1-1-2005

Children's sense of place as literacy learners in their classroom

Pauline J. Harris

*University of Wollongong, pauline_harris@uow.edu.au*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ro.uow.edu.au/edupapers](https://ro.uow.edu.au/edupapers)

Part of the Education Commons

**Recommended Citation**

Harris, Pauline J.: Children's sense of place as literacy learners in their classroom 2005, 1-20.


Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
Children’s Sense of Place as Literacy Learners in their Classroom

Pauline Harris, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong

Abstract

This paper focuses on children’s sense of place that they find in their classroom literacy situations. This paper presents findings of child interviews and samples of classroom observations from the author’s classroom-based research, to explore the pleasures and passions that children bring to or find in their classroom literacy situations, and the provocations they encounter there. Children’s pleasures, passions and provocations provide a backdrop for exploring and understanding their patterns of participation. This paper examines how particular kinds of classroom situations may help or hinder children’s participation and the sense of place that they find as literacy learners at school.

Introduction

Many years ago, a sociologist called Becker wrote:

‘To understand why someone behaves as he does, you must understand how it looked to him, what he thought he had to contend with, what alternatives he saw open to him.’ (Becker, 1966, Introduction, p. vii)

As I continue to observe young children doing literacy at school, these words continue to ring true. Consider six-year-old Christine (a pseudonym). She was approaching a collaborative story map task in such a way that redefined the teacher’s expectations. Christine and her group were drawing one large picture about the story rather than creating a schematic diagram that would show the story’s chronology of events. Did Christine not understand what was required? Did she not get the story’s flow? From task outcome alone, the answer would be, apparently not. However, Christine did understand both story and the task at hand – and took pleasure in learning through and being actively involved in her classroom tasks. So why did she do the task in the way that she did?

Classmate Jimmy (also a pseudonym) likewise was compliant and very task focused. His pleasure rested with leadership and baseball was his passion. To all intents and purposes, he was a prolific writer. He displayed much enthusiasm as a writer. He frequently wrote stories and made them into books that he shared with his class. Yet, Jimmy emphatically and repeatedly stated in interviews with the researcher that he disliked writing. So, what provoked Jimmy to continue producing new stories each day at home and school?

The puzzlements that these two children present are not surprising. After all, as humans, we do not always act in consistent or readily understandable ways, no matter how much we might
think we do. Different forces act on us from time to time and across different situations, which shape our actions and choices. However, to return to Becker's words, it is illuminating to explore what in their classroom literacy situations Christine and Jimmy felt they had to contend with. What pleasures did they find and what provocations did they encounter? Such is the focus of this paper.

**Context of the study**

This paper is based on an observational study completed in a Year One (six year olds) in an inner urban school. Over a period of six months, class literacy tasks and interactions were observed and documented as field notes and audiotape transcripts. Focal children in this study were interviewed, both in ongoing and informal conversations, as well as a formal, structured interview.

The formal interviews set out to explore how individual children perceived particular classroom literacy situations. It can be a long and complicated journey from what is in teachers’ heads about plans and expectations for the various literacy situations that they create, to what children end up doing in those situations. Part of what mediates that journey is what is in children’s heads – how they perceive the situations in which they are expected to engage and learn.

To tap into children’s perceptions, each child was asked to take part in an interview with the researcher. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and crosschecked against ongoing class observations of children in their literacy situations.

The structured interview took the form of a photo-sorting activity that was carried out on a one-to-one basis with each child. This activity was designed by the researcher and adapted from Kelly's Personal Construct theory and repertory grid technique (summarized in Fransella & Bannister, 1977). This technique was based on the notion that individuals construct their reality by virtue of the perceptions they hold. A person responds to what s/he perceives the stimulus to be rather than to the stimulus *per se*. In its original form, individuals were asked to identify their perceptions of situations in terms of polarised descriptors – for example, ‘helpful/not helpful’.

To assist young children completing this task, photos were taken of situations for which their perceptions were sought. These photos, taken at a different school site, were based on classroom situations in which the children were observed engaging. The photos provided stimuli
native to the child’s particular classroom to further elicit the child’s perceptions of that situation. Prior to the study, this technique had been piloted three times. In these pilot trials, and in the study at hand, the photo-sorting technique yielded data not otherwise gained form classroom observations and informal interviews, yet showed consistency with such data. Converging evidence across the photo-sorting activity, observations and interviews strengthened the validity and reliability of this study.

In the photo-sorting activity, children were presented with a set of nine colour photographs, all but one depicting classroom literacy situations, as shown in the left column in Appendices B and C. Children were asked to talk about their perceptions of each photo, in terms of what they saw in the photo and how it related to their own classroom experiences. Next, children were asked to sort the photos four times, each time according to a different set of criteria. These criteria are shown across the top row of the tables in Appendices B and C. If children found they were ambivalent and could not place a photo on either category, then that photo could be placed to one side and discussed separately. Each photo-sorting activity was audio-taped and transcribed. During each photo-sorting activity, the researcher also completed a grid, similar to the grids shown in Appendices B and C, which recorded children’s responses.

This sorting of photos provided important opportunity for children to reflect on each situation in terms of how they felt about that situation, and what they perceived were key aspects of that situation. In so doing, I was able to explore what did and did not give these children pleasure and sustain passion, and what provoked them and how. Such explorations revealed factors shaping children’s participation in class literacy situations and the sense of place they found there. These findings were supported by classroom observations.

Focal children’s reading proficiency was established through a three-part read-aloud task. First, a running record was completed that noted children’s use of semantic, syntactic and graphophonic strategies (Harris et al., 2001). Second, children were asked to retell the text they had read in their own words (Brown & Cambourne, 1990). Third, children were engaged in a Concepts about Print interview (Clay, 1993).

In deference to space constraints of this paper, two of the focal children have been selected for focus here – Christine and Jimmy. They have been chosen as they both were proficient in their literacy but revealed the complexities that even proficient literacy learners can encounter in their classroom.
Christine and Jimmy's classroom setting

An important two-way relationship exists between situation and participants in that situation: one acting on the other. Across different situations, different demands are made of participants. These demands arise from the nature of what the situation is about, who is involved, and through what modes of communication the situation is being enacted (Halliday, 1978).

In this study's classroom, literacy occurred across a range of situations that are overviewed in Appendix A. In this paper, 'situation' is defined as a set of circumstances that comprises the following features, the first three of which come from Halliday’s register theory (1978):

1. What the situation is about – the material focus or subject matter at hand
2. Who is involved in the situation – the participants, roles they have and relationships among them
3. How language is used through written, spoken and visual modes
4. Where and when the situation is located – its physical circumstances and scheduling.

Children bring their predispositions towards what pleases and provokes them to their classroom literacy situations. They also bring their funds of knowledge that they continue to accumulate over time from their experiences in their various home, school and community settings (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994). These funds constitute resources that children draw on in ways they deem appropriate in order to participate in the situation at hand. In regard to literacy these funds resource children’s participation in classroom literacy situations.

Resources relevant to participating in classroom literacy are thought of in terms of four sets of literacy practices (Luke and Feebody, 1999; see also Harris et al., 2001, 2003). These practices are: working with codes of written and visual texts, interpreting their meaning, using texts for particular purposes, and critically tuning into the values, ideologies and world views that texts construct.

Christine and Jimmy brought considerable resources to engaging in these literacy practices. Moreover, these two children were keenly aware of the resources they had and how these resources stood them in good stead at school. In this sense, these children’s resources could
be thought of as ‘cultural capital’ – that is, knowledge that helps an individual succeed in a particular setting (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

As Christine and Jimmy’s encounters as literacy learners at school are explored, key issues underpinning their participation are revealed. These issues are linked to the conference themes of pleasure, passion and provocation – the passions that the two children brought to their literacy situations at school; the pleasures they found in those situations; and the provocations they encountered there.

Children’s sense of place as literacy learners in their classroom

As this paper explores Christine and Jimmy’s sense of place, it will develop the following threads that link this paper directly to the conference themes. Definitions indicate how terms were operationalised by the researcher for the purposes of this study.

- What were the child’s *pleasures* brought to or experienced in classroom literacy situations? (‘Pleasure’ being defined in terms of positive feelings and attitudes)

- What were the child’s *passions* relevant to these situations? (‘Passion’ being defined as feeling intensely or strongly about something)

- What were the *provocations* encountered in these situations? (‘Provocation’ being defined in terms of impetus to act in a particular way)

Extending these themes, this paper seeks further to examine each child’s *participation* in their classroom literacy. That is,

- What was the nature of the child’s *participation*? What *practices* did they adopt? What *positions* did they take up?

From this set of four questions on pleasure, passion, provocation and participation, the ultimate question that is asked is:

- What sense of *place* did the child find in their classroom literacy?

Christine’s place

I begin with Christine. The *pleasures* she brought to or found in her classroom literacy in her classroom included working in harmony with her peers and being actively involved in her ongoing learning. As her interview revealed (see Appendix B), Christine felt happy about
children reading and playing together. She showed unmitigated pleasure in reading and writing alone and across all situations felt confident in her literacy abilities.

However, she expressed ambivalence in the photo-sorting activity when talking about situations where she was less actively involved. This ambivalence was most apparent in her talk about teacher-centred, whole class situations. In these situations, Christine made favourable links to learning. However, she made it clear that she would much rather be the one doing the actual ‘reading’ or task at hand, when the researcher asked her to explain why she put photos of these situations in negative groups. For example, Christine replied “Sometimes I wish I was reading that” and “Sometimes I feel like talking”.

Christine enjoyed reading and writing, and engaged positively with the texts made available to her in the classroom. These texts in many ways resonated with her home experiences. Christine talked about her home reading experiences in terms of how they contributed to her learning to read. When the researcher asked her, “What kinds of reading do you do at home?” she responded by explaining that she “started out by reading little purple books” about “monsters that were really funny”. From there she “read and read”, moving on to “Dr Seuss books which I really really like”. Thereafter she began to read “harder and harder books, then I got good, then I started reading magazines, and then I read my [older] brother’s books, and he was ten then!” Her way of describing her home reading appeared to be highly congruent with her school experiences, in terms of both the kinds of texts she read at home and how they were organised from less difficult to more difficult texts.

In terms of passions relevant to her literacy learning at school, Christine aspired to be a scientist. She was passionate about her learning, too. To that end, she seized opportunities as they arose in her classroom to engage in self-directed tasks and initiate her own activities that fed her interests. She would play with and tend to the class pet rat called Fire Rat, each day before school started.

Observational and interview data revealed that Christine felt strongly about the need to get along with her peers and for her peers to get along with one another – even if it meant sacrificing her own interests and preferences, Christine could put her interests second to that of the group with whom she worked. She found that in the face of disruptive peers, she could not get on with her own work – hence group harmony was tantamount both for its own sake as well as the sake of learning.
For example, it became apparent that her task definition, compatible with the teacher's expectations, was at odds with her peers when her group set to work on the collaborative story map task, described at the beginning of this paper. On previous occasions, she had successfully completed her own individual story maps to meet the teacher's requirements. She began to draw on these prior experiences as she organised herself for the recasting of the story map task as a collaborative activity. While her peers organised themselves for the task, she already had assembled her materials and said to group peer Kenny, "I'm waiting to do our little pictures."

The teacher had emphasised the importance of "co-operation" and "compromise" when setting this collaborative task. This expectation was put to the test as the group set to work. A group agenda emerged that digressed from the teacher's intentions. This agenda was to do "one big picture" instead of a series of small pictures in the format of a story map. The group decided they would all collaborate on the one picture. Christine, complying with the need to be co-operative and compromising, took up this plan, and began some detailed work on one part of the picture. The rest of the group finished while Christine was still working, and urged Christine to "hurry up". Christine answered, "I'm not finished", to which Kenny replied, "Yes you are". Christine held her ground, saying "I'm still doing this little part of the boat." Kenny rejoined, "You just want to mess me up!" to which Christine replied, "No, I don't want you to mess me up!". The rest of the group returned to the big drawing, colouring it in some more, while Christine finished her part of the drawing.

This episode typified the tensions Christine experienced in her group settings in the classroom. Christine worked towards her teacher's expectations and her own desire for learning, but at the same time tried to keep peace in her group. She could and would fall in with the group's wishes when there were disruptions—such as re-defining the story map task according to her group's wishes while continuing to take a careful and detailed approach to her work.

If group harmony helped serve her desire to learn and remain focused, then group disharmony was her provocation. When talking about the photo of children writing in a group situation, she said she felt "so-so -- sometimes I like it but not when I'm grumpy". What made her "grumpy" were occasions when her peers failed to co-operate and would bicker among themselves. Group disharmony was anathema to her, threatening to undermine the ability of herself and her group to work and learn.
Against the backdrop of Christine’s pleasures, passions and provocations, her participation could be described as focused on her work and her peers alike, with an emphasis on maintaining harmony. She was flexible in her focus and effectively orchestrated the demands of her group and task alike. Christine consistently acted on her desire for harmony by being a cooperative and compliant class member. Compliance was a complex issue for Christine. She sought to comply with her teacher’s agenda. However, her group could generate alternative agendas (as previously seen in the story map task). When those agendas dominated, Christine found herself complying with the group instead. Compliance also saw Christine sit quietly and listen to her teacher, even though she preferred to be more hands-on with her learning (as seen in the photo-sorting activity previously quoted).

Across all literacy situations, the positions that Christine took up could be best described as compliant with her teacher’s agenda and expectations. In relation to her peers, too, she was helpful and responsive to their needs. She showed willingness to compromise with her peers – even if at the expense of her own personal preferences, and was always ready to co-operate and contribute.

All in all, Christine found a place where she could further her own aspirations of doing well and learning at school, with a view to being a scientist later in life. In her classroom, Christine was able to find a place for resources developed in her home and community settings (such as reading increasingly difficult books) as she continued to stockpile her literacy skills that were valued at school and which she brought to bear on her tasks.

Yet her sense of place was not without its tensions. Outwardly, her sense of place did not vary across situations as she consistently adopted a position of compliance, co-operation and application. Inwardly, however, her sense of place was strongest in situations where she was in charge of her own domain, and undermined when she had to sit back and let others, including the teacher, ‘do’ the work. She had to work hard at keeping her aspirations in view, as her peers could disrupt her desire to learn as well as the way she wanted to get things done. Also, she often experienced frustration in situations where she could not be more active in her own literacy and learning processes. While she managed to squelch the provocation she felt in such situations, it did see her quietly struggle – a struggle she kept quietly to herself in the classroom but which she revealed in her interviews.
Jimmy’s place

In his classroom literacy situations, Jimmy found pleasure in doing well and being seen to do well. He enjoyed the praise that his teacher bestowed on him, often publicly before his class peers. His writing drew much favourable attention and he enjoyed sharing the stories he composed in his own time at home and school, and seeing these stories shared in Circle Time and displayed on the classroom walls.

When talking about classroom literacy situations in his interview (see Appendix C for his responses), he revealed enjoyment of situations in which he perceived he learned. He liked reading with other children, but not reading alone. Often, he found working alone “hard” and “not fun”. As for writing, he liked drawing and said writing was “easy”. None the less, he unequivocally and repeatedly said “I don’t like to write.” Although probed, Jimmy did not explain why he did not like writing. His stated dislike initially appeared to be a puzzlement, because he frequently was seen to choose to write in free choice situations at school and in his own time at home.

As for the teacher reading to the class, these were not pleasurable times for Jimmy (again he did not say why). He did acknowledge, however, that “you get to know the book” which helps when he would come upon the same book alone. The reading lesson was a different matter. While listening again was required – and listening, Jimmy said, was “hard” – it was something he enjoyed doing in this context because “you get to learn”.

If learning and doing well was his pleasure, playing baseball and being team captain were his passions. He aspired to be a baseball player when he grew up and constantly sported the cap of his home team. This passion spilled over to Jimmy’s literacy encounters at school– he was officially designated leader of his literacy group, calling himself “team captain”. Being seen to do well fed this passion – his school success continued to ensure his standing as leader.

If team leadership was his passion, then failure of his peers to co-operate was his provocation. In the face of non-cooperative and disruptive peer behaviours, Jimmy would admonish his peers, with comments like “You cannot do whatever you want”. He took much displeasure in not being able to get on with his own work under disrupted circumstances – even though the work he was engaged in was not necessarily work that he intrinsically enjoyed. What did matter was his potential to be seen to be doing well being undermined.
Here we return to a paradox in Jimmy’s place in his classroom literacy encounters – a puzzlement that this paper already has identified. Both Jimmy’s teacher and his mother reported that he enjoyed writing stories. Class observations consistently revealed his productivity in this regard. Jimmy produced stories daily, at home if not at school. He made his stories into little books that he shared with his class. However, as seen, he explicitly stated and restated in his interviews that “I do not like writing” and for that matter, “I do not like reading”.

This paradox can be understood by making recourse to what mattered to Jimmy. As seen, Jimmy felt strongly about doing well and being seen to do well, which affirmed his standing and role as group leader in the classroom. Team leadership and public recognition were important to Jimmy – and he earned these through the work he accomplished, even if he did not enjoy the work itself.

Against this paradox and in light of his pleasure, passion and provocation, how did Jimmy participate in his literacy situations? His participation, like Christine, was task-oriented and group-focused. Unlike Christine, however, Jimmy’s participation showed attention to class points he earned for his group and for which he took kudos as their leader. His participation was also geared towards teacher recognition and praise of his efforts. Jimmy took his own initiative to pursue his desire to be seen to do well and was able to be self-directing. He was reasonably proficient as a literacy learner but could sometimes feel a sense of struggle, as his interview responses reveal.

As a reader and writer, Jimmy’s literacy practices focused on meaning and code while also being mindful of the purposes his work served. Here, ‘purpose’ was less to do with the text and task at hand, and more to do with his ultimate purpose of furthering himself as a successful school participant. He took his own initiatives such as his ongoing writing tasks that received praise; he led his groups to positive task outcomes; he redirected disruptive behaviour among his peers; and he proclaimed his own successes and shared them with his class.

Like Christine, the positions he took up showed compliance with his teacher’s expectations. However, where Christine was relatively passive in putting her own interests second to group harmony, Jimmy was more proactive in organising his peers into action to get the job done as required by the teacher. Like Christine, he was able to compromise if it meant expediting the task at hand. For example, on the occasion of his group doing a collaborative story map, he realised that the initial way in which he organised the group was “going to take a long
time”. He subsequently re-organised his group, although he meant he took on a role less pleasing to himself (holding the focal book up for all to see) than what he had begun to do (doing his own part of the story map while others waited their turn). He did not always compromise, however. If he felt his group was out of line in their behaviour or task definitions, he would stand his ground with comments like “You cannot do whatever you want.”

Jimmy’s sense of place as a literacy learner at school was strongly defined by his sense of success and what defined success – that is, being seen to doing well, receiving praise, earning points, having work validated, shared and displayed, and being “team captain”. He was compliant with his teacher’s agenda, a position that consolidated his place in the classroom. He was comfortable in his role as group leader that continued to be affirmed.

Jimmy’s baseball interests and involvements nurtured his predispositions and skills for team work, leadership and earning points that stood him in good stead at school. However, not only did Jimmy connect his home and community experiences to school, he also took school home, where he initiated school-like tasks (writing books) that he knew were valued at school.

**Discussion**

Pleasure, passion and provocation constituted complex influences on these children’s choices and actions in the course of their classroom literacy experiences. Exploring these influences has revealed the impact of situational context on children’s literacy practices, in terms of what in the situation these children perceived they had to contend with when performing their literacy tasks.

This exploration also has revealed paradoxes in children’s literacy participation. In light of these paradoxes, these two children’s coming to a sense of place as literacy learners at school was a journey that took some twists and turns along the way.

The particular predispositions that these two children brought to their classroom literacy situations shaped their participation. Implicit in their chosen ways of participating were concerns such as what the child perceived to be important to and expected from the teacher. These concerns were counterbalanced by how the child wanted to go about the task at hand. Choices about task processes were bound up with peers with whom the child was working and how they felt towards those peers. Sometimes, peers were perceived as a help, at other times a hindrance. As Jimmy and Christine weighed up their choices vis-à-vis their teacher, their peers and their
own preferences, they made choices about the resources they drew on to complete set tasks to achieve expected or desired outcomes. In making those choices, sometimes greater compliance was shown with their groups than with their teacher.

Engaging with literacy at school involves academic content that might be characterised as literacy practices identified earlier in this paper (from Harris et al., 2001, 2003; Luke & Freebody, 1999). Both Jimmy and Christine showed reasonable proficiency in these practices, as previously established and as reflected in observations of their classroom tasks.

Engaging with school literacy, however, is not just about engaging with academic content. It also is about dealing with its social content. Applying Halliday’s register theory (1978), this social content can be seen to involve acting out roles and interacting with others. Status sets, alliances and rivalries among children infiltrate these roles and relationships in a place where the teacher holds ultimate authority.

All the while that Christine and Jimmy negotiated these academic and social dimensions of their school literacy, they dealt with multiple modes of written, spoken and visual language — modes over which they were still developing mastery in the early school years.

Amidst the business of negotiating the academic and social content of their literacy situations, sense of place continued to be important to these children. At times, they struggled to find their place, often needing to make compromises along the way.

As they sought their place from situation to situation, Christine and Jimmy engaged in a kind of critical literacy related to interrogating tasks. ‘Critical literacy’ here is used to signify that these children interrogated their classroom literacy situations. This interrogation, as illustrated in the previous data examples, was implicit in the children’s actions and more explicit in their interactions. Comments that Jimmy and Christine made, such as those included in this paper, attempted to re-direct their peers; showed awareness of teacher expectations; redefined tasks; complied with expectations when and where they could (including times that compliance went against their grain); worked towards desired and expected outcomes; and tried to work within constraints of time and place. These comments and actions are indicative of ‘task analysts’ who detect learner positioning and choose to accept or shift that positioning. In making their choices about task position, Jimmy and Christine continued to locate and define their sense of place as literacy learners at school.
Implications

Christine and Jimmy’s participation in their literacy situations, on the surface, was unremarkable in not presenting any overt problems. Yet, beneath the surface, these children did struggle and grapple with what was required of them as literacy learners at school – hence the importance of their stories.

Follow-up research might broaden the base of this study. Such research might cast a wider net over a broader range of classroom literacy situations; and carry out a detailed and systematic comparative analysis of the social and academic content of these situations and children’s functioning therein.

Further research might also involve longitudinal tracking of focal children in their early school years to tease out factors that shape a child’s positioning as a literacy learner at school; and to investigate how and why that positioning evolves, if it does.

Another research recommendation concerns the photo-sorting activity. This activity is a fruitful means for tapping into children’s perceptions. It brings to the surface insights not gained from classroom observations and ongoing interviews alone. The focused and concrete nature of this activity works well in exploring children’s points of view about literacy at school – what is involved, where they see themselves fitting in, what they perceive the teacher’s agenda to be, and how they relate to their peers.

Exploring classroom literacy from Christine and Jimmy’s perspectives has revealed the importance of the academic and social content of literacy experiences at school. What a literacy situation is about and the literacy practices involved are entwined with who is in the situation, what their roles are, and how they relate to and interact with one another. Teaching implications follow on from this understanding. One is the need to carefully consider the social as much as the academic content of the activities we as teachers plan and implement.

A second teaching implication is that teachers need to interpret and assess children’s functioning as literacy learners on the basis that different types of situations act on children in different ways. The social and academic content connect with and provoke children in ways that may not be immediately obvious and go against teacher expectations. What at first glance appears paradoxical and perplexing may come to make sense when viewed in ways such as illustrated in this paper. A sensitive observer of children at work will tune into the social dimensions and how they interact with the academic content of the task at hand.
A third teaching implication concerns the realisation that what children encounter in their classroom situations predisposes them to the practices and positions they take up in particular situations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). What is one child’s pleasure may well be another child’s provocation. As teachers, we need to understand the relevance of pleasure and provocation to a child’s literacy participation. To interpret and assess how children function as literacy learners in our classrooms, we need to continue to observe them over time and across different situations – for example, the same task in different situations.

The same literacy task undertaken in different situations will take on different dimensions of significance to children. For example, an activity modelled in a whole class lesson takes on new dimensions when recast in small group situations. When an individual task is reset as a collaborative task, then peer relations and in-group social processes substantially re-shape that task. Teachers need to closely observe children to see the shifts that occur and note children’s uptake and challenges as children negotiate such shifts.

Finally, as teachers, we need to be aware of the situational contexts in which we place children as literacy learners. The texts and tasks in which we engage children take on a life of their own when situated in particular classroom contexts such as the small group situation. Across classroom situations, engaging in literacy tasks at school means engaging in identity work, in which children work to find their sense of place at school – how they relate to their peers and how they are perceived by their teacher, how their resources are valued and how they can get ahead. The choices children consequently make may seem straightforward but be driven by underlying complex issues. Alternatively, children’s choices may seem paradoxical. For instance, we might see children working with texts and task in ways we think show misunderstanding or under-performance, but which make sense in light of the issues they felt they were contending with at the time. Such issues may be more social than academic in nature and relate to the situational setting, as we saw with Christine and Jimmy.

Whatever we as teachers and researchers might find with children’s functioning as literacy learners at school, it does well to recall Becker’s words (1966, p. vii) - ‘to understand why someone behaves as he does, you must understand how it looked to him’.
References


# Appendix A

## Classroom Literacy Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Situation (as used in classroom)</th>
<th>What the Situation is about</th>
<th>Who’s involved – roles &amp; relationships</th>
<th>Modes of language</th>
<th>Physical / temporal circumstances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Free Time'</td>
<td>Self-selected activities about reading, writing and other activities across curriculum&lt;br&gt;Free reading&lt;br&gt;Free writing&lt;br&gt;Free activities</td>
<td>Children in individual or small groups as they choose – independent engagement – teacher monitors activity and behaviour</td>
<td>Written, visual, spoken</td>
<td>Free reading 30 minutes daily&lt;br&gt;Free writing 30 minutes daily&lt;br&gt;Free activities one hour once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Rug Time'</td>
<td>Oral reading&lt;br&gt;Brainstorming&lt;br&gt;Modelled writing&lt;br&gt;Modelled reading&lt;br&gt;Shared reading&lt;br&gt;Shared writing&lt;br&gt;Skills instruction&lt;br&gt;Expository lessons&lt;br&gt;Discussions</td>
<td>Whole class – teacher-led</td>
<td>Written, visual, spoken</td>
<td>Daily, as components of a two-hour block, usually at start of block before teacher-assigned ‘station’ activities began</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 'Stations' (numbered 'Station One' through to 'Station Five') | #1 - Maths | Small rotating heterogeneous groups - children working with teacher or independently on individual or collaborative tasks Teachers working w/ groups; roving; monitoring; keeping time; overseeing change over; awarding points for behaviour, noise, clean tables | Written, visual, spoken | Daily, as key components of a two-hour block following 'rug time'

| 'Sharing Time' | Oral reading by child to class – fiction, non-fiction, child-composed texts | Whole class, teacher-led with children choosing books | Written, visual, spoken | Daily, 10 minutes

| 'Author's Chair' | Sharing stories written by children | Whole class, teacher-guided | Written, visual, spoken | Daily, 10 minutes

| 'Reading Buddies' | Reading with partner from older grade, with texts children chose | Children paired with more proficient readers – independent engagement – teacher-monitored | Written, visual, spoken | Daily, 20 minutes |
### Appendix B. Christine's Responses to the Photo-Sorting Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONSTRUCT SITUATION</th>
<th>Times I feel happy/ Times I feel sad</th>
<th>Things I like doing/ Things I don’t like doing</th>
<th>Times I do easy work/ Times I do hard work</th>
<th>Things that help me learn to read/ Things that don’t help me learn to read</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child writing at a table with books</td>
<td>+ I like writing and drawing</td>
<td>+ I like writing with a story book</td>
<td>+ It's easy but not when I’m grumpy</td>
<td>+ I sound out a lot to get my words down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child reading a community text (calendar) alone</td>
<td>- I’ve never gotten to do it before</td>
<td>+ It’s fun to get picked</td>
<td>+ It’s easy to stand up and put it on the board</td>
<td>= I read the numbers on the calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child reading a book alone</td>
<td>+ I love reading and I love writing</td>
<td>+ I like to write stories and read</td>
<td>+ It’s easy to read</td>
<td>+ I can learn new words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two children reading together</td>
<td>+ I just feel happy</td>
<td>+ I love reading with other people</td>
<td>+ It’s easy to read</td>
<td>+ They can point out the words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children doing a reading game</td>
<td>+ I like playing a lot and reading and sitting</td>
<td>+ I like doing reading games</td>
<td>+ It’s easy to read and it’s easy to play</td>
<td>+ If I get a word wrong, they’ll point it out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children writing at a table</td>
<td>= So-so, sometimes I like it, but not when I’m grumpy</td>
<td>= So-so</td>
<td>= It’s easy to write</td>
<td>+ I’m reading what I’m writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children playing in the playground</td>
<td>+ I really like playing in the yard</td>
<td>+ I like hopscotch</td>
<td>+ It’s easy to do hopscotch</td>
<td>= I learn the numbers I hopscotch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher reading to the whole class</td>
<td>= Sometimes I like it but I wish I was reading that</td>
<td>= Usually I would like to read</td>
<td>= It’s easy to listen, sometimes</td>
<td>= I learn to be quiet and listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher giving a phonics lesson</td>
<td>= I feel like talking</td>
<td>+ I like to learn a lot</td>
<td>+ It’s easy to sit there and watch</td>
<td>+ I learn long and short vowels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** + Refers to the first construct in each pair; - refers to the second construct in each pair; = refers to a photo not being placed with either construct.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONSTRUCT</th>
<th>TIMES I FEEL HAPPY/ SITUATION</th>
<th>TIMES I FEEL SAD</th>
<th>THINGS I LIKE DOING/</th>
<th>TIMES I DO EASY WORK/</th>
<th>THINGS THAT HELP ME LEARN TO READ/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child writing at a table with books</td>
<td>- I don’t like to write</td>
<td>+ I like drawing</td>
<td>+ It’s easy to write it down</td>
<td>- You’re just writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child reading a community text (calendar) alone</td>
<td>+ You get to put things up</td>
<td>- I don’t like doing the calendar</td>
<td>+ It’s easy to put things up</td>
<td>- You’re just putting things up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child reading a book alone</td>
<td>- I don’t like to do it</td>
<td>- I don’t like reading on my own, it’s not fun</td>
<td>- It’s hard to read on your own</td>
<td>+ You learn to read books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two children reading together</td>
<td>+ You get to read with a child</td>
<td>- I do not like reading</td>
<td>= It’s harder to read on your own</td>
<td>+ You read books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children doing a reading game</td>
<td>- I don’t like reading games</td>
<td>+ I like looking</td>
<td>- I don’t like reading books</td>
<td>+ You get to know the book</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children writing at a table</td>
<td>- I don’t like to write</td>
<td>- I don’t like writing</td>
<td>+ It’s easy to write things</td>
<td>- You’re just writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children playing in the playground</td>
<td>+ You get to play</td>
<td>+ I like playing</td>
<td>+ It’s easy to play, very easy</td>
<td>- You’re just playing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher reading to the whole class</td>
<td>- [no reason given]</td>
<td>- [no reason given]</td>
<td>+ It’s easy for the teacher to read</td>
<td>+ You get to know the book</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher giving a phonics lesson</td>
<td>+ I get to learn</td>
<td>+ I like listening</td>
<td>- You have to listen to the teacher, it’s hard</td>
<td>+ You learn the alphabet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. + Refers to the first construct in each pair; - refers to the second construct in each pair; = refers to a photo not being placed with either construct.