pointy-feeted’?”

I counted both interruptions and overlaps. I counted 27 interruptions in the boys’ discussions. The boys interrupted each other a great deal more in their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating” than they did in their discussion of “First Job.” There were 21 interruptions in the first discussion and only six in the second discussion. None of the boys interrupted a great deal more than the others.

I also counted 27 interruptions in the girls’ discussions; however, these interruptions were evenly spread across the two discussions with 13 interruptions in the first discussion and 14 in the second discussion. Not all of the girls interrupted each other though. Ginger and Isabelle were the only two girls who interrupted in the first discussion. As the gatekeeper, Ginger interrupted someone seven different times as she kept the conversation focused. In the partial episode below, Ginger interrupted Isabelle when she began discussing the definition of popularity. It is from their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” and the episode focused on whether Alma’s friend Sarah was popular:

Isabelle: No. Having a popular crowd I mean. Popular means that you’re well-known. Everyone knows...

Ginger: (Interrupting) Okay. This is off the topic. [Laughs]
Isabelle would interrupt someone because she wanted to be heard as can be seen in the following example from their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating” in which Isabelle interrupted Lena. Lena had initiated the episode by asking, “One thing I don’t get. Where’s the pants? [Laughs]”

Lena: I mean she talks about putting her shirts and her....

Isabelle: (Interrupting) She’s probably wearing those tight pants.

In the second discussion, Isabelle interrupted 11 times as she attempted to gain control of the conversation in the manner she wanted as the gatekeeper. For example, speaking in a whiny tone, she interrupted Lena to comment, “I’m the gatekeeper here. Okay.” Then she opened an episode of her own choice.

Both the boys and the girls overlapped each other much more often than they interrupted. I counted 272 overlaps in the boys’ discussions and 384 in the girls’ discussions. The overlaps seemed to arise from an enthusiasm to participate in the discussion. Later when I asked the children about the overlaps, they all said that it was difficult to wait until someone was finished speaking. As Bob put it, “Sometimes you think of something to say about what someone else is saying so you say it.” The following episode from the boys’ discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” in which Marty overlaps George, is typical of the overlapping that occurred in the discussions. The brackets indicate the overlap.

Bob: What was I gonna say? Why do you think that they give little kids more treats than us?
George: They don’t give little kids [more treats.]

Marty: [They don’t.] they give them less.

Mixed-Sex Discussions

Group One consisted of Marty, George, Lena, and Nikki, and Group Two consisted of Bob, Joe, Ginger, and Isabelle. Group One’s discussions included 85 episodes while Group Two’s discussions included 134 episodes. Thus, the total number of episodes in the mixed-sex discussions was 219. On page 119, Table 5.5 (created from the discourse maps) shows the type and frequency of episodes initiated by the groups as well as by sex, the average number of turns after each type of initiation, and percentages of the types of discourse sentences. As with Table 5.1, the number before the slash in the columns indicates the number of episodes of that type and the number following the slash is the average number of turns in those episodes, indicating the average length of the episodes. The first eight categories indicate the frames of reference which the participants used in discussing the texts.

Frames of Reference

Although Group One’s discussions included fewer episodes, the frame of reference was similar for the two groups. The predominant frame of reference for Group 1 was text-driven, focusing on responses to the plot, characters, and setting. Group One initiated 57 episodes that were text-driven, accounting for 67% of their episodes and 16 episodes that reflected a personal frame of reference, accounting for 19% of their episodes. Text-driven episodes averaged seven turns per episode. The boys initiated 25 episodes while the girls initiated 32. For the most part, whenever an
episode was initiated as text-driven, the focus of the episode remained text-driven. For example, in the first episode following the table George asks for clarification of a character’s name and receives clarification, then Nikki asks about the pronunciation of another character’s name. These episodes followed each other in the children’s discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride.”
George: What was the brother's name?
Nikki: Um...I don't think it said.
Marty: Eddie.
Lena: Eddie.
Nikki: Yeah, her brother, Eddie.
Lena: He's in New York.
Nikki: How do you say her name? Araceli or something?
Lena: I don't know.
George: I don't know.
Lena: I remember that. It was weird.

In Group 1, episodes that reflected a personal frame of reference tended to include fewer turns than the text-driven episodes, averaging four turns per episode. Eleven of these episodes were initiated by the boys while only five were initiated by the girls. Following is an episode initiated by George that is typical of these personal episodes:

George: Lip syncing, "Para la Bamba." Um. That's interesting. Would you do that?
Lena: No.
George: Okay. Just wondering.

Like Group One, the predominant frame of reference for Group Two was text-driven. Group Two initiated 76 episodes that were text-driven, accounting for 57% of their episodes. These episodes averaged 10 turns per episode. The girls in Group Two.
initiated 62 of these episodes while the boys initiated 14. As with Group One, episodes that were initiated as text-driven tended to maintain that focus. This is reflected in the episode below in which Isabelle comments on the character development:

Isabelle: They didn’t elaborate on the characters. I know I already said that.

Ginger: No.

Bob: All you hear about is his name.

Ginger: I know. You always hear about these people’s names.

Isabelle: And they don’t even tell about his parents. They don’t even really tell about him very much.

Joe: They don’t even tell his last name.

Bob: It’s a short story.

Ginger: I know.

Isabelle: But wouldn’t they at least tell his last name?!

Group Two’s discussions included only nine episodes that reflected a personal frame of reference, accounting for 7% of their episodes. Averaging 15 turns per episode, these episodes averaged more turns than the text-driven episodes, as all of the participants took turns contributing their comments until they were finished discussing the topic. This was especially the case during their discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride” when Isabelle, the discussion director, would direct everyone to respond to a question with a personal frame of reference. For example, during their discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride,” Isabelle began an episode, “What did this story remind
you of and I'm gonna go in alphabetical order by first name.” This episode included 81 turns as Isabelle directed the turn-taking.

**Types of Sentences**

My analysis of the usage of questions and statements for episode initiations indicated some parallels between the two groups. Overall, statements were used more often than questions and the majority of both the questions and statements were text-driven. However, there was a difference in how the groups initiated episodes which reflected a personal frame of reference. Group One initiated these types of episodes with an equal amount of questions and statements while Group Two tended to initiate these types of episodes with a question rather than a statement. On the following page, Table 5.6 shows the number of episodes beginning with questions and the average number of turns per episodes while Table 5.7 shows the number of episodes beginning with statements and the average number of turns per episode.

Group One initiated 49 episodes with statements (58%) and 36 with questions (42%). The majority of the statements initiating episodes were text-driven (71%) as were the majority of the questions (61%). In terms of examples of statements that initiated episodes, in their discussion of “La Bamba,” George commented, “This story was one to get quick to the plot and finish itself quickly,” and in their discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride” Nikki commented, “She seems like she’s jealous of everybody in her family that’s taken a plane ride.” As for examples of questions, in their discussion of “La Bamba” George asked, “What does in the limelight mean?” and in their discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride” Nikki asked, “What were you all’s thoughts about the characters?”

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Table 5.6
Number of Episodes Beginning with a Question and the Average Number of Turns per Episode in Mixed-sex Discussions

<table>
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<th>Types of Questions</th>
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<td>&quot;NAF&quot;</td>
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<tr>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>2/6</td>
<td>2/6</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1/11</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
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<td>2/8</td>
<td>9/7</td>
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<td>36</td>
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Table 5.7
Number of Episodes Beginning with a Statement and the Average Number of Turns per Episode in Mixed-sex Discussions

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<tr>
<th>Types of Statements</th>
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<td>B</td>
<td>G</td>
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<td>%</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>2/3</td>
<td>1/3</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text-Driven (S)</td>
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<td>9/6</td>
<td>7/5</td>
<td>12/7</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Con. Maint. (S)</td>
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<td>Off-focus (S)</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>10</td>
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A much smaller percentage of Group One's statements (16%) and questions (22%) initiated an episode with a personal frame of reference. In terms of statements that initiated an episode with a personal frame of reference in their discussion of “La Bamba,” George commented, “I would tell my parents if um, I was, what I was doing, but this kid didn’t do, didn’t say what he was doing,” and in their discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride” Marty stated, “When they described the place where they flied, real flights aren’t like that. Although my uncle in his plane, he did stuff like that. He did 180’s and hit air pockets.” As for examples of questions that initiated episodes, in their discussion of “La Bamba” George asked, “What would you do if you wanted to impress somebody? ’Cause this guy was trying to impress people,” and in their discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride” Nikki asked, “What did it make you think of?”

Similar results emerged in Group's Two's discussions. Group Two initiated 85 episodes with statements (63%) and 49 with questions (37%). Like Group One, the majority of the statements that initiated episodes were text-driven (59%) as were the majority of the questions (53%). In terms of examples of statements that initiated episodes, in their discussion of “La Bamba” Isabelle commented, “I thought the ending was very abrupt,” and in their discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride,” Ginger commented, “I thought it was sad. All of her relatives, even her little, baby cousin, Carlos, had already flown.”

As for examples of questions, in their discussion of “La Bamba” Isabelle asked, “Um...What did you think he was feeling about why he entered the talent show?” and in
their discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride” Joe asked, “First of all, why would they charge a nickel a pound just to go flying?”

As with Group One, there were proportionately fewer episodes focusing on a personal frame of reference, and those episodes that did tended to be initiated as a question. Twelve percent of the personal frame of reference initiations were questions, whereas only four percent were statements. In terms of examples of questions that initiated an episode with a personal frame of reference, during their discussion of “La Bamba” Ginger asked, “If it was next year would you raise your hand for the talent show,” and in their discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride” she asked, “Would you, if you were riding a plane ride with obese people sitting next to you, would you like it?” As for examples of statements that initiated an episode with a personal frame of reference in Group Two’s discussion of “La Bamba” Bob stated, “Well, I just kind of noticed this. I heard of this song, ‘Like a Virgin.’ It’s a Madonna song. It’s not very old, and I thought it’s supposed to be old, and in their discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride” Joe commented, “This sort of reminds me of my first plane ride. I got freaked out that I was, that we were gonna crash or something.”

Other Episode Types

The mixed-sex discussions also included episodes that were initiated through an off-focus sentence or through a conversation maintenance sentence (See Table 5.5 p. 119). Off-focus comments tended to disrupt the focus of the rest of the group while conversation maintenance sentences tended to enable the students to regain the focus. Group One’s discussions included fewer off-focus episodes and fewer conversation
maintenance episodes than Group Two's discussions. Another difference between the
two groups was that in Group One there were no off-focus or conversation maintenance
episodes embedded in other episodes while there were several in Group Two's
discussions.

I noticed only one off-focus comment in each of Group One's discussions,
accounting for two percent of their total episodes. Both of these episodes were initiated
by George. At the beginning of Group One's discussion of "La Bamba," George stated,
"This is going to make a real interesting home video." Toward the end of their
discussion of "Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride," he asked, "Is it just you or does everyone
sound like they're half dead? It's like we're sitting here going, 'Uh, that's how it
goes.'" Both of these episodes were short and did not cause redirection through a
conversation maintenance comment.

Group One's discussions included 10 conversation maintenance episodes,
accounting for 12% of their episodes. Most of these episodes were initiated by the
girls--seven of the 10. After group guidelines were established at the beginning of each
discussion, conversation maintenance episodes emerged in the discussions only to keep
the conversation going, such as, "Does anybody have a question?" There were no
conversation maintenance episodes that focused on redirecting the discussion.

Group Two's discussions included more off-focus episodes and conversation
maintenance episodes than Group One. There were seven off-focus episodes in their
discussions, accounting for five percent of their total number of episodes. In their first
discussion, "La Bamba," these episodes stemmed from Isabelle's focus on the time and
her desire to end the discussion, "It's 12:10." and, "Okay. The discussion is over."
These episodes were brief and the children continued with their discussion of the story.
The discussion of "Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride" included five off-focus episodes,
initiated by both boys and girls—Bob and Isabelle who were both concerned about the
time. Bob was concerned about missing an ice cream treat at 12:30, and he asked
"What time is it?" two times. Isabelle seemed to want to end the discussion. "This
discussion is over," she would say, or "This discussion is dead." As with Group One,
none of the off-focus episodes resulted in redirection.

In Group Two's discussions, numerous focused episodes included embedded
off-task comments. These comments were made by Joe. The other children
immediately redirected Joe after he made one of these comments. This can be seen in
the following episode from Group Two's discussion of "La Bamba" in which the
children were discussing the temporal setting of the story:

Isabelle: I think it was the 80's, cause they did have records in the 80's. It
was probably the early 80's.
Ginger: Ok.
Joe: Early 80's or late 70's.
Ginger: Let's say it's in the late 70's.
Joe: Star Wars! Peuu! Peuu! Bam!
Bob: Joe! Off subject!
Ginger: Joe!
Joe: Okay.
Group Two's discussions included 42 conversation maintenance episodes, accounting for 31% of their total. Many of these began with comments that kept the conversation continuing, such as Ginger stating, "Okay, I have a question," or asking "Anybody have a comment?" The majority of these episodes were initiated by one of the girls. The girls initiated 35 of these episodes while the boys initiated seven.

**Nonsentence Discourse**

As with the same-sex groups, I categorized nonsentence discourse in the mixed-sex discussions. Several differences between the two mixed-sex groups emerged. Table 5.8 below shows the frequency of the types of nonsentence discourse. I will discuss my results in the order that they appear in the table.

**Table 5.8**
**Frequency of Types of Nonsentence Discourse in Mixed-sex Discussions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Nonsens. Discourse</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Group 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>&quot;NAP&quot;</td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>75</td>
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Group One's discussions included few motions and sounds. All of these were made by the boys. I counted one motion and three sounds in their discussions. The motion and one of the sounds was made by George at the end of Group One's
discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride” when he pretended to fly a plane while making engine noises. The other two sounds were also made by George during the discussion of “La Bamba.” He made a sound of disgust to emphasize his dislike of Michael Jackson and whispered, “Blah, blah, blah” to emphasize that Lena was speaking too softly, then added, “Got to speak up!”

Group Two’s discussions included few motions, but many more sounds. I counted only two motions in this group’s discussions. In their discussion of “La Bamba,” Joe pretended to be lip syncing and dancing when the group discussed the main character’s actions. The other motion occurred when Isabelle pretended she was putting her cheek next to a boy’s like the main character had done.

I counted 13 sounds in Group Two’s discussions and 12 of the 13 were made by Joe. Joe made sounds such as the sound of an airplane going down, the “Kaboom!” of a plane crash, the sound of a screeching tire, and an Indian war cry.

The amount of laughter in the two groups varied. I counted 33 instances of individual laughter in Group One and 28 of those instances were from the girls. Nikki did most of the laughing, and it was primarily nervous giggles rather than finding humor in a comment. For example, during the discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride,” Nikki asked, “Does anybody have something to say about the story?” This question was followed by a pause that was broken when Nikki said, “Ummm.” and giggled nervously. Group laughter occurred only seven times. The group laughter was all in their discussion of “La Bamba” and tended to occur when the students discussed the acts in the talent show. They referred to the act that included, “Brush, brush, brush.
Floss, floss, floss. Brush all the germs away,” several times and each episode resulted in group laughter.

There was a great deal more laughter in Group Two. I counted 78 instances of individual laughter that was fairly evenly split between the boys (40 instances) and the girls (38 instances). Joe would laugh at his off-task comments, while Ginger tended to giggle or laugh at different types of sentences. For example, at the beginning of the group discussion of “La Bamba” Ginger giggled when she said at she would be the discussion director, “I’ve already been it, but that’s okay [giggles].” Later on in the discussion, as she was responding to Bob’s comment that the story was, “a little strange and had a strange topic,” she giggled as she commented, “It was about a talent show.” Still later in the discussion after Joe continued to discuss Madonna’s song, “Like a Virgin,” Ginger laughed as she redirected the discussion, “This is getting off the subject.”

Group laughter occurred 20 times. Seventeen times it was after a girl had made a comment, primarily after a comment about the physical appearance of a character or a comment about a character’s socio-economic status. For example everyone laughed in the discussion of “Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride” after Isabelle stated, “They always have a fat person,” and later on in the same discussion after she commented, “These people, ’cause we were talking about yesterday whether the other people were rich or poor.”

I counted both interruptions and overlaps in both group’s discussions. I counted five interruptions in Group One’s discussions. All of the interruptions were instances of
boys interrupting girls. For example, Marty interrupted Nikki to finish a sentence for her:

Nikki: Ok. You all, that doesn’t have anything to do with...

Marty: [Interrupting] the story.

At another point in the discussion, George interrupted Lena so that he could share his thoughts:

Lena: Yeah, I thought they said they were gonna...

George: [Interrupting] I thought he said he was gonna bring a, no, two playing records. Yeah it was the record that was damaged not the record player.

I counted 15 interruptions in Group Two’s discussions. The interruptions in Group Two were fairly even between the boys (seven) and the girls (eight). In fact, each of the children in Group Two interrupted someone a few times as they discussed the topic at hand. In the following episode Bob interrupted Ginger:

Isabelle: Wouldn’t he have been the “La Bamba” guy if the record player hadn’t broken?

Ginger: I know. I didn’t get that. They said...

Bob: (Interrupting) No, it’s cause he’ll be after, so he’ll be an easy act to follow. Cause I mean, the karate kid is not too exciting, or it is exciting and the people would be in awe and then he’d come on.

There were many more overlaps than interruptions in both groups. I counted 75 overlaps in Group One’s discussions and 270 overlaps in Group Two’s discussions. I
noticed that the boys and girls did not overlap each other in the mixed-sex groups as much as they had in the same-sex groups, so I asked all of them about it later. Marty’s response was typical of the boys, “When you’re with girls you think about what you say first, ‘cause you don’t want to look stupid.” On the other hand, with the exception of Lena who stated that she “felt the same in both groups,” the girls commented echoed Isabelle’s, “I felt a lot more comfortable working with the girls, because we share a lot of the same opinions.”

**Summary**

In all of the discussions, I analyzed the primary frame of reference, the use of questions vs. statements and nonsentence discourse. The boys’ tended to use a personal frame of reference in their same-sex discussions. Even episodes that began as text-driven tended to be diverted into a personal frame of reference. The boys initiated more episodes with statements and a greater proportion of statements were used to initiate episodes with a personal frame of reference. A greater proportion of questions were text-driven. The boys’ discussions also included off-focus episodes and conversation maintenance episodes. In terms of nonsentence discourse, the boys enhanced their contributions to the discussions with both motions and sounds. The boys also laughed frequently during their discussions. All of the boys interrupted each other some in their discussions. There were many more overlaps than interruptions in these discussions.

On the other hand, the girls tended to use a text-driven frame of reference in their same-sex discussions. The girls’ discussions tended to flow from one text-driven topic to another. There was not much difference in the overall usage of questions and
statements in the girls' discussions. Both questions and statements tended to be text-driven. However, the girls tended to use questions to initiate episodes in which they compared one's self to the action in the story. The girls' discussions contained few off-focus episodes and many conversation maintenance episodes. In terms of nonsentence discourse, the girls included few motions and sounds in their discussions. They laughed frequently during both discussions. Only two of the girls interrupted others, but there was a great deal of overlapping by all of the girls.

The students in Group One tended to use a text-driven frame of reference in their discussions. These episodes were initiated by both boys and girls although the girls initiated slightly more of these episodes. Episodes with a personal frame of reference tended to be initiated by the boys and included fewer turns than the text-driven episodes. Statements were used more often than questions to initiate episodes and the majority of both questions and statements were text-driven. However, episodes which reflected a personal frame of reference were initiated with an equal amount of questions and statements. Group One's discussions included few off-focus episodes and few conversation maintenance episodes. No off-focus or conversation maintenance comments were embedded in Group One's discussions. In terms of nonsentence discourse, Group One's discussions included few gestures and sounds. There was also not much laughter in these discussions. The girls did laugh more than the boys. Only a few interruptions occurred in Group One's discussions. These were all by the boys. There were many more overlaps by both boys and girls.
Like the students in Group One, the students in Group Two tended to use a text-driven frame of reference. The girls tended to initiate these episodes. Few episodes occurred that reflected a personal frame of reference. These episodes tended to be longer than the text-driven episodes. Overall, the students used statements more often than questions to initiate episodes and the majority of both questions and statements were text-driven. However, episodes which reflected a personal frame of reference tended to be initiated with a question rather than a statement. Group Two’s discussions included a few off-focus episodes and several conversation maintenance episodes. The off-focus episodes were initiated by one of the boys and one of the girls. The conversation maintenance episodes tended to be initiated by the girls. In Group Two’s discussions numerous focused episodes included embedded off-task comments. In terms of nonsentence discourse, Group Two’s discussions included few motions and several sounds. Individual laughter was fairly evenly split between the boys and the girls. There were several instances of group laughter, most of which occurred after a girl’s comment. There were several interruptions in these group discussions. The interruptions were fairly evenly split between the boys and the girls. Overlaps occurred more frequently by both boys and girls.

Discourse patterns varied when the students discussed their responses in same-sex groups versus mixed-sex groups. One difference was in the primary frame of reference. When discussing their responses in same-sex groups, the boys’ primary frame of reference tended to be personal while the girls’ primary frame of reference tended to be text-driven. Also, in the boys’ discussions, episodes that began as text-
driven tended to be diverted into a personal frame of reference, while the girls' episodes remained text-driven. However, the primary frame of reference in all of the mixed-sex group discussions was text-driven and tended to remain text-driven.

Differences existed in the use of questions and statements for episode initiations. In the same-sex discussions, the boys initiated considerably more episodes with a statement, especially ones reflecting a personal frame of reference. They tended to use questions to initiate text-driven episodes. In the girls' discussions, there was not much difference in the number of statements and questions for episodic initiations, and the majority of both statements and questions in the girls' discussions were text-driven. For both mixed-sex groups, a greater proportion of the episodes began with statements and were text-driven.

The girls and boys initiated episodes with a personal frame of reference in a different manner. In the same-sex groups when the girls compared themselves to the action in the story they tended to initiate the episode with a question while the boys initiated those types of episodes with a statement. However, in the mixed-sex groups, both boys and girls initiated episodes reflecting a personal frame of reference with both questions and statements.

In terms of other episode types, in the same-sex groups there were more off-focus episodes in the boys' discussions than in the girls' discussions. In the mixed-sex groups, the number of these off-focus episodes was lower than it had been in the boys' discussions. Conversation maintenance episodes were a part of all of the discussions.
The only difference in these was that Group One's discussions did not include embedded conversation maintenance episodes.

Nonsentence discourse varied between the discussions. The boys incorporated more motions and sounds in their same-sex discussions than the girls did in theirs, and more than either boys or girls incorporated into the mixed-sex discussions. Also, the girls laughed more in their same-sex groups than the boys did in theirs, and more than either boys or girls incorporated into the mixed-sex discussions. There were more interruptions and more overlaps in the same-sex discussions (both boys and girls) than in the mixed-sex discussions.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I shall discuss the results of the study in relation to the primary patterns that emerged in the discussions. First, I shall discuss the variations in the response patterns of the boys and girls. Next, I shall discuss the discourse styles of the boys and girls that were evident. Third, I shall discuss the intertextual connections that the boys and girls made as they interpreted the stories. Then, I shall turn to other significant findings, the fact that the girls were not silenced in the mixed-sex groups, the students' perceptions of the discussion groups, the importance of the social context for meaning construction, and my subsequent classroom observations. Overall, the results indicated gender positioning of these white boys and girls from mid-to-high socio-economic backgrounds.

Gendered Response Patterns

The different ways that boys and girls respond to literature has rarely been addressed. Written response research has shown that the sex of the reader influences the response of the individual in terms of written responses (Bowman, 1992; Gabriel, 1990). In these studies, the girls focused on emotions and relationships while the boys focused on the plot and physical action.

The oral responses of boys and girls as they shared their responses in literature discussion groups have been analyzed by Cherland (1992) and Evans (1996). Their finding were similar. Cherland (1992) identified the different styles of talk as a discourse of action for the boys and a discourse of feeling for the girls. She described a
discourse of action as one "concerned with logic and legality, that valued reason and believability, and that sought meaning in plot and in action," reflecting "an inclination to define characters by what they do rather than by what they feel" (p. 189). In contrast, a discourse of feeling focused on emotion in the text, involving "human relationships," valuing "loving kindness," and attaching "positive value to 'caring'")(p. 189). Plot details were viewed in terms of clarifying character development. Evans (1996) identified the same patterns.

As I reflected on the different types of talk that emerged in the discussions in this study, I noted similarities to Cherland's (1992) classifications, but also some extensions that question the dichotomy. Like the boys in Cherland's (1992) study, the boys' same-sex discussions were characterized by a focus on action. In their discussion of "Trick-or-Treating," the boys focused on their personal experiences trick-or-treating and what they were permitted to do. For example, they shared their "scaring little kid" stories and discussed how long they are able to trick-or-treat. Other types of responses also focused on action, but reflected the boys' inability to relate to the actions of the characters. Due to the intertextuality of their lives, the boys were unable to identify with the characters as they interpreted their actions. This was especially evident in their discussion of "First Job," as the boys primarily interpreted characters' traits through their actions. For example, Marty's stated, "That lady he worked for must have been really weird, because she swept leaves into a cardboard box." This inability to relate to the characters was also evident when the boys compared themselves to the action in the story. The boys always initiated these episodes by stating what they would do in
comparison to what the character did. For example, in their discussion of “First Job” George stated, “I wouldn’t agree to work for a dollar.”

Like the girls’ responses in Cherland’s (1992) study, the girls’ responses in the present study were characterized by a focus on emotions and relationships. They attempted to understand the characters’ feelings about the action in the story, as evidenced in their discussion of “First Job” when Lena asked, “Why do you think he was so anxious to get his first job?” The girls also focused on the relationships of the characters. For example, in their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating” they discussed the relationship between Sarah and Alma, Alma’s family relationship, and the relationship between the boy who frightened Alma and the rest of the children at the party. When comparing themselves to the action in the story, the girls did so with questions. These questions were aimed at eliciting another’s view in order to create a sense of community among themselves and reflected a connection to the character’s experience. For example, in their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating,” Ginger asked, “How would you feel if one of your best friends threw a party and didn’t invite you?”

Thus, the different positioning of the boys and girls influenced their interpretations of the story. The boys tended to separate themselves from the characters by not relating to the characters’ actions. In contrast, the girls tended to connect with the characters as they focused on the relationships of the characters and discussed how they would feel if they were in situations similar to that which the characters experienced.
Cherland (1992) and Evans (1993) analyzed the discussions of different students discussing literature in either same-sex groups or mixed-sex groups. In Cherland's study there were seven all-girl groups, two all-boy groups and five mixed-sex groups. The ethnicity of the students in her groups is not clear. Cherland noted that all of the girls-only groups primarily used a discourse of feeling as did three of the five mixed-sex groups. The all-boys groups and two mixed-sex groups primarily used a discourse of action.

Evans compared two groups—an all-girls group and a mixed-sex group. The students in these groups were from various ethnic backgrounds. The girls' group consisted of three European-Americans, one Asian and two Hispanics, and the mixed-group consisted of three European-American boys, one Hispanic boy and two Hispanic girls. The girls' group focused on a discourse of feeling while the mixed-sex group focused on a discourse of action.

In the present study, the mixed-sex discussions focused predominantly on relationships and feelings in relation to the action in the story. Both boys and girls were willing to discuss their feelings about the events in the story and whether they liked or disliked the story. They also shared their interpretations of the characters' feelings about actions and discussed the relationships of the characters. For example in Group One's discussion of "La Bamba" Marty remarked, "It looks like he is jealous of Benny [a classmate], because he [Benny] didn't mess up." This group discussed Manuel's family and his relationship with them as well. The students in Group Two also considered Manuel's feelings. Isabelle asked, "What did you think he was feeling about
why he entered the talent show?” These students shared their feelings about the size of Manuel’s family.

The mixed-sex discussions contained episodes that focused on the action in the story as the students evaluated the action in the story in relation to themselves. These intertextual responses indicated a further activity on the part of the students. Sometimes they separated themselves from the action in the story. For example, in Group One’s discussion of “La Bamba” the students discussed the talent show act in which the participants ran around the stage chanting, “Brush, brush, brush. Floss, floss, floss. Gargle the germs away. Hey! Hey! Hey!” Marty commented, “I would not do that.” Nikki added, “It’s kind of strange.” George remarked, “I don’t think that would happen in real life.” At other times, they projected how they would feel if they were in the characters’ position. For example, at another point in Group One’s discussion of “La Bamba” Lena commented, “If I was him.... I would have stopped singing and everything when it broke and stuff and everybody was laughing....” In Group Two’s discussion Ginger asked, “If it was next year, would you raise your hand for the talent show?” In response to this question, Isabelle commented, “No! He made a foooool of himself.” Joe stated, “I’d do it, because I’d think that everybody’d laugh at me again, and I’d get all that fame again, and that’d be cool.” As with Lena, both of these students projected how they would feel if they were in Manuel’s position.

Sometimes, the students’ discussed the characters’ actions as they tried to clarify the content of the story, using their knowledge base of the action. For example, in Group One’s discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride” as the students were
discussing the setting of the story George commented, “If the brother was off to New York, then this must have been a school day, 'cause why would they make a trip on a Sunday?” [The brother had traveled to New York with the high school band.] Marty responded, “No, it wouldn’t be a school day or else she wouldn’t go flying.” In Group Two’s discussion of “La Bamba” Ginger asked for clarification on the action, “Did he [Manuel] actually sing?” This question initiated a lengthy episode as the students discussed whether he was lip syncing or actually singing.

The results of this study question Cherland’s (1992) dichotomy of a discourse of action vs. a discourse of feeling. Although the students focused on action in the manner in which she defines a discourse of action, they did not separate their feelings from that action. When the students evaluated characters based on their actions, shared personal stories or compared themselves to the action in the story, their feelings about that action were evident. In addition, although the students focused on emotions and relationships in the manner in which Cherland (1992) defines a discourse of feeling, these emotions were attached to action and they understood relationships in terms of actions.

The responses of these boys and girls reflected gender positioning. In the same-sex groups, the boys were more inclined to separate themselves from the characters in the story by not relating to the characters’ actions. They also judged events in the plot from a perception of objective rules. For example, during the boys’ discussion of “First Job” George commented, “It’s illegal to burn leaves.” On the other hand, the girls responses reflected empathy and a sense of being connected. For example, during the girls’ discussion of “First Job,” Ginger stated, “Okay. So ended Alex’s first summer
job. I thought that was sad. And he didn’t even earn a dollar.” These gender
differences provide support for the work of Chodorow (1978) who noted that femininity
is defined through attachment and masculinity through separation. Support is also
provided for the work of Gilligan (1982) who derived her theory of moral reasoning
from the work of Chodorow (1978).

The response patterns that emerged among the mixed-sex discussions suggest
that the boys and the girls influenced each other and that the compositions of these
groups opened discursive spaces for both sexes. In the mixed-sex groups, the boys
were more inclined to express connections with the characters as they shared their
feelings about the events in the stories, their interpretations of the characters’ feelings
and discussed the relationships of the characters. For example, in Group Two’s
discussion of “La Bamba” Isabelle stated, “He always cares about what other people
think of him.” Joe responded, “Well, you know, sometimes that can make a
difference.” At the same time, the girls were more inclined to separate themselves from
the characters by not relating to the characters’ actions when they were in the mixed-sex
groups. In other words, the discursive practices of the opposite sex enabled an altering
of both the boys’ and girls’ positioning. This altering of gender positioning is reflected
in the following episode from Group One’s discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride:”

Nikki: I don’t understand why they would sit out there for so long to get
into a plane that’s not going anywhere.

Lena: I don’t know.
George: Maybe some people think it's fun.

Lena: It was weird.

Although George did not totally connect with the characters' action, he did not place himself in opposition to them as the Lena did. The fact that the boys and girls in this study altered their gendered positioning in the mixed-sex groups provides support for the poststructuralist theory of gender development (Davies, 1989). Davies (1989) argued that masculinity and femininity are culturally constructed and that boys and girls learn to position themselves in multiple ways according to the discursive practices of their society.

**Gendered Discourse Styles**

Gendered discourse styles were exhibited by the boys and girls, especially in the same-sex discussions. The different discourse styles that the students exhibited have been documented by sociolinguists (Leaper, 1991; Miller, et al., 1986; Tannen, 1990, 1994) and refer back to the work of Chodorow (1978) and Gilligan (1982). It is my understanding that there has been some recent questioning of Tannen's (1990, 1994) work; however, I observed the boys and girls in the current study exhibiting some of the gendered discourse styles that she documented. Tannen (1990) documented a male tendency to be direct, to sidetrack, “jockey for position” and argue. She also documented a female tendency to take turns, cooperate and agree.

My analysis of the use of questions vs. statements revealed gender differences. The boys were more direct in their same-sex discussions, initiating more episodes with statements than questions. Episodes which reflected a personal frame of reference were
more likely to be initiated with a statement (especially when comparing oneself to the action in the story). The boys' "I" statements reflected assertiveness; for example, "I wouldn't go trick-or-treating when I was 13." In contrast, the girls initiated episodes with almost an equal amount of statements and questions; however, when comparing one's self to the action in the story the girls used questions. The questions reflected a desire for sharing emotions, for example, "What was your first job and were you anxious for it?"

The amount of off-focus and conversational maintenance episodes in the same-sex discussions indicated gender differences. The boys' discussions included more off-focus episodes and comments. These episodes/comments were ones that took the conversation away from the focus of discussing the short story. Sometimes they were completely unrelated to the story, such as asking, "What time is it?" At other times, off-focus comments would be unrelated directly to the text, but refer back to a previous comment. For example, in the boys' discussion of "First Job" Marty commented, "I was expecting the chickens to jump on the fire." Later in the discussion, Joe asked, "Anybody for roast chicken?" In contrast, the girls' discussions included more conversational maintenance episodes which kept the conversations focused and flowing. Many of these episodes were initiated to make sure that everyone who wanted to participate had a turn. For example, in their discussion of "Trick-or-Treating" Ginger asked, "Does anybody have anything else to say about this topic?"

The tone of the same-sex discussions reflected differences in discourse styles. The tone of the boys' discussion of "Trick-or-Treating" was one of comraderie as the
boys shared personal experiences, including motions and sounds for emphasis. The sharing of these personal experiences seemed to reflect a desire to achieve status by “telling a better story” and the boys “jockeyed for position” to do so. For example, in their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating” when the boys were sharing their “scaring little kids” stories. George stated, “Um, I’ve got a werewolf mask and anyway, I’ve got a story.” Bob immediately said, “I’m next.”

The argumentative, aggressive tone of the boys’ discussion of “First Job” also reflected male positioning. The boys engaged in conflict, argued and issued commands. The tone for this discussion originated at the beginning of the discussion when George, the gatekeeper, stated, “I’ll be gatekeeper. Now, here’s what we’re gonna do.... I, I’m gonna point at one person. If other people talk, I’m gonna tell them they’re supposed to be quiet.” The rest of the boys took offense at his directness as reflected in Bob’s overlapping response. “George, you’re not the dictator!”

In contrast, the tone of the girls’ discussions tended to be one of acceptance of another’s views. They tended to be cooperative, agree, and support each other. For example, at the beginning of their discussion of “Trick-or-Treating” Ginger suggested, “Okay. What I think we should do is, like if you have a question, you say it, and then we like get in a little circle and you can say if you want to comment on it. And then you wait. And then, when you’re finished a new person can talk.” Lena added, “And like, if the gatekeeper thinks that somebody is trying to say something and they’re not really getting it out, then just ask if they have another opinion about it.” The rest of the girls agreed.
This difference in tone between the boys' discussions and the girls' discussions is reflected in the following episodes from the students' discussions of "Trick-or-Treating" which focused on the same topic. The first episode is from the boys' discussion and has an argumentative tone as Marty questions Bob's answer and Bob counters George's response.

Marty: Who's Roger Craig?
Bob: He's a football player.
Marty: Are you sure?
George: Maybe he's a football player that wore a leather helmet.
Bob: It wasn't a leather helmet! You wouldn't be called Roger Craig if you wore a plastic helmet, and you're supposed to wear a leather helmet.

In contrast, the following episode is from the girls' discussion. Rather than arguing with Isabelle, Nikki accepts her response as being correct and uses that information to clarify the temporal setting of the story.

Ginger: Who was Roger Craig?
Nikki: Roger Craig?
Isabelle: A famous 80's football player.
Nikki: You know?
Isabelle: Uh huh.
Nikki: Oh...Oh. Then that (the story) is from the 80's then.
Nonsentence discourse in the same-sex discussions reflected the comfort level of the students discussing these stories with members of their own sex. Although a great deal of laughter occurred in all of the same-sex discussions, the girls laughed almost twice as much as the boys. All of the same-sex discussions included some interruptions; however, there was a great deal more overlapping. This overlapping was not an attempt to dominate the discussion as much as it was "to show enthusiastic listenership and participation" (Tannen, 1994).

**Intertextuality**

The intertextual patterns that emerged across all four of the discussions reflected the importance of the students' cultural context for meaning construction, including the students' gender positioning. Previous research pertaining to intertextuality has not focused on gender. Lemke (1995) noted the importance of one's cultural context for meaning construction stating that, "all meanings are made within communities and that the analysis of meaning should not be separated from the social, historical, cultural and political dimensions of these communities" (p. 9). The intertextual connections that the students' made reflected their gender positioning. Some of the intertextual connections have been discussed previously in terms of gendered responses and gendered discourse. The gendered positioning that emerged as I considered the intertextual patterns support the work of Chodorow (1978) who noted that femininity is defined through attachment and masculinity through separation. Also, aspects of Tannen's (1990) gendered discourse were evident, such as the male tendencies to be direct and "jockey for status" in conversations.
Gender positioning influenced the autobiographical connections that the students made. Autobiographical connections in which the students related themselves to the primary action in the story were a part of all of the discussions, but were more prevalent in the boys’ discussions. In the boys’ discussions, these episodes tended to be initiated with a statement, indicating directness on the part of the boys. Their “I” statements reflected a separation from the characters as well, for example, “I wouldn’t go trick-or-treating when I was 13.” In contrast, in the girls’ same-sex discussions, the girls always used questions to initiate episodes in which they compared themselves to the action in the story. The questions reflected a desire for sharing emotions and making a connection with the characters. For example, in the girls’ discussion of “First Job” Lena asked, “What was your first job and were you anxious for it?”

The girls primarily made autobiographical connections in which they clarified aspects of the story or extended responses to include references to other people from their lives. These types of connections indicated attachment to people who were important in their lives. For example, in the girl’s discussion of “First Job” when the girls were trying to determine the meaning of “Hauled junk that was not really junk” (p. 28), Lena remarked, “My dad said in Japan they did that, like for all the little electronic thingies. They would just, if there was just one little thing wrong with it, they’d throw it out.”

The boys made more intertextual links to other texts, such as movies, television shows and magazine articles than the girls. These types of connections reflected male positioning in two ways. First, these connections were sometimes made in a jocular
manner, displaying an attempt to gain the groups' attention and create laughter. Joe especially made these types of connections, such as his connections to the "Sesame Street" characters Bert and Ernie when Ginger was discussing Manuel's friends Bennie and Ernie. Secondly, these connections were presented as coming from a "position of knowing." Bob especially presented his connections in this manner. For example, when he stated that bar dollars are worth more than a dollar, George asked him what a bar dollar was. Bob explained adding, "I read about it in Zillions," [Consumer Reports magazine for children]

Intertextual connections to the other short stories that the students read in this study were primarily made by the girls. These connections seemed to reflect the girls' overall focus on "staying on topic." Some of these connections were organizational (Lemke, 1992) in which the girls initiated episodes that focused on the character development and plot of short stories. For example, in Group Two's discussion of "Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride" Ginger commented, "All of the stories are kind of the same. They have one main person and a little person that's off. Not really main." In the girls' discussion of "Trick-or-Treating" Nikki commented, "Both of these stories, they seemed not finished." (She was comparing "Trick-or-Treating" to "The Squirrels" which was a pilot story.)

When determining the pronunciation of the characters' names, both the boys and the girls made intertextual connections to people in their lives and other texts, such as television shows, movies and books. This reliance on the various texts of their lives reflected the importance of their cultural context in determining their construction of
meaning. These children, who lived in the Southeastern United States, had limited experience with the Spanish language and had not known children named Araceli, Jaime, Jesus, Alma, and Manuel. Consequently, they had difficulty with the names of the characters and used texts that were familiar to them to determine the pronunciation. For example, in Group Two’s discussion of “Nickel-a-Pound Plane Ride” the students decided to call Araceli “Arachne” and “Aphrodite.” The students were studying Greek gods and goddesses at that time in their social studies class.

Other intertextual links to the short stories were orientational (Lemke, 1992) and reflected the importance of the students’ cultural context in determining their meaning construction. This was especially evident in the girls’ preoccupation with the physical appearance of the characters which reflected their own cultural standards for physical attractiveness. For example, in the girls’ discussion of “First Job” Isabelle commented, “All of these stories that we’ve read are kinda revolting.... They’re talking about this nasty stuff, like the guy with the stomach and the little thirteen-year-old belching, and then the woman with the arm flub” [starts laughing uncontrollably]. Intertextual links such as this one reflect the fact that adolescent girls in our culture today are primarily interested in “looks” (Pipher, 1995).

The importance of the students’ cultural context was also evident in the intertextual episodes that focused on the ethnicity of the characters in these short stories. These children were not familiar with the Spanish language and had no previous experience interacting with Hispanics. Their lack of background knowledge was apparent. For example, in the boys’ discussion of “First Job” Marty asked, “Why,
why is there Spanish in every one of these stories?” Bob responded, ‘Cause they’re in Spain.” Focusing on the fact that there was Spanish in all of the stories, Lena connected the use of Spanish with the ethnicity of the author, “It kind of seems like the author would be Mexican, ‘cause both of those stories are like written by the same person, both have Mexican in them. I don’t know why. It just kind of seems like it. Seems like she’s writing about her people or his.”

Nonsilenced Voices

In contrast to previous research (Barbieri, 1995; Spender, 1992) and contrary to Evan’s (1993) prediction, the girls in the present study were not silenced in the mixed-sex groups with the males dominating the discussion (Tannen, 1990). Overall, the girls in both mixed-sex groups initiated more episodes than the boys. Also, the mixed-sex discussions were more like the girls’ same-sex discussions than the boys.’ The primary frame of reference in the mixed-sex groups was text-driven, and there was more of a willingness to share feelings about the plot and discuss the relationships of the characters. Also, fewer off-focus episodes occurred in the mixed-sex discussions than in the boys’ same-sex discussions. The girls tended to initiate conversation maintenance episodes in these groups.

There was evidence that their discourse in all of their discussions was driven by the classroom discourse of good behavior and rule-following (Walkerdine, 1990). For the girls, it was important to stay focused on the story as evidenced in the overall number of episodes that were text-driven, and their intertextual linking of the short
stories. Whenever the conversation would veer away from story elements, one of the girls would immediately comment, "That's off-topic."

A variation of the IRE pattern of classroom discourse observed by Cazden (1988) was prevalent in all of the discussions in which all of the girls were present. The discussion director would initiate an episode, one of the participants would respond, the discussion director would make a comment or ask if someone else had a comment on it, then the sequence would begin again. This sequencing was teacher-directed; however, it was response-based rather than simply evaluative as Cazden (1988) had observed.

The following episode from Group Two's discussion of "Nickel-A-Pound Plane Ride" reflects this sequencing pattern. Isabelle was the discussion director:

**Isabelle:** What was everybody's overall reaction? We'll kind of like let everybody take turns. Ginger, what was your overall reaction to the story?

**Ginger:** It was pretty good. The thing I don't like about it is it had like um...climax ending. It was working up about this plane, and she was so excited. Then, 'Bam!' she starts crying 'cause she thought the plane ride wasn't that fun. I thought that was kind of strange. It built too much climax for such a boring ending.

**Isabelle:** Right. Ok. And, um, so you didn't like the ending to this?

**Ginger:** Yes.

**Isabelle:** Anybody have any comments about Ginger's opinion?

**Bob:** Uh, not really.
Isabelle: Ok, Joe, what was your opinion about the story?

As reflected in the episode above, the girls perceived the discussion director/gatekeeper to be in charge of the discussion. When they were gatekeepers, the girls adopted a “teacher” role that mirrored the manner in which Miss Tyler conducted whole-class discussions. The girls’ decision to direct the mixed-sex discussions, and the boys’ decision to let them seems to reflect gender positioning. The girls appeared to identify with the role, taking charge of the discussions. In contrast, the boys appeared to separate themselves from teacher positioning in these mixed-sex groups.

The Students’ Perspectives

In order to qualify and verify my findings, I decided to talk to the children about their perceptions of their roles in these groups and how they felt about participating in same-sex groups versus mixed-sex groups. All of the students acknowledged that they thought the boys and girls talked about different things. Ginger, Isabelle and Bob all noted that the boys got off the subject. As Bob stated, “Boys usually got sometimes off-topic, but the girls kinda straightened them out.” Joe’s comment was, “Boys told more personal stories.”

Six of the eight children—Ginger, Nikki, Isabelle, Bob, Marty, and Joe—preferred to discuss the stories in same-sex groups, commenting that they felt more comfortable in those groups. Marty commented, “I could express myself more in front of the boys. I just didn’t want to embarrass myself.” Joe remarked that he talked less in the mixed-sex group, because, “Girls like to take charge more than boys…. I’d say that the girls were more dominant than boys in those group discussions.” Bob stated that he
preferred to work with all boys, but, “It works best with mixed, 'cause girls tend to keep the boys straight.... The girls kind of went, 'Get back on topic'” [Chuckles].

The two children who preferred the mixed-sex discussions, Lena and George, had reasons that were similar to each other. Lena commented, “You kind of get different views from boys. Well, not really like a different opinion, but just kind of...it's a different way of seeing something.” George, who had initially resisted the idea of discussing the stories with the girls by asking, “Do we have to talk about these stories with girls?” thought that “things were better” in the mixed-sex discussions, because, “They had their own ideas,” and “We were a lot calmer. The boys weren’t yelling as much.”

The comments by Lena and George indicate that they were aware of the gendered discourse that the boys and girls brought into the mixed-sex group discussions, and they saw these as beneficial. Discursive spaces were created for both boys and girls in these groups that enhanced these discussions. The girls' presence seemed to have a calming effect on the boys without eliminating the boys' focus on the action in the stories. At the same time, the girls contributed their foci of relationships and feelings.

Only two of the eight children perceived themselves as being silenced in the mixed-sex groups. Marty, who was afraid of embarrassing himself, and Joe, who thought the girls tried to dominate the discussion, thought that they contributed less in the mixed-sex groups. The rest of the children thought that they contributed the same amount, viewing their role as contributing their ideas and opinions (Lena, Nikki, and

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George) or directing the discussion (Ginger, Isabelle, and Bob). Thus, none of the girls felt marginalized in these groups. The discursive practices of their discourse community enabled them to position themselves so that they contributed their ideas and opinions or directed the discussion. It is possible that this positioning is related to their age and that at a different age they would position themselves differently.

Influence of the Social Context

The social context influenced the content of these literature discussions in several ways. First, as I have discussed, the composition of the groups [same-sex vs. mixed-sex] altered the manner in which the stories were discussed, especially for the boys.

As I’ve noted in my discussion about intertextuality, the social context of the students’ lives influenced the intertextual connections that the students made. As Lemke (1995) stated, “Our meanings shape and are shaped by our social relationships, both as individuals and as members of social groups” (p. 1). Gendered positioning was evident in the types of intertextual links that the students made. The girls tended to make connections to people who were important in their lives. They also focused on the physical appearance of the characters. In contrast, the boys tended to make intertextual connections to other texts, such as movies, television shows and magazine articles, presenting them either in a “jocular” manner or using the connection so that they came from a “position of knowing” (Tannen, 1990).
All of the students made intertextual connections to determine the pronunciation of the characters' names. Sometimes they would pronounce them according to English standards. At other times, they would change the name.

The tone, lower amount of nonsentence discourse and discussion lengths of the mixed-sex discussions indicated that the students were more comfortable discussing the short stories in same-sex groups. The tone of Group One's first discussion was nervous and tentative, and the tone of their second discussion was subdued. Group Two's discussions were more serious and calm than the same-sex discussions.

As I had noted, the lower amount of nonsentence discourse was lower in the mixed-sex groups. The boys contributed fewer motions and sounds to the mixed-sex discussions, than they did to their same-sex discussions. Also, both the boys and the girls laughed less in the mixed-sex discussions. The mixed-sex discussions included fewer interruptions and fewer overlaps as well.

The discussion lengths of the mixed-sex discussions tended to be shorter. This was especially evident in Group One's discussions. Group One's discussions were 20 minutes and 22 minutes long, while Group Two's discussions were 23 and 29 minutes long. In contrast, the boys' same-sex discussions were both 25 minutes long while the girls same-sex discussions were 29 and 36 minutes long.

The comfort level of the students influenced their oral responses. They adjusted their contributions to the discussion when they were in mixed-sex groups. In follow-up interviews, when I asked the students about their responses in these groups, six of the eight children stated they did think about what they were going to say, especially when
they were in mixed-sex discussion groups. For example, Bob commented, “It’s kind of
easy to say things with boys because they understand. You have to kind of think if the
girls would understand the same thing. You know, some things boys like and would understand. There are some things that girls like and would understand. They’re
different things.” Ginger’s response was similar, “Sometimes with the boys um, I won’t say a lot of stuff, because it’s kind of strange, you know.... It’s just different, because with the girls I’ve known them for longer and been around them longer.... Like some of my opinions about like maybe I think that the boy character was treating the girl character bad or something. I wouldn’t usually say that in front of the boys 'cause they’d start defending boys and everything.”

Thus, the students in this study censored their interpretations in light of the
social group in which they were discussing the story. These findings qualify Bleich’s (1975) contention, “interpretation is always a group activity, since the individual interpreter is creating his statement in large part with an eye toward who is going to hear it” (p. 75). The students were aware of their personal interpretations, but made choices about when and if to share them depending on the social group.

Back to the Classroom

I used a pull-out design for this project, because I wanted to eliminate any time
constraints or distractions that would be placed on the children in a regular classroom. In order to determine if what I observed while the students read and discussed the short stories for me was consistent with their behavior in their regular, classroom setting, I observed them in their regular classroom for two months after the project.
Before I began my project, Miss Tyler, their teacher, told me that the students had discussed *The Golden Goblet* (McGraw, 1986) in literature discussion groups earlier in the year. She and I decided to have the students discuss *The Door in the Wall* (deAngeli, 1949) in literature discussion groups during mid-April, five weeks after they had discussed the short stories for me. The entire class participated in these discussions; however, the students who participated in my study discussed the story in the same groups as they did for me. There were four discussions that alternated between same-sex and mixed-sex compositions. I audiotaped the discussions, but did not videotape them.

My primary interest in observing the children in their classroom literature discussion groups was to determine whether or how pulling them out of the classroom had influenced their interactions. All of the patterns discussed previously in terms of "gendered response patterns," "gendered discourse," and "nonsilenced voices" were also evident during these discussions. The ways the children interacted with each other did not change to any great extent. There was some amplification in terms of giggling on the part of the girls and off-task behavior or comments on the part of the boys. However, the children's contributions in these groups paralleled their contributions in their group discussions of the realistic fiction short stories.

During follow-up interviews with the children, I asked them to compare their discussions of *Door in the Wall* (de Angeli, 1949), a historical fiction novel, to their discussions of the realistic fiction short stories. Their comparisons echoed my observations and provided support for my reasons for taking them out of the classroom.
for my study. All of the children stated that they thought the two sets of discussions were basically the same. In fact, both Isabelle and Ginger commented, “They were a lot the same.” Bob commented, “Other than the topic [subject matter of the stories] they were the same.” George stated, “Um, the only difference I think is the book we were talking about was better, and um, there were people in the background that you could hear, so that changed it a little bit.” Joe commented, “Uh, in here [outside the classroom] the groups did better. There were no distractions. Out there [in the classroom] it was everybody talking and it’s kind of hard to hear and stuff. But in here [outside the classroom] it was so quiet. It was easier to communicate.” Nikki’s comment also focused on the fact that there were more people talking in the classroom, “Well, you could talk louder in here ‘cause we didn’t have to get quiet so that like other people could hear.”

During my two months of observing these children, I was able to observe them in a variety of learning activities. I observed them working with a partner assigned by the teacher, working in peer groups of their own selection, working in peer groups selected by the teacher, and participating in whole class discussions that were not always directed by the teacher. Their individual interaction patterns were consistent with ones I observed during their literature discussion groups with me. In particular, all of the girls actively and consistently participated in the various activities. Lena, who described herself as shy, did not direct group activities as the other three girls did. Nikki, Ginger, and Isabelle tended to take charge of group work.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the discourse and response patterns according to gender-related patterns of peer-led literature discussion groups that alternated between same-sex and mixed-sex group compositions. The results indicated gender differences in response patterns, intertextual patterns and discourse patterns. Other significant findings included the fact that the girls were not silenced in the mixed-sex groups and the importance of the social context for meaning construction.

Gendered response patterns emerged which reflected Cherland's (1992) classifications of a discourse of action vs. a discourse of feeling; however, the students' responses did not reflect a dichotomy. Even though the boys' same-sex discussions were characterized by a focus on action, they did not separate their feelings from that action. The girls' same-sex discussions were characterized by a focus on emotions and relationships; however, these emotions were attached to action and they understood relationships in terms of actions.

The responses of these boys and girls reflected gender positioning. In the same-sex groups, the boys were more inclined to separate themselves from the characters in the story by not relating to the characters' actions. They also judged events in the plot from a perception of objective rules. In contrast, the girls' responses reflected empathy and a sense of connection. These gender differences provide support for the work of Chodorow (1978) who noted that femininity is defined through attachment and

The response patterns that emerged among the mixed-sex discussions suggest that the boys and girls influenced each other and that the compositions of these groups opened discursive spaces for both sexes. In the mixed-sex groups, the boys were more inclined to express connections with the characters as they shared their feelings about the events in the stories, their interpretations of the characters' feelings and discussed the relationships of the characters. At the same time, the girls were more inclined to separate themselves from the characters by not relating to the characters' actions when they were in the mixed-sex groups. In other words, the discursive practices of the opposite sex enabled an altering of both the boys' and girls' positioning, providing support for Davies (1989) poststructuralist theory of gender development.

Gendered discourse styles (Leaper, 1991; Miller, et. al., 1986; Tannen, 1990, 1994) were apparent, especially in the same-sex discussions. The boys were more direct in the same-sex discussions initiating more episodes with statements than questions (especially when comparing themselves to the action in the story). In contrast, the girls initiated episodes with almost an equal amount of statements and questions; however, when they initiated compared themselves to the action the story they used questions. The boys' same-sex discussions included more sidetracking than the girls' same-sex discussions. In contrast, the girls' same-sex discussions included more conversational maintenance episodes which kept the conversations focused and flowing. The girls included turn-taking in their discussions as well. In the same-sex
discussions, the boys shared personal stories and "jockeyed for position" to do so. They also engaged in conflict, argued and issued commands. In contrast, the girls tended to be cooperative, agree and support each other.

The nonsentence discourse in the same-sex discussions reflected the comfort level of the students discussing these stories with members of their own sex. A great deal of laughter occurred in these groups with the girls laughing almost twice as much as the boys. The students also overlapped each other's turns as they enthusiastically participated in the discussions.

Gender positioning influenced the intertextual connections that the students made in several ways. Autobiographical connections in which the students related themselves to the primary action in the story were a part of all of the stories but were prevalent in the boys' discussions. The boys tended to initiate these episodes with an "I" statement, indicating directness and a separation from the characters. In contrast, the girls always initiated these episodes with a question that reflected a desire for sharing emotions or making a connection with the characters. The girls also made autobiographical connections in which they clarified aspects of the story or extended responses to include references to other people from their lives. These types of intertextual connections indicated separation by the boys and connection by the girls, providing support for Chodorow (1978). In addition, the boys made more intertextual links to other texts, such as movies, television shows and magazine articles than the girls. These types of connections reflected male positioning in terms of attempts to gain the groups' attention by creating laughter and as coming from a "position of knowing,"
providing support for Tannen (1990). The girls also made organizational intertextual links to the other short stories in this study while the boys tended not to do so. These types of connections seemed to reflect the girls’ overall focus on “staying on topic” and provides support for Walkerdine (1990).

The importance of the students’ cultural context (Lemke, 1995) was apparent in their intertextual connections. Both the boys and girls relied on various texts in their lives in order to determine the pronunciation of the characters’ names. They also both focused on the ethnicity of the characters. The girls were preoccupied with the physical appearance of the characters in the short stories. This preoccupation reflected the girls’ cultural standards for physical attractiveness.

Unlike previous research (Barbieri, 1995; Spender, 1992), the girls were not silenced in the mixed-sex groups with the males dominating the discussion (Tannen, 1990). Overall, the girls in both mixed-sex groups initiated more episodes than the boys. Also, the mixed-sex discussions were more like the girls’ same-sex discussions than they were like the boys. There was evidence that their discourse in all of their discussions was driven by the classroom discourse of good behavior and rule-following (Walkerdine, 1990). The girls adopted a “teacher” role when they were gatekeepers and tended to use a variation of the IRE pattern of classroom discourse that they had observed Miss Tyler use in their classroom. This variation was teacher-directed; however, it was response-based rather than the simply evaluative pattern that Cazden (1988) had noted.
The social context influenced the content of these literature discussions in several ways. The composition of the groups altered the manner in which the stories were discussed, especially for the boys. The girls tended to direct the mixed-sex discussions. Also, the intertextual connections that the students made in their discussions reflected the importance of the social context of their lives on their interpretations of the stories. Finally, the group composition influenced the students' oral responses. In follow-up interviews, six of the eight children stated they did think about what they were going to say, especially when they were in mixed-sex discussion groups. The tone, lower amount of nonsentence discourse and discussion lengths of the mixed-sex discussions indicated that the students were more comfortable discussing the short stories in same-sex groups.

In short, the findings of this study indicate that gender differences between boys and girls (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Cherland, 1992; Tannen, 1990) do influence and can enhance mixed-sex literature discussion groups. In the mixed-sex literature discussion groups, a blending of response patterns and intertextual patterns occurred as the students positioned themselves according to the practices of their discourse community. At the same time, the types of discourse that interfered with a focus on the story in the same-sex groups, such as excessive laughing and off-focus episodes, were reduced.

**Implications for Teaching**

One implication for teaching is that same-sex and mixed-sex literature discussion groups seem to have different values and benefits. The students all stated
that they enjoyed the same-sex discussions more than the mixed-sex discussions with six of the eight students acknowledging that they felt more comfortable expressing their thoughts in these groups. In their same-sex groups, they didn’t censor the responses that they contributed to the same-sex discussions as they did to the mixed-sex discussions.

In contrast, the mixed-sex literature discussion groups are beneficial for other reasons. The students in this study incorporated their gendered responses into the mixed-sex discussions. As Lena had commented, “You kind of get different views from boys... It’s a different way of seeing something.” There was a reduction in the amount of off-task episodes and nonsentence discourse in these discussions as well. As Bob had stated, “It works best with mixed, ’cause girls tend to keep the boys straight.”

A second implication for teaching is the need for teachers to realize that literacy practices are a key site for the construction of gender. Widening the range of discourses available to both boys and girls is important if students are to expand the possibilities for how they as gendered beings interact in the world. In the same-sex groups, gendered discourse was prevalent; however, the mixed-sex discussions indicated a blending of gendered positioning as both the boys and the girls expanded the types of responses that they contributed to the discussions. The boys were willing to share their emotions and discuss the relationships of the characters while the girls incorporated responses to the action in the plot. Thus, both the boys and girls altered their positioning.
A third implication for teaching is the need for educators to consider the social context when they have students read and respond to literature in peer-led discussion groups, both in terms of the students' background and the classroom. It is important for educators to understand that the intertextuality of the children's lives will influence their interpretations of the stories that they read. The students in the present study interpreted these short stories from the intertexts of their white, mid-to-high socioeconomic backgrounds, grasping at familiar texts to understand aspects of the story they did not understand.

The need for educators to help their students build an intertextual base is important in two ways. First, students need background information to more fully understand stories in which the character's cultural background varies from their own, even when the stories contain universal themes. Second, as Jane Yolen has stated, "stories lean on stories" (1977, p. 647). The students in the present study had been reading Greek myths, thus making this unusual connection. Beyond that, as the students discussed these realistic fiction short stories, they made intertextual connections to the short stories they had read previously for me, gaining insights into the elements of a short story. It is important for educators to immerse students in similar texts and provide modeling, so that students can make these intertextual connections.

When implementing peer-led literature discussion groups, educators need to consider the social context of the classroom. In her classroom, Miss Tyler had established a "community of learners" (Atwell, 1987), which influenced the manner in
which the students in the current study responded in these literature discussion groups. These students had participated in student-centered instructional activities frequently. In particular, they had previous experience discussing literature in literature discussion groups. Also, Miss Tyler incorporated a response-based approach to her whole-class instruction that I evidenced the students model as they directed their discussions. If the students had come from a traditional teacher-directed classroom, it is probable that they would have been unable to conduct these peer-led discussions.

**Implications for Research**

One implication for research is to study the responses of children from different cultural and socio-economic groups. This study was limited to white students who came from mid-to-high socio-economic backgrounds and provides insights this population of students as they responded to the literature they read when they discussed these stories in peer-led discussion groups. Insights were gained into their gendered responses, the discourse patterns they included in their discussions and how the intertextuality of their lives influenced their interpretations. Extending studies such as the current study to include other populations would provide additional insights. Students from diverse backgrounds would have home environments in which the discourse varies from the students in the current study. This variation would influence their interpretations. Also, as gender is a cultural construction (Davies, 1989) further insights would be gained in terms of gender positioning. Thus, in order to more fully understand how a student’s background influences their response to literature, future research including students from culturally diverse backgrounds is needed.
When studying the responses of students from culturally diverse backgrounds, the ethnicity of the characters in the stories is an important aspect to consider. The responses of the students in the current study revealed the influence of their cultural intertextual histories on their interpretations of the stories. In particular, these students made unusual intertextual connections as they interpreted aspects of the stories that were unfamiliar to them, because the characters in the stories were Hispanic. Hispanic children reading and responding to these stories would almost certainly have made different intertextual links. By having students read texts and respond to texts that are from their own culture and from other cultures, further insights into the influence of students' cultural backgrounds on their interpretations of stories can be gained.

A second implication for research is to have students discuss texts which portray gender roles in peer-led literature discussion groups. The realistic fiction short stories used in the current study were not gender-specific in terms of the actions of the protagonists. Both boys and girls go trick-or-treating, participate in talent shows, ride in an airplane and have a first job. More light might be shed on how boys and girls position themselves in terms of masculinity and femininity by using other texts, such as texts in which the characters portray heavily traditional roles or nontraditional roles. The responses of individuals have been studied (Anderson & Many, 1992; Trousdale, 1987, 1989, 1995); however, responses to these types of stories have not been conducted with literature discussion groups.

A third implication for research would be to study children of different ages as they respond to literature in peer-led discussion groups. The current study provided
insights into how these preadolescents positioned themselves at this age in peer-led discussion groups. Younger children may position themselves differently and older students may as well. For example, in the current study the girls were not silenced in the mixed-sex groups. Would they have been silenced if they had been at a different developmental stage? Also, at varying ages would the same patterns of gendered response and discourse patterns be evident? Previous research has been conducted involving students of different ages discussing literature in peer-led groups (Almasi, 1995; Willert, 1993); however, the previous research has not focused on gender, so questions remain about how children at different developmental stages would position themselves in these groups.

A fourth implication for research is related to the third implication in terms of understanding the influence of one's developmental stage on gender positioning. This implication would be to conduct a longitudinal study that includes students discussing the same types of stories at varying developmental stages. In the current study, the girls were not silenced in the mixed-sex groups. Would the girls be silenced in these types of groups if I conducted a similar study with them in three more years when they are in high school? Also, would the same types of gendered response patterns and discourse styles emerge among the students? Examining the same students' responses according to gender-related patterns when they are at different developmental stages would provide insights into some of the questions that remain. For example, students' responses could be examined at third grade, sixth grade, and ninth grade.
A fifth implication for research would be to compare the individual written literature responses of students to the oral responses that they share in peer-led literature discussion groups that alternate between same-sex and mixed-sex group compositions. The students in the current study stated that they monitored the responses that they shared when they discussed the stories in mixed-sex discussion groups. To what extent did the composition of the literature discussion groups influence the responses that they shared? Future research comparing these responses would provide insights into the influence of the social group.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INITIAL INTERVIEW
(Some questions from Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 1996)

1. What are your favorite things to do?
2. Are you very good at doing something? Tell me about it.
3. What would you like to learn more about?
4. What do you like to spend most of your free time doing?
5. What do you like to read?
6. What kinds of books do you like to read?
7. When do you read?
8. What do you like to write?
9. When do you write?
10. Who is in your family? Tell me a little about your family members.
APPENDIX B

GUIDED INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE PROMPTS

1. What is the first thing that comes to your mind about this story?
2. What are your thoughts about the characters?
3. What are your thoughts about what happened in the story?
4. What is your overall reaction to the story?
APPENDIX C
PARENT CONSENT FORM

To: The parents of ________________________________
From: Peggy Rice
Date: ____________________

I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education and will be conducting my dissertation research in late February and March at the Laboratory School. I am interested in having your child participate in my research.

I will be observing your child’s class during reading and social studies with Miss. Tyler. On five separate days, I will pull several students out for small group discussions of selected short stories appropriate for sixth grade students. I will also ask the students to write their own short story.

I will audiotape and videotape the small group discussions. These tapes will be reviewed for data analysis only. Your child’s identity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym.

This study will provide your child with a pleasurable experience with literature. It will also provide an opportunity for the children to write a short story.

Your child may choose not to participate at any time with no penalty.

Please indicate below whether or not you give permission for your child to participate in my study. If you have any questions, please contact me at 664-3891.

Thank you.

I, ________________________________, give permission for my child, ________________________________ to participate in Peggy Rice’s research project.

I, ________________________________, do not give permission for my child, ________________________________ to participate in Peggy Rice’s research project.
APPENDIX D
STUDENT CONSENT FORM

I, ________________________________, agree to participate in Peggy Rice's research project at the laboratory school. I understand that I will be reading and responding to four short stories on four separate days. I will write an individual response to each story and share my response to the story in a discussion group. I will write my own short story during the fifth research session.

I also understand that the discussions will be audiotaped and videotaped, and that these tapes will be reviewed for data analysis only. My identity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.
VITA

Peggy Sue Rice received a bachelor of science degree in psychology from Western Illinois University in Macomb in 1980. She received her elementary teaching certification from The University of Texas at El Paso in 1994 and her master’s degree in reading education from The University of Texas--El Paso in 1990. She is currently completing the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Louisiana State University, and expects to receive her degree at the May 1998 commencement.

Ms. Rice has been an educator for 14 years. For seven years, she taught elementary school (first through fourth grades) for the El Paso Independent School District in El Paso, Texas. In 1991 she moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where she taught fourth grade at the University Laboratory School. In 1994, she moved to Austin, Texas, and taught sixth grade reading/language arts. For the past three years she has been a teaching assistant at Louisiana State University, teaching children’s literature to preservice elementary school teachers.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Peggy Sue Rice

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Title of Dissertation: Texts and Talk: A Close Look at Gender in Literature Discussion Groups

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Wendy Krall

[Signatures]

K. E. Richardson

Date of Examination:

April 6, 1998

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