



## Teaching English in Untracked Classrooms

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*This teacher-researcher/university-researcher collaboration focuses on teaching and learning in untracked English classes, but has implications for all classrooms where students have different needs. We primarily examine the teacher-researcher's (Delp's) eighth-grade untracked English class but also include data from a group of beginning teachers learning to teach in similar settings. In the end, we challenge previous findings about teaching and learning in untracked English classes and raise issues about the theories that guide such work as well as the relationship between theory and practice. In the context of strong student growth across achievement levels and ethnic groups, we found that the activity system in Delp's classroom differed markedly from what is usually recommended for teaching heterogeneous groups. Instead of teacher-organized small groups (as in cooperative learning or complex instruction), Delp relied on whole-group, multimodal activities and one-on-one teacher-student interactions during group activities. We hypothesize that the activity system is not critical in deciding how best to teach in untracked classrooms. More important is a set of underlying principles, rooted in Vygotskian and Bakhtinian theory, which support the activity system. The principles include (a) building a long-term curriculum that promotes the recycling of structures and ideas, with room for ever-deepening levels of complexity; and (b) considering learners to be in control of their learning and building structures that support them in challenging themselves; (c) building a learning community that respects and makes productive use of diverse contributions from varied learners; (d) providing opportunities for diverse ways of learning; (e) providing support to individuals as needed; (f) challenging all students; (g) keeping learners actively involved. This analysis of Delp's teaching and her students' learning further shows how Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" functions within a whole-class context, where students are involved at their different levels and where the teacher plays an active role in tailoring instruction to these levels, both through the whole-class activity system and through the ongoing one-on-one interactions. Finally, the analysis explores how notions of development across long stretches of time can help teachers see and understand growth for an academically and socioculturally diverse group of adolescent students, growth that includes intellectual as well as ethical and emotional components.*



Research on ability-group tracking has revealed many problems with this common practice—from negative effects on student achievement and self-esteem to exacerbating educational inequity for lower socio-economic classes and traditionally underserved ethnic groups. Given these problems, we need to learn how to successfully meet the needs of highly diverse groups of students in untracked classes. This three-year research project focused on what is involved for teachers in creating curricula in untracked classrooms. It shows how teachers hold students to high academic standards across a range of achievement levels, and has implications for all classrooms where students have varied talents and needs, independent of tracking designations.

The project emerged from a collaboration between Sarah Freedman, a university faculty member, and Verda Delp, a 30-year veteran teacher and a teacher researcher in the Berkeley schools. We established this collaboration to bring together our experiences and areas of expertise to contribute to knowledge and advance theory related to the construct of academic ability and adolescent learning. We further hoped that our collaboration would help us contribute to practitioners' understandings of how to take advantage of diversity in the schools. The project included two phases: an in-depth study of one of Delp's untracked eighth-grade English classes, and a study of beginning teachers learning to teach in heterogeneous settings.

### What's Wrong with Tracking?

Those who have examined the effects of tracking have found that the practice depresses the academic achievement of students placed in the lower tracks and does not provide special benefit to those in the higher tracks, with the gaps in achievement between the tracks widening across the school years (e.g., Kulik & Kulik, 1982; Oakes, 1985; Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Slavin, 1990). A study of differences in the curriculum available to students in high- and low-tracked classes shows that students in the higher tracks are exposed to “more complex and more difficult thinking and problem-solving tasks,” while those in the lower tracks are exposed to “less demanding topics and skills” (Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1992, p. 583). Those in higher tracks also engage in more discussion and show greater growth (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Gamoran & Berends, 1987; Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends, & Lepore, 1995; Nystrand, 1997). Although tracking may or may not be the cause, students in the lowest tracks have “the most negative views of themselves . . . academically and generally and the lowest expectations for their educational futures” (Oakes, 1985, p. 143). Further, students of color and students from homes with low socioeconomic status populate the lower tracks in disproportionate numbers (e.g., Brown, Carter, & Harris, 1978; England, Meier, & Fraga, 1988; Hilliard, 1988; Lucas, 1999; Natriello, 1994; Oakes, 1985; 1995; Oakes, et al., 1992).

Oakes (1985) raises the pressing question: “If tracking is as bad as the evidence seems to indicate, why *do* we continue it?” (p. 15). She argues that tracking, which began in the late 1880s so that the schools could provide vocational training as well as preparation for college entry, has been the ordinary way to do business in U.S. schools for so long that it is difficult for educators and members of the public to imagine other possibilities. Many school-reform efforts have attempted to untrack or to create programs that would lead to untracking (e.g., Cohen, 1994; Comer, 1988; Levin, 1987; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996; Sizer, 1984; 1992; Slavin, Kaweit, & Madden, 1989; Weinstein, 2002; Weinstein, Soule, Collins, Cone, Melhorn, & Simontacchi, 1991). The untracking related to these efforts, however, has not been accepted on a large scale. Oakes and Guiton (1995) found that advocates of tracking hold firm to beliefs that students’ abilities, motivation, and aspirations are fixed attributes and that teachers can best meet students’ needs when those with similar attributes are grouped together so that curricula can be designed to accommodate, not alter, their attributes. It may also be the case that teachers argue for tracking because they do not have adequate strategies for teaching students in heterogeneous classrooms. Even today, few teacher-education programs do an adequate job of preparing new teachers to meet the diverse needs of their students in any grouping practices that they may encounter.

Cohen (1997) and Lucas (1999) warn that as long as teachers favor tracking, even if classes are de-tracked, they will find ways to re-track the students inside the classroom. Cohen explains that “Social systems in heterogeneous classrooms have the potential to recreate a new status order that reflects, at least in part, the old status order of tracking and ability grouping” (p. 7). Lucas concurs: “If de-tracking advocates are successful, what will stop teachers from re-tracking inside their classrooms once students are no longer divided by course assignments?” (p. 146). He concludes that re-tracking is “likely if teachers are not convinced that de-tracking is both logistically manageable and pedagogically sound” (p. 146).

### **Research on How to Teach Untracked English Classes**

The literature on teaching untracked classes provides little guidance for teachers, especially for secondary English teachers. For the most part, the research is general and crosses curricular areas, although it does form a necessary foundation for particular curricular areas. Work by Weinstein and her colleagues (Weinstein, et al., 1991; Weinstein, 2002) shows what is involved in getting teachers to raise their expectations for the achievement of traditionally low-achieving students. In Weinstein’s project, teachers met with university researchers weekly to discuss the literature on expectancy theory, then developed techniques to help them raise their expectations. As part of this process, Weinstein and her colleagues suggest that once teachers change their views of their students, they begin to offer more

substantive educational opportunities, in particular providing students previously labeled “low track” with an academically demanding curriculum. They found that students in “high expectations” classrooms developed more positive attitudes toward school and achieved more than students in classrooms taught by teachers with low expectations. The main curricular strategy for the English teachers in Weinstein’s project involved using in the new de-tracked classes the same materials and activities as for the honors track and devising ways to support all students to benefit from those materials.

Cohen (1994) and Cohen and Lotan (1997) conducted extensive research on the sociology of the heterogeneous classroom and argue for what they call “complex instruction.” Cohen (1997) suggests that curricular strategies of using high-level materials for all students are insufficient. As part of complex instruction, she calls for a “multiple-ability curricula” (p. 11), which she describes as including “curriculum materials that reflect a wider range of human intellectual activity” and which “make it possible for different students to be seen as competent in different classroom activities” (p. 10). Besides changes in curricular materials, Cohen calls for changes in “task structure and evaluation practices.” She documented achievement gains by implementing cooperative learning groups where mixed-ability groups work together on tasks and receive group rather than individual grades (see also Cohen, Scarloss, & Arellano, 1999; Slavin, 1983, 1990). Cohen (1994) concludes that “creating equity in the heterogeneous classroom requires a change in curriculum materials, a change in instructional strategies, and a direct attempt to change differential expectations for competence that lead to status differences” (p. 12). Weinstein also argues for all of these changes.

Subtle contrasts in Weinstein’s and Cohen’s approaches uncover one of the many tensions teachers face in enacting high expectations for all students: how to offer high-level materials and at the same time engage all students in productive learning activities. Further, while Cohen and Lotan offer sample tasks across different disciplines and age groups that illustrate what they mean by “complex instruction,” neither Weinstein nor Cohen and Lotan had a goal of providing specific guidance for developing an English curriculum.

Rubin (2003) complicates Cohen and Lotan’s findings for English and social studies teachers. In her study of students in de-tracked English and social studies classes that use Cohen’s cooperative groups and complex instruction, Rubin found that higher-achieving students often undermined cooperative learning groups that were set up to accommodate students at a range of achievement levels. The higher achievers asserted their superiority and systematically silenced the others. She concludes that the success of de-tracking “depends on diverse students’ harmonious social interactions . . . and thus may call for a more conscious form of adult intervention in students’ social worlds” (p. 568). She further argues for “targeted attention to the needs of individual students . . . explicitly training teachers in de-tracked

classrooms to meet these and other challenges and creating new structures to support students in reaching raised expectation[s]” (p. 568).

The literature on teaching English in untracked classrooms either presents unresolved challenges (Cohen & Lotan, 1997; Rubin, 2003), is not research-based (e.g., King-Shaver & Hunter, 2003; White, 1976), reports on small-scale studies by teachers who provide information about their practice (e.g., Cone, 1993, 1994), is focused on non-U.S. settings (e.g., Freedman, 1994; White, 1976), comes as a relatively minor part of a piece looking at the larger social context, including public policy issues (e.g., Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996; Oakes, Wells, & University of California Los Angeles, 1996), or is discussed in a methods text as something for English teachers to consider (e.g., Smagorinsky, 2002). This literature usually does not explicitly examine student learning or provide a great deal of information about how to teach. The present project attempts to fill some gaps. It is a research-based study that looks at what is involved in teaching and learning English in untracked classrooms.

This study takes up where Rubin’s left off. Rubin identified problems with even the most progressive methods; she studied what was wrong rather than what worked. Thus, she could only offer a few concluding speculations on how to right the wrongs she observed. This study of Delp and the beginning teachers focuses first on examining a case that generally works, based on observational data as well as student performance on a standardized writing assessment. We focus on Delp’s classroom but set Delp’s work within the context of student performance on in-class, externally scored writing from the classes of Delp and a subset of the beginning teachers. We use these performance data as one, relatively standardized assessment of change in writing. After establishing some evidence of student growth with the performance data, we examine teaching and learning in Delp’s classroom and then look closely at teaching and learning from the point of view of two of Delp’s students. We ask the following intertwined set of research questions:

- In Delp’s untracked classroom, what theories and curricular strategies does she use to provide her varied students with opportunities to learn to analyze and write about literature?
- How does she think about and respond to the needs of different students at a range of levels, and how do varied students participate in her classroom?

### **Theory and Practice**

In the process of answering our research questions, besides contributing to the literature on tracking, we hoped to use our university-schools collaboration to come to new understandings about the relationships between theory and practice, and what is involved both in appropriating and building practice-sensitive

theories. In his review of the uses of Vygotskian theory, Smagorinsky (1995) found that scholars appropriate theories in their own ways and that sometimes they interpret the same theory in contradictory ways, which fit their own biases. Cazden (1996) makes a similar point. No doubt our scholarly and practice-based appropriations of theory are influenced by our biases.

In this project, our goal has been to be transparent about our use of theory and in this way to directly address theory-practice connections. This study and Delp's teaching were grounded in Vygotskian and Bakhtinian theories. We were especially interested in how Vygotsky's and Bakhtin's ideas about learning through the coming together of students' and teachers' historical, socio-cultural, and intellectual worlds were related to creating an intellectually diverse classroom community that would support students' literacy development. We hoped our focus on intellectual and socio-cultural diversity would allow us to learn something new about how to theorize what is involved when many different voices come together to contribute to learning.

In thinking about her teaching, Delp found special resonance with Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) theories of the many voices that contribute to how individuals develop as meaning makers. She wrote about her belief that if students have varied opportunities to come up against the ideas of others who think differently from the ways they think and who have different knowledge bases, students will learn to "bring forth" for themselves "newly constructed ways to mean" (Delp, 2004, p. 203). She was interested particularly in creating opportunities for a diverse group of students, as they struggled to make their own meanings, to listen to and incorporate the voices of others. For her students, these voices were mainly the voices of the other students in the classroom, the voices of significant others outside the classroom, and her teacher voice.

Putting her work with students in a larger context, Delp further believed that her students' understandings would develop gradually, across their lifetimes. Delp (2004) quoted Bakhtin concerning the gradual accumulation of meaning, which he likens to a chain with an infinite number of links, each adding to the next:

[T]here can be neither a first nor a last meaning; [anything that can be understood] always exists among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning, which in its totality is the only thing that can be real. In historical life this chain continues infinitely, and therefore each individual link in it is renewed again and again, as though it were being reborn (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 146; quoted in Delp, 2004, p. 210).

Vygotsky, too, considers how development occurs, using a metaphor that contrasts with Bakhtin's chain metaphor but also contains some similarities. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that development proceeds across time "in a spiral, passing through the same point at each new revolution while advancing to a higher level" (p. 56). Vygotsky (1986) explains that word meanings *evolve* during childhood;



that is, their meanings grow and change. One does not simply learn an idea, but one builds meaning, connecting new knowledge to what has come before. Words, along with signs, symbols, and metaphors, serve as mediators for learning. Britton (1987), commenting on the implications of Vygotsky's writings for educators, notes that "it cannot be assumed that when a child uses a word he means by it what we as adult speakers would mean" (p. 23). Rather, over time, with continued opportunities to explore ideas in increasing depth, children develop their understandings. For Vygotsky, internalizing these ever-deepening ideas through social interactions with others, much like Bakhtin's chain of social interactions, is the essence of learning. The spiral, though, emphasizes the ways ideas are strengthened and change for each individual while the chain focuses on a linking of a diversity of voices.

Important to our work, too, is the fact that Vygotsky sees meaning development to be dependent on understandings at once emotional and intellectual. Vygotsky (1987) provides evidence that "intellectual experiences [are] associated with . . . intense emotion" (p. 335), that like intellect, emotion develops across time" (p. 334) and "becomes more varied with every step mankind takes on the path of historical development" (p. 335). Vygotsky further suggests that there is a "dependency . . . between the development of the emotions and the development of other aspects of mental life" (p. 332). DiPardo and Schnack (2004, p. 18) point out that Vygotsky writes about "creating 'an intimate connection between the emotional reactions and the rest of the human mind'" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 332). He argues that emotions are "within the same structure as the other mental processes" (p. 336) but that there is "a unique system of relationships between thinking and emotions" (p. 337).

To further help us think about connections between research and practice, we also draw on Leont'ev (1978; 1981), who, building on Vygotsky's ideas about meaning and mediation through social interaction, was one of the major contributors to what has come to be called cultural-historical activity theory. Cole (1995) discusses different versions of Soviet activity theory and the debates about Vygotsky's role in its development. He concludes that fundamental to "activity theory" is action as the unit of analysis. Action has a goal, a means, and a result and is mediated both by signs and tools. Cole suggests that a system of activities has "its own standing rules, artifacts, social roles, and ecological setting, that is, its own culture" (p. 194). Referring to Lamb and Wozniak (1990), Cole suggests six issues to be considered in research taking this theoretical approach:

1. dynamic analysis of the flow of events over time
2. interactional analysis of dyads, triads, and larger units
3. pattern analysis of the interrelatedness of variables

4. transactional analysis of person-environment interactions
5. multicultural and historical analyses
6. willingness to deal with the messy interactions outside laboratories (Cole, 1995, p. 193).

In our analyses, following these six issues for research, we examine how Delp and her students developed new and expanded meanings, and how such development was supported by activity systems. To account for the diversity in her classroom, we further consider the role that different voices played in the teaching-learning process.

Given the fact that we studied a real-life classroom replete with messy and complex interactions, we knew that our analysis would need to move beyond considerations of dyads and triads to include a substantial focus on the larger units mentioned in issue number two, in our case the larger unit of the classroom. Many studies of teaching and learning that rely on a Vygotskian theoretical frame focus on dyadic or small-group interactions (see Cazden, 1988, for a review of such studies). Few consider the special issues raised by interactions within the whole-class space when a range of student needs must be met at once. One exception is Moll and Whitmore's (1993) study of a third-grade classroom. They examine how classroom teachers, who have to consider the needs of multiple students at once, manage to teach within Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" (ZOPED), that space where students cannot complete a task alone but can complete it with the assistance of an expert other. Moll and Whitmore propose "a 'collective' zone of proximal development" that emphasizes the "interdependence of adults and children and how they use social and cultural resources" (p. 20). They characterize the teacher as providing "mediated assistance, indirect help" and the students as giving "directions and control" (p. 40). Cazden (2001) discusses various forms of "scaffolding" within students' ZOPEDs, including an example from Hillocks (1995) of curricular scaffolding for the whole class. Unlike either of these examples, in Delp's class, the focus was on socio-culturally and intellectually diverse students at the middle-school level. We thought the configuration of Delp's class might raise its own issues about Vygotskian theory in general and how the ZOPED in particular functions in a whole-class setting. We further were interested in observing the interplay between Bakhtinian and Vygotskian theories.

### Participants

The main participants in this study included Delp and her students. As a veteran teacher, she was not implementing a new de-tracking reform. Rather, as one of the architects of the de-tracking of the Berkeley schools in the 1980s, she came with many well-developed techniques for meeting the needs of her diverse students,

techniques that she had sharpened over 20 years of teaching in untracked settings. She further had developed her ideas during her participation in the M-CLASS teacher research project (Delp, 1999) and through her extensive in-service work with teachers through the Bay Area and National Writing Projects.

Delp's class included 30 students, 16 female and 14 male. Of those, ten were African American, ten were White, three were Asian American, two were Latino, and four were from other ethnic groups or were of mixed ethnicity. On standardized tests, 11 were lower scoring (30th percentile or below on SAT9 reading or language), five were middle scoring (between the 30th and 80th percentile), and 14 were higher scoring (80th percentile or above). We made these segmentations to serve as proxies for tracking decisions, that is, to provide a sense of which students would likely have been assigned to which tracks. It is often the case that SAT9 reading and language scores strongly influence and are sometimes the exclusive determinant for tracking decisions in schools that have academic-tracking policies. In addition, these cut points are relatively consistent with those used to place students in the higher, middle, and lower academic tracks in many school districts.

For more in-depth study of student learning, we originally chose six focal students who showed something of the range in the class (Table 1). These students also provided a lens for viewing how Delp managed heterogeneity from her students' points of view. Two of the students (Rose and John) had relatively high test scores in reading and received relatively high grades in previous classes. Two received average grades (Isabel and Damien) and a mix of high and mid-range test scores. A third pair received relatively low grades and test scores (Bizhan and Malika). Three were males and three females, with one male and one female in each pair. Consistent with the multiethnic nature of the class, the students came from a variety of ethnic groups, with at least one student of color in each pair. Damien and Malika were African-American, Rose was White and Japanese-American, Isabel was Latina, Bizhan was of Middle-Eastern and South-American descent, and John was White, with parents born in the United States. All students

TABLE 1: Focal Students

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Tracking Proxy
John	male	White	higher scoring
Rose	female	Multiple	higher scoring
Jamal	male	African American	middle scoring
Damien	male	African American	middle scoring
Isabel	female	Latina	middle scoring
Bizhan	male	White	lower scoring
Malika	female	African American	lower scoring

were native speakers of English, although Bizhan's and Isabel's parents were not. Isabel's mother was, however, a fluent English speaker.

Near the end of the data-collection period, we decided to add a seventh focal student, Jamal, an African-American male, because he often seemed engaged, but was failing the class. We hoped to learn more about the classroom community by studying the ways he did and did not participate. Although his previous teachers said he was a low-performing student, Jamal's test scores were between the 35th and 46th percentile, on the low side of the middle range. The main data missing for this student were interviews, although fortuitously we did collect one interview with Jamal in the spring of the study year.

Besides Delp and her students, we included 22 beginning teachers enrolled in a summer course that Delp offered on the teaching writing in heterogeneous classes. The course was sponsored by the Bay Area Writing Project and provided supplementary data on how Delp theorized her teaching. We also included in-class writing samples from the students of three of these teachers who participated in a weekly teacher research group across the year.

Finally, we hired three independent raters to score the in-class writing samples produced by Delp's students and the students of the three beginning teachers. These raters were experienced middle-school teachers whose student populations were similar to those in this study. The raters also came with experience scoring district-level writing proficiency examinations. One was a White male, one a White female, and one an Asian-American female.

### Background on Delp's Eighth-Grade English Curriculum

Delp's English curriculum was loosely coordinated to her students' U.S. history curriculum, which was taught by a different teacher. Her class had social studies first period and then stayed together for English second period. Across the year, Delp engaged her students in six major "literature studies." The first included the short stories "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker (1973) and "Bill" by Zona Gale (1974). Delp used these stories to introduce three themes that would be important during the year: heritage, choice making, and perspective.

The second literature study began in mid-September when the class read *The Light in the Forest* (1953) by Conrad Richter, set during the Indian Wars of the 1770s. The third study, *April Morning* by Howard Fast (1961), portrayed the first days of the American Revolutionary War. These two novels tied directly into the students' study of these eras in their history class. With these novels, Delp taught the notion of perspective and introduced the idea of tragedy.

During December, Delp's students began their fourth literature study, a series of autobiographical vignettes: "The Jacket" (1986) and "Ode to My Library" (1992) by Gary Soto; "Eleven," "No Speak English," and "The Rice Sandwich" by Sandra



Cisneros (1988); “Complexion” by Richard Rodriguez (1982); “A Christmas Memory” by Truman Capote (1994); “This is Just To Say” by William Carlos Williams (1962); and “Major Ballou’s Letter Home” (1861/1990). For these readings, students considered the themes of heritage, choice-making, and perspective, along with socio-cultural issues of immigration, English as a second language, cultural dominance, and race. These readings led to a piece of autobiographical writing.

Following the winter break, the students engaged in two lengthy and complex literature studies, both again coordinated with their history class. They read Ernest Gaines’ *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), a novel set in the rural south between 1864 and 1960. The themes that surfaced in this novel included freedom, insight, compassion, dignity in the face of oppression, nobility, and integrity. To broaden and enhance their understanding of these themes, most especially the notions of freedom and oppression, students then read another Alice Walker short story and listened to blues music. At the same time, students worked with members of the Alvin Ailey dance company, examining dance as metaphor and focusing on the parallel theme of dignity in the face of oppression. A member of the Ailey company taught them some of the choreography from two pieces in *Revelations*: “I Been ‘Buked” and “Wade in the Water.” The students later attended a public performance by the Ailey company where these dances were performed. They also read Alice Walker’s short story, “Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self,” as they reviewed the themes that they had been studying.

Beginning in April and ending the last week of school in June, Delp’s students engaged in their sixth and final literature study, another novel by Ernest Gaines, *A Lesson before Dying* (1993). This novel addresses complex ideas about discrimination, race, and politics in a small southern town in the late 1940s. It afforded the class the opportunity to revisit many of the themes they had studied throughout the year.

## Data Collection

### *Classroom Observations: Videotapes, Fieldnotes, and Associated Data*

Two research assistants observed, took fieldnotes, and videotaped Delp’s second-period class during the first three weeks of school and during three of the six literature studies: *The Light in the Forest* across eight weeks in the fall, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* across eleven weeks in the winter, and *A Lesson before Dying* across seven-and-a-half weeks in the spring.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Freedman observed and took fieldnotes once or twice a week during the data collection periods. In all, we collected 111 videotapes representing 26 weeks of class time. Each class lasted 50 minutes, but often we began taping before class because Delp frequently conferred with individuals then, and often we continued taping after the bell rang because Delp usually continued class well into the first part of the

homeroom period that followed. Tapes routinely ran over an hour. We also collected all teaching materials related to the tapes, including books and short stories the students read and handouts Delp distributed.

The research team, including Delp, Freedman, and the two research assistants, met weekly to review the videotaped data and add information to the fieldnotes about Delp's intentions and her sense of her students' progress. In these meetings we also tried to identify important aspects of teaching and learning during each class. Notes from these weekly research meetings were appended to the fieldnotes that accompanied the videotapes.

Besides the videotapes, audiotapes, and associated materials and notes, Delp wrote daily fieldnotes about her teaching during the research year, describing important events, especially as they related to the heterogeneous nature of the class. She also audiotaped and we transcribed two individual conferences that occurred outside of class time, one with each of the two higher-scoring students. Although she reported holding one or two other conferences with focal students outside of class, she did not audiotape them.

### ***Focal Student Interviews***

The research team developed interview protocols, and the two research assistants interviewed each of the original six focal students twice during the study year, once at the start of data collection and once in the spring. They interviewed the seventh focal student only in the spring. In addition, another research assistant conducted follow-up interviews with the original six focal students during the year after data collection ended.<sup>2</sup> In the first interview, students' self-concepts as learners were explored. Questions were posed to engage students in determining their perceptions of their skills and their sense of their teacher's role in developing their skills. Students also were asked to characterize the classroom environment and their places in it.

The second interview returned to the topics of the first and allowed the students the opportunity to deepen their reflection on their experience in Delp's class by having them view and reflect upon a video clip of their participation in the classroom. We chose a clip in which the student was struggling to learn something new.

For the follow-up interviews the next year students were asked first to talk generally about Delp's class and her teaching so that we could learn about the class "from a student's point of view." They then were asked to discuss what they had learned in Delp's class that they were still using in ninth grade. Lastly, they were given a binder of their work from their year in Delp's class and asked to give the interviewer a "tour," choosing which assignments to focus on and describing either the assignment itself or the process of completing it (Shefler, 2002).



### ***Student Work and Test Data***

We collected all writing, art, vocabulary tests, and any other work completed by the focal students during the taping periods. This work included everything completed both in class and at home. We also collected student work completed between the main data collection periods whenever possible, and we collected some work from non-focal students. Most work was compiled in folders that Delp collected after each literature study. In all, we collected 564 pieces of focal student work. Besides completed pieces, whenever possible, we collected drafts.

In addition, three of the beginning teachers and Delp administered a beginning- and end-of-year timed, in-class writing prompt to their students. The prompt is one that Delp had used for many years at the beginning and end of her teaching year to get a sense of her students' progress. It is similar to prompts used on district proficiency tests. Although Delp did not practice timed writing with her students, she expected them to be able to perform better on such writing after she had taught them specific interpretive skills and after they had done a great deal of writing about literature across the year. All of the teachers were comfortable with the prompt and felt that it reflected something of what they were teaching their students. The teachers administered the prompt in their classrooms and timed the writing for one hour. In the fall, the prompt was as follows:

Think about a book, short story, or play you have read or a movie you have seen recently. Then think about the characters in this piece of literature or movie. Of these characters, choose one who you think stands out as particularly significant. Using details, briefly describe this character. Then explain why and in what ways this character is significant. Perhaps you will want to include a particular event from the piece of literature or the movie to help you explain the character's significance.

In the spring, the option of choosing a movie was omitted, and many students chose a character from one of the pieces of literature studied in their English class that year. These timed writing samples allowed us to develop a general sense of changes in the students' writing under timed conditions.

Finally, we collected the most relevant standardized test scores available for Delp's students as well as for the students of the three beginning teachers. At the time of this study, these were reading or language scores on the statewide Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program, which used the Stanford 9 (SAT9) test. The state of California had eliminated writing assessments from the state testing program, and so no cross-district, standardized writing scores were available.

These test scores, in combination with the in-class writing samples, provided independent measures of student change. We had sufficient data from 74 students who took both the writing pre- and post-test and had standardized test scores from either the April before or during the study year, including 22 of Delp's stu-

dents and 52 from the classes of the beginning teachers. These numbers reflect the transience of the student populations, especially in the classes of the beginning teachers. We eliminated students without at least one standardized test score because without such information, we had no way to estimate which track students might have been assigned to if there had been tracking; in other words, we did not have any way to create a proxy for tracking decisions.

### ***Beginning Teachers' Class and Meetings: Tapes and Notes***

We collected video recordings of the two-week, 30-hour, summer course that Delp taught for the beginning teachers. We transcribed segments in which Delp explained her philosophies about teaching. We also wrote fieldnotes for ten monthly meetings across the academic year with the beginning teachers and on occasion collected audiotapes.

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Timed In-Class Writing***

To provide background for the qualitative study, Freedman supervised independent ratings of students' in-class writing samples. For the ratings, any information that identified students was removed from the papers. Fall and spring writing samples were combined, so that the raters would not know that they were scoring writing from different times in the year; the raters saw only the fall prompt and did not know that the spring prompt had no movie option.

Two raters scored each piece of writing on a six-point holistic scale. In cases where the raters disagreed by more than one point, the writing sample was scored a third time by a new rater. In these cases, we used the two scores where there was the most agreement. If the third rater gave the sample a score that was between the original two scores or outside the range, we doubled the middle score in hopes of achieving the fairest score possible.

In cases when the sum of the scores for the fall writing sample was the same as the sum of the scores for the spring sample, we asked a new rater to provide a forced ranking of the pair of papers. We added half a point to the score of the paper that was rated higher according to the forced ranking. Again, the raters did not know why they were providing forced rankings and were not told that each pair of papers was written by the same student.

Next, we conducted paired sample t-tests to assess change in the fall and spring repeated measures. For this analysis, we combined data from the students in Delp's class with those in the classes of the three beginning teachers. We compared change scores for sub-groups based on teacher, ethnicity, gender, and the tracking proxy of standardized test performance. The t-tests allowed us to determine whether the change from fall to spring was greater for any group of students.

We conducted additional paired sample t-tests for Delp's class. We did not make these comparisons across all of the separate classes because the numbers were small, but for Delp's class we wanted, at least, to get a sense of the trends. We were able to examine the sub-groups of gender, ethnicity, and tracking proxy.

We interrogated the stability of the findings related to tracking by conducting a two-way analysis of variance for repeated measures for the entire study sample. In doing so, we created a general linear model to compare the three tracking groups. Finally, we used the students' SAT9 scores from before the study year to ascertain whether these classes, which the schools labeled heterogeneous, were populated with students who looked heterogeneous according to their standardized test scores.

### ***Teaching and Learning***

The methodological perspective for the study of Delp's teaching and her students' learning is consistent with what Erickson (1986) calls "interpretive research." This perspective assumes (a) "the nature of classrooms as socially and culturally organized environments for learning, (b) the nature of teaching as one, *but only one*, aspect of the reflexive environment, and (c) the nature (and content) of the meaning-perspectives of teacher and learner as intrinsic to the educational process" (p. 120).

Delp participated fully in all analyses of the classroom data. It is important to note that her ability to communicate her intent in an ongoing way and her ability to retrieve from memory relevant events that occurred outside the times we were formally collecting data allowed for a more in-depth analysis than is normally possible. Because, in addition, there were generally at least two observers in the classroom, and because the research team included Freedman and six research assistants over the course of the project, multiple perspectives informed our interpretations of events. Just as team members pushed Delp to consider alternative interpretations, she did the same for them. In the end, although one never can be objective in interpretive research, our conclusions represent a synthesis of a number of research voices. Even though we all brought our biases, we considered many alternatives and looked for disconfirming findings as we analyzed the qualitative data.

To begin our analysis of the classroom data, we indexed the 111 classroom tapes. As part of this process, we inserted counter numbers to indicate segments showing Delp's decision points and key strategies for teaching untracked classes and those showing evidence of students' struggles to learn. These portions of the data set were most related to the research questions we posed concerning what we stood to learn about teaching and learning English in the heterogeneous classroom. We then made decisions about which tapes to transcribe in full. We selected the entire first week when Delp established her expectations for the class, a sequence of approximately one week from each of the three data collection periods,

and a selection of individual classes and segments of classes when Delp made key decisions for teaching a heterogeneous group or when important struggles involving focal students were evident. We also transcribed segments that included in-class, teacher-student conferences with the focal students. In all, during the 26 weeks of observation, 34 of the 111 observed class periods were transcribed in full and 25 were transcribed in part.

We next coded the talk. Based on both the theories that guided our work and the patterns we saw in the transcribed tapes and tape segments, we developed three sets of codes. The coding categories were often overlapping; much of the talk was coded with more than one code. First, some of the coding was nested, in that we coded major activity systems and then the substantive work or meaning-building that took place within them. Similarly, alongside coding the meaning-building, we coded the ways meaning-building was functioning in the classroom. Within the nested systems, more than one category was often visible simultaneously. Although it was possible to code what was happening at each moment in time, it was not possible to develop meaningful codes that were non-overlapping.

The first set of codes characterizes the activity system that organized teaching and learning in Delp's classroom. The activity system consisted of a set of participant structures and a set of activities (Table 2).

TABLE 2: The Activity System:  
Organizing Teaching and Learning

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**Participant Structures**

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Whole class  
Small groups or peer dyads  
Teacher-student conferences

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**Activity Structures**

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Logs  
Book, map, log discussions  
Maps  
Spelling and vocabulary  
Pictorial representations  
Essays  
Other

---

Consistent with activity theory, derived from the initial work of Vygotsky (Leont'ev, 1978; 1981; also reviewed in Smagorinsky, 1995 and Wertsch, 1995), the activity system shows the "mental functioning and the sociocultural setting . . . as dialectically interacting moments" (Wertsch, p. 60). These codes, indicating details of the setting, reveal the organizational flow of the curriculum and are both part of and underlie the mental functioning.

The second set of codes was characterizes the meaning-building system by focusing on the mental functioning. (Table 3).

Referring back to both Bakhtin's and Vygotsky's notions of meaning-building, we coded a limited set of vocabulary words that were repeated across time and recycled across classroom activities. This coding helped us trace the meaning-building process through the classroom talk and the students' interactions with that talk. These repeated vocabulary words shed light on the intertwined ways that Delp understood the ethical and emotional needs of the group and how these

**TABLE 3: The Meaning-Building System: Looking through the Lens of Vocabulary**

FOR CLASSROOM COMMUNITY AND LITERARY STUDY	
Compassion	Responsibility
Dignity	Trust
Integrity	Vulnerability
Respect	
FOR CLASSROOM COMMUNITY, LITERARY STUDY, AND METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS	
Contemplation	Reflect
Mindful	Struggle
Perspective	
FOR METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS	
Embellish	Interpret
Grand Themes	Symbol

**TABLE 4: Communication Modes and Functions**

Modes
Reading
Writing
Art and other symbolizing, including musical and kinesthetic
Functions
To remember
To engage in personal conversations
To give reasons for doing something
To tell a story
To organize work
To praise
To provide context
To respond to behavior
To reveal expectations
To teach and to learn taking responsibility
To teach and to learn interpretive strategies

needs related to students' individual growth and the creation of classroom community. They also showed how Delp thought substantively about what to include in the English curriculum, both with regards to the concepts to teach and the habits of learning for students to develop. Finally, they provided a lens for viewing how students responded to the curriculum.

The third set of codes identified the modes and functions of communication, both within the activity system captured by the first set of codes and within the meaning-building system captured by the second set (Table 4).

As an overlay to all three sets of codes, we noted each time a focal student participated and each time Delp interacted individually with a focal student or with other individuals. This coding allowed us both to see the teaching from Delp's point of view and to examine teaching-learning interactions with a variety of students. Noting each time a focal student participated and how Delp individualized instruction helped us explore how she accounted for the heterogeneity of her students and how different students partook of varied opportunities in the class.

To show the flow of teaching and learning across time, we coded a relatively large subset of the transcribed videotapes and tape segments. We selected for our first and most formal coding 20 of the 34 transcribed lessons. These lessons consisted of 19 hours, 7 minutes, 31 seconds of talk. To facilitate coding the videos, we used two computer programs: (a) V-Prism, which allowed us to connect transcript to video and to analyze small amounts of textual and video data, and (b) Ethnograph, which allowed us to code large amounts of transcribed text. During the analysis process, we first coded using Ethnograph, and then as we located pat-

terns and key segments of the data, we reviewed the video to examine non-verbal signals. Our coding began when talk began related to a code and ended when talk ended related to that code. Codes often overlapped in part and also often started and stopped at different points in the conversation. For example, the activity structure of what Delp called “book, map, log” (BML) discussions might go on for some time, with different meaning-building codes starting and stopping throughout and with different functions and different student participants doing the same.

We coded all of the student interviews, using these same codes whenever applicable. This additional coding allowed us to compare what happened in the classroom with students’ comments on and memories of the teaching and learning that had transpired. Since the interviews were audiotaped, we used Ethnograph to manage this part of the coding.

In addition to this formal coding, we used supplementary data to check and elaborate findings from the coded classroom and interview corpus. Particularly useful were the additional transcribed lessons and lesson segments, as well as the materials that accompanied each day we taped. Also, transcripts of individual conferences with the focal students and the focal students’ writing helped us elaborate findings in other parts of the data set. Much of the supplementary data in this study provided the primary sources for following students’ development across time (Delp, in progress). Finally, we examined the tapes from our work with the new teachers and Delp’s fieldnotes to elaborate how she explicated her philosophies related to teaching heterogeneous groups of students.

The coded data, along with the supplementary data, allowed us to explicate the activity system in Delp’s classroom, showing which activities dominated. The data further allowed us to explore how Delp managed different activities as she worked to promote equity for her students. The data also showed how the community functioned and the opportunities varied students had to build meaning across time. Finally, we were able to trace the progress of the students and explore Delp’s underlying theories of teaching and learning in untracked classrooms, both as she applied them and as she articulated them to other teachers.

## What We Learned about Teaching and Learning in Delp’s Untracked Classes

### *Background Results from Timed In-Class Writing*

Most important, we found that students’ scores increased significantly from fall to spring for the sample as a whole (Table 5). Of the 74 students who completed both the fall and spring in-class writing prompts, 52 showed growth, and nine had the same holistic score in the fall and spring; of the nine with the same score, eight were rated higher in the spring on the forced ranking. Only 14 students showed a decrease in score. The gains were significant for every class except one, and students in that class also showed gains.

The gains were statistically significant for boys and for girls and for African Americans, Latinos, Whites, and Asians (Tables 6 and 7). It is interesting that the growth for students of color was more significant than for White students.

We also found that regardless of probable track placement students showed statistically significant gains from fall to spring (Table 8). These gains are particu-

TABLE 5: Fall-to-Spring In-Class Writing Change

Teacher	Fall Mean	Spring Mean	SD for Paired Difference	t-value
Delp <i>n</i> = 22	5.00	6.66	2.11	-.3684 ***
Teacher 1 <i>n</i> = 14	2.46	5.04	3.06	-3.142 **
Teacher 2 <i>n</i> = 20	5.85	6.63	2.37	-1.462
Teacher 3 <i>n</i> = 18	2.67	4.58	1.60	-5.076 ***
Total <i>n</i> = 74	4.18	5.84	2.33	-6.126 ***

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$

TABLE 6: In-Class Writing Change across Genders

Teacher	Gender	<i>n</i>	Fall Mean	Spring Mean	SD for Paired Difference	t-value
Total <i>n</i> = 74	female	46	4.51	6.14	2.36	-4.694 ***
	male	28	3.64	5.34	2.32	-3.878 ***

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$

TABLE 7: In-Class Writing Change across Ethnicities

Teacher	Ethnicity	<i>n</i>	Fall Mean	Spring Mean	SD for Paired Difference	t-value
Total <i>n</i> = 74	White	13	4.39	6.08	2.43	-2.513*
	Afr Am	24	4.71	6.27	2.54	-3.016 **
	As Am	20	3.85	5.88	2.38	-3.803 ***
	Latino/a	11	3.73	5.55	1.59	-3.803 **
	Multiple	6	3.58	4.00	2.46	-0.415

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$

TABLE 8: In-Class Writing Change across Tracks

Teacher	Track	<i>n</i>	Fall Mean	Spring Mean	SD for Paired Difference	t-value
Total <i>n</i> = 65	higher	18	5.39	6.47	2.00	-2.296 *
	middle	24	3.29	5.81	2.55	-4.840 ***
	lower	23	4.11	5.33	2.10	-2.775 **

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$

larly noteworthy because, despite differences in starting points on the fall writing sample, the students' scores increased such that there was considerably less diversity in spring scores.

Upon construction of the general linear model, we found strong evidence of a difference in means for the different tracks; the tracking proxies identified three distinct groups of students (Table 9). There is also strong evidence of a difference in means for the fall and spring writing samples. This finding reinforces our earlier result that the change from fall to spring represents significant gain. There is not, however, evidence that the two variables interact. That is to say, our data do not suggest that students' tracking proxies will predict writing gains as measured by the in-class writing assessments.

In examining the gains within Delp's class, paired sample t-tests on the subgroups reveal significant gains on all pairs except those with numbers too small to measure significance (Table 10).

TABLE 9: ANOVA Table for Two-Way Analysis of Variance with Fixed Effects Track and In-Class Writing and Repeated Measures on Writing

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value
BETWEEN SUBJECTS				
Track	44.47	2	22.24	3.063 *
Error	450.02	62	7.26	
WITHIN SUBJECTS				
In-Class Writing (Fall or Spring)	82.61	1	82.61	32.492 ***
In-Class Writing x Track	14.14	2	7.07	2.780
Error	157.64	62	2.54	

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$

TABLE 10: Delp's In-Class Writing Change across Variables

Variable	Label	<i>n</i>	Fall Mean	Spring Mean	SD for Paired Difference	t-value
Gender	female	12	5.58	7.13	2.25	-2.373 *
	male	10	4.30	6.10	2.04	-2.875 *
Ethnicity	White	9	5.44	7.44	1.94	-3.098 *
	Afr Am	6	3.50	5.92	1.36	-4.632 **
	As Am	3	6.33	6.67	2.08	-0.277
	Latino/a	1	7.00	10.00	X	X
	Multiple	3	4.67	4.67	3.61	0.000
Track	higher	12	6.17	7.67	2.11	-2.462 *
	middle	4	4.25	5.00	2.63	-0.570
	lower	6	3.17	5.75	1.74	-3.628 *
Total	---	22	5.00	6.66	2.11	-.3684 ***

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$

X indicates insufficient n to calculate.

We next compared SAT9 standardized test scores on reading and language from the spring before and the spring of the study year (Table 11). These scores do not show gains. Statistically, it would be unusual to show gain on this type of measure because for gain to occur, the group of students would have to change position in relation to the population of test-takers from one year to the next. Scores would stay the same if growth in a given year were normal. Importantly, the standardized tests did not measure what was central to what these teachers taught. The SAT9 measures students' ability to recognize grammatical forms and answer comprehension questions on short reading passages.

What the standardized tests do show is the heterogeneity of the population of students in this study. As a group, scores were in the 50 percentile range, more or less average for students nationally taking the SAT9. The standard deviations are high, showing that there was a great deal of variance for the scores of the students of these teachers; there were truly diverse populations of test-takers in these classes.

In conclusion, the writing samples show significant growth in general and across most groups. In spite of the small numbers, the findings for Delp's students paralleled those for the entire sample. The measurable growth could be due to the passage of time; however, in most studies that administer beginning- and end-of-year writing samples of the sort that we used in this study, students do not show significant growth without evidence of extraordinary teaching (Hillocks, personal communication, January 7, 2004). In fact, it is difficult to show growth in writing across such a short period of time using just six score points, making it unlikely that the gains occurred only because of the passage of time.

Since African-American and Latino students usually score lower on standardized tests than their White and Asian counterparts, the finding of equivalent gain across ethnic groups is an important one. It suggests that this in-class writing assessment was generally equitable. Also, insofar as it measured learning in these classes, learning was equally distributed across ethnic groups. Finally, regardless of their probable tracking designation, students in these classes showed significant gains. It appears that all categories of students were afforded opportunities to improve their performance on this measure of analytic writing.

TABLE 11: SAT9 Change

Test	<i>n</i>	Mean for Year Preceding Study	Mean for Year of the Study	SD for Paired Difference	t-value
Reading Comprehension	61	50.33	48.62	15.65	0.681
Language Arts	59	57.61	59.95	12.76	-0.384

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$

### *Teaching and Learning for Diverse Students*

The next three sections focus on teaching and learning in Delp's untracked English class. The first focuses on the activity system, relying on coding in Table 2, and looks at the activities inside the two dominant participation structures in her class: whole-group teaching and one-on-one teacher-student interactions. These participant structures were quite different from the cooperative, small-groups that Cohen (1994) and Slavin (1983) developed as the backbone for teaching heterogeneous groups of students. Through whole-group teaching, she worked to provide a sense of group cohesion and equity. Through one-on-one interactions, Delp worked to keep the entire range of students involved in the whole-group activities and to push forward the development of individuals. The only small-group interactions were informal, spontaneous, and student-initiated; there were virtually no formal, teacher-directed small-group activities. The activities inside these participant structures show the structural flow of the curriculum, from day to day, across each week, and across the year.

The second and third results sections, relying primarily on the coding in Tables 3 and 4, look more closely at the meaning-building system, using the lens of classroom vocabulary to examine how developing meanings related to the development of community and curriculum and to examine the role of meaning development in student learning. In these sections, we further consider how the different modes and functions of instruction were part of students' meaning-making activities.

### **The Activity System: Whole Group and Individualized Participant Structures**

To promote equity, Delp thought it essential to offer the same curriculum to all students, which led to her focus on creating a set of participant structures that favored whole-group teaching, with the backup of much individualization. One of the beginning teachers in the summer course asked Delp what she did when a student did not participate well in a whole-group activity. Delp replied:

I just keep going with who has done the work. And then I do a lot of individual talk with kids. I mean I think that is probably my greatest strength as a teacher is that I can keep everybody going and I can go over and talk to people individually.

And this is for the most part how we observed Delp keep as many students as she could "going" during the whole-group activities.

Within these participant structures, we coded the following repeated activities: log writing, signing, and sharing; "book, map, and log" (BML) discussions; map making, signing, and sharing; spelling and vocabulary discussions and tests; discussion and creation of pictorial representations; and essay writing, discussion, and conferences. These activities fell into a predictable rhythm across time.

**ACTIVITIES INSIDE WHOLE-GROUP PARTICIPANT STRUCTURES**

*Logs.* Class usually began with 10 to 18 minutes of log writing, signing, and sharing. We coded four hours, 35 minutes, 24 seconds of the 19-hour, 7-minute, 31-second corpus (24%) as log activity. Although the whole group participated in this activity, it also provided space for informal pair work and informal small-group work as well as individualization.

With respect to what the whole group did, students came to class with logs that they had written at home in response to the reading assigned for that day. If students arrived without their logs, they could use this time to write. Otherwise, students shared their logs. The main goal of reading one another's logs was not to provide evaluation but to get ideas. Delp explained to the class, "After you've read every kid's log, I hope that you'll have more ideas about what we're talking about." When students first started sharing, they worked with their friends and those who sat near them. When she introduced log-sharing, Delp shared her expectations:

I'm not going to make you read them [logs] out loud or anything, but you'll go up to someone and say, "Would you please read this log of mine?" And we'll do it that way. We'll do that tomorrow, actually, to start with.

Students controlled with whom they shared, but over time Delp made sure that they expanded who read their logs and whose logs they read.

After log sharing, Delp asked students to write some more, to "embellish" their logs, using any new ideas they picked up from reading other students' logs or ideas that they thought of since they had last written in their logs. She gave the following directions the first time she asked students to embellish:

Under the last part of the log . . . draw a line like this [draws a line on the board] and then write the word "embellishment" . . . The word "embellishment" means "to make beautiful," and I want you to just keep making it more and more filled with ideas . . . Anything new that comes up, you add it.

She further told the class, "We're going to be doing this all the time." True to her word, every day after students read one another's logs, they embellished their own with new ideas. She also frequently prompted them to embellish after she read something they had written.

Delp used log-sharing time to check to see that every student had completed a log, to sign completed logs to give students credit, to talk to those who had not completed their work to discover the problem, and to hold brief conferences with students to push their thinking and writing forward. The time also allowed her to make personal contact with every student before any whole-group discussion began.

*Book, map, log discussions.* The log-writing, signing, and sharing activity usu-

ally served as preparation for whole-group “book, map, log” (BML) discussion. We coded 41% of the talk (seven hours, 50 minutes, 29 seconds) as BML discussion. These discussions lasted on average 30 minutes but could be as short as 20 minutes or as long as 40 minutes. At first glance, the BML discussions seemed much like the usual teacher-led, whole-group discussion described by Mehan (1979). They were dominated by teacher talk and often had the structure of teacher initiation, student response, teacher evaluation (IRE). In these discussions, Delp provided context for the reading, often in the form of mini-lectures. Then she and the students discussed the text, with Delp reading portions of the text and asking questions. Most students paid attention and were actively involved in taking notes; as is usually the case in whole-class discussions, some talked more than others.

A closer analysis reveals that Delp had embedded specific structures within the BML discussions to make sure all of her students were participating. Even when discussion appeared to follow mostly an IRE format, Delp’s questions and the students’ answers had an atypical flow. In an early BML discussion, for example, Delp introduced *The Light in the Forest*. She first assessed the students’ prior knowledge about Indians, asking nine questions to elicit what the students knew. Instead of asking students to give oral answers, she asked them to write what they knew in their logs. Then she asked them to read silently what they had written and underline one thing that they knew to be true. After that she organized an oral read-around in which all students shared one thing they knew to be true about Indians. This approach ensured that all participated, showed something of what students knew, and provided a public space for displaying the background knowledge of the group about something essential to understanding the story.

Delp next asked students a set of probing questions. She first directed the students to ask themselves the following questions when they read the poem that prefaces the book: “What do I think about this? What are my ideas about what the author is telling me?” She then asked several volunteers to read a passage aloud so the class could hear the same passage through different voices. Afterwards she asked class members to comment on what stood out as they listened. After several answered, she asked for more (“Is there anything else that stands out?”), and students volunteered with further interpretations. Delp rarely asked students to respond to known-answer questions but when she did, the questions were not ends in themselves. but, rather, led to more probing questions. She continued the conversation by asking students to tell her the title of the book and then immediately followed this easy question with a more challenging one: “What could that mean?”

*Maps.* Maps provided another space during BML discussions when students who remained silent could also be active. Just as students continued to embellish their logs throughout the discussion described above, during every discussion students took notes on what Delp called a “resource map.” Delp designed this note-



taking strategy to provide students with structures and strategies for organizing and keeping track of their evolving ideas about the texts during the discussions. Delp explained to the beginning teachers how she thought about resource maps: “I want to call it the documentation of the classroom’s community discussion, with me being the guiding person.”

The students worked on the same map throughout the study of each novel or each group of shorter works. To help students create the map, Delp gave each one an 8.5" x 14" sheet of white paper at the beginning of each literature study. She had the students fold the paper to make eight boxes on each side. If the students needed more boxes, they added another sheet. Since they often added extra sheets, Delp increased the size of the paper and doubled the number of boxes for the last literature study. The boxes provided spaces for the students to trace their thinking about topics that Delp and the students selected. They typically allocated a box for the context and one for the setting, one for each major character and event in the story, one for each important symbol and theme, and one for each key vocabulary word in the literature. During the BML discussions, Delp helped students record their thinking on their maps as well as make use of the discussion to record her thinking and the thinking of others in class. Students copied quotations that supported their thoughts, including page numbers for reference. Delp also asked the students to draw pictures to help them better understand their responses to the themes in the literature, the metaphorical language, and the perspectives of the characters. She frequently directed the class and individuals to make note of something particular on their maps and then to write what they thought about whatever they had noted. To provide a sense of what the students’ maps were like, we include Rose’s map for *The Light in the Forest* (see Figure 1).

Since students filled in the content of their maps during class discussion, even when there was lots of teacher talk or when other students were participating orally, most were taking notes on their maps. During the summer course, Delp emphasized to the beginning teachers that maps kept students on task:

I was having a lot of trouble with kids flaking out in the classroom with me. They would just be going like this [looks up at the ceiling]. Or like that or not paying attention, and that also drives me crazy. I have to have people on task. And I thought about the idea that if they were active, if they were required to make notes during class, they would have to attend.

Delp rejected the more usual maps teachers use to help students brainstorm and organize ideas for writing (for examples, see Margulies, 1991; Rico, 1983; Wycoff, 1991). She had tried this kind of mapping but reported that she had had difficulty getting students “to go from that [kind of map] to writing anything that had substance. They just didn’t know what to do with it.”

She attributed the students’ difficulties with the more usual maps to two sources. First, her voice was missing. She thought that to make good use of maps,

**Light in the Forest**  
 THE FOREST  
 By Conrad Richter  
 ©1953

Takes place around 1765 in Delaware + Pennsylvania

rescues of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy (but he beholds the light and whence it flows/he sees it in the forest - wordsworth)

Lenni Lenape tribe  
 Lenni Lenape language  
 White people call the tribe Delaware people + the language "Delaware"  
 Yengwe: white people  
 Paxton: white people  
 Heritage: The history/roots of a person

**Tribe SON**

- raised to endure physical pain
- \* icy water
- \* hot rocks
- "Then how could he be born from his **Lenape** like a sapling from the ground and given to the alien whites who were his enemy?"
- Indian Heritage
- Age of Age
- White heritage
- Indian soil: new beliefs
- "Image of him everything he was/was with/had gone black" his mind went blank, he was in shock, he felt empty. Despair!
- blackened his face and hid in tree.
- Felt like he was now the tribes enemy: would rather die Indian than die white
- he's hiding from his fears. Does not know where he belongs - caught between two enemies
- "he struggled like a panther kit"
- wanted desperately to be free, but didn't know where to go from there
- Gifts: corn; moccasins; blanket (moccasins)
- "I will bear my disgrace like an Indian (P22)"

**Coyote**  
 (Indian father)  
 lost a son kidnapped a white child to be a replacement  
 raised, treason to be Indian  
 Patience, wait for the right time to fight back  
 Sends True son back to white people by choice.  
 disowns him as a son  
 "This is where the path must be closed between us. My place is on this side. Your place is on that."  
 "Your heart is Indian. Your blood is Indian. But the whites (confront on map 2)"

**Half Arrow Little Crow**  
 (Cousin)  
 brings hurt anger  
 pregnant wife back to whites  
 to whites death.  
 Intent: want revenge!  
 don't hurt/ result whites  
 action: child's scalp for his brother's death  
 wasn't minded, insulted whites  
 killed + scalped by white W

**Company**  
 like iron  
 runs away to the woods when T.S. is being tried.

**Lenni Lenape**  
 tribe does not murder/scalp children as they would do in other tribes  
 than H.A. shows up the anger, shame, hatred (confront on page)

**Company**  
 like iron  
 runs away to the woods when T.S. is being tried.

**Company**  
 like iron  
 runs away to the woods when T.S. is being tried.

**Company**  
 like iron  
 runs away to the woods when T.S. is being tried.

FIGURE 1: Rose's Map for The Light in the Forest

the students needed what she could provide. She explained to the beginning teachers, “I have a voice in my classroom, and you know I participate in the discussions with the kids because partly I want to put my perspective into the community because I think it is important that all teachers model their perspectives.” Delp did not worry that the power of the teacher’s voice might overshadow the voices of the students because she had so clearly structured ways for students to incorporate their own and their peers’ voices as well as hers.

Second, she was concerned that in the more usual mapping activity, the students had access only to the voices of the few students who spoke, not to the wide array of student voices in the classroom: “I realized [with traditional maps] . . . what was coming up in the classroom was just what the kids said, which meant it wasn’t even representing all the ideas that were in the class because not everyone says everything.” Delp continued, “It was representing a few kids who had the courage to talk.”

In the end, Delp observed that her resource maps not only provided a structure for note taking but also left room for individual students’ thoughts:

It’s highly structured and it has also got tremendous freedom inside of it . . . I see it as very free because all kids do it differently . . . I am very explicit about it at the beginning of the year, and then . . . I take less and less responsibility.

*Spelling and vocabulary.* The whole-group spelling and vocabulary study was the next most frequently occurring activity, but it was far less frequent than the activities related to books, maps, and logs. In all, one hour, 43 minutes, 17 seconds (9%) were coded as spelling and vocabulary. Another four hours, 59 seconds (21%) were coded as one of the words central to meaning-building and also part of the spelling and vocabulary study.

The discreet spelling and vocabulary time almost always occurred on Mondays and Fridays. At the beginning of the week, Delp gave students a list of 15 vocabulary words central to the current literature study. For example, when the students first began studying *A Lesson before Dying*, the vocabulary words were: dignity, aggravate, avert, stealth, innate, commitment, verdict, innocent, guilty, prosecutor, electrocution, parish, satchel, cynic, disgrace, and bitterness. Delp assigned one word the status of “word of the week”; in this week it was “dignity.” At the end of the week, she gave the class a vocabulary test. Once a word appeared in a vocabulary lesson, she encouraged students to use it in their logs and on their maps, and she used the words often in her classroom talk, especially the “word of the week.” Important words appeared on more than one week’s list. Delp usually asked students to write her a note on the back of their spelling tests. Topics ranged from their thoughts about the class, to something they wanted Delp to know, to something connected to the book they were reading.

*Pictorial representations and essays.* The last two activities, the pictorial and the essay, functioned as culminating activities for the literature studies. Students worked on their pictorials and their essays both in class and at home. None of the lessons we coded included a major focus on either of these activities. For both the pictorials and the essays, Delp expected students to use their logs, maps, and vocabulary as resource material.

The pictorial was their final, elaborate, visual and textual representation of what they took from the piece of literature they just studied. Delp called the pictorial “a poster representing the images in your mind.” Figure 2 provides an example of a pictorial, this one by Bizhan for *The Light in the Forest*. Bizhan liked pictorials because, in his words, “I’m a good drawer.”

The focal students reported learning a great deal from this unusual way of synthesizing and thinking critically about ideas related to the literature they had studied. As was the case for many students, Bizhan said the pictorial allowed him to think: “Like when I’m drawing I could think better.” John similarly explained, “I got to write out things and then I also drew pictures to go along with it so it made me like picture it in my mind instead of just thinking about the words like about how they looked.”

The other final whole-group project, the formal essay, always went through several drafts and response cycles, usually including a formal teacher-student conference. Delp gave students a relatively formulaic structure to follow when writing their essays, which all except Isabel reported finding extremely helpful. The difference between what Delp taught and the usual teaching of the five-paragraph theme was Delp’s focus on substance more than form. Although she was attentive to form, she spent more time talking about the importance of writing about meaningful topics and reflecting deeply on ideas than she did on the form. As was the case with the pictorial, the diverse group of focal students also said that they learned a lot from doing the formal essay, and every one of them recognized its importance to their future success in school. Most reported spending more time on their essays than on any other work that they handed in for grades in Delp’s class.

**ACTIVITIES INSIDE INDIVIDUALIZED PARTICIPANT STRUCTURES.** Across the data set, we coded an extraordinary 1,359 instances of individualization, taking up 8 hours, 36 minutes, 23 seconds, or an astounding 45% of the talk. Only 57 minutes, 25 seconds or 5% were traditional one-on-one conferences about writing or other work. Of these one-on-one conferences, Delp held only a few outside of class time, on occasions when particular students seemed especially needy; most of the one-on-one conferences occurred during class. More frequently, though, individualization occurred within the context of whole-group participant structures and did not take the form of a formal conference. Rather, these moments were informal and often quite personal. The activities of log sharing, signing, and writing

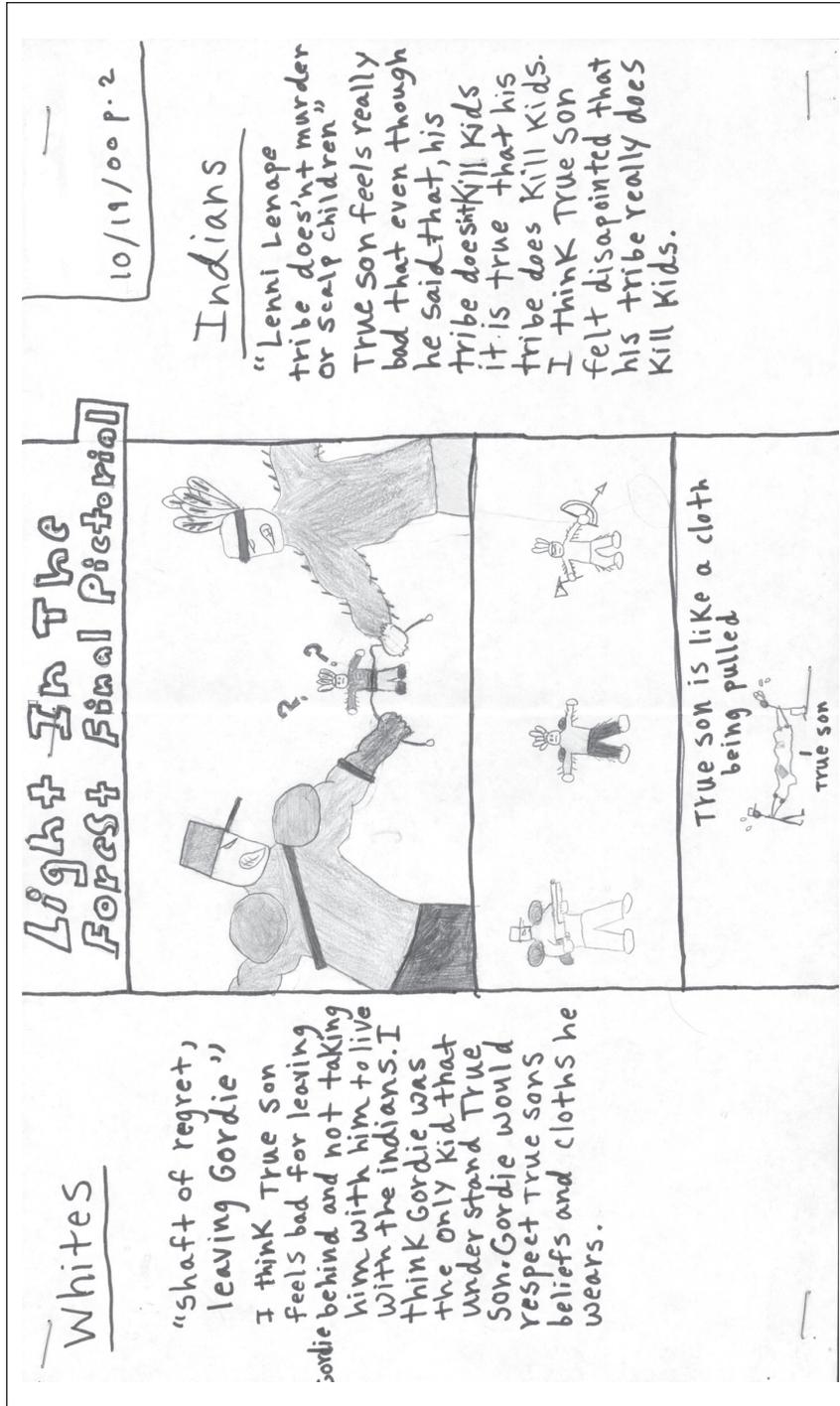


FIGURE 2: Bizhan's The Light in the Forest pictorial

specifically provided time for Delp to talk informally to individuals, sometimes about writing, and sometimes just to connect. In addition, she had frequent brief side discussions with individuals during other activities, mostly to keep students organized and on task, to praise their work, to make and maintain personal connections, and to challenge their thinking.

Although self-reports are not always credible, it seems noteworthy that six of the seven focal students, from high-scoring Rose to low-scoring Bizhan, volunteered that they very much appreciated the individual attention. Rose recalled in her interview the year after the project, “One of the greatest parts is that she, Ms. D., always found time . . . to meet with you individually . . . She really pushed you.” Similarly, Bizhan recalled, “She wasn’t like most English teachers that give you the work and didn’t explain. She explained the work really good, and helped you whenever you needed any help.” Even Jamal, who failed the class, wrote to Delp that the individual attention can “really help.” The only exception was Isabel, who said she benefited, but reported not being comfortable talking individually with Delp.

A look at individual discussions in the 20 coded lessons between Delp and the focal students showed that individualization was not evenly distributed. The numbers ranged from 23 separate conversations with Damien to 259 with Jamal. Delp talked next most frequently with Malika, holding 53 conversations with her. After Malika, she held 47 conversations with John. The numbers of conversations with the other three focal students were similar to the number with Damien.

To provide a flavor of the forms individualization took, we examine the case of Isabel, a fairly typical focal student with respect to the patterning and types of individual attention she received. Although Isabel said she did not like the individual attention, she seemed to be able to use it to learn and gave Delp no indication of her discomfort. In fact, she often initiated individual contact.

Delp and Isabel engaged in 26 conversations across the classes we coded, on the low side of normal. As happened with the other focal students, Delp’s interactions with Isabel were evenly distributed across the data collection period. None focused on behavior, which was only a focus for three of the seven focal students, and then only in significant numbers for two of them. Delp’s interactions with Isabel functioned mostly to help her get organized to do the work and to provide response to the work she produced. They also included several personal comments and greetings. Isabel volunteered to talk only once during the BML discussions we coded. Several of the interactions about getting organized occurred on a day Isabel came back to class after being out sick for a few days. Delp helped her catch up with what she missed so she could join in the activity.

During whole-class time, in the substantive conversations with Isabel about her writing, Delp praised Isabel’s accomplishments and pushed her forward. In the first of these conversations, Delp only gave praise, saying, “Your logs were terrific, kiddo, on ‘Everyday Use.’ They were really good, especially the first one about

your own heritage.” A few days later, Delp provided more specific guidance for an early log on *The Light in the Forest*, asking Isabel to be more specific and more direct in her writing. After providing this oral response, Delp asked Isabel to make a list that would help her generate the ideas she would need to provide more specificity. After talking to a few other students, Delp returned to Isabel to check the list she was producing and to give her another encouraging push. A few days later, Delp praised another of Isabel’s logs on *The Light in the Forest*: “That was a good log you wrote, Isabel. Oh my goodness. You took so much time and you showed all your beautiful thinking. That was beautiful. I was so proud of you. I wrote that note, didn’t I? It was great.” When Delp collected logs for *The Light in the Forest*, she said to Isabel, “Wow, you’re prolific.” When Isabel didn’t understand what prolific meant, Delp suggested that Isabel ask another student who knew the meaning. With this act, Delp again emphasized the value of shared knowledge and the resource role students can play in the class. In particular, Delp showed Isabel, who tended to spend lots of time helping others, that she could seek help for herself as well.

One of the longer one-on-one interactions with Isabel was an informal two-minute, 19-second conference about an essay draft for *A Lesson before Dying*. Isabel initiated the conference just after the bell rang on April 25, wanting to get feedback from Delp. During the conversation, Delp told Isabel she thought one of her sentences seemed redundant. After looking again, she realized that Isabel was attempting to make a new connection, and so she tried to help her clarify the idea she was trying to communicate and make the text better reflect her intentions. This individualized attention was meant to show Isabel how a knowledgeable reader would interpret her intended meanings.

Another frequent type of individualization never came up with Isabel, but happened as asides during the BML discussions. Delp often needed to help Jamal during these discussions. The following aside was typical:

T [TO THE WHOLE CLASS]: When you write logs in my class, you are going to take the time to let all your ideas come up inside of your head and on the paper.

And you are going to show your integrity on this piece of paper. You show who you are . . .

T [TO JAMAL]: Do you need some paper?

JAMAL: Huh?

T: Do you need some paper?

JAMAL: (uc)<sup>3</sup>

T: Thank you.

JAMAL: (uc)

T [TO THE WHOLE CLASS]: Okay and then on the top line write Logs for *Light in the Forest*.

In these cases Delp singled out individual students who needed help getting organized enough to participate. She also helped students who were not following the ideas being discussed or who were exhibiting behavior problems.

**CONCLUSIONS ON THE ACTIVITY SYSTEM.** The activity system promoted equity in several ways. First, many activities were particular to Delp's class, which meant that all of her students had to learn to participate in them, regardless of their past academic experiences and their achievement level. Second, the structures were repeated for every new literature study. Along with a new literature study came another set of logs, another map, another set of vocabulary and spelling words, another pictorial, and another essay. The repetition gave the students who were having difficulty an opportunity to begin again in a way that would be familiar. As she told the class in April, when they began their last novel, *A Lesson before Dying*, "We're starting fresh and clean now. This is all good. So everybody's on the beginning log now. Let's get this done so we're all at the same place." As the structures grew familiar, Delp was able to spend less and less time giving directions. Finally, the varied nature of the activity system left space for students to show their talents and also offered them challenges, with different students finding different activities more or less useful and more or less challenging. The regular rhythm of whole-class and individual work supported Delp's students as they learned to participate in her classroom.

### **The Meaning-Building System: Integrating Community and Curriculum**

As Rubin's (2003) research shows, it is particularly difficult and also particularly important to build a well-functioning intellectual community in a heterogeneous classroom. The activity system, especially Delp's individualization while treating the class as a whole group, provided a foundation on which she and her students built the community. Our coding of classroom vocabulary (Table 3), our examination of the modes and functions of classroom communication (Table 4), and our study of the focal students showed us that the community functioned according to a set of moral values and a community ethos in which diverse views and approaches to learning were both valuable and valued. Across time, the values and the classroom ethos were reinforced by and helped students understand and make personal connections with literary themes and characters. In this way, community and curriculum mutually reinforced each another.

**COMMUNITY VALUES: EXPLICIT MORAL FOUNDATION.** Delp began the year by getting her students to agree to live according to a common moral and ethical code. She, too, agreed to abide by the code. Our coding on Table 3 reveals how over time, members of the class grappled with how to "respect" and "trust" one another; act with "integrity," "dignity," and "compassion"; examine and "reflect" on the "perspectives" of others; "contemplate" across time; and take "responsibility" for their actions. They also considered what it meant to be "mindful" of others and



themselves, show their “vulnerability,” and be willing to engage in the inevitable “struggle” associated with learning and growth. Delp spent time helping her students understand the values connoted by these words and why such values were important to building an equitable intellectual community.

On the first day of class, Delp asked the students to think about how they saw three moral values—dignity, respect, and integrity—functioning in the community they would build. She began by explaining the meaning of these concepts to the whole class. Then she gave a log-writing assignment to get the students to define the concepts for themselves. After asking students to write dictionary definitions for the words, she asked them to connect the concepts to their vision for their classroom community:

I want you to think about what you think makes a good classroom community and how dignity, respect, and integrity can perhaps play into a fine classroom community. And then underneath this write about your ideas about a classroom community with dignity, respect, and integrity . . . So you're going to think to yourself, “Hmm respect. What does that mean?” You're going to look at that definition. “Do we need to have respect in our classroom?” Then you're going to think “dignity: honoring oneself, honoring other people. Do we need to have that in the classroom?” And you'll write about that.

To reach her range of students, Delp circumscribed the writing task without closing it off. She gave explicit and detailed directions for how to perform the task, and she modeled a thinking process.

All of the focal students used this assignment to consider how to build a classroom community, and all contributed their ideas. All could do some part of the task, some with more depth than others. Bizhan only gave dictionary definitions. Isabel, by contrast, provided a well-considered analysis of the importance of the concepts:

In a classroom which is like a community there is respect because you want to be considerate person to everyone in the “community” (classroom). Also to be respectful to the class is to relate what's happening, for example, if a classmate is speaking in front of the class be respectful and relate to that person feelings. Dignity is needed in the classroom because you need to feel dignified in your mind to succeed in a classroom and to feel you can do everything the best you can. And the last thing you need in a classroom is Integrity, because to keep the “community” together we all need to be honest to each other, because then we can trust one another too. With respect, dignity, and integrity in the classroom, “community” we can all get along.<sup>4</sup>

As a second part of this log, Delp asked the students to discuss these values with an adult they knew well: “[For] part two, I want you to ask your parents what they think about these three words or your grandparents, or an uncle. Someone



over 18.” This part of the assignment gave the students the opportunity to see the concepts from another point of view and to enlarge their academic community as the adults’ words entered the world of the classroom, some of them writing and others granting interviews which the students wrote up.

The adults would write more about the values themselves and how they wanted their children to behave in life than about the classroom. They also voiced hope concerning how their children might use their education to achieve life goals. Jamal’s mother, for example, emphasized the importance of respecting one’s elders and of using the traits of dignity and integrity to reach life goals. John’s parents responded similarly, noting, “Respect is more than good manners. It also implies a regard that recognizes the distinct worth of another person,” and that dignity “means to take yourself seriously. Many people give other people respect, yet for some reason, neglect to give it to themselves and thus short-circuit their own ability to work towards goals.” Unlike most of the adults, John’s parents mentioned the class: “If the class sees that they have common goals then they will strive together rather than alone and will be able to accomplish more towards their goals.”

Across time, Delp revisited these three values and added others. She also used the moral code to teach about her behavioral expectations. As she explained to her students on the first day of school, “[I] expect everybody to be wonderful and kind to each other and respectful.” Her expectation and assumption was that all students were committed to respectful behavior. At the same time, Delp realized that she played a critical role in reminding students to act respectfully. Indeed, in most middle-school classes, and Delp’s was no exception, student behavior must be carefully managed, and Delp told her students that she understood that there would be times when a student might forget to behave respectfully.

Delp liked a relatively quiet and orderly environment. Across the 33 classroom lessons we transcribed and coded, she dealt with issues of student behavior in 188 verbal incidents. Nonverbal incidents were not coded, but the videotapes and fieldnotes show that Delp would often pause to get the students’ attention, or she would look at a student until he or she stopped an undesirable behavior. Most of the verbal incidents were quick asides when Delp told the class or an individual student to quiet down. As was the case for most of the students, Delp rarely addressed the six original focal students about issues of behavior. Two or three students had more difficulty staying in control and most of Delp’s talk about behavior was directed at them. Jamal was one of these. Fifty-one of the 188 incidents, or 27%, were directed at Jamal, possibly because Jamal was so extraordinarily demanding of Delp’s attention.

Once Delp had introduced the community values and their concomitant behaviors and as the students were beginning to accept them, she invoked these values in teaching the literature. In January, for example, Delp discussed the con-



cept of “respect” as she introduced *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, as well as the concept of “mindfulness.” The group had been using the concept of “mindfulness” as Delp had introduced it at the start of school year: “When you’re mindful that means that you are considering your actions in relation to other people on this earth. So that means that when you do something, you are thinking about how your actions affect other people.” Delp reiterated her sense of mindfulness as being “careful” of others, being “thoughtful,” having others “in mind.” Delp again introduced these values of mindfulness and respect as she previewed the fact that the class would encounter difficult issues in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and reiterated the importance of a safe, trusting, and “respectful” community for dealing with them:

Now we’re going to begin studying *Miss Jane Pittman* as I said. And this book is about race and racism. And that is a really tough subject to read about, to think about, and to talk about, and to write about. So in order for us to be able to talk about the issues that are going to come up because we are reading this book, and to be able to share our ideas about it, we have to have a safe and trusting place to talk. We have to have a place where people can respect the ideas of other people, and where people are not afraid to say what they need to say because someone will make a noise or laugh or something. And I expect that of you all the time in my class, but I especially, especially expect this during the remainder of the school year, because we’re studying books, all of which have to do with oppression of people, pushing down on people. Society treating people in a negative way. And we can learn a great deal from this, but we have to be able to talk about it in an appropriate way, where people aren’t afraid to say what they need to say.

Throughout this relatively long teacher monologue, a look at the video shows that the students sat silently, with eyes focused on Delp, seemingly all giving her their full attention. In her teaching, the values support Delp in assuming a “critical literacy” perspective. Recognizing that the term critical literacy has many meanings, we agree with Green’s (2001) argument that such a perspective most centrally includes “repositioning students as researchers of language, respecting minority culture literacy practices, and problematising classroom and public texts” (p. 7).

Given the difficulty of the material the students would be encountering, Delp felt the need to further reinforce the classroom values. She next asked the students to write the first half of their logs on the moral value of mindfulness and then to commit to these values of trust and respect in a letter to her. She gave the following directions for this segment of the log:

I want you to write about what it means for you . . . to be mindful—a mindful person in this world. And I strongly recommend that you look at your spelling assignment from last night, and you use words like awareness and integrity, and I can’t think of the other



words, thoughtfulness, and don't just make a list. I'll be so mad at you if you go like, "Oh I need to be thoughtful and caring and whatever."

When she first assigned logs in September, she had asked for reflection and saw any use of the vocabulary words as early efforts at understanding. By the time of this log in January, she had raised her expectations for the level of reflection she expected, saying she would be "mad" if she got a list of vocabulary words that sounded like platitudes.

In the letter, besides asking students to recommit to the values of trust and respect, she also asked them to explain what "we need to do to be a great class," and to include "something about you that you want to tell me." She ended by explaining, "This is a very serious letter. Please don't not do this. Don't put this off for last homework tonight." To emphasize the importance of the assignment, she allowed the students to start writing in class.

The students wrote mostly about their positive feelings about the growing community, but two of the focal students took the opportunity to write about their struggles. Rose, one of the higher-scoring students in the class, wrote about how hard it was for her personally and for the class to behave mindfully and to meet Delp's expectations for the community:

Dear Ms. Delp,

I think mindfulness is a difficult concept. It's hard for me to push my focus out of my head toward being aware of my surroundings. To show care for everything all around is extremely difficult, but it feels good to put out the effort. I think the biggest part of being mindful is seeing things from other people's perspectives.

To have a classroom community where everyone shares their opinions depends on the trust and respect between everyone. I think it's next to impossible for an entire class to feel comfortable and trusting of one another. As a result, many thoughtful insights and reflections aren't shared, and the class misses out on that piece of knowledge.

To create a comfortable atmosphere where everyone feels safe to share their ideas, we need to work hard at seeing each other's perspectives. We need to be mindful of the effects we have on other people, and strive toward being compassionate.

I struggled so much with the autobiographical study (you already knew that), and I got really upset when you were so hard on me! But I think it helped me a lot in the long run, so thank you! I hope all is well with you, and we'll talk later!

—Rose

Rose was able to appeal to her relationship with Delp and reveal her struggles, her feelings about the community, and her feelings about Delp's responses to her work.

Jamal also appreciated and understood the foundation of their classroom community, noting that "I think trust & respect goes along with the class room community." Like Rose, Jamal positioned himself as in the midst of a struggle with Delp over her high standards. He was conscious that the struggle was about



her wanting him to learn, and he understood that it was related to Delp's caring. In his spring interview he explained, "She picks on [you] most of time if she cares about you enough."

Again in April, when Delp introduced *A Lesson before Dying*, she invoked the community values as a base for the "critical literacy" perspective underlying the teaching and learning to come:

I want to treat it [*A Lesson before Dying*] with a lot of respect and dignity . . . And I want you to just be really thoughtful and compassionate and caring. And then you're going to have to really be good to each other in here because we're going to be talking about really tough issues, about race, about being hurt and angry. And how to deal with your anger when you're in a terribly powerless position. How to be treated badly over and over and over again. And how you have to keep enduring that and getting through that to get what you want. So we've got to be really respectful to the ideas in this book and to each other.

She did not initiate further whole-group activities to get the students to understand and commit to the community values. By this point in the year, all of the focal students reported in their interviews that the community had gelled. The one exception was Damien; however, he was vague about why he did not think the class was a community and had difficulty defining the concept of community. He seemed to be uncomfortable with the interviewer and may not have understood the question. The next year, when he was in ninth grade, he remembered a close community in Ms. Delp's class. In comparing her class to his current English class, he volunteered, "In Ms. D's class, the classroom got more closer. The people could talk to each other, but now, I mean we all know each other's name and still talk to each other, but it's not the same as Ms. D's."

**COMMUNITY ETHOS: EQUALIZING OPPORTUNITY.** The community ethos seemed to be sustained because of Delp's focus on equalizing opportunity for her students. She took two actions that helped her provide equal learning opportunities. The first promoted a culture that at its center valued sharing ideas (Bakhtin, 1981). She believed that all students had good ideas to share and that students could benefit by giving and taking ideas from her and from their classmates. Even if their skills differed, all were on level ground with respect to their ideas. Second, she made visual, musical, and tactile experiences integral to the class. Although she did not use computers or the new digital media, she used a number of experiences to supplement verbal ways of learning. While still attending to the development of verbal skills, with her multimodal approach (Jewitt & Kress, 2003), she presented new challenges to some students who were strong verbally, while others who were weaker verbally were able to shine when they made use of skills that often lay dormant in school settings.

*Sharing ideas.* Delp told her students that her notions about learning through



sharing ideas were based on Bakhtin's (1981) theory that we learn by weaving the voices of others together with our own. In talking with them toward the end of September, Delp made this explicit:

At Cal they have this word they use to describe this [way of teaching], and they call it negotiation. They say that what we do is that each of us, in all the situations in our life, we come into our situation, and we're who we are, and we negotiate in that situation. There's this back and forth. Actually it's a dialogue that happens . . . You're taking the ideas that you already have, and you're listening to other ideas, and then you're negotiating your thinking. So you may take on some new thinking. Or you might even feel more strongly about what you already think. That's good. But it's hard work. And I know that.

By invoking the authority of UC Berkeley (Cal), she emphasized to her students the importance of sharing ideas to teaching and learning in school.

Delp also explained Bakhtinian theory to the beginning teachers, conveying similar concepts, especially emphasizing the struggle students must engage in:

Bakhtin talks about this wonderful struggle to take on another person's words. And you know, he says, it's not easy. And if you think about it, that's what we do all the time. That's how we learn and grow. We talk and interact, and all these voices come together, and then we've appropriated some of the voices, and then we try to put forth our own voice.

In her diverse classroom, Delp expected that all students would have interesting ideas to share and that everyone's ideas would be enriched by an ongoing struggle to incorporate the perspectives of others. To enact her theoretical stance, Delp shaped the activities in ways that required students to share their ideas. We found that the most explicit idea sharing occurred during the almost daily sharing and embellishment of logs and the BML discussions, when students recorded the ideas of others, including Delp's, on their resource maps and in their logs. Delp was conscious of the primary role of these activities. She told the new teachers that "These are the two strategies . . . that provide the most structure for the kids." Ultimately, Delp hoped that the ideas of others, including their teacher's, would find their way into the culminating projects, the pictorials and essays.

Toward the end of the year, when Delp's students were used to sharing, she capitalized on their growing willingness to share broadly with their classmates:

It is really interesting and exciting for me as your teacher, and I would imagine for you, too, you guys as students, to read each other's logs because we have been together all year. And we have read a lot of books together. And we have shared a lot of our ideas together. And you are used to writing about your ideas. And . . . I know . . . how good you have become, and better you have become, at sharing your ideas and your writing,



showing your ideas, showing your thinking . . . I want you to read as many people's logs as you can. And I am going to read as many people's logs as I can. And what we are going to do is honor each other's thinking . . . And I would like you to underline and star [the symbols Delp and the students used to indicate their pleasure with what they read] very specific things on the logs as I will be doing.

Delp's ongoing emphasis on positive response likely helped her students grow comfortable sharing their writing. She connected positive response to gathering ideas from others as she explained, "We're looking for good ideas, good thinking, excellent words. Okay, so you're going to try to find something really good to notice." This emphasis on positive response seems particularly important in heterogeneous classrooms, where it is all too easy for those with stronger skills to critique surface aspects of their peers' work, and not see what they could learn from others.

When students embellished their logs after reading each others', Delp encouraged students to consider the ideas of others and perhaps incorporate them in their writing. Besides the embellishing that occurred during the log-sharing activity, Delp explained to her students that she expected them to embellish their logs if they got ideas during BML discussions:

I always figure and expect that kids are looking at their logs all the time. So today in class, for example, if we're talking about an idea that you didn't fully explain in your log, then go back and add it. That's your job. So that these logs end up with all of your thinking, go back and embellish your logs whenever you want to. I'm not worried about crossing out. And I love it when kids draw little arrows and write more in the margin, or draw a little arrow and write embellishment here. This is good. This means you're going back to look at it and you're adding more thinking.

Once she had given instructions to the class about embellishing their logs, Delp kept track of whether individuals were following through. She stayed alert to opportunities when particular students might especially benefit by incorporating the thoughts of others. Varied students commented on the centrality to their learning of embellishing their ideas. When Jamal was asked in his end-of-the-year interview what he thought he had learned academically in Delp's class in terms of reading and writing, he explained how embellishing had helped him and his classmates learn: "Like after we do a log, she tells us to embellish. It's like what we learn from ourselves, from our logs. To go further on." Like most of the focal students, Jamal focused on learning from the act of embellishing, not from the ideas of others. Similarly, when John reviewed his writing for Delp's class a year later, he felt that he improved across the year. The interviewer asked him to be specific about "what got better," and John replied, "I started actually writing down all of my thoughts . . . instead of just writing down like the bare minimum and keeping



the rest in my head.” When the interviewer asked him “What happened to you that made you change?” John replied,

Well, basically, it was just Ms. Delp. You know, I’d write something, and she’d say “Embellish it.” . . . She’d come over, and she’d say, “Well, where’s your (uc)?” And I’d say my idea, and she’d say, “Now just put that in writing.” And I’d just write it down. But in the next log I’d do the same thing, and she’d just keep doing that until I actually started writing out all my ideas.

No doubt, the students’ ideas came from their environments, including all of the sharing of ideas that was part of Delp’s class, as well as from themselves. It makes sense that the students believed that they alone decided what to write and that they credited Delp’s role in urging them to add more. As Bakhtin (1981) notes, our thoughts consist of the ideas of others mixed with our own; we therefore naturally appropriate community ideas as ours.

Whereas the logs required students to share ideas in local and often personal conversations, the resource maps provided a structure for gathering ideas in the more public whole-class space. Delp frequently reminded students to write on their maps when she thought something important was being said in class, either by her or by one of the students. For example, early in the year, when the class was discussing *The Light in the Forest*, Delp read a sentence from the book about the main character, True Son—“Everything inside of him had gone black”—then told the students to go to their symbol box and “write down what you think this means.” Mike volunteered, “He [True Son] was full of despair.” Delp directed the rest of the students to include Mike’s idea on their maps: “Yeah, so despair is in there. Write that down. That’s a nice interpretation because it’s loss of hope. As if he had hope before, and then he lost it. That’s a beautiful interpretation.” On another occasion, Delp ended a discussion by praising the students: “All of the comments you made before were excellent.” She reminded them, “Add those on your map. Beautiful interpretations.”

The students seemed more aware that they were gathering ideas from others in this public space than they did in the more private space of their logs. In his first interview, John explained that he appropriated the ideas of others for his map: “I included most of the things from the teacher and the other students,” he noted, “but some of it I didn’t think I’d need, so I didn’t include it.” It is interesting that he took ownership of what he included but freely admitted to including some ideas from others. At the end of the year, John expressed appreciation of the idea sharing, explaining, “I like when we work on maps in class because then we walk away with more ideas than we would if we just worked on it [on] our own . . . Normally I write down other people’s comments and what she [Delp] says right on the map.” John added his criteria for including the ideas of others. He did not



include comments by classmates that he strongly agreed with because, as he said, “I know them.” Instead, he wrote what he disagreed with: “I always write it down if I disagree with it.” The following year, John again noted that he liked the maps because “everybody would contribute” adding, “This was actually one of the few pieces of work that I never really got tired of because we’d all get to share our ideas, you know, and see what other people thought and stuff.”

Bizhan, Damien, and Rose reported that they included their ideas as well as Delp’s and their classmates’. It seems particularly significant that a student at the top of the class gained so much from others. Rose explained,

I like to have different perspectives and opinions on my map. It’s good you know. It helps me to see things in different ways and I guess it’s that I put down what makes me think the most and the hardest . . . I definitely don’t write down everything or a lot of it even. But sometimes someone says something, and I’ll be like, “Wow” [laughs].

By the end of a year of sharing ideas, this very diverse group of focal students all felt that they had benefited. As early as November, Bizhan said that he appreciated the help he received from his peers and further remarked, “No one’s really afraid of anybody to share their logs with.” In his May interview, high-scoring John explained that others in the class “really help me, like, push ideas.” He attributed the community spirit to the fact that “we all contribute our ideas and everybody walks away with more ideas.” By the end of the year, Isabel called the class a community because “we work together and we help each other when we need help. And we can talk to each other without really having to worry about what someone might say.” Isabel explained that she got many ideas when she was helping others. Jamal, too, said he felt comfortable sharing his writing, noting that “I’ll share with everybody.”

*Multimodal Learning.* Delp’s multimodal approach, especially her integration of drawing, music, dance, and other kinesthetic activities, further affected her students’ appreciation of one another’s abilities and affected their opportunities to learn. Besides providing support for students who had difficulty using their talents in traditional classrooms, Delp’s approach challenged students who found few challenges in more traditional classrooms.

Delp promoted a multimodal approach because she found that students could deepen their thinking by broadening their ways of communicating their thoughts. She further believed that students learned in different ways and thought it important to provide opportunities for visual, musical, and kinesthetic ways of learning as well as verbal ways. In one of her main activities, the pictorial, visual representation of student thinking was central. Delp first described pictorials to her students in the fall at the end of their study of *The Light in the Forest*:



A pictorial representation is your thinking about a text. And because it's your thinking, it will look just like you. Every pictorial in this class will be very different. They're all different because each of you thinks differently about this text.

Delp then showed the class three examples to illustrate what she meant when she said the pictorials would vary:

These three are showing the same dance performance from three different perspectives. And even from afar you can see that this person has done a light version. This [next one] looks so powerful with the arms out. And then this one sort of looks like balance. So just visually you can see that these three people think about the same thing in a different way.

Delp here was teaching a kind of visual literacy, connecting visual representation to thought and emotion, while simultaneously valuing multiple perspectives and interpretations.

After showing how pictorials can portray different perspectives, Delp explained how the students might decide on a focus for their own pictorials. She was especially concerned about reassuring students who were intimidated by drawing. She presented two equally strong models of past pictorials on *The Light in the Forest*, one by a student who had difficulty drawing and another by one who drew well. She called the first model "one of my all time favorite pictorials." She quoted a conversation she had with the first student, which revealed the student's anxiety about creating a visual representation and which she hoped would connect with some of her current students' anxieties:

This was an eighth-grade student who just flipped out. [She said], "There's no way I know how to do a pictorial. I don't know how to draw. And I can't draw and I'm not going to do it" . . . I said, "Well yeah, you are going to do it. You just have to figure out what this book means to you. And then just use words to show your ideas." Cause she was just so upset that it was a pictorial. She thought that [doing a pictorial] meant [only] art, you know.

Delp went on to explain how this student solved her problem, showing that even reluctant artists could perform this task well. Delp then offered a model from a student who produced what she called a "remarkable drawing." Finally, she allocated class time for students to begin working on their pictorials so that she could help them with their drafts.

In his interview after the project year, Damien recalled that it was easier for him to do the pictorials than the essays. He explained to the interviewer that he liked to draw and that he felt some relief because "I didn't really have to write it like the essay." He said that he usually came up with an idea for his pictorial before



he came up with an idea for his essay. Normally high-achieving John was not a strong artist but reported that he liked the way the pictorials pushed his thinking:

I got to write out things and then I also drew pictures to go along with it so it made me like picture it in my mind instead of just thinking about the words, like how they looked . . . You know you choose words, but then to go along with the words I have to think about pictures that represented and really like showed my thoughts about it.

Approximately a year later, when John was in high school, he recalled how much the pictorials had challenged his thinking:

I kind of found the pictorial interesting because you'd write some of the things and have to find a way to illustrate your words in pictures, and that's more interesting than just writing an essay . . . It made you have to visualize what you were writing.

John later said that the pictorials forced him to struggle to portray his meaning more than the essays did, and they made him think in new ways.

The Alvin Ailey dance project presented Delp's students with yet another way to think and learn. It allowed Delp to help her students experience metaphorical thinking kinesthetically, thereby supplementing their visual and verbal experiences. The metaphor of "dignity in the face of oppression" was central both to a set of dances the Ailey company was performing and to *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, which the students were reading.

The dance project was part of a formal school collaboration sponsored by the dance company. Across a week's time in March, a company dancer visited Delp's class. She and Delp first talked to the students about how the metaphors were part of both literature and dance. Then the dancer spent two class periods teaching Delp's students parts of the dances. At the end of the week, Delp's class attended a public performance that was part of a regular concert series on the Berkeley campus.

During her interview the year after Delp's class, Rose voluntarily told how transformative this activity had been for her, although she did not say why:

One thing that I forgot to talk about was the Alvin Ailey dance thing that we did which I will never forget. The dancing and going to see the show. It was such an amazing experience, and it was just like an English class turned into this monumental experience in my life.

John, too, found the dance experience important because it was so different. Bizhan, however, was less enthusiastic: "We invited a famous dancer or something, and we had to practice dancing, very early in the morning." When asked what the experience was like, he replied, "I didn't really like it. It was kind of embarrassing." He continued, though, to tell what he had liked: "But the music I didn't mind listening to. And we went to a music concert. I think it was a performance, and they



were dancing. We saw the dance that we practiced.” Different students responded differently to different aspects of the activity; it was unusual for students and fortunately had enough dimensionality to allow space for a range of reactions and ways of connecting.

In addition to these formal activities, Delp infused graphic markers, art, gesture, and music into many of the daily activities in her class. She used these non-verbal modes of communication to focus the students’ attention and to help them remember and better understand something new.

A typical use of a graphic marker occurred when she gave the class spelling and vocabulary lists and asked them to underline or box or circle repeated letters (e.g., the two “a’s” in *betrayal*) or difficult sequences (e.g., “ei” in *deceive*), to help them remember spellings or see morphemes (e.g., “con” in *condone*, “hor” in *abhorrence*) to show them affixes and roots. To keep the class alert, she sometimes asked them to draw a picture next to a word to help them remember its meaning. For example, in an early vocabulary lesson she asked the students to “write the word ‘reflection’ and then draw a little symbol for that. It could be a mirror, it could be a piece of paper with words on it. Write down what you think reflection means.” She sometimes even gave time for free drawing. Once, after they finished writing a note to her on the backs of their spelling tests, she suggested, “When you are done with that, you can doodle. Draw me a picture. Tell me how you are doing.”

At the end of the year, when the class was studying *A Lesson before Dying*, Delp integrated the verbal and the artistic during spelling and vocabulary to emphasize the gravity of the themes and the vocabulary they were learning. She called particular attention to the word “generator”:

Now look at the word “generator.” I don’t want you to underline it. I just want you to draw a little machine next to it. He [Gaines] is going to talk about the generator for the electric chair. Don’t underline the word. And then he is also going to talk about the executioner and that is the “er” at the end of this word means “one who.” So write that. Circle the “er” and write “one who.”

By this point, the direction not to underline was marked and indicated the special status of these words; the classroom community understood the gravity of this direction. She followed this explanation with a typical IRE structure, asking the class “So what is an executioner?” The group responded chorally, “One who executes”; and Delp gave her evaluation, “That is correct.” Along with the absence of the routine of underlining, reverting to this traditional structure to say together what they all knew seemed further to emphasize the significance and horror of the events in the book and the words they were learning.

Delp also used drawing to help her students understand and make a personal connection to the concepts in the logs, as she did when she introduced the log on



“mindfulness.” To help them understand the meaning of “mindfulness,” she first gave an everyday example of the importance of paying attention to the effects of one’s actions on others. She explained that one was mindful if one was aware of others when walking with a backpack. She then told a story about a tree and a star: “Every time a tree is cut down in the forest, a star falls from heaven.” She meant for this story to become a symbol of mindfulness, of the consequences of one action on another. Delp suggested that the students draw a tree and star in their logs. She also had pictures of trees and stars drawn by students in past years on the walls in the classroom, and she had drawn a picture of a tree and star on the board. The artifacts in the classroom as well as the study of the story connect this class to Delp’s past classes in a continual line. To further reinforce the concept of mindfulness from another angle, she invited students to “Please draw a picture of yourself being mindful.”

When she assigned the first log for *The Light in the Forest*, she remarked that “You might want to draw a little forest up here tonight if you are happy with that idea. You don’t have to now.” During class discussion the next day, the class was talking about a tree that functioned as a symbol in the book, and Delp asked the students to draw a picture of a tree and roots on their maps. For homework, she asked them in their logs to draw a picture of the tree (including its roots) at age four and again at age 15, then to write an interpretation “of what you think the author means by True Son [who had been raised by Indians and then at age 15 was returned to his White family] being torn from the ground like a sapling.” The next day in class, she asked them to draw another version of the tree, with notes, on their maps.

Sometimes the drawings were not literal but imaginary. When she introduced the concept of logs, Delp described log writing as “a painting you do with words.” She often got students to visualize scenes as she read, with phrases such as “make a little drawing inside your head,” and “I want you to visualize this. I want you to have this picture in your head.”

Delp also used gesture and visual symbols. As an example of a gesture, she asked students to raise a baby finger to commit publicly and to show agreement with a particular way of being in her classroom. The fact that the students always responded to one another’s writing with stars and underlining to provide praise and to indicate their pleasure offers another example of a visual symbols. They also used other symbols; for instance, to remember to save paper, they wrote the abbreviation STWOBS (Save Trees Write On Both Sides) and drew little trees next to their names on every paper they handed in. Delp sometimes fostered creativity and personal connections within these routines. When she introduced this one, she suggested, “You might want to develop your own little symbol for this [idea of saving paper].” When they wrote their names on their papers, Delp often gave them special instructions (for instance, “Write your favorite color by your first name, and double-underline your last name”).

Although drawing and symbol-making dominated the classroom, music entered as well. Delp sometimes played music to create a contemplative mood while students wrote and shared logs. The music was usually tied thematically to their reading and writing. When students first studied *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, for example, she played Billie Holiday's version of "Strange Fruit" while students read over the lyrics, which they later interpreted in their logs.

**CONCLUSIONS ON INTEGRATING COMMUNITY AND CURRICULUM.** The community-building process created an "in group" that included all the members of Delp's class. They had their own moral code, they had common ways of sharing and appreciating the ideas of others, and they shared a common set of literary and artistic practices. They knew the meaning of STWOBS, they shared stories such as the one about the tree and the star, they made stars and underlined phrases of one another's work to indicate their appreciation of another's ideas, and they read books, danced, and shared music together. In the midst of all this commonality, Delp encouraged the students to be themselves, to take their own routes to learning, to develop their own stories and their own pictures and their own symbols, to appreciate diversity. They learned that by freely participating in the community, they could make it a stronger place.

In interviews a year after the study, two of the focal students used the image of a "family" when recalling Delp's class and the community within it. Isabel remembered "how much fun we had and how we joke like one big family." Bizhan made a similar remark: "The way she taught made our class seem almost like a family in a way." These students particularly appreciated the closeness of the "family" and also understood the special obligations to one another that "family" implies.

### **The Meaning-Building System: Student Development across Time**

As Delp worked with her students to create an academic environment that would support the developmental progress of her diverse group of students, she offered a program of study consistent with her theoretical assumptions about learning and development. Delp's understanding of the importance of "contemplation across time," one of the coded concepts in the meaning-building system (see Table 3), was particularly resonant with both Vygotskian and Bakhtinian ideas. Her strong belief that learning occurs through repeated engagement with an idea across time led her to plan and enact a curriculum in which carefully selected critical ideas could cycle across the year. Students worked with the same concepts over and over, in different contexts, in different ways, and at different points in the year. Delp was patient, and through past experience knew that she could expect that students would learn over time. In a talk for the National Council of Teachers of English (2003), Kristin Land, one of the beginning teachers, spoke eloquently about the importance of this concept for her and her students. It allowed her to have more faith in her students' abilities and gave her permission to be patient with the pace of their learning. It further freed her of much worry and helped her to accept that, as a teacher, she, too,



would learn across time, that she did not have to know everything at the start.

In the coming sections, we show first how the concept of “contemplation across time” led Delp to consider curriculum as a “year-long journey,” not as a set of relatively discrete instructional units. Then we examine how two of Delp’s students “latched on” to her curriculum. We look at two focal students who present the most complex stories, clearly suggesting the challenges every teacher faces and emphasizing the importance of planning for and thinking about teaching and learning by offering a multitude of opportunities to “latch on” across a greatly expanded sense of time.

#### **CONTEMPLATION ACROSS TIME: A YEAR-LONG JOURNEY**

Named long ago, when I first considered the notion of teaching thematically across the year—rather than episodically by units . . . I think of my teaching and my students’ learning as a year-long journey—a year-long study of literature and writing (Delp, in progress).

Delp advised the beginning teachers, noting “If you can see time being horizontal, that you have from September until June . . . the question is [for each activity], ‘What am I asking my students to do, and why?’” She emphasized that the year must be a coherent whole, with the different literary studies connected to one another across time.

Delp called the main ideas that held the year together the “grand themes.” She brought them up often, hoping that students would grapple with them in more and more complex ways with each encounter. Delp, who usually told her students why she did what she did, explained on the first day of class how she expected students to learn:

You can be exposed to something once, and then you have a little bit of understanding about it. And then if you’re exposed to it a second time maybe, oh my goodness, you understand a little better or deeper. And so forth. So we’re going to be doing a lot of work where I’m going to ask you guys to think, and to think about it again. And then I’m going to ask you like three weeks later, “So what do you think about that?”

Not surprisingly, one of the grand themes in Delp’s class was “contemplation,” and one of the classroom mantras was “contemplation over time.” She explained to the beginning teachers why contemplation over time was a foundation for her year-long planning and for her diverse students’ learning:

One of the things that I have up on the board. It says, “Contemplation.” It’s in big letters across the top of the board. It says, “Contemplation over time, to ponder and to think about.” And I tell that to the kids the very first day, that what their job is, in my classroom, is to think about things . . . I want them to just think about ideas and that that’s a really good way to spend your time: to just be thinking about ideas. And it may be that



today you think a certain way, and then by next Thursday because you've read this little short story and we've had this conversation, you may shift your thinking a little bit. And I want you to be—I tell the kids—I want them to be aware of these little shifts that go on in their thinking, and to notice them.

Importantly, the themes had to be “grand” and not trivial. Delp agreed with Bruner (1960) that “any subject can be taught to any child in some honest form,” and, therefore, “a curriculum ought to be built around the great issues, principles, and values that a society deems worthy of the continual concern of its members” (p. 52). Bruner gives an example of teaching a great issue and value through literature, “an awareness of the meaning of human tragedy and a sense of compassion for it” (p. 53). He argues that it is desirable to teach tragic literature even to very young children. Delp, too, placed “great issues, principles, and values” at the core of the curriculum. It is noteworthy that in Delp’s case, many of these “grand themes” overlapped with the values she promoted in her classroom community. The community concepts of dignity, integrity, compassion, vulnerability, trust, and respect also were central themes in the literature the students read. Delp additionally introduced literary concepts—symbols and grand ideas or themes—and metacognitive strategies such as contemplate, reflect, and embellish. Delp (1999) discusses these different kinds of “vocabulary” that permeate her classroom. She explained to the group of new teachers, “What happens in a classroom is that we construct over time the language of meaning. We attribute words to certain ideas. We share those words.”

As part of her notion of contemplation across time, Delp provided multiple entry points for her students and expected different ones to understand different aspects of the meaning of the grand themes at different times. She described for the new teachers how she saw her classroom of diverse students:

The main thing in my mind is that I trust that everybody is going to participate in my class, everybody is going to have some ideas and think about what’s going on in my class, and everybody is going to do the work in my class. And it’s my job to figure out how to make that all happen. You know, on a daily basis, to keep kids up, to offer things. I teach . . . really excellent literature to the kids. High level, high texts that kids have to really think about . . . I constantly try to figure out ways to hold up everybody. And to believe that everybody can engage in the material in his or her own individual way.

**LATCHING ON.** Given the varied activities and ways of learning in Delp’s class and given Delp’s unrelenting work with individuals over time, most of her students found ways to latch on to multiple parts of her curriculum at their appropriate levels. And they learned and grew across time. Instead of examining those focal students who happily and quickly took advantage of the many opportunities Delp offered, in this section, we examine how the two most puzzling focal students,

Isabel and Jamal, did and did not latch on. These students show the struggles teachers face in helping the most difficult students; they show the decisions and fine curricular adjustments that are part of the process of working to meet such students' needs; and they show the specific benefits for students when teachers can think about growth across more extensive spans of time.

Just as Isabel reported being uncomfortable with individualization, she also rejected many other aspects of Delp's curriculum—and yet with Delp's support, Isabel did find ways to progress. Jamal, on the other hand, liked most of the activities, but did not progress enough to pass the class. Although Delp consistently tried to help him, she often could not reach him. Her long view of the pace of growth and her ability to see what progress he made kept her from giving up on him. Isabel and Jamal provide insight into the complexity of getting students to latch on at an appropriate level. We explore Isabel's case in more detail than Jamal's because we have more data on her. She also was a more typical student in that she found ways to learn and grow, although unlike most of the others, she thought she did not change across time, especially as a writer.

Isabel characterized herself as an average student, right in the middle. While we originally selected Isabel as a focal student because of her relatively average scores on standardized tests and relatively average past performance, by most measures she was not an average reader or writer in Delp's class. Isabel's initial in-class writing received significantly higher scores than the average for Delp's students (7, compared with the class average of 5), as did her final in-class writing (10, compared with the class average of 6.66). She also showed more gain on this writing measure than most of Delp's students (a 3-point gain, compared with the class average gain of 1.66). Her final grade for the class was B+, which according to Delp's grading system meant "well above average."

Isabel thought she could have done better if she had chosen to spend more time on her work and paid more attention. We too observed that Isabel's level of effort was not consistently strong. She put less effort than most into the daily work that was meant to provide resource material for the major projects, and her level of effort for daily work decreased across the year. Her average number of words across five randomly selected logs on the last novel, *A Lesson before Dying*, showed that she wrote 623 words compared with the focal student average of 718. She also wrote less than at the start of the year when her average across five randomly selected logs was 904 words, compared to the focal student average of 482 words. Delp gave her a C+ on her last set of logs and wrote, "Isabel—Your logs seem hurried! I wish you would write more of your ideas!" Isabel commented on the importance of this intervention to her learning and remembered it a year later.

Isabel only seemed willing to do the work that she found useful. She put in greater-than-average effort on the essays and pictorials, the major projects. For example, she wrote significantly longer essays than her peers for both *The Light in*



*the Forest* (623 words, compared with the focal student average of 482 words) and *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (903 words, compared with the focal student average of 519 words). In fact, her winter essay on *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* was the longest of any of the essays produced by any of the focal students. Isabel especially liked the pictorial, observing, "I have to choose subjects to do a pictorial on. I sort of get more involved with that." She said she learned more from doing pictorials than from any other activity. Her grades on the pictorials were generally in the B/B+ range.

Isabel was the only student to whom we talked who voiced negative feelings about multiple aspects of Delp's class. She characterized most of the activities as having been relatively useless to her as a learner. She said the spelling and vocabulary study was "not that great"; the books the class studied were not very interesting; the individual attention Delp gave her was "a little annoying"; the BML discussions were "just talking, talking. I don't really do anything. You just sit down and listen to her [Delp] talk"; the maps seemed helpful at first, but as time went on they were not very useful because "I don't look back at them." Isabel claimed to refer only to the book when she wrote her essays or did her pictorial. All in all, Isabel found the set of activities "boring . . . because I already know the whole thing."

Nevertheless, Isabel found ways to learn in Delp's class. She relied on the fact that the class was a well-functioning community and latched on to those parts of the curriculum that allowed her to participate in teaching-learning interactions with her peers. She depended on those interactions to support her learning. About her peers, Isabel said,

We work together, and we help each other when we need help. And we can talk to each other without really having to worry about what someone might say . . . So you don't have to be afraid of asking any questions because we [are] free to say whatever feelings we have.

Isabel characterized her role in the classroom as someone who listened to other students and helped them. When asked if she thought students came to her more often than to others, she said she thought they did. We observed Isabel over and over playing the role of teacher to her peers. She even liked to sit in the teacher chair behind Delp's desk and work there informally with peers. Delp was good-humored about having Isabel take her seat and noticed that Isabel was taking on this teacherly role. Not wanting Isabel to help others at the expense of her own learning, Delp did express concern to Isabel that other students could be taking advantage of her willingness to help. Isabel told the interviewer that one day Delp told her that she did not have to say yes when others asked for help, that she could use doing her own work as an excuse. Isabel reported that Delp said, "Imagine there's always someone at your desk asking for help, and you don't always have to

help them because you're doing your work.” Isabel countered that helping others actually helped her, giving a specific example of a conversation with a fellow student, Sharmaine, about Sharmaine's log:

S [ISABEL]: While I'm helping them, I'm writing too because I get ideas from what I'm saying.

...

Like Sharmaine, she came up to me and she asked about like last week's log and I told her it was (uc)

I [INTERVIEWER]: (uc)

S: The one about Vivian and Grant.

I: Oh, the fight.

S: Yes.

I: Um hmm.

S: And I told her that Vivian, she knew that Grant could have kept all that anger inside, and he could've just walked out, but all he wanted to do was just start a fight. And then I told her that Vivian didn't really want to say anything because she might say something bad. And I didn't think about that so I wrote it in my log.

I: After you talked to her, Sharmaine, about it?

S: Um hmm.

Consistent with her preference for interactions with peers, Isabel claimed that she learned more from the BML discussions than individual conferences with Delp “because I get other perspective on things and different students (uc) are useful.” Indeed, the only thing she liked about whole-class discussions was getting ideas from her peers.

Perhaps what made it possible for Isabel to find productive learning spaces was the fact that she respected Delp as a teacher. Isabel knew Delp had her best interest at heart even though Isabel had difficulty making use of the elaborate support structures Delp provided. “When I don't understand something, she explains it,” Isabel remarked with appreciation. She knew that Delp wanted the class to behave respectfully and “to work together and (uc) other people's perspective.” Isabel felt that by and large the class, herself included, acted respectfully.

Had Isabel taken full advantage of Delp's instruction, she might have shown even more progress. It is possible that Isabel would have been happier and may have learned more in a classroom that provided more space for group work. In spite of the mismatch between Isabel's preferred ways of learning and a number of the instructional opportunities in Delp's class, Isabel was resourceful and created her own unofficial structures, which Delp allowed Isabel to use. When Delp knew that Isabel was working within alternative spaces, she allowed Isabel to con-



tinue in spite of her reservations about whether Isabel was benefiting as fully as she might. Although more of the structures Delp created were useful to other students in the class, Isabel still was able to find classroom spaces where she could latch on and learn.

Jamal presents a different story entirely. Unlike Isabel, Jamal liked the activities Delp offered. He particularly appreciated the individual attention, explaining to the interviewer that it meant that Delp cared about him. Jamal also liked the books Delp chose because “they told me about my heritage and how my people are being treated, like, a long time ago.”

Jamal ultimately failed Delp’s class. Yet Delp remained confident that he would find his way “over time” and that at some point in the future the strategies and skills she taught him would prove useful. This “long view” proved critical to Delp’s goals as she kept working with Jamal, and the fact that Jamal kept trying inspired her to continue to devote high levels of energy to him all year. Jamal wanted to succeed in Delp’s class and Delp wanted him to succeed, until the last day of the year and beyond.

Jamal and Delp had somewhat different views of why he was failing and what he needed to do to succeed. Jamal thought he was failing because he could not handle the workload. The only solution from his point of view would have been a decreased load that he could have managed. From what we saw, he seemed to lack confidence in himself and in being able to do the amount of work that Delp required. He felt overwhelmed and did not think any amount of help that Delp could provide would be enough to help him meet her expectations.

Delp thought Jamal was failing because he was not organized and had difficulty focusing his attention on the work for extended periods of time. She felt confident that she could help him learn organizational and study skills that would help him and that once he learned these skills, he would have more success. She tried other hypotheses in some one-on-one conversations, testing to see if he understood the reading and the class discussions and if he knew how to structure his writing. After assuring herself that he did understand, she stuck to her original hypothesis. She never accepted Jamal’s belief that the workload was more than he could handle.

In the end, although Delp thought that Jamal learned a great deal, he did not hand in a sufficient amount of work to pass. A tour of Delp’s grade book reveals that Jamal failed every grading period and showed a very irregular pattern of work completed, a pattern he established at the start of the year and was not able to change. During the first grading period he did not get a grade for his first set of logs or for his pictorial representation for *The Light in the Forest*, and he missed and never made up two out of seven spelling tests. He completed his essay and a number of logs. As did most of Delp’s students, he received As on the spelling tests he did take, but his grades on larger projects were in the C or D range. The result

was an F for the first semester. And so it followed every grading period thereafter. It is important to note that it was rare for any student in Delp's class not to complete a large project.

Delp frequently asked students to write her notes about how they were progressing. Although Jamal gave many clues earlier, not until April did he clearly articulate his difficulties keeping up with the work. In his April note he explicitly pleaded for help:

Dear Ms. Delp

How are you doing? Im alright you know. I really want to pass your class but I don't know how. Because I get so much work for little Me and It is a burden and I don't know how to handle It all. So If you have some advice for me please come and talk to Me because It will really help and Make a difference.

Sincerely

Jamal

This note of desperation came after Delp confronted Jamal about a paper he handed in on *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* that his tutor had written for him; Delp blamed the tutor more than Jamal, but the incident made Jamal realize that he would have to do the work himself, and he did not feel that he could. When Delp returned Jamal's note, she wrote asking him to come and talk to her during fourth period so that she could help him. Delp recalls that he agreed to come on a daily basis. He attended for about two weeks during which time she helped him generate notes for his logs and with organization of his work. Besides Jamal, five or six other students also came for an informal study hall with her at the same time, and they helped him as well. He read their logs, and they talked to him about the book and also prodded him to keep working. Although she encouraged Jamal to continue, he stopped coming. Delp thinks there could have been two reasons. First, the other students in the study hall were high achievers, and although they were inclusive of Jamal, he may have felt like an outsider. Also, Jamal was pursuing an Independent Work Experience opportunity during fourth period for one of the vice principals. The position was very social and held high status with students. The job involved mostly delivering notes to teachers. It provided easier ways for Jamal to be successful than the academic work did.

In his spring interview, Jamal reiterated that he was overwhelmed by the workload. He complained to the interviewer, "Even on the weekends, she gives us homework. We always have big projects, pictorials and essays . . . a lot of stuff . . . She gives at least three or four assignments a night." Compared with past English classes, he said, "I probably have to work twice as hard in this class." In addition, he remarked that he understood only 50% of the assignments.



Delp, meanwhile, had been working to help Jamal get organized and to focus on his work for the entire year. She kept an almost constant eye on him and helped him as he seemed to need it, which was frequent. To provide a sense of what happened across the year, we tell the story of Delp's attempts to help Jamal complete his first set of logs; her efforts at the start of the year were similar to those outside of class in April. One day in September, Delp saw that Jamal had come to class without an early log on *The Light in the Forest*. She asked him privately, "So Jamal, do you have the log from last night?" When he said he did not have it, she said, "Well, let's start it now, okay?" She provided substantive help, asking him questions about the novel to make sure he understood what was happening and had something to say. She also helped him create a structure for what he would write in his log. Jamal wrote this log by the next day, and Delp praised him and helped him organize his logs and other papers. Unfortunately, when it was time for Jamal to turn in his collection of logs on *The Light in the Forest*, he had only completed 25% of them. Delp called him to her desk to explain the consequences and give him another chance: "I'm not going to give you a grade on these because it's not [worth] a grade. You can't just turn in one fourth, Jamal. I hope you have them in your binder and you'll try to turn them in to me late." Jamal replied "Alright." A few minutes later, Delp told Jamal "Write yourself a note about how you're going to deal with your work." The next day Delp asked Jamal again about his work and why he wasn't completing it. Jamal never handed in this set of logs.

On another day when he seemed depressed about his situation and seemed to stop trying, Delp called him to her desk after class. She feared that he would give up. She asked him why he was "giving up so easily." He said he did not know, and then when he did not say anything more, Delp voiced her fears:

I think you haven't been doing the reading, and you are so behind now that you're so worried that you don't know what is going on because you haven't been keeping up that you're just going to give up, because it's too hard.

Jamal replied, "I am keeping up" and then claimed that he was only a little behind. He never admitted to her that any of the work was too hard for him. Relieved, Delp suggested, "Why don't you get all your logs so I can see where you are and we can get you organized?" She then reiterated her request:

**T:** You can't give up. Look at me. You can't give up . . . You know when you give up like that, it makes you seem like you don't care about yourself. And I know you do. I know you do, don't you? Let me see your cute face, let me see your face. Don't you care . . .

**J:** Umm, hmm.

**T:** Go get your logs.

These same sorts of interactions continued across the year.

In spite of his difficulties, Jamal credited Delp with helping him organize his materials and said that she “tries to make me feel good.” He concluded, “She’s a real nice person.”

Although no other student in Delp’s class raised this issue, Jamal’s case presents a dilemma that teachers of heterogeneous classes must face. In spite of her extraordinary amount of individual work with him, Jamal did not pass the class. Did his difficulties warrant an adjustment of the workload? When might it be appropriate to adjust the workload for students with particular difficulties? When does making such adjustments provide a diminished opportunity to learn? Given the fact that he could read at grade level and seemed capable, did Jamal’s lack of confidence, which Delp was unable to change, keep him from passing? Or, as Jamal thought, did the workload defeat him? What is clear is that early on both knew that Jamal was in trouble. Both also spent the year trying to get him on track, and Jamal took advantage of many of the opportunities Delp provided. We would guess that more often than not, students can do more than teachers think they can. But every now and then, a Jamal surfaces and raises concerns about what amount of work is appropriate. There are no right answers. Teachers can only use their best judgment at the time and try to learn from what transpires. Only one other student besides Jamal did not pass Delp’s class, and that student had failed eighth-grade English twice before. He did not put in the kind of effort that Jamal did.

**CONCLUSIONS ON STUDENT DEVELOPMENT ACROSS TIME.** A year-long curriculum rather than the common division of separate units provided opportunities for the recycling of many ideas across time in Delp’s class and a growing complexity of thinking and depth of understanding on the part of her students. The stories of how Isabel and Jamal did and did not latch on to the curriculum show the importance of flexibility. They further show the importance of taking a long view of student learning.

## Discussion

By most measures, Delp and the three beginning teachers in this study did an excellent job of meeting the needs of their students in their heterogeneous classes. The quantitative results show that not only did their students make gains in their in-class writing samples, but they did so in an equitable way. Students at all levels had an equal chance of moving forward, as did males and females and students from different ethnic groups.

Delp achieved most of her goals with most of her students. Across her class of 30, three had significant difficulty; two failed (one of these was the added focal



student, Jamal), and one dropped the class. All those who had difficulty would have been in the lowest track had classes been tracked, two because of behavior problems and the other because of previous and ongoing academic difficulties. Jamal's troubled academic past had always been related more to his problems paying attention than to his ability to do the work. The data show that Delp did not ever give up on Jamal; rather, she continued to devote significant amounts of individual attention to him, trying to help him until the end of the year. Significantly, the other seven students who would have been in low-tracked classes did well in Delp's class, and the 14 students who would have been in the higher tracks grew significantly as well. It is also the case that even those students who failed the class did a great deal of work and improved their skills.

In interviews the following year, Delp's focal students stated that her class was their most challenging, including the two highest-scoring students. John explained that Delp expected a lot from him and that this class was tougher than most of his classes. Rose found Delp's class her most challenging. She reported that it was the class in which she worked the hardest and learned the most. Rose, who wrote in her October letter that she was upset by how hard Delp was on her, by November told the interviewer, "I like her to be critical and just like rip up all my work so that it can get to be the best that it can be." At the end of the year, Rose directly addressed her difficulties around being criticized and how, with Delp's help "not to take it so personally," she resolved the problem. In the end, Rose explained, "I'm learning something more to make me better."

Accompanying their sense of being challenged was an increase in social comfort. Rose struggled with her insecurity about talking during whole-class discussions, saying at the start that "I feel like someone else has already said it . . . like everyone's already thinking that" and also that she feared being contradicted ("maybe my opinion is different from everybody else's and I don't like to be contradicted"). At the end of the year, Rose reported change: "In the beginning of the year I was really shy about raising my hand, and I think I'm a lot more comfortable with that now. I think sharing our logs with each other and giving each other feedback brought us together a lot."

It is worth noting that Delp in many ways offered an explicit social-justice pedagogy, and as part of that, her classroom became a socially just space. Although she did not characterize her pedagogy as "critical," she offered a moral code that supported the classroom community and that fostered a deep understanding of such values as fairness and integrity, respect and dignity.

In the end, this study of Delp's classroom challenges previous findings about teaching and learning in untracked English classes. It also suggests new ways of connecting theory and practice as well as new ways of thinking about the theories themselves.

### ***Challenges to Previous Findings about Teaching and Learning in Untracked English Classes***

Delp's way of teaching, using whole-class participant structures in combination with individual attention, offers an alternative to the orthodoxy of using small groups for teaching heterogeneous classes. In Delp's class, small-group interactions occurred informally. In the beginning, students sat near others who were like them and generally shared their work with those students. These were not the heterogeneous groups recommended by Slavin and Cohen and colleagues, but, rather, pairs or small clusters of students. At first, the groups consisted of students who felt most comfortable together, but over time, students included more diverse others. Focal students, a year later, all said they would have been comfortable having anyone in the class read their writing.

One idea behind de-tracking is to disrupt traditionally comfortable patterns of interaction. Delp's gradual building of a culture of inclusion illustrates what is involved in disrupting such patterns. She shows that disruption takes time to foster and requires patience and understanding on the part of the teacher. At first, her students shared with others outside their immediate circles of comfort only with Delp's urging, but later they did so on their own. What was critical to the functioning of the activity system in Delp's class was the students' growing respect for diverse ideas and their development of a genuine desire to work with students outside their usual circles.

Delp's concentration on whole-class participant structures has led us to question how best to frame recommendations from research. Given the fact that researchers like Slavin and Cohen have also demonstrated gains using different participant structures, we would not argue that Delp's whole-class approach was a critical variable, any more than we believe cooperative learning groups are critical. We have come to believe that many researchers make recommendations for practice that are at too specific a level. It seems possible for teachers to be equally skilled, but to prefer different participation and activity structures (see Freedman [with Greenleaf & Sperling], 1989, for an example). Rather, the recommendations that seem more useful are general principles, supported by examples that provide a variety of activities for teachers to choose from and that provide stimulus for teachers to invent their own activity systems, with their own participant and activity structures. Our study of how Delp's students developed as meaning-builders within her activity system suggests seven such principles:

- building a long-term curriculum, which promotes the recycling of structures and ideas, with room for ever-deepening levels of complexity
- considering learners to be in control of their learning and building structures that support them in challenging themselves
- building a learning community that respects and makes productive use of diverse contributions from varied learners

- providing opportunities for diverse ways of learning
- providing support to individuals as needed
- challenging all students
- keeping learners actively involved.

Although not all new, these principles are given new life by the ways Delp instantiated them. This new life provides depth for such principles as involvement, community, and diversity that Freedman articulated in earlier research (Freedman, 1995) and that others have articulated as well. These principles are also remarkably similar to some of the principles that Gee (2003, 2004) puts forth in his study of students learning computer games. Gee argues for the importance of what he calls “affinity groups” or “affinity spaces” (2003, pp. 192–194; 2004, pp. 77–89). He suggests that the principles that govern learning in affinity spaces are strikingly absent from most classrooms. He rejects the term “community” because it implies that some people are in and some are out; however, in an inclusive classroom community, students must be able to find a place, and to the extent that they cannot, the community is dysfunctional. Further, students do not choose their classroom community, only the subgroups within the classroom; still, these subgroups benefit if they find a route that allows them to meld happily into a well-functioning whole group. Delp’s classroom adds to our models of what an “affinity space” might look like when moved from the free-flowing peer spaces where computer games are mastered to the English literature classroom, where interpreting literature, and reading, writing, and other forms of symbolizing are mastered amidst the many outside forces influencing membership. The only outsiders are those who are not in Delp’s class.

We conclude with the expectation that future research will uncover additional models of successful teaching and learning in untracked or otherwise diverse classes. This study provides general principles to guide English teachers in achieving the goal of teaching their students in a heterogeneous classroom. It also provides an elaborated example of how one teacher put the principles into practice. Delp’s classroom emphasizes the importance of building an intellectual community based on moral values that emphasize inclusion and that make demands on students that rely on the multimodal ways they learn.

### ***Theory-Practice Connections***

Our study first explores what is involved for practitioners to understand development across time. Delp shows what a protracted project teaching and learning are. She makes clear progress with some students, but with others her work is very much in progress when the year ends. Her timelines reach beyond the year she has with her students. She sees students as cultural-historical beings in a Vygotskian sense. She is interested in what happened to them before she met them, but she is equally interested in the effects of her work beyond the formal ending of



the school year. Traditional school timelines for thinking about growth are so brief that teachers can too easily see students as failures rather than learners.

In many ways, Delp's curriculum was philosophically similar to the "spiral curriculum" described by Jerome Bruner (1960), characterized more recently by Applebee (1996) and Applebee, Burroughs, and Stevens (2000) as an integrated curricular "conversation." These writers have been influenced by Vygotsky's concept of development occurring in the spiral and as a conversation. Bruner focuses on the spiraling of thematic concepts and Applebee (1996) focuses on the spiraling of curricular experiences. Applebee claims that an integrated curricular conversation is rarely found, but that when implemented, it is associated with increased student achievement. Delp's curriculum did function in a spiral, but she had an additional concern; that is, she was always thinking about enacting her curriculum in ways that would support teaching equitably in her untracked class. As the year went on, concepts that spiraled in complexity for some of Delp's students seemed to be learned for the first time by others. Her patience and her understanding that different students would understand in different ways at different points in time were essential features of her teaching. She further worked with her students to build activity systems that would support these differences. Although she did not always feel that she had perfect success with every student, she was more successful than not, and she had well-honed systems in place to guide her work.

This study also points to how Vygotskian and Bakhtinian theories apply to whole-class settings. Beyond a repetition and deepening of concepts and ideas, Vygotsky argues that students need to be presented with curricular material within their "zone of proximal development" (ZOPED). In many applications of this aspect of Vygotskian theory, it is assumed that the teacher must find the students' ZOPED (e.g., Applebee & Langer, 1983; Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Under this assumption, managing instruction within each student's ZOPED becomes complex, if not impossible, in heterogeneous classrooms. We found that Delp operated under a different set of assumptions.

She assumed that students would find the zone where they would be challenged and that they would work within that zone, with her support and encouragement. She further assumed that no other person, not even she, could know the learner's ZOPED as precisely as the learner. From Delp's point of view, the teacher's role is to create activity systems that help students assume the responsibility of finding their own ZOPEDs. Within the activity system, teachers can provide needed tools, offering a range of appropriate opportunities to the group and working with individuals to challenge themselves and then supporting them as they work through the struggles they encounter.

Moll and Whitmore (1993) describe the classroom they observed as functioning as a "collective" zone of proximal development, and Cazden (2001) de-

scribes curricular activities. But in Delp's classroom, what was more salient than either the collective zone or the particular curricular activities was the dynamic created by a collective socio-cultural and historical space where multiple zones were operating at once. As was the case in the classroom that Moll and Whitmore describe, the activities in Delp's class were within the students' control. But Delp's roles were somewhat different from the roles Moll and Whitmore's teacher played. Whereas their teacher was guide and supporter, participant in the learning, and evaluator and facilitator, Delp actively planned activities in which students at multiple levels could participate at the same time, each in his or her own way, each challenging him or herself to reach beyond what was possible alone to what he or she could only do with the help of another. Although Delp did not think it possible to know exactly where each student's ZOPED was, she held herself responsible for planning structures that supported activity at multiple levels simultaneously, and she held herself responsible for working with students to challenge themselves. Delp thought the student learner, not the teacher, ultimately must decide exactly how and when to take advantage of learning opportunities. If students decide on their learning zones, our theory for praxiology would suggest that the multiple structures and tools Delp offered are essential.

Finally, given our findings, we think that the field's usual uptake of Vygotskian and Bakhtinian theory may be too narrow. Past researchers have tended to explore how these theories related to the more cognitive aspects of learning. However, both Vygotsky and Bakhtin consider the emotional and ethical aspects of classroom life as intimately intertwined with the cognitive aspects. As DiPardo and Schnack (2004) point out, we often ignore these emotional and affective aspects of teaching and learning or treat them as somehow separate from the cognitive. Delp shows how the ethical and emotional are intertwined with the cognitive. She shows how the "caring" aspects of the work and "high standards" are part of the same fabric. This study leads us to argue that applications of Vygotskian and Bakhtinian theory to everyday practice will be most productive if emotional and intellectual processes are considered together to help us think about what is involved in teaching and learning.

We have concluded that if we want an educational system in which increased numbers succeed, we will have to stop striving for homogeneity in our classrooms. Rather, we will need to assume heterogeneity, regardless of whether or not classes are tracked. If we were to work from an assumption of heterogeneity, we would never think we could teach to the whole class, and we would not believe tracking would make teachers' jobs easier. We would look across students to assess their strengths and weaknesses broadly, and we would uphold high standards in many domains. In this way, we ultimately would take advantage of the talents students bring and help students grow in their areas of need. We then would have a better chance of meeting the needs of the wide range of students who enter our schools.

## AUTHORS' NOTE

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## NOTES

1. During the data collection, the research assistants were Colette Cann and Lance McCready.
2. Laura Shefler was the research assistant who conducted the follow-up interviews.
3. The notation (uc) is used when tape recorded talk is too unclear to be transcribed.
4. All quoted writing appears exactly as it was originally written; errors have not been corrected.

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### Tribal College Faculty Fellowship

The Tribal College Faculty Fellowship offers financial aid to selected faculty members currently working at tribally controlled colleges to attend the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) March 22–25, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. We are offering two Tribal College Faculty Fellowships in the amount of \$750 each.

Featuring over 500 sessions focusing on teaching practices, writing and literacy programs, language research, history, theory, information technologies, and professional and technical communication, the annual CCCC meeting provides a forum for thinking, learning, networking, and presenting research on the teaching and learning of writing. With this Fellowship, CCCC hopes to create new opportunities for Tribal College Faculty members to become involved in CCCC and for CCCC to carry out its mission of serving as a truly representative national advocate for language and literacy education.

**How to Apply:** By **November 15, 2005**, please submit an application letter (on institutional letterhead) describing who you are as a teacher and what you teach at your tribal college, what your research interests are, and what you hope to gain from the experience of attending CCCC (how it could help you in your teaching or research). Send your application letter to CCCC Administrative Assistant, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

**Selection Criteria:** A selection committee will review applications for the Tribal College Faculty Fellowship. Fellowship awards will be based on overall quality of the application letter. You do not need to present at CCCC in order to qualify for this award.

For more information, please contact the CCCC Assistant at [kmcgowan@ncte.org](mailto:kmcgowan@ncte.org).