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OF “ILLUSTRATORS,” “NARRATORS,” “EDITORS,” AND “READERS”:
DESCRIBING RELATIONS BETWEEN SIGNIFICANTLY DISABLED STUDENTS
AND THEIR PEERS

by

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A DISSERTATION/THESIS

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in

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with an emphasis in Teaching-Learning Processes

December, 2006

Advisory Committee

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Abstract

This paper interweaves several theoretical strands—disability studies, narrative theories, and sociocultural perspectives on learning—both as a means to understand current practice in the education of students with significant disabilities as well as to envisage other forms of participation for them. The aims of the study are derived from the argument made by Ferguson (2003) that the narratives of others in the lives of severely disabled individuals are critical to the formation of their identities. Appropriating this idea to the classroom, this study explores the notion that the narratives of classroom peers are vital to the participation of the severely disabled student. The study was conducted at two separate sites, an elementary classroom and a high school setting, where at least one severely disabled student was included. Data collection at the elementary classroom was accomplished through ethnographic methods. At the high school, the emphasis was on completing interviews with students who were the classmates of the included significantly disabled student. Linde's (2001) construct of "narrative induction" generated the analytical framework for understanding the data obtained in the study. A theory of the ways in which the participation of the significantly disabled student was linked to the social processes within the classroom emerged. Two distinctive paradigmatic narratives drawn from school and classroom practices surfaced within each setting that set in motion varying forms of student relations with the disabled student. The linkage between peer appropriation of the larger paradigmatic narrative and their own relations with the disabled student was explored. A preliminary examination of the conditions that can best support the participation of the significantly disabled student in general education settings is offered.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This is a study about the ways that young people in schools make sense of each other. It is also a study about the ways they make sense of the settings in which they find themselves. And inevitably, it is a study about the ways they use those meanings to make sense of particular individuals and events within those settings. The individuals and events that together constitute the basis of this study are students with significant disabilities who are educated along with their non-disabled peers in general education classrooms. The placement of students with significant disabilities in general education classrooms, emerging slowly from a disturbing history of exclusionary practices, is by no means a universally accepted norm. Nevertheless, as substantiated by the numerous forms in which such inclusion takes place, it raises important questions about not only what constitutes “best practice” for these students, but also about how *all* students should be educated. The subsequent pages will, I believe, illustrate that all participants within an educational setting remain intertwined in processes that cannot be easily disentangled and understood separately. The study will show that the connection of significantly disabled students to their general education peers extends well beyond a simple, shared location.

Who are “severely/significantly disabled” students? These students are frequently labeled by school systems as severe-profound/multihandicapped, multihandicapped deaf, multihandicapped blind and deafblind (Downing & Eichinger, 2002). It would be difficult, if not impossible, to define all the particular characteristics of these delineated categories. More importantly, an interpretive task requires that researchers concern themselves less with definitions and more with the ways in which people *use* meanings (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1995). Consequently, setting aside but not disregarding the list of

documented *deficits* that the above terms imply, my use of “severe/significant” disability centralizes the capacity of the environment to engage in meaning-making with these students. The “severity” of disability then, becomes less a function of the student’s abilities and more a function of the environments in which (s)he participates. This meaning resonates to a significant extent with the position of the American Association of Mental Retardation that holds the provision of personalized supports as an important purpose for applying the label of mental retardation (www.aamr.org). This is also consistent with the theoretical approach that perceives the disability as residing not within the individual but in the social practices in which she is embedded. Though such an understanding has been readily appropriated to various categories of disability, it has not been easily explained in relation to those with severe disabilities (Ferguson, 2003). In the field of education, this difficulty has been compounded by instructional approaches that systematically seek targeted increases in behavioral skills. This method of research and practice intensifies the depiction of the severely disabled student as a collection of deficits, straining to meet the demands of a framework that is accepted as universal. This finds a logical extension in the various labels of *multihandicapped*, *severe/profound*, etc.

The emphasis on expanding the student’s repertoire of behavioral skills is intrinsic to the developmental approach brought to special education (Ferguson & Baumgart, 1991). The minute focus on skill acquisition leaves both students and teachers in highly frustrating situations. Given the deeply variable nature of the engagement of severely disabled students with the learning environment, the emphasis on discrete behavioral elements has defined participation for them in extremely narrow ways so that, despite the apparent “inclusiveness” of the setting, they often remain peripheral figures in

schools and classrooms. Such behavioral approaches have merged with an unquestioned adherence to a normative schooling framework that imposes a standard set of expectations for all students, disabled or non-disabled. So severely disabled students can either spend their entire educational careers preparing to demonstrate those skills that will guarantee them access to inclusive settings, or if they are included in general education classrooms, those same normative values constrain the ways their participation is defined so that the net result for both is still the same: a peripheral location within the district, within a school building or within a classroom.

Such social positions continue to leave students with significant disabilities understood only in terms of their inability to produce the skills and behaviors required to achieve some level of membership within that environment. Aspects of the severely disabled student's identity that are unrelated to academic performance often remain inaccessible to others, peers and adults alike. Why is this significant for the severely disabled learner? "Schooling is about learning. Passive participation in the hopes of social acceptance is a poor substitute for growth in functional competence, even when the increments of growth are small and fragile" (Ferguson & Baumgart, 1991, p. 222). If severely disabled students are to genuinely benefit from general education settings, how should learning be conceptualized for them? Is it different from the ways other students learn? Subsequent chapters will seek to explore theories of learning that encompass *all* learners and, importantly, understand the process of learning as inextricably intertwined with identity formation. If learning, then, is all about the construction of identities, what supports should the educational environments that include significantly disabled students offer so that the complex identities of these students can emerge? Further, when

traditional tools of establishing communication are unworkable in the face of overwhelming disability, can we draw on other ways with which we all grapple with the complexities of attaining mutual understanding, to assist in the project of making sense of students with severe disabilities?

Questions about identity formation inevitably implicate the social environments in which they occur. The participants who comprise the social environments of significantly disabled students include professionals, families, other disabled students and non-disabled peers. The Disability Rights Movement has rightly pointed out the dominance of professional understandings of disability which have conferred certain types of identities on disabled individuals. The Disability Studies paradigm (Pfeiffer, 2003) which traces its origins to the Disability Rights Movement, now offers new ways to examine, understand and practice disability. Scholars utilizing such an approach have disavowed the cultural stereotypes of disability to forge new meanings that are more reflective of the lived experience of disabled individuals. In the process, they have been instrumental in achieving significant changes in the larger social fabric. For severely disabled individuals, however, this has been achieved to a much lesser degree because, as Ferguson (2003) points out, meanings inevitably emerge from the people who envelop them. In other words, any changes in the meaning of disability that severely disabled persons can experience, must also originate in the actions of others in their lives.

While family narratives of severe disability might have received some recognition as offering a challenge to the meanings implicit in professional discourse, little attention has been accorded to the other important group within the educational environments of these students—classmates. How do peers in inclusive general education settings make

sense of severe disability? Their voices have not received a legitimate niche in the academic discourse on special education, besides the occasional report on their attitudes towards a disabled classmate. How can their narratives—their ways of making sense—be used to influence the educational context for severely disabled students? In focusing on this group, this study attempts to go beyond a mere documentation of their perspectives or attitudes. It hopes to offer a glimpse into the process by which students come to understand severe disability. In doing thus, it recognizes them as key participants in the production of cultural narratives of severe disability. Temporarily unfettered by adult perspectives on social concerns, children bring unique ways of understanding the world around them. The narratives they use to make sense of the experiences in which they participate, may be different from the narratives that adults use to do the same.

The world of objects (Blumer, 1969) is constituted differently by different individuals through their unique interpretations. Even as children participate in shared meanings to effectively help reproduce predictable, collective behaviors and maintain continuity in classroom events, they still utilize their unique biographies to interpret those events in ways that might differ from each other and from other groups. Their narratives—their actual words as well as their actions—embody this process of interpretation offering researchers a useful tool to examine this process of formation and subsequently explore the important question: how can educational settings effectively use peers to embody the commitment of the disabled student's social network to afford her meaningful participation?

This approach to effectively utilize peer narratives in the participation of severely disabled students cannot be reconciled with an instructional approach that requires the

individual to be detached from the cultural-historical dimensions of his context in order to demonstrate the skills of participation. Instead, a sociocultural approach to learning (derived in significant part from the writings of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky) holds the social context as playing a determinate role in the individual's cognitive development. The social context is not separately analyzable from the individual learner; rather they are mutually constituted. Learning conceptualized thus offers a sound theoretical framework to understand participation for *all* students. If learning is inextricably enmeshed with the local practices, then the modes of participation afforded to *all* students, including the student with severe disability, reflect those practices. Since proponents of the sociocultural approach maintain legitimacy of membership in a community of practice as a *condition* for learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), then one must examine the markers of learning not in the specific performance of the student, but in the ways that that membership is actualized. Further, through careful documentation of the values, goals, and specific practices of that setting, one can begin to speculate on the unique mechanisms by which children make sense of the "objects" in their world, in this case a severely disabled classmate. Additionally, the construct of context as mutually constituted by participants implies that certain choreographies of events with the same participants can generate different "contexts." In this instance, can peer narratives be effectively included in the choreography so that it results in increased participation for severely disabled students?

Adopting such a sociocultural approach, this study was conducted in two settings: a first grade classroom in which a severely disabled student was included, and several high school general education classrooms which included a tenth grade student with

significant disabilities. The study focused on the narratives of the classmates of these disabled students. In the first grade classroom, these narratives emerged from the patterns of student relations with the severely disabled student as well as the verbal activity (talk and writing) and drawings of classmates. At the high school, peer stories were elicited through semi-structured interviews coupled with some participant observation in the classrooms. Simultaneously, narratives were also elicited from teachers and families of the disabled students about their experiences. Maintaining that the narratives of other students are necessary to secure the effective participation of severely disabled students, *the central aim of this study was to describe those narratives*, contextualized by the discourse on disability instantiated through classroom practices. This descriptive and interpretive analysis generated a framework to speculate on the kinds of intervention that could facilitate the emergence of new ways to understand severely disabled learners.

Chapter 2: Framing the Study

Disability Rights and the Emergence of a New Paradigm

Throughout human history, disability has been variously characterized as tragic, pitiful, frightening, inspiring, sinful, encumbering, or useful, finding expression in an equally diverse range of social practices. However, the dominant trend exhibited by these practices has persistently framed disability in exclusionist rather than inclusionist terms. It speaks to the power of this exclusionist ideology that the popularity of institutionalized and segregated settings for disabled people that peaked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries lingers even today. More importantly, despite the passage of enlightened legislation over the last several decades (frequently, due to the dogged efforts of self-advocates and their families), exclusionary forms of thinking are ubiquitous in current events. Whether it is in the practice of prenatal testing (Parens & Asch, 2000) or the controversy of physician-assisted suicide (Longmore, 2003), the danger lies in the hegemonic assumption—a disabled life is not worth living—that frames the arguments. It has largely been disability rights activists who have drawn attention to this issue and attempted to reframe the discussion to incorporate the role and responsibility of social institutions in ensuring increased quality of life for *all*, including disabled individuals.

Disability has been historically understood as an individual problem. This has been reinforced by the academic discourse on disability that was influenced by Talcott Parson's description of the "sick" role (Barnes, Mercer & Shakespeare, 1999). This not only postulated certain standards of behavior that those with illnesses were expected to demonstrate, it also ensured that the medical profession would set the parameters for social understandings of disability. In medicalizing disability thus, societal discourse on

disability has required of all its members an unquestioning faith in the concept of the “normal,” “healthy” body and all aberrations of this norm as undesirable differences (Michalko, 2002). The individual then lives out this “tragic” condition, either applauded by society for bravely adjusting to its effects and seeking to overcome it, or pitied for being unable to do so. This depiction of the disabled person as “sick” has had numerous consequences, the most significant being—at least from the perspective of a burgeoning rehabilitation industry—the “desirable” manner in which she must conduct herself as “client”—usually understood in terms of compliance to, and acceptance of professional judgments. The disabled individual is, in other words, required to embrace the imperative to “get well,” acknowledging it as her responsibility to do so.

Growing numbers of disability rights activists began to question the authenticity of this model of disability, insisting instead that disability resided in the oppressive social practices that were imposed on them. Though the earliest resistance to the “tragic” model of disability was demonstrated by several separate groups during the early half of the last century, it was during the ’60’s that an organized disability rights movement emerged and which began to assume a national character (Shapiro, 1993). The Independent Living Movement, subsumed under the larger disability rights movement, emerged from the need to restore the self-determination of disabled individuals subjected to a pervasive professional ideology that sought to minimize their disabilities and “normalize” them. Simultaneously, it argued for social institutions to accommodate to the specific needs of disabled individuals so that they could share the opportunities to participate in the activities of mainstream society. After more than two decades of activism, the far-reaching Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990, banning discrimination

against disabled people. During this period, several other important pieces of legislation were also enacted, including the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education of the Handicapped Act in 1975 (currently reauthorized as IDEIA or Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act). During the same period, several scholars who were themselves disabled began to make academic presentations on their experiences of disability. From the web of these activities, the field of disability studies was born.

In an effort to explicate the disability studies paradigm, Pfeiffer (2003) traces its development from the social construct model—disability as constructed by social practices, and a minority group model—disabled individuals as belonging to an oppressed group, to the newly emergent legal model—disability as “existing only in specific acts of discrimination for which there are political, legal and economic recourse” (p. 101). Disability occurred only during and as a result of discrimination. Without discrimination, there is no disability. While the legal model did not contradict the position of the other two models, it differed in that it rejected essentialist notions of disability. Disabled people were not different from nondisabled people in any fundamental, essential way. People could not be categorized as disabled or nondisabled due to some core, essential difference. However, it maintained the focus, as did the other models, on disabled individuals as the primary decision-makers on issues that concerned them and emphasized the removal of environmental barriers instead of requiring that the individual be “fixed.” In formulating the disability paradigm, Pfeiffer grapples with the problem of how the notion of disability itself could be defined. He concludes that disability can be defined as *being regarded as being disabled*. Discrimination results when this perception of being disabled produces negative actions. Still, it might be

argued that Pfeiffer's definition obscures the variety of meanings that can emerge when disability is perceived instead as existing in the relations between individuals and various institutional arrangements.

The Disability Studies Paradigm and Special Education

What implications does Pfeiffer's articulation of the Disability Studies Paradigm have for research activity—research in the education of disabled students, and specifically for research in the education of severely disabled students? He suggests that anyone who uses the disability paradigm to do research is doing disability research. An examination of the practice of special education since it was mandated for all disabled students in 1975 reveals how the individual and medical model of disability has dominated and determined educational practice. Linton (1998) correlates society's variously categorized responses to disability with specific educational practices. The separate, segregated settings in which students were initially placed, and incredibly, continue to be so even today, is reminiscent of the rejectionist approach to bodily aberration. These individuals needed to be sequestered from others because they existed outside the pale of normal life. Their perceived disfigurement, physical, emotional and intellectual, disqualified them from entry into mainstream educational life. Though subsequent advances in practice saw increasing numbers of disabled students entering the mainstream classes, they were usually held accountable to the framework already in place. In other words, only those who were most likely to succeed in existing classrooms were allowed to be mainstreamed. If professional judgment did not express confidence in the student's ability to integrate effectively into the regular classroom, he would not have

the opportunity to experience that environment. Not surprisingly, severely disabled students were rarely considered eligible to become legitimate, full-fledged members of the regular classroom.

Perceptions of disabled individuals as draining society's resources are reflected in the ways programs to meet the educational needs of these students are understood. Evaluating such services in terms of cost-benefit ratios reflects a community's (and society's) preoccupation with predetermined goals of efficiency, with scant attention paid to examining the nature of inclusiveness in community settings. The costs of including students with disabilities in regular classrooms are assessed as unnecessary when considered in the light of their anticipated (minimal) contribution to society. However, Linton concludes that it is only through the practice of full inclusion—all children regardless of the extent of their disability—that disabled students can experience an educational life that is truly participatory and which offers room for an authentic expression of their identities. "Inclusion is not an educational plan to benefit disabled children. It is a model for educating all children equitably" (p. 61). If disabled and nondisabled people are not essentially different in any way as the Disability Studies Paradigm intends, it follows that there can be no acceptable rationale for educating them in separate, segregated settings.

The Disability Studies Paradigm embodies a critique of professional practice that has disempowered clients, in this case, disabled students. McKnight (1977) offers a scathing description of the service ideology that has sustained the practice of human service professionals, including educators. As he illustrates quite simply, three propositions are communicated to clients (students): "You are deficient. You are the

problem. You have a collection of problems” (p. 82). The ensuing system of practices is based in its entirety on this individual model of disability. Hugman (1991) suggests that it is this assurance of the client’s “sickness” that provides the basis of power at the individual level. Through the consequent appropriation of the role of “expert,” educators consolidate their professional knowledge base, creating a narrative of disability that rarely incorporates the voices of other actors, including students, families or other disabled individuals. Their services to students can be understood as the “restitution” narrative (Michalko, 2002; Frank, 1995). They will offer instruction in the skills that will attempt to compensate for the student’s deficits and restore her to as great an extent as possible, to mainstream nondisabled living.

For severely disabled students, this has resulted in an increasingly microscopic focus on expanding the range of observable and measurable behaviors (Ferguson & Baumgart, 1991) in order for students to demonstrate legitimate entry into various community settings. Given the nature and severity of the disability, this means that these students frequently remain in isolated or segregated settings. The restitution narrative, as both Michalko and Frank illustrate, invalidates the person’s (or the family’s) own understanding of disability. The family’s knowledge of the severely disabled student as a participatory member is obscured by the dominance of professional values, goals and assessment of student’s future. In actual fact, this service ideology specifically calls for the proverbial professional “detachment” as critical to the effective delivery of services. Hugman (1991) suggests that this detachment itself is an effective mechanism by which the profession can attract members, despite the “courtesy stigma” (Goffman, 1963, p. 30) entailed in its practice of working with a devalued population. Educators remain

distanced from the lived experience of disability regarding this privileged stance as demonstrative of greater accuracy and “truth.”

Adopting a stance aligned with a Disability Studies perspective, several leading scholars (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1995; Ferguson, 1994; Taylor, 1988; Danforth & Rhodes, 1997; Gallagher, 1998; Reid, 2004, among others) have mounted a critique on professional understandings of disability that have informed educational practice thus far. Their work implicates and questions the epistemological foundations of the field of special education itself and the meanings of disability that it has generated. This introspective scrutiny of the profession has generated a new research interest—Disability Studies in Education—that stands apart from the aims and values of traditional special education research. Reid (2004) articulates the aims of this emerging field as promoting the understanding of disability as a function of ordinary human variation and the meanings attributed to those variations; and as examining the role of disability in the arts, humanities and sciences so that inquiry shifts from the individual to the interaction between the individual and society, and therefore the structures of society itself. A logical extension to such a focus is to examine not how students can be accommodated in the classroom, but how education is delivered to all students.

Much of this early critique of special education drew on the writing of Skrtic (1986) who deconstructed the knowledge base of special education, pointing to the absence of a sound theoretical framework to shape its practices and questioning its ability to meet the needs of students. His writings have helped to consolidate the theoretical argument against the forms of delivery of special education services. Skrtic subjects the organizational structure of schools to a careful analysis to infer that its functioning

requires the identification of failure and its subsequent relocation to other avenues within the system, i.e. special education, created solely for the purposes of addressing such failure. Within this “professional bureaucracy” students are force-fitted into standardized programs. Skrtic (1991, 1995) seeks instead a more creative “adhocracy” where professionals can create truly individualized educational programs for students.

Disability Studies and the narratives of severe disability

How has this nontraditional approach to the meanings of disability and professional practice influenced research and practice in the field of severe disability? One significant effect has been the use of alternative ways for accessing and describing the experience of severe disability. Reliance on the tools of positivist research (Skrtic, 1995) that comprised largely quantitative methodologies is being challenged by methods that may be subsumed under an interpretivist paradigm. These forms of qualitative research seek to understand the experience of disability from the perspective of the disabled individuals themselves (Ferguson, Ferguson, & Taylor, 1992). Moreover, in doing so, they unearth the process wherein the concept of disability is constructed through the social practices in which individuals collectively engage.

Trent’s *Inventing the Feeble Mind* (1994) illustrates the societal processes that create the different meanings of intellectual disability. By scrutinizing letters from residents of institutions and their families, the correspondence between institutional superintendents, public documents, and proceedings of professional conferences, he charts the historical path by which intellectual disability acquired different meanings at different periods during the past century, fueled by a variety of socio-political concerns

and followed by a variety of social consequences. As Trent discovered, not surprisingly, it was the restitution narrative that social reformers in the nineteenth century used to make their case to the public to create institutions where intellectually disabled individuals could be trained. The education and training that they would receive in these sequestered communities, the superintendents of these institutions claimed, would transform them so that they could be restored to the community as productive and contributing members.

While some of the earlier “success” stories were grandly touted by these reformers, it was not very long before they were confronted with the inevitable scenario—their training could not ensure the return to the community of some of the children and youth that they accepted. The restitution narrative having failed, retaining them in the institutions, (often for the remainder of their lives), was explained as being necessary to restore the *family* to its normal state—after that had been disrupted by the arrival of the intellectually and/or severely disabled member. This disablement of families by an emerging class of professionals was soon to infiltrate the very notion of disability itself. Raising a disabled child became a process understood in professional literature as dominated by guilt, denial, anger, and sorrow (Ferguson, 2002). The institutions that this narrative of disability spawned grew in number, size and complexity of design (Trent, 1994) some remaining in existence for more than a hundred years.

Other researchers (Goode, 1980, 1995; Gleason, 1989) have drawn on the tradition of anthropology to study the lives of severely disabled children. Goode, working within the strand of qualitative research known as ethnomethodology, sought to understand the processes by which intersubjectivity with multiply disabled children could

be attained. He discovered that the identities conferred by professionals within an institutional setting emerge as being vastly different from the ones generated in familial environments. He held parental and familial understandings of these children as possessing greater complexity and depth. Families came to attach meaning to the actions of their children through participation in shared routines. These constituted a broad base of knowledge from which to access the actions of the child. Professional assessments must, he concluded, inevitably defer to the knowledge of families. He illustrated the process, which he described as “behavioral sculpting” (1980) by which a parent’s narrative of the child’s actions not only invested her with intentionality and emotionality, but also appeared to shape the course of her subsequent acts. Goode’s research was completed during the period when the first federal mandate for the provision of education for all disabled children went into effect, and when institutions were still a primary setting for severely disabled children. In seeking to explore the subjectivities of these children and examine the interactional patterns between them and the adult caregivers with whom they came into contact, Goode’s narrative offered a glimpse of the lived experience of severe disability. The ethnomethodological approach, however, has been characterized as ahistorical (Denzin, 2002) and this is evident in the lack of attention Goode paid to the nature of the context—institutional/segregated—in which the study took place.

Gleason (1989) also completed his ethnographic study in an institutional setting for children with severe developmental disabilities. In examining the professional narrative, he too discovered that their patterns of thinking often diverged from those of the attendants (caregivers) who ascribed greater emotionality to them. Like Goode, he

sought to explore the subjectivities of these children, (understanding them “on their own terms”) either imaginatively or by careful, detailed and lengthy observations that charted a distinct sequence of events—the progression of a narrative—from within their actions. In the process, he offered a window into their perceptions of the individuals around them and the regulatory effect of such perceptions on their own actions. He emphasized the importance of examining the context to attach meaning to their actions. “Without fundamental awareness grounded in observation of their conduct of daily life, any cultural interpretation of the severely and profoundly mentally retarded and multiply handicapped is tied to clinical assumptions” (1989, p. 59). Yet, like Goode, he did not question the inevitability of the institutional setting. His position was that without an understanding of the unique spatial and temporal dimensions of their lives created from their impaired sensory systems, professional judgment was incomplete. Goode and Gleason both stressed the social context as a critical factor in the emergence of agency in these children. But their critiques assumed the inevitability of segregated contexts and the practices that accompanied them. Extracting meaning from their work to affect practice in inclusive environments where severely disabled students are freely included with their nondisabled peers, poses a genuine problem.

More recent research affords greater possibilities for those inclusive contexts. Underlying the Disability Studies perspective is the critical element of asking different questions or asking questions differently (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1995). In their research, Kliewer and Biklen (2001) and Kliewer, Fitzgerald, Meyer-Mork, Hartman, English-Sand, and Raschke (2004) examine the opportunities for literacy development that young severely disabled students receive, and through that process not only describe the

influential roles of teacher beliefs and expectations on the cognitive development of these students, but also illustrate that social interaction is conceptually prior to symbolic development.

In contrast to convention, our observations suggested that teachers who effectively supported the development of symbolic capacities in individuals with disabilities acted on a recognition that social engagement (i.e. students meaningfully interacting with others around them) drives the development of internalized symbolic capacities (i.e., symbolic abilities that allow people to meaningfully interact with others around them).

(Kliewer & Biklen, 2001, p. 5)

Further, they draw attention to the unique properties of what they term “local understandings” that stem from intimate relations with the severely disabled student and which promote the development of those symbolic capacities that remain obscured to individuals who stand removed from such relations. This inference is not dissimilar to Goode’s observations derived from his earlier research and like him, they too underscore the concomitant value of incorporating parental narratives in educational concerns and adopting a more observant and empathetic stance during classroom encounters (Kliewer & Biklen, 2001). Yet in centralizing the concept of literacy, Kliewer et al have not only brought to the fore hitherto unquestioned assumptions of these students’ intellectual development, they have also exposed the necessary conditions for their learning.

In the sphere of adult services for severely disabled individuals, there appears to have been greater success in making progress towards implementing the renewed understanding of disability. One school of practice that has been functioning for more

than two decades since its inception has been the set of practices understood as person-centered planning (O'Brien & O'Brien, 2002). The O'Briens state their perspective quite succinctly. "We view person-centered planning as a systematic way to understand a person with a developmental disability as a contributing community member" (p. 3). They hasten to add that it was not merely a tool-kit of techniques that could simply be imparted to others through in-services and workshops. Person-centered planning needed to be embedded within a community of committed individuals who shared similar goals for the disabled individual, and who could create unique social arrangements for that individual to meet those goals. These goals were to be expressed through increased choice, avoidance of labeling and other stigmatizing procedures, respecting the voices of the individual and his/her family and friends, assistance in building relationships, individualizing supports and striving towards achieving increased forms of support from agencies.

However, declaring one's intention to conduct person-centered planning without examining current and possible social arrangements invalidates those goals. Person-centered planning required a systematic appraisal of specific goods, services and other supports that the individual needed to be a respected member of the community as well as "what needs to happen for these services and supports to be made available by the right people in the right places at the right time?" (Brost & Hallgren-Ferris, 1981 cited in O'Brien & O'Brien 2002, p. 10). For severely disabled individuals then, the ability to exercise self-determination was contingent on the capability and commitment of that community of practice to pull off those social arrangements—to hold together the "10,000 details" (O'Brien & O'Brien, 2001) that would ensure the successful

participation of the person in the community. It was not simply a matter of imparting instruction in skills that could offer them a means of participation in society. While some scholars such as Browder (2001) have adopted the person-centered planning approach towards educational programming for students with severe disabilities, they have been less cognizant of this committed interdependence between different community entities in ensuring its success.

Embedding severely disabled individuals in the community affords a way that they can be immersed in a web of relationships that in turn, generate multiple opportunities for shared identity formation with multiple social partners. Exploring the value of stories in our culture, Ferguson (2003) suggests that identities of severely disabled members are contingent on the narratives disseminated by others. It is in the process of interpreting the actions and, by extension, the lives of severely disabled people, that they are enculturated. Their identities emerge from a complex interplay of other's behaviors and the levels of participation afforded them as a result of those behaviors. Describing his son, Ian, Ferguson notes:

Other people are Ian's salvation; they are essential to the daily elaboration of who he is. Even more than for most of us, other people are a crucial part of who Ian is. Cognitive disability is not the absence of self; it is the absence of other people. (2003, p. 136)

What are the stories about severe disability that pervade our culture? Professional narratives that have dominated cultural discourse on severe disability have been steeped in the individual model of disability with its concomitant notions of deficit and remediation. Family narratives that offer alternate identities have been accorded a less

significant status in the cultural arena. Whether it is the absence of stories, or the dearth of multiple narrative genres—frameworks that can tap into the richness of varied human experience—the fact remains that current stories predominantly anticipate isolation, custodialism, sadness and pity rather than fulfillment, friendship, participation and joy. The actors within the prevalent stories remain largely non-agentive, passive individuals who are marked solely by their defects, and lacking in depth or dimensionality.

Ferguson's emphasis on narrative as culturally significant is shared by other theorists who have documented the ubiquitous nature of stories in regulating human understanding. What can we learn from them about how and why stories are generated, what purposes they serve and what implications this could have for enabling severely disabled individuals to acquire entry into, and membership within the communities in which they are engaged, including classrooms? What modes of participation can be inferred from these theories?

Exploring narrative theory

Polkinghorne (1988) postulates that human beings use various cognitive schemes to organize and interpret their encounters with the environment. These schemes organize our reflections and recollections in the face of continually expanding interactions with the environment. Narrative is one of those cognitive schemes. As Bruner (1986) suggests, narrative is one of two modes of cognitive functioning, the other being the logico-scientific or paradigmatic mode. Each provides a distinctive way of constructing reality. Each uses different means of convincing another. The paradigmatic mode seeks

universals whereas the narrative mode looks for particular connections between events.

Narrative ordering of events seeks to place them within a unified whole.

In the narrative schema for organizing information, an event is understood to have been explained when its role and significance in relation to a human project is identified. This manner of explanation is different from that favored by logico-mathematical reasoning, where explanation is understood to occur when an event can be identified as an instance of an established law or pattern of relationships among categories. The power of explanation by laws comes from its capacity to abstract events from particular contexts and discover relationships that hold among all the instances belonging to a category, irrespective of the spatial and temporal context. ... But explanation by means of narrative is contextually related and is therefore different in form from formal science explanation.

(Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 21)

Unlike the paradigmatic mode which concerns itself with explanations in order to predict, narrative explanations are necessarily retroactive, because they attempt to decipher the significance of events that have already occurred, based on the outcome. Individual events and characters are understood only in relation to their significance to the overall configuration of the story—its plot. The plotting of events and characters in narrative form is an intrinsic part of our everyday lives though we are hardly aware of the process. It imbues our daily realities with meaning that are uniquely constructed by us. Each of us both receives and tells stories. We create and narrate our own stories drawn from other stories that we receive. “Narrative” then can be understood to be both a

process—the process of story-making—as well as the individual “stories” or “tales” that we share.

In its concern for verisimilitude rather than some aboriginal truth, narrative inquiry invests all its characters with agentivity; they are all actors with intentions and goals, and must be perceived as such, for the significance of the story to unfold. This is especially significant for severely disabled students whose actions are routinely “explained” in the literature but whose self-stories are just as routinely ignored. The value of interpretations is eclipsed by the apparent predictive power of causal explanations. However, adopting an interpretive stance does not mean rejecting causal explanations or “being anti-empirical, anti-experimental, or even anti-quantitative” (Bruner, 1996, p. 113). It means recognizing that the power of explanation is mediated by the three elements that Bruner identifies as integral to the process of making sense: perspective, discourse, and context. The studies conducted by Goode (1995) and Gleason (1989) described earlier, despite their unique attempt to access the “interiority” of severely disabled children fell back on the conventional notion of deficit as residing within the individual. They recognized and explored the perspectives of the children in the context of the professional and familial relationships in which they were embedded so that they emerged as agentive beings capable of participating in a communication sequence. But they failed to read the text of the children they studied as situated in a particular discourse that perceived them as *requiring* segregation. Consequently, they secured the notion of disability *within* the child leaving very little room for reconceptualizing practice. Again, Ferguson comments:

Not only must Ian have other people help tell his stories. He must also have his stories placed in a critical, sociohistorical context. The thick explanation of why Ian can or cannot wink would have to attend to the opportunities for people with cognitive disabilities to be perceived as winking by other members of the culture. (2003, p. 136)

Why have certain narratives of severe disability acquired greater circulation over others in our culture? Bruner (1996) points out that culture is comprised not only of multiple narratives, but more importantly, multiple narrative *genres*. Stories merely fill in the particulars of the specific genre in question. It is the various narrative structures or *genres* which are used to both generate and understand stories. If, as Bruner suggests, genres are “culturally specialized ways of both envisaging and communicating about the human condition” (1996, p. 136), then the stories that do characterize the experience of severe disability constitute a limited set of genres—plot structures that anticipate human tragedy, isolation, incomprehensibility and custodialism. The particulars of different stories “fill” in the pre-existing framework of a genre. The stories that are written about severely disabled individuals fill in a narrow range of narrative structures which in turn limit the kinds of particulars—the kinds of characters, events, actions—that are generated. The stories about severe disability that circulate in our culture, therefore, are not drawn from the rich and varied ways of interpreting human existence.

What implications does this have for the conditions created by educators and other professionals to secure the participation of severely disabled individuals? One salient point that has already been raised is the requirement for many different “readers” to achieve those conditions. They must be embedded in contexts that reflect the inevitable

diversity of community life experiences. However, their roles must be understood in relation to both the setting in which they are placed as well as the actions of which they are a part. “The inseparability of character, setting and action must be deeply rooted in the nature of narrative thought” (Bruner, 1986, p. 39). If we must generate recognition of our severely disabled students as agentive characters, in what ways can we manipulate the setting and action? Mere placement in a regular education setting does not do justice to the goals of participation envisioned by the legislative efforts to include these students in mainstream school life. Clearly, physical proximity must be accompanied by attention to other facets of the activity setting that can be altered such that they allow for the generation of different identities for these students.

Bruner’s concept of *subjunctivity* may be useful in offering a conceptual framework for examining classroom or other social contexts to determine their effectiveness in generating different narrative genres of severe disability. He suggests that any good story is characterized by a certain “subjunctivity.” It refers to the quality of a story that leaves it somewhat open-ended, allowing for differing interpretations. “To make a *story* (italics in original) good, it would seem, you must make it somewhat uncertain, somehow open to variant readings, rather subject to the vagaries of intentional states, undetermined” (Bruner, 1990, p. 54). Reality can be subjunctivized by various means, three of which Bruner identifies: creation of implicit rather than explicit meanings; the depiction of reality not through an “omniscient eye that views a timeless reality,” but through the consciousness of the protagonists of the story; and the multiple perspectives generated simultaneously by a set of prisms each of which captures a part of

the reality (Bruner, 1986). Together, these elements enable the reader to enter the story and create his own virtual text.

It is the significance attached to the consciousness of the different actors in filtering the events of the story that offers the greatest promise in transforming classroom contexts for severely disabled children. Could we create contexts in which students can legitimately draw on their unique perspectives to weave narratives from their interpretations of events involving the severely disabled student? Perhaps we could empower those readers to not only enter the subjective states of these students, but to build on that empathetic knowledge to weave those stories. Bruner states that to be in the subjunctive mode is to be “trafficking in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties” (1986, p. 26). It might be appropriate for educators to relinquish their monopoly on classroom narratives of severe disability to grant legitimacy to the stories of peers.

Eagan (1986) offers another powerful reason for incorporating narratives within classroom practice that can have significant implications on the ways we structure inclusive contexts for severely disabled students. He systematically identifies the flaws in traditional assumptions about young children’s learning, namely, progression from the concrete to the abstract, known to the unknown, and from simple to the complex. He illustrates how these taken-for-granted beliefs discount the knowledge that children already bring to the classroom, knowledge of abstract concepts with which they understand stories, such as *Cinderella* or *The Lord of the Rings*. The abstract concepts to which he refers are binary opposites—good/bad, fear/hope, security/destruction, brave/cowardly, etc. Children, Eagan suggests, use these binary opposites to make sense

of the stories that they hear. “There is a sense in which we might say that children understand such concepts so profoundly that they understand *with* them: they use them to make sense of new knowledge” (Eagan, 1986, p. 12). Further, even if they cannot articulate these abstract concepts, they are still able to use them effectively to make meaning. So they are able to participate in imaginative or fantasy narratives outside the realm of concrete/known experiences because such stories are held together by those binaries with which they make sense.

Eagan argues for an instructional methodology that will utilize these abstract concepts brought by children to teach all subjects including mathematics and social studies. In other words, when new knowledge is presented in a narrative form—when cognitive meanings and affective meanings are not artificially separated—the content can be more readily grasped by children. Eagan’s theory not only underscores the importance of approaching the task of making sense of severe disability through narrative means but suggests that such an approach is the most logical one, because it builds directly on what children already bring to the classroom. Furthermore, narrative itself may be perceived as one of the constituent cognitive tools that are subsumed under the larger cognitive tools of literacy (Egan & Gajdamaschko, 2003). In fact, the uniqueness of narrative stems from its capacity to embrace many other constitutive cognitive tools that Egan and Gajdamaschko identify as valuable in the development not just of logical operations but of imagination, self-reflection, emotions and awareness of the child’s own thinking. Development of literacy is understood by these authors less in terms of mechanistic approaches to the use of symbols and more broadly within the realm of “making sense” suggested in the work of Kliwer et al (2004) cited earlier.

The preceding sections have established the requirement for investigating the lived experience of severe disability in ways that understand these students as participants in human culture. The construct of narratives and the conditions that stimulate them have been offered and explored as a potential tool to enabling that process, paying particular attention to the classroom context. It has also been suggested that narrative may be a significant, if under-utilized, element in children's learning that can potentially enhance cognitive development. Leading naturally from these arguments, it is prudent to ask if such a narrative approach can be grounded in theories of learning that can understand participation for all students, disabled and nondisabled, differently?

Current research in special education is dominated by theoretical approaches that hold the individual solely accountable for the acquisition of learning. This has especially disadvantaged the severely disabled learner who has been confronted with an array of instructional strategies that are characterized by increasing levels of precision to elicit new behaviors. The influence of *sociocultural* theories of learning has been less evident in the literature on special education, generally, and in the area of severe disability, specifically. Can sociocultural theories of learning offer the means to conceptualize learning itself in alternate ways? Can such alternate understandings assist in implementing those "subjunctive" contexts that have been postulated as necessary for the creation of multiple narratives of severe disability? I turn now, to examine the writings of key sociocultural theorists and speculate on their contribution towards the exploration of these questions.

Vygotsky and the sociocultural approach to learning

For many years, the study of child development has been dominated by approaches that posit the individual child as actively constructing knowledge as she encounters the external world. While such theories necessarily acknowledge the significance of the social context in which the child is situated, nonetheless learning is still largely postulated as taking place squarely within the head of the individual learner (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Furthermore, the social context is theorized as just that—a distinctly separate influence on the learner whose impact can also be separately distinguished (Rogoff, 1998). This constructivist model is understood to emerge mostly from the work of Piaget (Edwards, 2003), though many theorists within the constructivist tradition also draw on the writing of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (Fosnot, 2005). Vygotsky's theoretical position and contributions are detailed below. Piaget's primary focus was on the individual rather than the features of the social world that the child engages in his attempts understand it. Assuming a social world conceived of as similar for all learners, Piaget set out to characterize the developmental stages whereby the individual proceeded from a predominantly egocentric perception of the world to a more mature concept of reality. While he speculated on the role played by the social factors in the child's environment, he did not make it central to his theory of cognitive development in children (Rogoff, 1990).

This, however, was the position of Vygotsky, whose work has also undoubtedly exerted significant influence on educational practice in the United States. Vygotsky centralized the "collective" as critical to understanding learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978). His theory was built on the assumption that the individual's cognitive

development could only be understood in relation to the social milieu in which she was embedded. He proposed that all human development occurred along two intertwined lines—the natural line of development and the cultural line of development. The natural line subsumed the biological attributes of the individual, while cultural development occurred as a result of the “tools” that were used in the process of engaging with the social environment. Within the context of development Vygotsky identified two kinds of psychological functions that emerged. The “elementary” (or lower) functions were a consequence of the biological attributes of the individual. The “higher” functions emerged purely in the course of the cultural line of development. The individual’s cognitive development, therefore, occurred through the process of being embedded in specific sociocultural activity. It followed then, that the unique sociocultural context experienced by the individual mediated his learning. Rogoff (1990) describes the implications of this argument: “Thus individual development of higher mental processes cannot be understood without considering the social roots of both the tools of thinking that children are learning to use and the social interactions that guide children in their use” (p. 35). Drawing on this thesis, Vygotsky introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development. This refers to the region between the independent accomplishment of the child and his accomplishment with the guidance of a more capable adult or peer. It was within this zone that the adults or peers who were more skilled in the use of specific cultural tools employed them to enable the individual learner to build on existing concepts in order to learn new ones. The mediational mechanisms that contextualized all learning were, in effect, concretized within the zone of proximal development.

Vygotsky (1993) used his theory of human development to offer a detailed analysis of the nature of prevalent special educational practices, focusing specifically on blindness, deafness and “mental retardation.” He faulted contemporary schooling practices as excessively and narrowly focused on elementary functions; it was devoted to sensori-motor training that was devoid of all context and real purposes and did not appear to result in any real growth. There was an overwhelming emphasis on visual/concrete methods to the exclusion of all other means. Counterintuitively, he proposed that the pedagogy for “mentally retarded” children should strive to bring about *higher* psychological processes. This resonated with his persistent focus on the importance of cultural tools in stimulating development, rather than on the biological deficit, because elementary functions were most immune to sociocultural factors. It also accorded with his fundamental principle of cognitive development: “Thus, the higher functions of intellectual activity arise out of collective behavior, out of cooperation with the surrounding people, and from social experience” (1993, p. 197). Central to this theory was the belief that the disability resulted in a certain “social dislocation” that handicapped the individual. So, pedagogical efforts must be aimed at remedying these negative social effects by underscoring the essential fact that a child is first and foremost a child, before being understood as a *disabled* child. “Blindness is not a disease but the normal condition for the blind child; he senses his uniqueness only indirectly and secondarily as a result of his social experience” (p. 81). The experience of disability for the disabled individual originated in the collective.

How did Vygotsky use his theories to understand the social context of disabled students? Vygotsky envisioned the social-collective for the “mentally retarded” child in

two main settings. Firstly, he addressed the immediate social context in which pedagogical practices must be carried out—who will be the intellectually disabled child's classmates? Curiously, he never contemplated the possibility of educating these children with “normal” children. Instead, he distinguished the different levels of “retardation” among this group, making this an important prerequisite for collective activity. In other words, children at the lower (more severe) levels of “retardation” would engage with those at the higher levels of “retardation.” As a rationale, he suggested that they understand their own kind better than those without intellectual disabilities. He extended this theory to the second collective setting— of “social labor” or vocational education— which he maintained as an integral component of their education. While he conceptualized such education as occurring within an integrated community for both blind and deaf individuals, for “mentally retarded” children it would necessarily be conducted in the “auxiliary” school which would retain ties with the “normal” school.

In emphasizing the role of the “social-collective” in the education of disabled children, Vygotsky effectively incorporated his general theory of human development to offer a form of practice that departed significantly from contemporary schooling. However, his underlying premise on the “defectiveness” of disability and the impetus to minimize its effects complicates the notion of “social-collective” for children with intellectual disabilities. In positing *semi-segregated* polytechnical education as the more desirable form of education rather than the totally segregated, therapeutic form of training offered by contemporary traditional schools, Vygotsky still evidences a somewhat narrow conception of the role of the social-collective for these children. Given the conspicuous absence of the nondisabled population in Vygotsky's social-collectives for these children

(as opposed to the collectives he envisaged for blind and deaf students) one is forced to question how he understood the phenomenon of “mental retardation,” and by extension, all disability.

In developing a theory that would draw disabled individuals directly and compellingly into the mainstream of life, Vygotsky presented a vision that was far ahead of his times as illustrated by the lingering segregated educational programs that exist in American schools even today. But this apparent vision of “inclusion” that Vygotsky offers presents the same flaws that derail the current implementation of inclusive practices. The premise of inclusive schooling is the education of all students, whatever the nature of the disability, in the regular classroom. When some differences are included, but not others, it is no longer inclusive schooling. The social-collective cannot be differently constituted for different groups of students. When this occurs, it reflects a preoccupation with the principle of “normalization” which perceives some individuals as more “normalizable,” as it were, than others. This preoccupation stems from an understanding of the difference of disability as fundamentally a defective difference (Michalko, 2002), rather than as a positive characteristic that reflects normal human variation. Vygotsky’s ideas, despite his insistence that disability should not be regarded as a defect, ultimately, remained chained to this premise.

Gindis (1999, 2003), a leading scholar who has sought to interpret Vygotsky’s theories and relate them to special education practice, suggests that it is easy to misunderstand or inadequately understand Vygotsky because of “his nonacademic and sometimes unsystematic and contradictory ways of expressing ideas, his passionate argumentation with authors who are completely forgotten today, and obsolete

terminological relics that sound harsh to our ears” (2003, p. 201). Even allowing for this possibility, Vygotsky’s vision for disabled individuals remains ambiguous at best. Gindis (1999) describes Vygotsky’s distinction between the “primary disability”—the organic impairment stemming from biological factors—and the “secondary disability”—the distortions of higher functions as a result of the negative social consequences of disability. But neither he nor Vygotsky for that matter, attend to the cultural values that are implicated in *both* understandings of disability. In other words, the construct of *impairment* is as culturally contextualized as is the experience of disability itself (Michalko, 2002). Vygotsky’s theory of “disontogenesis” (the divergence of the natural and cultural lines of development) calls for the deployment of disability-specific compensatory strategies by the individual (Gindis, 2003). Yet, the structure of social and cultural institutions that collectively comprise the context in which the meanings of disability are forged (and in which those strategies must be used), are not problematized. And, compensatory strategies, Gindis does caution, are not simply mechanical substitutions for impaired functions. They are “aimed at mastering psychological tools and using them to acquire cultural forms of behavior” (p. 206). Clearly, those strategies themselves must be deeply embedded in certain values and societal goals.

Vygotsky himself illustrates this point in his response to sign language as an important psychological tool for deaf individuals (Vygotsky, 1993). Believing that the development of speech was critical to the formation of consciousness, he actively advocated the use of oral speech over signs. Even though he eventually acknowledged the usefulness of sign language, it still remained an “auxiliary means of language acquisition” (Knox & Stevens, 1993, p. 24). While this may be the preferred pedagogical

approach in many school systems today, nevertheless it has been critiqued and even rejected, for its imposition of certain cultural norms and its insensitivity to the Deaf experience. It is not merely the social response to disability, therefore, that must influence the course of development of the disabled child, but the pervasiveness of a normative framework that informs social-cultural institutions and which must inevitably regulate the development and implementation of those compensatory strategies.

Expanding Vygotsky's contribution: issues of context and participation

Although Vygotsky acknowledged the role of cultural-historical factors within his theory of learning, the primary mediational mechanism that concerned him was language, as it found expression within the adult-child dyadic encounter. He did not adequately develop the cultural-historical dimension of learning (Wertsch, 1991). Nevertheless, his theories have spawned a vast literature on the significance of the sociocultural context in which all facets of human development take place. The writers within this tradition (Wertsch, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991 to name a few) have sought to extend Vygotsky's contribution to incorporate cultural-historical practices and broaden the context within which learning is understood. Wertsch (1991), drawing on a Bakhtinian approach to meaning, proposes the "tool-kit" analogy that not only includes the kinds of mediational mechanisms suggested by Vygotsky but also different "social" languages and speech genres that individuals employ in their daily social encounters. These forms of speech are embedded within specific cultural contexts that require prescribed behaviors and uphold the value of certain domains, attributes and forms of practice over others. For instance, the language used by teachers in describing the

educational needs of their students to families and to other professionals mediates their own understanding of their students. It is also used to scaffold families into particular understandings of their own children. The language of “parenting” or “child-raising” assumes a subordinate position to the superior, scientific status of the language of the educator. (Undoubtedly, teachers might very well have been initiated into this form of social language during their own training process as they were becoming socialized as professionals).

The cultural-historical dimension to speech genres is further revealed in the study by Minick (1993) of kindergarten teachers in a regular classroom. Minick concerns himself with the issue of representational speech—where the meaning of the utterance corresponds with what is actually represented in words—and its role in the classroom, through the mediation of specific forms of practice. Minick explores the context in which teachers resort to a reliance on “explicit and unambiguous representation of intended meaning” (p. 347) and how students are scaffolded in this process of acquiring literal understandings, of “bracketing situational sense.” It was not the connection between the words and the actual phenomena in that particular context that was being bracketed, but the “constellation of interests and concerns that make the referent meaningful in a situationally defined way” (p. 351).

As in many primary school classrooms, a significant portion of the education of those with severe disabilities involves the use of what Minick refers to as “representational directives”—instructions that require representational understandings on the part of the student. Vygotsky might have conceived this as a narrow focus on the mechanics of an activity and the assumption that instruction cannot address higher-order

skills. Further, state-of-the art approaches to the education of these children are characterized by highly precise and definitive goals that require teachers to extend the same precision in the systematic and sequential application of those procedures (Snell & Brown, 2000). Behaviors and tasks are methodically task-analyzed, and broken down into smaller and smaller units, so that mastery of one level in the hierarchy of skills is contingent upon mastery of other units. Furthermore, and this is where Minick's work is significant, the speech genres that are utilized by teachers—the verbal mediation they provide to the task—require the kind of “bracketing of situational sense” that can influence the affective dynamics that regulate the student's response. The systematic delivery of verbal and physical prompts that require the student to utilize a representational interpretation is central to instructional approaches to these children (Snell and Brown, 2000).

Minick reveals how the teacher's requirement of such representational interpretation interferes with, even delegitimizes, cognitive responses initiated by the students that might actually proceed in the direction of the teacher's own goals. Yet, in the interest of maintaining control over the activity and to ensure efficiency, such responses that arise from nonrepresentational understandings must be discouraged. When teachers of severely disabled students have little control over the tools by which they can access the psychological functioning of their students, they (the teachers) respond by extending that control to the nature of the task itself and the verbal strategies that mediate those tasks. Different, possibly “discordant understandings” of that task can then be eliminated through the use of task directives (verbal and physical) that demand a representational or literal, understanding. Minick suggests that sometimes it was not

merely the verbal directives offered by the teacher, but the design of the activity itself that required bracketing of situational sense. It is not uncommon to find severely disabled students in both inclusive and segregated settings working on tasks that require them to follow instructions literally, in order to meet professional standards of success. Requiring representational understanding also ensures that these students' complex and inaccessible subjectivities are eliminated from the instructional process.

Other theorists who have built on the contributions of Vygotsky include Rogoff (1990) and Lave and Wenger (1991). They offer theories of learning that transcend the traditional context of "school" learning. Preferring a view of communication that is not restricted to verbal interactions, Rogoff (1990) incorporates "tacit forms of communication in the verbal and nonverbal exchanges of daily life and the distal arrangements for childhood involved in the regulation of children's activities, material goods, and companions" (p. 16). She emphasizes the mutuality of relations between the individual and the social, suggesting that children's cognitive development occurs in the context of socioculturally structured collective activity. Conceptualizing cognition largely as problem-solving, she explores the various cultural dimensions of cognitive activity. The tools and technologies utilized by a cultural community including its language systems, literacy practices, materials of communication as well as its desired goals and values mediate the cognitive development of its individual members.

Rogoff uses the metaphor of apprenticeship to understand cognitive development in children (1990). Introducing the concept of "guided participation," she offers a view of children as novices actively seeking to engage adults in making sense of the world. Adults in turn find effective ways to achieve shared thinking that will stretch the

children's understanding, enabling increased participation in the world. She conceptualizes shared problem solving as being central to the process of learning in apprenticeship. Her concept of "guided participation" suggests that both guidance and participation in culturally valued activities are essential to children's apprenticeship in thinking. The model provided by this construct of apprenticeship is one of "active learners in a community of people who support, challenge, and guide novices as they increasingly participate in skilled, valued sociocultural activity" (p. 39).

If the work of Wertsch and Minick has drawn attention to contexts that inhibit the generation of alternate narratives of severe disability, how has Rogoff's account of the development of learning helped in the examination of educational services for severely disabled students? Bruner (1990) suggests that the narratives of children emerge through their attempts to solve problems. Perhaps we can examine this story-making process by assessing the "social and societal values and goals, tools and institutions in the definitions of the problems and the practice of their solution" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 61). When a student is socialized by classroom expectations to remain unresponsive to her severely disabled classmate who, during whole group instruction offers loud vocalizations, she defines this anomaly (e.g. students are obliged to speak only when called upon by the teacher, and are supposed to speak not vocalize), in ways that reflect imbibed classroom values. The disabled student is violating classroom norms and a peer's role is either to report the behavior to the teacher or wait for the teacher to respond. The peer student has not been offered any other mechanism by which to understand her disabled classmate's behavior and so consequently, her "practice" reflects that single option. So her definition of this

“problem” draws on the cultural practices of the classroom which offer her few options for resolution.

Yet Rogoff’s notion of active learners seeking guidance does not address the various actions of severely disabled students that are not instantly recognizable as having a “communal” meaning (Polkinghorne, 1988). Actions of severely disabled students often lack the “readability” that prompt further interactive responses from others—students and adults alike. Her emphasis on including nonverbal dialogue as an important element in the process of guided participation is significant to the extent that teachers need to exhibit “responsiveness” (Rogoff, 1991) to the attempts of the severely disabled student—frequently nonverbal—in engaging with the context. However, responsiveness presumes shared thinking—the intersubjectivity that Rogoff and other sociocultural theorists maintain as critical to actualizing the zone of proximal development. How are we to attain that intersubjectivity with severely disabled students, in the absence of traditional tools by which we come to generate shared meanings? What could “joint participation” look like when the activities of explanation, discussion, provision of expert models, active observation (Rogoff, 1990) are unavailable to severely disabled learners? In order to seriously appropriate her notion of “guided participation,” these questions still need to be resolved.

The construct of “legitimate peripheral participation” suggested by Lave and Wenger (1991) offers a view of learning that is similar to Rogoff’s notion of apprenticeship, while emphasizing the prerequisite of legitimate group membership. Learning itself, these authors propose, is an evolving form of membership in a community.

As an aspect of social practice, learning involves the whole person; it implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities—it involves becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person. In this view, learning only partly—and often incidentally—implies becoming able to be involved in new activities, to perform new tasks and functions, to master new understandings. Activities, tasks, functions, and understandings do not exist in isolation; they are part of broader systems of relations in which they have meaning. These systems of relations arise out of and are reproduced and developed within social communities, which are in part systems of relations among persons. The person is defined by as well as defines these relations. *Learning thus implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations* (italics added). To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities. (Lave & Wenger 1991, 33)

Learning is a continuous process by which we create and re-create our Selves in different contexts. Lave and Wenger elaborate further on this notion of learning to illustrate that different contexts—and by extension, different communities of practice—offer (or inhibit) access to learning in different ways to newcomers within that context. We are all, at various moments or periods in our lives, newcomers within a specific context. Each time we enter an unfamiliar social environment with the intention to engage with it and derive some benefit from it we have assumed the role of newcomers. To the extent that we are granted a legitimate status by the “old-timers” of that context

and provided the means to participate in the practices of that community, we can proceed from the periphery to become full members of that community. Engaging in practice might easily be a condition for effective learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In conceiving of learning as subject to conditions of membership—legitimacy of presence in that community and access to practices—Lave and Wenger underscore the political context in which the learning environment is constructed. Do all students have equal access to those opportunities by which they can become full participating members within their community of practice? Legitimacy of membership does not necessarily guarantee access to opportunities. Yet, are severely disabled students even legitimate peripheral participants? To what extent does the larger community of schooled adults offer a legitimate status to these students as novices proceeding on their way to full participation? How do the technologies extended to these students impede or facilitate their participation in different communities of practice?

As the authors point out, legitimate peripheral participation is all about access. In this regard they pay particular attention to the notion of *transparency* as a feature of the technologies that are constituent of the practice in which the members are engaged. Transparency means that the fundamental meanings of the artifacts that constitute the technology of practice and the ways in which they are used are readily available to the learner (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The transparency of the technology stimulates a particular form of participation, thereby mediating the learning process. When a disabled student is required to demonstrate visual tracking skills by responding to objects on a Light Box (an educational aid commonly employed in visual stimulation activities), I would suggest that, from the perspective of the student, the meaning of the use of this

artifact might remain obscure. Consequently, the form of participation that the use of the Light Box—the specific physical, social, and linguistic nature of the context—generates might be significantly different if the student’s visual abilities were to be assessed in the context of a snack-time routine in the presence of peers and other adults. Extending this idea further, the technology contained in the practice of diagnosing and categorizing students with “special needs” engenders a particular form of participation. Students’ authentic experiences are often invalidated by the identities imposed on them through the process of labeling, leading to specific forms of engagement in the classroom.

Lave and Wenger (1991), departing from a strictly Vygotskian approach, prefer to understand learning not necessarily as internalization but as participation. In conceptualizing the community of practice as a set of relations between person, activity and the world that continually overlaps with, and is related to other communities of practice, they anticipate McDermott’s (1993) conclusion that from one perspective, learning is not in individual heads but in the *relations* between people.

Learning is in the conditions that bring people together and organize a point of contact that allows for particular pieces of information to take on relevance; without the points of contact, without the system of relevancies, there is no learning and there is little memory. (McDermott, 1993, p. 292)

In examining the ways in which the notion of learning disability is constructed in the routine activity settings of a student labeled as learning disabled, McDermott suggests that when using a “degradation” approach to his performance, neither the student nor his disability can be understood apart from those very settings in which he participated. It is this idea of “context”—as “not so much something into which someone is put, but an

order of behavior of which one is a part” (p. 290)—that he and other writers in this tradition have sought to clarify. Lave (1993) explores this notion of context and how it can be understood as a theoretical construct rather than simply as a container in which everything floats. Should the significance of context be understood through the enumeration of its many constituent variables and their separate (and/or combined) influence on the activity of the learner? Lave, along with McDermott and Rogoff (1990) among others, would suggest rather that individual, activity and context are inextricably enmeshed with each other. They are not separately analyzable entities. Context could be understood in terms of the objective social structures that bear on the activity.

Any particular action is socially constituted, given meaning by its location in societally, historically generated systems of activity. Meaning is not created though individual intentions; it is mutually constituted in relations between activity systems and persons acting and has a relational character. (Lave, 1993, p. 18)

The activities of severely disabled students, (whether in self-contained or in inclusive settings) cannot be understood apart from the institutional history that is contained within those educational practices. The ways in which the larger institutional structures intersect to regulate the practices of teachers, students and families constitute a critical element in understanding educational contexts for students. Context, however, can also be understood from a phenomenological perspective, which “begins with the premise that situations are constructed as people organize themselves to attend to and give meaning to figural concerns against the ground of ongoing social interaction” (Lave, 1993, p. 19). Children’s participation, including those of severely disabled learners, is

mediated by the relations between persons as well as the specific verbal and nonverbal mediational means that the actors bring to the activity itself. Furthermore, using McDermott's (1993) metaphor of "choreography" to recognize the mutually embedded nature of participation of both severely disabled students and members of their social world, can enable us to envision different roles for all participants in that context. The concept of legitimate peripheral participation and its more refined understanding of context offer greater scope for actualizing alternate learning situations for severely disabled students.

Meanings of participation in current research in education of severely disabled learners

In many ways, the notion of learning implied in these constructs resonates in the analysis of Ferguson & Baumgart (1991) of educational practice of students with severe disabilities. Ferguson and Baumgart examine in depth and detail, the practice of implementing the principle of partial participation that they had proposed earlier. "The principle of partial participation was proposed to ensure that even those students who might never be able to acquire a full complement of functional skills to *completely* participate in the activities of their lives would still be able to learn enough to *partially* participate" (p. 219). They proceed to examine classroom settings that included severely disabled students to suggest that some of the apparent lack of success in implementing this principle might have resulted from an instructional approach that seeks to expand a student's behavioral repertoire. Confronted with students who demonstrate little consistency in target behaviors and are often unable to engage adequately with the teaching context, such an approach is likely to result in frustration for the teacher as well

as inhibit participation for the student in the classroom. Participation for these students then must derive its meaning from the ways and means by which students are allowed to practice their skills rather than function in isolated contexts where they are required to learn new behaviors. The emphasis is now shifted to structuring opportunities for the student in the communities relevant to his classroom whereby he can learn by practicing his skills.

While researchers continue to actively promote the goal of inclusion for severely disabled students and offer teachers practical ways in which curriculum and classroom practice can be made accessible to severely disabled students, not all focus on the description of participation suggested above. Giangreco, Cloninger, Dennis and Edelman (2000) suggest ways of engaging other students in the process of instructional modification. Browder (2001) proposes a blend of the ecological approach and person-centered planning to explore the needs of the severely disabled student and thereby to generate appropriate instructional objectives. Meyer (2001) and Meyer, Park, Grenot-Scheyer, Schwartz and Harry (1998) address in depth and detail the opportunities for developing social relations between children with and without disabilities. They examine evolving friendship patterns of children and attempt to configure the needs, assets and liabilities of severely disabled students within that framework.

Downing (2002) and Downing and Eichinger (2003), however, do pay specific attention to issues of participation. Their focus is not restricted to “disability-specific” goals that are context-independent. Instead, they seek to enable the student to be recognized as a member of the classroom. To this end, they examine various features of preschool, elementary and secondary settings to list numerous ways in which teachers

can embed student goals in regular classroom routines. Simultaneously, in an effort to broaden the scope of participation, they offer alternate ways in which these goals can be actualized. For example, assisting the teacher in administering a spelling test to the rest of the class can fulfill requirements for specific student goals as well as contribute to her standing as a valued member of the classroom. The authors are mindful of the need to facilitate friendships between disabled and nondisabled students and actively support the role of peers in fostering participation of the severely disabled students in the classroom.

Even though Downing and her collaborators do not actually use the words “narratives” or “interpretations” to explore the ways in which peers can support severely disabled students, in effect they are offering some narratives for the students to use in interpreting the actions of these students. Finding connections between the nonverbal behaviors of disabled students and their own life-experiences is certainly a strategy to help students attach meaning to their actions, and regulate their subsequent responses. Furthermore, they also list of the types of support that peers can be encouraged to provide which anticipates the kinds of stories that will describe participation differently for severely disabled students. More importantly, the authors underscore the value of allowing students to become skilled in interpreting the needs of the disabled student. Carefully structuring the ways in which the disabled students and her classmates can support each other in the classroom is eminently feasible, as the authors point out.

By maintaining the general classroom context to be central to the process of envisioning expansive educational opportunities for severely disabled students and in seeking to offer alternative roles for them within such contexts, writers such as Downing are attempting to forge the means by which different identities of these students can be

elicited. As Bruner (1986) has noted, actors are inextricably embedded in the setting and its actions. When these students are drawn directly into the many and varied activity settings of mainstream classroom life, the members of that community are invited to re-imagine different sequences of events. This re-configuration of plot structure is necessary if the actions of the protagonists are to assume different meanings. To what extent does the form of participation encouraged by the activities suggested by Downing result in new understandings of severe disability? Have the earlier identities generated by more limited forms of participation (e.g. segregated or self-contained settings) been replaced by those that portray these students as agentive, intentional and emotional beings? Are these inclusive settings true *contexts of practice* (Bruner, 1990) for these students in which they can actively practice their Selves, in which they can leave unique traces of themselves that will eventually be incorporated into another's narrative?

Researchers such as Downing, assume that systematic methods of engaging other students to participate in the school experiences of the severely disabled student can lead to a deeper understanding of these students. Fostering qualitative contact opportunities between them certainly brings them nearer to this goal. Structuring contexts carefully to afford all students different roles will firmly draw the severely disabled student into the classroom continuity. Yet, these researchers also make assumptions about the ways students make sense of each other and this might not always work to the advantage of the disabled student. One element in their interaction that speaks to this concern is the issue raised earlier, of "readability" of actions (Polkinghorne, 1988), an element that he maintains as necessary for endowing those actions with meaning. According to him,

actions in any narrative must have a certain “communal significance” that makes them instantly recognizable.

Human action occurs within cultural settings that maintain symbolic narrative forms for use in the articulation of action. These symbolic forms have a public character and are not the private understandings of a particular actor. Thus, an act is undertaken with the knowledge of what it will mean to the community in which it will take place. The actor in a particular culture realizes that the act of bowing before another is a means of expressing contrition within the community and will be understood by others in it as such an expression. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.144)

What if actions lack the “readability” that can translate immediately into the communal significance that Polkinghorne deems essential for narrative structuring? When their actions are outside the pale of recognizable symbolic narrative forms, actors lose their narrative potential as agents. This further inhibits the project of attaining intersubjectivity with the student so that his classmate can function as a more capable peer in the former’s zone of proximal development. Consequently, even when peers assume responsibility for ensuring that severely disabled students have access to opportunities for participation (Downing, 2002) this does not imply that they can adopt the perspective of the severely disabled student. In other words, their narratives of severe disability may still remain unchanged. Therefore, despite the inclusive nature of the immediate context, included disabled students often continue to remain on the periphery of that activity setting. They do not emerge in any sense as “characters” with feelings, motives, or intentions. They remain shadowy “figures” (Bruner, 1986) who might only be understood in relation to the

adult paraprofessionals whose presence by their sides becomes an extension of their identities.

The inability to readily interpret seemingly incomprehensible acts may not be the only obstacle to ensuring the membership of the severely disabled student. The concept of “readability” itself is a function of the context in which the actions occur. The activity setting, including the values and goals articulated in the actions of the participants, generates the meanings that can render a seemingly puzzling sequence of actions comprehensible. In the absence of those teacher-directed contexts which foster increased participation from the severely disabled student thereby offering a larger pool of meanings to draw from, how do peers make sense of him? Can the ways of participation envisioned by Downing et al ensure that classmates imbibe a sense of the disabled student as possessing a stable identity, invested with a certain continuity across many different contexts? If not, is there some element intrinsic to these contexts of practice and necessary for the emergence of those identities that might remain obscured during such participation? Since peer involvement has been established as an integral piece for the effective participation of disabled students, a logical line of inquiry would be to explore how classmates made sense of these contexts. What are the narratives that they use in order to participate in shared routines with a severely disabled student? What are the ways in which they use their narratives and what purposes do they serve? Exploring these questions can also lead to the identification of those spaces in classroom life that have the potential to alter the narratives that are currently generated.

How should the study of children’s narratives be approached?

Studying children's narratives

Scholarly interest in children's narratives has emerged within the realm of mainstream social cognition research (Nicolopolou, 2001). They are now increasingly regarded as constituting a valuable source for revealing the inner worlds of children and for documenting the ways they make meaning of the events they encounter. However, Nicolopolou (1997) argues that much of the research on children's narrative has retained a narrow focus on the developmental and structural dimensions of children's narratives. A perusal of current literature indicates that studies are concerned with examining the narrative skills at various ages (Klitzing, Kelsay, Emde, 2003; Nelson, 1996; Engel & Li, 2004), the contextual variables that influence the quality of narratives (Cain, 2004) and the differences between stories produced by boys and girls, to name a few lines of inquiry. Nicolopolou suggests however that the study of "how children come to acquire and develop *narrative skills* needs to be integrated with an interpretive analysis of the *symbolic content* of narrative as a vehicle of meaning and with an examination of the various ways that children *use* narrative as a tool to grasp reality and confer meaning on experience" (1997, p. 404). In her critique of current research on children's narratives (2001), she draws specific attention to the insufficient attention paid to the sociocultural context in which these narratives are embedded. Children's narratives cannot be understood independent of the sociocultural context in which they are embedded. The narratives of severe disability, too, that emerge in classrooms derive significance and meaning only when understood as inextricably linked to the forms of practice which constitute the make-up of a classroom. They emerge from a foundation of culturally valued norms and goals shared by the participants of that setting.

The structural dimensions of narrative, however, can still hold considerable relevance to the goals of this study. Bruner (1990) in explicating his narrative scheme notes that a key element that triggers the production of narratives is the recognition of a non-canonical event, something that deviates from the norm. This recognition prompts the participant to produce a resolution to this deviation. Concurring with this hypothesis, Nelson (1996) enumerates a list of proficiencies that are required for an individual to effectively narrativize. In her list, she not only includes the ability to note the non-canonicity of an event, but also *the capacity to offer a resolution that can be culturally comprehensible*. This immediately raises the question, to what extent does the experiential makeup of the students embedded in specific cultural practices offer them the interpretive mechanisms by which they can effectively resolve the non-canonicity of severe disability? In what ways are such resolutions revealed in their participation in activities with the severely disabled student?

In this regard, Nelson's distinction between *scripts* and *stories* can be a useful tool to record the students' perceptions of the canonical or the default situation. Descriptions of routinized events in which students participate would be delineated as scripts. The specific events that occur during one of those routines could constitute a story. Nelson understands scripts as functioning as skeletal frameworks that form the basis for constructing more specific narratives. To what extent, do the narratives of classmates remain at the level of *scripts*? Bruner also maintains the centrality of an agentive actor in the production of stories. To what extent do peers understand their disabled classmate as having intentions and goals? Could the perceived absence of agentivity influence the quality of interactions between these students? Furthermore, Nelson's list of narrative

competencies includes the ability to adopt the perspective of the actor. To some extent, this derives from an understanding of the student as intentional and agentive, but it also implies that classmates must operate from within an empathetic framework that can allow them to take his/her role. This further presupposes that the severely disabled student is perceived as sharing emotional experiences that are familiar to his peers. Do the narratives of children embrace this dimension of the severely disabled student effectively?

The present study accepts the utility of both approaches, structural and symbolic, to the examination of children's narratives in order to obtain a careful and coherent description of children's narratives of severe disability as well as to secure a more nuanced understanding of the classroom practices which contextualize them. The term "narrative" is understood broadly to encompass both the verbally expressed statements of the children as well as those sequences of extra-linguistic actions that can be understood as conveying symbolic meaning.

In the preceding pages I have sought to clarify the theoretical strands that have informed my perceptions of the current and possible roles played by severely disabled students in the classroom. These theoretical traditions have offered both a means to understand current educational practice as well as to envisage other forms of practice. I strongly seek and advocate alternative conceptualizations of classroom participation for these students than are currently available in practice. I have maintained that the theoretical frameworks described in this section can be effectively employed to articulate those alternative scenarios. I have begun this project by examining the narratives of

school children about severe disability. The impetus for this position is derived from the argument made by Ferguson (2003) that the narratives of others in the lives of severely disabled individuals are critical to the formation of their identities. Having appropriated this argument to the classroom context, I seek to explore how participation for severely disabled students can be defined differently and how the contextualizing narratives of other students can aid the implementation of that goal. My argument, then, centralizes the narratives of other students in the classroom. I hold other children's narratives to be critical to the participation of severely disabled students. I am thus interested in discovering the narratives of severe disability that emerge from these other students. Where and how are they evidenced? Under what circumstances do they emerge? What is the nature of the context in which their emergence is inhibited? What impact does the presence or absence of these narratives have on teaching practice and student behaviors? What impact do they have on the severely disabled student and how is that understood by his/her classmates and teachers? I have proposed that an exploration of these questions can offer practitioners clues about their own practice that may be implicated in the generation of these narratives as well as an alternate framework to understand participation for severely disabled students. I suggest that together, this knowledge can assist in generating the types of identities—agentive, emotional and intentional—for severely disabled students that have eluded them so far through traditional approaches to their education.

Chapter 3: Method

Purposes and Questions

In the light of the theoretical issues raised in the preceding chapter, my purposes for this study were manifold. Broadly, the main purpose of this study was to explore alternate ways of conceptualizing participation for severely disabled students in the classroom. This subsumed an inquiry into the role of teachers and classmates in shaping the identities of severely disabled children in the classroom. More specifically, it implied a quest to describe the influence of instructional practices in facilitating children's understanding of severe disability and to document the ways in which such understandings are reflected in the classroom discourse of students. Classroom discourse was understood to refer broadly to all forms of expression demonstrated by the students. This encompassed their talk, written expression and dramatic play and other observable behavior in the classroom.

An important practical purpose of this study was to assist practitioners in identifying the markers by which participation for severely disabled students can be understood differently. In assuming that the quality of the lives of these students had been adversely influenced by traditional approaches, a further significant practical aim upheld in this study was to ameliorate that situation. To this end, I hoped to decenter professional narratives in the educational programming of severely disabled students to stimulate interest in other perspectives. My experiences as an itinerant teacher of blind/visually impaired students who delivered educational services to multiply/severely disabled students on an itinerant basis contributed significantly to the aims of this study. My critical reflections on my own practice and that of my former colleagues stimulated a

deep personal commitment to achieve, in some small measure, social justice for students with severe disabilities. Further, adopting a parental perspective to education for all students with my own daughter's entry into the institution of formalized schooling served to enhance my perception of the needs of severely disabled students and increased the urgency to affect practice in ways that could effectively meet their goals.

The research questions stemming from the theoretical framework discussed previously and the aims of the study were as follows:

1. What kinds of stories about severe disability circulate in classrooms which include one or more severely disabled students?
2. What are the contexts which stimulate particular kinds of stories?
3. What are the effects of such stories on the participation of all members within the classroom—students and teachers?

Research genre and tradition

In its attempt to answer the above questions, this study adopted an interpretive approach. This presupposes the use of qualitative methods for conducting the study. Studies discussed earlier that have situated the locus of learning solely within the learner have adopted quantitative tools that, by their very use, have asserted descriptions of severely disabled students as being limited and deficient. Qualitative methods, however, are uniquely suited to understanding context, illuminating process and offering findings that are actually meaningful to practitioners (Maxwell, 1996). These purposes are compatible with the different theoretical frameworks that have been postulated as informing this study. The present study did not necessarily seek causal explanations but a

more meaningful understanding of the process by which certain perceptions of severe disability are fostered over others. It subjected the context to an intense scrutiny in an effort to achieve these goals. Furthermore, its aim was not to simply evaluate an existing program, but to examine the complexities of the contexts within the program to assist in reformulating practice. Interpretive inquiry generally subscribes to the notion that reality is socially constructed and therefore its aim is not to predict and control but to describe, interpret and understand (Ferguson, Ferguson & Taylor, 1992). Furthermore, as these researchers point out, it is particularly suited to unearthing the perspectives of those whose voices have been largely unheard. Recognizing that professional narratives have dominated educational discourse, this study has attempted to secure the views of peers, as well as families of disabled students as a means of making sense of events. A key element in the study was the systematic pursuit of multiple perspectives—a central characteristic of an interpretive approach—in this case, of teachers, parents, students, administrators, paraeducators, to mention a few.

The present study falls within the tradition understood as “symbolic interactionism” that has been expressly articulated by Blumer (1969) who himself drew heavily on the writings of George Herbert Mead. Its conception of meaning affords it a distinctive position among other traditions:

The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. Their actions operate to define the thing for the person. Thus symbolic interactionism sees meaning as social products, as creations that are formed in and

through the defining activities of people as they interact. (Blumer, 1969, p. 5)

There are therefore, three main premises to this approach that Blumer identifies. First, human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Second, the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction with others. Third, these meanings are handled in an interpretative process used by the person as she grapples with the thing she encounters. Blumer emphasizes that interpretative action is performed by the individual who is not merely responding to internal or external forces but actively taking into account various salient issues including her own objectives, desires, the actions and anticipated actions of the other, and the possible consequences of a particular line of action. Symbolic interactionism, then, sees social interaction as a process that *forms* human conduct, rather than as an arena for the display of human conduct. This accords with the perspective of sociocultural theories of learning described earlier, that maintain that individual development emerges from the sociocultural context in which it takes place. The social context within this perspective is not a discrete entity whose effects on various events can be separately analyzable. Interpretive descriptions of children's narratives of severe disability must be embedded within the sociocultural context in which they are found.

Designing the study

In order to incorporate the principles outlined above in the collection and analysis of data, a significant component of the present study was designed as ethnography. Ethnographic studies are derived from research traditions in anthropology, where the

researcher immerses himself in a setting for a prolonged period, collecting data primarily through participant-observation and interviewing (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The ethnographic site for this study was a first grade classroom in a public elementary school in a suburban middle-class district. One student, Harry, considered severely disabled was included in this classroom. He was included in the kindergarten classroom in the same school the previous year. The first grade classroom had 17 students, some of whom were Harry's classmates the previous year. I spent 3-4 days a week (2-3 hours a day) for a period of 3 months in this classroom. Following that, I continued to visit the classroom once in two weeks, gradually diminishing to once a month by the end of the school year. My period of study lasted from the end of September to the middle of May.

During this study, I was a "participant as observer" indicating a point on the participant-observer continuum (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) where I assisted with the classroom routines whenever I was requested to do so, engaged directly with the students/teacher during the course of those encounters as well as observed classroom happenings. I therefore participated to a significant extent in the everyday world of these students, in the belief that this would provide me greater access to learning about their classroom community. My primary goal in immersing myself in this classroom was to understand the salient features of this setting, its participants and their behavior. This particular knowledge I hoped, would offer me a unique way to understand how narratives of severe disability emerged in this first grade setting. Participant-observation was accompanied by open-ended interviews with the classroom teacher, special education personnel, school principal, Harry's mother, and the paraeducator assigned to him. The multiplicity of perspectives achieved through this whole process is integral to the

interpretive approach that looks for the meaning of disability in the ways in which it is used (Ferguson, Ferguson, & Taylor, 1992). It also afforded a valuable means of “triangulation” of data (Maxwell, 1996) to establish validity.

The study involved a second site—a public high school setting—where participant-observation was conducted in the general and special education classrooms that included a severely disabled tenth grade student. The study itself was carried out over a period of 3 months, 4-5 days a week. The primary focus in this site was the completion of a series of interviews with the classmates of the severely disabled student. The selection of this setting as a second site draws on the methodological framework suggested by and Strauss and Corbin (1990) and is premised on the analytic/interpretive procedures used in conceptualizing data. These writers delineate the grounded theory approach that systematically uses these procedures to develop an inductively derived theory about a phenomenon. Grounded theory techniques call for developing categories during the process of analyzing data, then further developing those categories to distinguish their *properties*, which can now be analyzed along different *dimensions*.

After generating the categories from the first setting and examining the relationships between them, I could venture to deliberately track a category within a different setting to uncover variation along those many dimensions. For example, if the category “community-building practices” could be linked to a certain type of narrative that emerged from Harry’s participation and that of his peers, then I sought to identify if the same connection could be made in the high school setting. If not, I tried to identify the situational factors that could be linked to its absence. Or, were the narratives surrounding the participation of the disabled secondary student similar along any of the

dimensions identified in the first setting? What conditions promoted those specific dimensions in this setting? Strauss and Corbin state that in this form of “relational” or “variational” sampling, one tries to find as many differences as possible at the dimensional level in the data. The goal is to sample as many events and incidents that “indicate differences and change in conditions, context, action/interaction, and consequences” (p. 185). They add that this is done to “uncover variation and process as well as to densify the categories” (p. 185). In doing thus, my objective was to develop a sound and fairly robust description of the theory that emerged from the data collected.

In a qualitative study conducted in a neonatal intensive care unit Bogdan, Brown and Foster (1992) studied the patterns of communication between professionals (nurses and physicians) and parents to suggest that the unique context in which the participant’s response was situated, determined their particular understandings of the life career of these infants. Professional communication to parents therefore remained unmindful of their unique histories so that what the staff told parents was not always the same as what they (parents) heard. Extrapolating the findings of their own study to other, possibly disparate, settings such as special education, the authors conclude that gathering data from a variety of settings can eventually lead to “a grounded theory of professional-client communication” (p. 35). The selection of the high school as the second site for this study derived its justification from the same logic. The data collected in this site not only “tested” the findings of the first site, but enhanced the theoretical sensitivity of the relationships that were hypothesized between different categories. Were the narratives of severe disability in the high school settings different from the elementary setting? If so, what were the conditions that contextualized that difference? How did the participants’

narratives influence their own participation within it as well as that of the severely disabled student? Obtaining such data from two different schooling sites enabled me to generate a theory of story-making that might be usable in different educational (or other) contexts. It also allowed me to unearth elements of instructional practice that had significant implications for the story-making process, thereby offering ways to identify the spaces where intervention could modify or alter the narratives that were produced.

Ethical issues

Procedures for protecting all participants in the study and ensuring the confidentiality of the information gathered were detailed in an application to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Missouri-St. Louis which granted its approval to carry out the study. Parental consent for all students was secured prior to the collection of any data. A description of the study was provided to families with the notification that there were no known risks to the participants in the study. They were also given the opportunity to decline to have their son/daughter participate in the study. They were notified about the nature and scope of the study and the measures taken to maintain the anonymity of all participants. Prior to the collection of data, I also established contact with the families of the severely disabled students and offered them the opportunity to learn more about the study. Any information that was obtained in connection with this study and that could be identified with specific participants remained confidential. Pseudonyms were used for transcriptions and during all analysis and coding of the transcribed interviews and conversations. Any names of individuals, schools and specific geographical locations were given pseudonyms. Transcriptions will be retained

for a period of 3 years following the study after which they will be destroyed. Separate consent forms were obtained from the parents of the severely disabled student in both settings. All signed consent and assent forms (for high school students) will remain secured in a locked cabinet in the principal researcher's home-office for a period of 3 years after completion of the study.

Data Collection

Identifying sites for data-collection

Participant-observation and interviewing constitute a significant portion of “doing ethnography” (Geertz, 1973). These in turn assume careful attention to the process of gaining entry, selecting informants, developing and maintaining rapport, and keeping detailed field notes. The selection of sites and settings for the present study could be described as *purposeful sampling* or *criterion-based selection*. Maxwell (1996) describes this as “a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that can't be gotten as well from other choices” (p.70). The selection of the sites for this study emerged from two Research Internships that were completed in prior semesters at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The focus of these internships was to explore inclusive settings in the local area, particularly educational settings where severely disabled students were included. Both the elementary and secondary school sites utilized for this study were visited during the course of these internships. The inclusive models in both settings met the requirements set by the design of this study.

Harry's placement in the first grade classroom was part of a district wide attempt to include students with severe disabilities in the general education classrooms. During the course of the internship I had already established favorable relations with the administrator who had initiated this project and she committed herself now to affording me entry into the setting. Harry was selected for this study because he fulfilled two criteria that were critical to this project. His disability might be described as "severe"—as a multiply disabled boy, he used a wheelchair; he had little verbal communication, if any; his vision was impaired; and he demonstrated developmental delays. The second criterion he fulfilled was that he was included in the regular first grade classroom for all or most of the school day. Inclusion of the severely disabled student in a general education setting was critical to the research purposes of this study.

The selection of the particular high school setting as the second site in the study resulted from the second research internship when I was, briefly, an observer in the classrooms which included Michael, a significantly disabled student. This high school was situated in a different school district. Michael also met the two criteria described above that were integral to the accomplishment of the research purposes of the study. (However, as it turned out, out of the eight "blocks" of time that constituted his schedule for the semester in which the study was conducted, only three of those blocks were classes which he shared with general education peers. During the other blocks, he attended classes primarily composed of special education students. Michael's "inclusion," as it was still understood by the staff, then, had a very different character than Harry's experience). Furthermore, during the earlier internship a conversation with his paraeducator (who had served in this capacity with Michael for five years) revealed

another important dimension to the inclusion of students with severe disabilities in the regular education setting. His paraeducator, as the primary individual entrusted with implementing his curricular goals, articulated a vision of inclusive classroom practice that connected easily with the position advanced in this study. This was important, especially in the high school setting, where several teachers share the educational responsibilities of a single student, in contrast to the elementary setting where a single classroom teacher holds primary responsibility for the implementation of student goals. The latter therefore, could significantly influence the “inclusive” nature of the school experiences of the severely disabled student. In the high school setting, however, that influence is usually distributed among several educators. Frequently and partially as a result of differing and/or conflicting views on inclusive practices among teachers—special and regular—the paraeducator assumes an important role in shaping the school experiences of the student (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). A paraeducator who regulated her own behavior solely by the direction (or absence of it) that she received from the regular and special educational personnel, leaves the severely disabled student vulnerable to differing learning situations requiring different, often minimal, levels of participation. Given these concerns and the aims of this study (which presumed inclusive learning contexts) Michael was selected as an important participant for this study.

Procedures of data-collection: Interviews

Interviews with professional staff were designed to elicit their own particular narratives of Harry and Michael respectively. Teachers’ perspectives on assessing the successful “inclusion” of a severely disabled student were elicited. Teachers create and

maintain various types of classroom communities. Through interviews and observations I hoped to capture the salient features of these particular classroom communities (first grade and some secondary general education classrooms) in which Harry and Michael were included. In doing thus, I hoped to locate and explore those facets of a teacher-directed classroom context that influence the production of narratives and thereby speculate on alternate forms of teaching practice. At the elementary setting, two formal interviews and several informal conversations were held with Harry's classroom teacher. Single interviews were conducted with the special education teacher, two therapists, the paraeducator and the school principal. At the high school, the special education teacher, one general education teacher (Foods), and the chairperson of the special education department were the professionals who were interviewed once during the study. All teacher interviews lasted between 40-60 minutes. I had hoped to interview several more teachers in the High School building. However, given the unvarying nature of Michael's participation in almost all the classrooms that he attended and the lack of diversity in the instructional practices observed in these classrooms, I did not believe that interviewing other teachers would have added significantly to the data that I had collected through participant observation in that setting.

The families of Harry and Michael were also interviewed. The goal of these conversations was to draw out the ways in which they described their severely disabled child and to examine how such descriptions influenced their relations and behaviors with their children. How were their narratives similar to or different from the narratives of professional staff and from the data generated from my own participant-observation? What leads could they offer me to understand Michael's and Harry's participation in

school? Each family was interviewed once during the period of the study. Interviews lasted for 40-60 minutes. After several weeks of participant-observation, 6 students in Harry's classroom emerged as "key informants"—their relations with Harry were notable to the extent that obtaining additional data about them was considered important for furthering the purposes of the study. The mothers of these students were interviewed separately. The aims of those interviews were to generate additional data on those students in order to contextualize their practice with Harry in the classroom.

At the high school level, data was collected through direct, tape-recorded, open-ended interviews with 21 students who were Michael's classmates during this semester. Interviews with students were conducted both individually and in the form of focus groups. These groups consisted of 3-4 students often drawn from different classrooms. All interviews lasted about 20-25 minutes. They were conducted in the school library during the Academic Networking Period (described in detail in chapter 4). For two of the students, I followed up with individual interviews. Students were drawn mostly from general education classrooms, but also included two special education students. An interview was also conducted with Michael's sister who was a senior in the same building. I explained my objectives to students prior to the interview in the following manner: "I am a University researcher who is trying to understand what it means for a severely disabled student to be included in a high school setting. This means that I really want to find out what you know about him. So my questions to you will be about the kinds of interactions you have had with him and what you think about those interactions."

The interviews, therefore, directly sought descriptions of Michael from the perspective of each student and their conceptualizations of his role and participation in

the student community. Initial criteria for such selection that included proximity in class, frequency of encounters in the classroom, joint participation in school/classroom events, and shared history of school settings (attended the same middle or elementary school) had to be modified. During the course of participant-observation in this setting not a single general education student was found to interact with Michael, besides an occasional casual greeting. So criteria based on relations with him had to be abandoned. On the whole, selection of students was determined by my own observations within the classrooms. I anticipated that some students might relish the prospect of talking with a high-status adult and offer generous accounts of their experiences. However, I also expected that some may be noncommittal about this experience or find it uninteresting and a chore to be tolerated at best. By posing open-ended questions and emphasizing the importance of the accounts that *they* authored to the goals of the study, I tried to enlist greater participation from them.

Procedures of data-collection: Participant-observation

. When I entered the first grade setting, I found that I was not required to explain my presence to the students. The classroom teacher had informed them that I would be visiting the class often. She had apparently not offered any other detail regarding my presence in the room and had not received any significant questions from them either. I learnt later that students in this class were accustomed to the presence of many adults in the room and approached them (as they did me) without any reservations. As a participant-observer, I engaged directly with the students during various classroom activities, such as reader's workshop, writer's workshop, or "choice" time. I assumed the

role of an adult volunteer, aiding the students as necessary in the classroom. During “morning meeting” when they were gathered in a circle on the carpet, I sat with them on the carpet, positioning myself at the back of the group. In keeping with the parameters of this role, I did not present myself as sharing authority with the teacher (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988). Assuming the role of an authority figure might have inhibited the quality of stories that I elicited from the students. It might also have been perceived as unnecessarily intrusive by the teacher and jeopardized our collaborative relationship. Though I intended to deflect, as much as possible, issues of peer conflict to the classroom teacher, I found that there were few, if any, instances when I was actually called upon to mediate such situations. When offering assistance to students, I verified my response with the classroom teacher before doing so.

I joined students in small groups assisting them, or simply keeping them company during activities that included reading, writing, math, coloring, board games, building with blocks, etc. The aim of these direct encounters with the first grade students was to unearth the ways in which they described Harry while simultaneously searching for the relations between those stories and their own behaviors in the classroom. Instead of eliciting narratives from students separately, research suggests that young children (Mauthner, 1997) might be more forthcoming in small groups. Consequently, stories about Harry were elicited during the course of routine classroom group activities. Detailed, descriptive notes were taken of the setting and of my encounters with the students. “A good interpretation of anything—a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society—takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation” (Geertz, 1973, p.18). Careful observations of students in the classroom interacting with

each other and with Harry were conducted. The study also attempted to document the process of change, if any, in their stories, by revisiting their narratives at different points in the study. Such documentation of children's narratives often reveal new purposes, new definitions that offer a deeper understanding of children's thought processes (Katz, 1998).

At the high school, detailed observations were also be made in the general education and special education classrooms that Michael attended. In the participant-observer continuum (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), I was mostly an "observer-as-participant" within these settings. My focus in each of these classrooms was to ascertain the ways in which specific classroom practices determined the level of participation demonstrated by Michael and his peers.

The following tables clarify the unique implications of data collection in each setting.

Table 1

Data collection process in the two settings: STUDENTS.

Elementary School	High School
Size of student pool: 17	Size of student pool: 150-175
Procedures:	Procedures:
Observations	Student interviews (22)
Staff interviews (6)	Observations
Parent interviews (including Harry's mother) (6)	Family (Michael's) interview (1)
Writing samples	
Informal conversations	
Implications:	Implications
Opportunity to trace individual trajectories; actions were contextualized by the narratives of others, other classroom experiences and researcher observations; the focus was less on examining their individual stories as much as looking for evidence of how they were used and how that impacted the practice of all students.	Students directly articulate their stories to researcher; there was less opportunity for those narratives to be contextualized by other narratives or by researcher observations; the focus was on documenting the nature of those narratives rather than fully exploring how they were appropriated.

Table 2

Data collection in the two settings: STAFF

Elementary School	High School
<p>Staff observed: 1 classroom teacher; 1 special education teacher; at least 3 therapists; 2 “Specials” teachers; 1 paraprofessional</p>	<p>Staff observed: 4 general education teachers; 1 special education teacher; 1 paraprofessional</p>
<p>Observations of 1 classroom teacher: 4-5 hours a week</p>	<p>Observations of 5 classroom teachers: 6-8 hours a week</p>
<p>Number of interviews with 1 classroom teacher : 2 formal, several informal</p>	<p>Number of classroom teachers interviewed once: 1</p>
<p>Interviews with other staff: 5 (included school principal)</p>	<p>Interviews with other staff: 3 (included case manager and chair of special education department)</p>
<p>Implications: Greater evidence of classroom teacher’s teaching philosophy; its implications</p>	<p>Implications: Less opportunity to gather evidence of each classroom teacher’s teaching</p>

in the classroom; more opportunity

philosophy on student actions;

Elementary School

High School

to examine how her practice was contextualized by the students' actions; greater access to her evolving thoughts on students.

however, better opportunity to gather a sense of general school values and goals within this teaching community.

Data analysis

Detailed field notes of observations in the chosen settings were maintained. While notes were jotted down during the course of participant-observation, they were developed into lengthy and detailed descriptions following each day's experience. These notes were accompanied by analytic "memos" (Maxwell, 1996; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) recording reflections, analyses, and questions that surfaced during the course of the study. I also used a "subjectivity file" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) to record, monitor and control use of my subjectivity.

All audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim. Maxwell (1996) reports two analytic options in handling the data: categorizing strategies (such as coding) and contextualizing strategies (such as narrative analysis). In this study, I performed both kinds of analyses. Coding involved the breaking down of data into smaller chunks of

information and then rearranging them into categories that emerged from the reading of the data. The comparison of data within and between the categories lead to the development of the concepts that became central to the theory that emerged. In order, therefore, to unearth the underlying concepts which participants used to make sense of their world of objects (Blumer, 1969), in this instance severe disability, it was necessary to subject the data to the coding process. Field notes as well as the data from interviews were subjected to the coding process.

Contextualizing strategies seek “relationships that connect statements and events within a context into a coherent whole” (Maxwell, 1990, p. 79). The focus in utilizing such strategies, therefore, is *not* to break down the data. Denzin (2001) emphasizes that “contextualization locates the phenomenon in the personal biographies and social environments of the persons being studied” (p. 79). He lists the key elements of this process as obtaining the self-stories that embody the phenomenon in question; presenting contrasting stories to highlight variations on the stages and forms of the process; indicating how lived experience alter the process; and comparing and synthesizing the main themes of these stories. In analyzing the data collected from educators and families I applied contextualizing strategies simultaneously with coding procedures. This was also true of the narratives of students in the first grade classroom. In urging researchers to adopt an interpretive and sociocultural approach to children’s narratives, Nicolopouou (1997) suggests that they should be understood as symbolic forms that have certain structures of meaning for children. How do children *use* narratives and for what purposes? The verbal exchanges with students and between students that constituted an important part of the data collected through participant-observation were contextualized

with other field notes detailing their participation in the classroom, teacher commentaries as well as data from parent interviews. Those field notes were subjected to coding procedures to highlight the concepts/categories that emerged from this setting.

Data generated from the high school was analyzed in similar ways. Coding and contextualizing strategies were utilized with data generated from staff members. Student interviews were subjected to different levels of coding. The first application of this procedure yielded broad categories. Systematic examination of those categories generated several themes, which were subjected to further examination to achieve refinement. Given the limited period of data collection at the high school, and the “spread” of students from a variety of grades who comprised Michael’s peers, contextualizing strategies could not be effectively applied to these interviews. While my field notes recorded the actions of these particular students in the classes where I was a participant-observer, there was very little other data generated about them from other sources.

Validity

Blumer (1969) argues that any research must be empirically validated during every step of the process. He suggests that while empirical validation in symbolic interactionist research is not bound by the rules of research in the physical or natural science, nevertheless it must still be tested against the empirical world. Interpreting this in methodological terms, Maxwell (1996) states:

All we require is the possibility of *testing* these accounts against the world, giving the phenomena that we are trying to understand the chance

to prove us wrong. The key concept for validity is thus the validity
threat: a way you might be wrong. (p. 78)

Any qualitative study must seek to continually examine how the stated interpretations and explanations could be wrong. Furthermore, as Blumer repeatedly emphasizes, to maintain fidelity to the empirical world, one must examine and clarify the assumptions behind the purposes, questions and tools used in the study. In the present study, I have clearly assumed several phenomena in the teaching-learning process. In attempting to reconfigure classroom participation for severely disabled students, the study assumed that inclusive classrooms are the default settings in which these students should be placed, and that meaningful participation is achievable for these students. Teachers and other groups may not assume that current practices are unsatisfactory and/or may not conceive of successful participation for severely disabled students in terms other than physical inclusion in the activities of the classroom.

The research questions also presume that children are constructing their knowledge as they participate in classroom routines, but that adults also play an important role in mediating the development of the children. This is an important assumption because much of the justification for placement of severely disabled students in the regular classroom acknowledges the former—that children actively construct their knowledge, but has paid less attention to the mediating influence of teachers and other adults in the classroom. Further, in subjecting the discourse of children to scrutiny, I have presumed that some, not necessarily all, of that knowledge enculturation is evidenced in some expressible form. The danger of that assumption is that interpretations of their thinking will render them static rather than processual. Children may not always express

exactly what they are thinking or may periodically revise, modify, contradict what they have expressed. Also, in seeking to describe narratives, I have assumed that I can successfully identify those narratives in the discourse of children which includes both talk and play.

I sought to monitor and evaluate these assumptions and its implications for the different roles—former teacher, researcher, parent, recipient of public services—that I assumed and which would inevitably collide during the process of data collection in several ways. I continually searched for traces of my subjectivity in my notes and interpretations and kept a record of this. In my interviews with professional staff and families, I presented my topic of dissertation as stemming from an interest in understanding how peers processed their understanding of a severely disabled classmate. In assuming the inclusive classroom as the default setting for all students, regardless of disability, I would have risked being unmindful of the efforts undertaken by the school community to implement it. In the interest of creating and maintaining rapport with the school community, I tried not to demonstrate disapproval of their current educational practices, but rather validated their pioneering efforts (Harry's inclusion was part of a district-wide initiative conducted for the first time).

During the interviews, I probed the ways in which teachers understood their roles in children's acquisition of knowledge and its implications for severely disabled students. I triangulated this during my observations of classroom procedures and through detailed descriptive notes of the events. Though the theoretical perspective that I brought to my analyses might differ from that employed by teachers, I did not foresee that this assumption will invalidate the data collection in any way. To record the process of

children's thinking, rather than assume that their narratives were "final" products, I have attempted to document their actions over a period of time and on different occasions.

The validity threats to which qualitative studies are particularly susceptible include valid description, valid interpretation and valid theoretical basis of the report (Maxwell, 1996). To address these, every effort was made to provide "thick" descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the setting and events. Denzin (2001) describes thick descriptions in the following way:

It presents detail, context and emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. It enacts what it describes. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience or sequence of events for the person or persons in question. In thick description the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard, made visible (p. 100).

Data collected were detailed and complete to obtain a full and clear picture of what was going on. This also implied that any interpretations offered by the study would be grounded in the ways actors—professionals, families and students—perceived the event in question. These multiple perspectives were allowed to emerge through the detailed descriptions, but also through interviews with the different groups who were participants in the Harry's and Michael's educational experiences. Interviews used open-ended questions to allow participants to freely share and describe their views. Member-checking during the course of the interviews were used to ensure that participants' meanings were not misrepresented. (A more detailed member-check was made towards the end of the

study when I shared some preliminary findings with Harry's classroom teacher).

Recording and analyzing different forms of children's expression represented a means of acquiring greater access to the "conceptual structures" of these important actors.

Identifying and analyzing discrepant data is another significant part of establishing validity in a qualitative research study. Serious efforts were made to be alert to data that could not be accounted for by proposed interpretations. These were carefully examined to analyze their implications for the theoretical framework that emerged from the study.

The issue of generalization in qualitative research has been questioned and explored in different ways (Eisner, 1998; Maxwell, 1996). This study was restricted to two distinctively separate settings with different circumstances framing the experiences of the severely disabled students. The intention of the study was not to suggest that the narratives of severe disability described within these two settings would be found in all elementary and secondary settings. However, it does not foreclose the possibility that these might be some of the narratives that circulate in many other first grade and high school settings as well. Maxwell (1996) distinguishes between internal and external generalizability. "Internal generalizability refers to the generalizability of a conclusion within the setting or group studied, whereas external generalizability refers to its generalizability beyond that setting or group" (p. 97). In seeking to elicit diverse voices within the setting, in examining many and varied interactions in the classroom for a prolonged period, as well as in obtaining the perspectives of those outside the classroom but who were participants in the process of "inclusion" of Harry and Michael, this study sought to establish internal generalizability in each setting.

With respect to external generalizability, I concurred with the thoughts of Eisner (1998) that in qualitative studies it is more likely that the readers will determine whether the research findings fit the situation in which they find themselves. Given the high degree of context specificity in different school settings, this is a much more useful and desirable goal for a qualitative study. In the light of this, the aims of this study I think were better suited to performing a retrospective role (Eisner 1998) wherein it offers readers—practitioners—a way to examine their own practices in a new light. “When we make sense of experience we already have, the generalization can be regarded as retrospective” (p. 205). Yet this in turn performs an anticipatory role in that it sensitizes teachers to different possibilities in their practice and in the behaviors of their students. And that was, after all, the practical aim of this study.

Chapter 4: The Settings

“Narrative induction”

As the preceding sections have proposed, the central project of this study was to unearth, document and contextualize the peer narratives in school communities which included significantly disabled students, while simultaneously recording the ways in which they transformed the participation of these disabled students. In order to facilitate this, I have utilized the construct of “narrative induction” offered by Linde (2001) which offers a rich source for understanding the ways by which “institutions acquire new members and new members acquire a new identity” (Linde, 2001, p. 608). Referring to this phenomenon as “narrative induction” she describes it as the process by which “people come to take on an existing set of stories as *their own story*” and proceeds to illustrate this through a case study of a major American insurance company. While the construct of “narrative induction” may be a useful heuristic to describe the data collected in this study, its significance extends in many and varied ways. Examining this process within these educational settings through the narratives of students and other key participants sheds light on critical elements of educational programming for students with significant disabilities. Alternatively, it might be suggested that the nature of the general education setting itself generates a certain choreography of events/processes—narratives—that can determine the participation of the disabled student in differing ways.

Examining Linde’s construct a little more closely clarifies its implications for this study. Narrative induction into a new identity is a process “of being encouraged or required to hear, understand, and use someone else’s story as one’s own” (Linde, 2001, p. 613). In the case of the insurance company that Linde studied, it was the story of the

founder (of humble beginnings leading to eventual commercial success) and the history of the company that was actively and deliberately promoted as representative of the values and ambitions of the company. Training for new recruits was a particularly important site for the telling of this narrative by other experienced agents. The story was made available in many forms—videotapes, literature, even games, that might be used in different ways during training events. Importantly, “old-timers” who shared their experiences came to frame their own stories with reference to this company narrative. Retiring agents described their own careers in the company, relating it to the company’s history and the vision of the founder. The founder’s story then coalesced with the stories of others who had achieved similar success within the company to collectively form the framework of a “paradigmatic narrative” that was available for use within the institution.

As Linde takes care to point out, the full paradigmatic narrative was never told on any one occasion. Instead, pieces of it were disseminated to suggest different possibilities. In the case of this company, the paradigmatic narrative represented the ideal trajectory for an insurance agent, a career that had been successfully completed by many others and which an agent could most likely expect. So the stories of successful individuals were delivered not as their particular achievements but as instances of career possibilities available to any agent present at the telling. Linde also highlights the fact the paradigmatic narrative was used by agents to define their own progress and success. “It allows them to measure whether they are on track or not, and how they should feel about where they are” (p. 622). In other words, this narrative, someone else’s story, came to have relevance in the individual lives of the agents. Part of this process, Linde explains is learning *how* to tell one’s own story. Some elements of the paradigmatic narrative might

not necessarily be suggested for emulation. For some groups (such as religious or other conversion groups), there might be a preferred form by which these stories are to be told. Agents' description of their story of success corresponded to the official story of the company—an upward-moving trajectory. Learning to tell one's story as an instantiation of the official narrative drew one's own values in close alignment with the values upheld by the company. Alternatively, the *non-participant narrative* (Linde, 2001), someone else's story, promoted by the company came to resonate with the self-stories of the individual agents. Linde states her findings definitively. The study shows “how aspects of personal identity are constructed by social process, rather than being unproblematically inherent in the person” (p. 629).

In the following chapters, I will draw on Linde's construct to examine and understand the interactive processes that took place in the classrooms under study. My first task was to identify and describe the paradigmatic narratives implicit in these educational settings. This could only be accomplished after a careful scrutiny of the settings themselves. This section, therefore begins with a close examination of the activities of the participants and the nature of the environments in which they took place. After the description of each setting, I will attempt to describe the paradigmatic narrative that emerged within that setting, employing Linde's analytical guide to do so. Specifically, this seeks answers to the following questions: What is the narrative? Who tells the narrative? Why is it told? When is it told? What are the values embodied in the narrative? What is the relation of the paradigmatic narrative to the reward structure of the institution? As we shall see, two distinct yet surprisingly related, paradigmatic narratives emerged from data collected in each setting. In subsequent chapters I will extend Linde's

idea to suggest a framework for understanding the contexts within which student relations occur.

West Creek Elementary School

West Creek Elementary School is located in a largely middle-class affluent suburban district of Oakland in a large metropolitan area of the Midwest. The suburb itself was established as early as 1853 and boasts many historic sites, quaint neighborhoods and community parks. The median household income as reported by the city is \$65,340 with more than 90% of the population of about 27,000 classified as White. West Creek Elementary is one of 5 elementary schools in the district, serving 425 students according to the information posted on its website. The website further informs us that it was established in 1956 when it began with seven classrooms. Responding to a steady and rapid growth in population, the school now houses 29 classrooms, two gymnasiums, a computer lab and a library among a host of other utilities. Sprawled over 10 acres of land, the school offers a newly re-modeled playground that can be accessed by wheel-chair users.

The demographic make-up of the school as reported in the Annual Report Card for the school on the State Department of Education website indicates that over 75% of the students are White, with about 21% considered Black. Latino and Asian students made up the remainder of the school population. The principal offered some background on how this proportion was realized within this largely white suburban community. Explaining the initial downward trend in the reported academic standing of the school during her first years as the school's new principal, she noted:

And that was because the way it [Oakland] is divided into the little elementary school districts, West Creek was the most affluent. We had the most money per se out of all the other elementaries. And we didn't have as many minority students. So, the Board made this decision ... our goal is to have 25% minority in every building so West Creek should get mostly all the VTF students [Voluntary Transfer students from the city]. We get more VTF students than anyone else. So we get more in order to make our 25%. So *that's* when the scores started changing. I think they were, first of all, shocked by just how the kids acted differently, because they never had that many minority students in their school before ... ever. This was the "lily-white school" [laughs] and they didn't know how to respond to the behaviors, that's the first thing. They didn't know what to do they wanted to blame the fam.... I mean, they had all these reasons for not really just embracing these children and saying they are our own too. So I had to deal with that.

The school was the designated "accessible" elementary school in the district. So, all elementary students with physical disabilities in the district would attend West Creek Elementary school. According to the principal, this had been the first year that all elementary schools had begun to retain students whose disabilities were not necessarily physical in nature; these were students with "extreme needs" and the Board had required that they attend their home schools. Overall, the principal felt that the teachers in her building had come to accept the inclusion of these disabled students, whether they might have initially wanted to or not, and they just needed to be supported through it. "I think

it's the pressures of everything, and that's just one more pressure, see, that they didn't have to deal with before. That's all it is. Not that they don't want the child, I don't think per se. It's just one more thing."

The district's mission was described on their official website in the following manner:

The mission of Oakland R-5 schools, a personalized educational network rich in tradition and energized by future possibilities, is to create environments characterized by a passion for learning, purposeful discovery and expectations of excellence in order to guarantee that each learner achieves personal goals, academic success, and becomes a leader in society. (Official Website of the district)

Elaborating on the specific goals at West Creek, the principal listed the primary goal as making sure that students succeed academically; the second goal was to sustain communication with the community and the families, with the third goal being high expectations of behavior.

The school had met the requirement of achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the past year as defined by the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, but the principal noted that there was increasing pressure to maintain the high scores and to continually move towards the 100% goal set by the law to be achieved by 2014. She anticipated that these pressures would grow steadily and she sought to bring about the necessary changes in her own building, by presenting it in as non-threatening ways as possible to the teachers and encouraging them to take "mini-steps" towards the desired goals. "I don't want it to feel like pressure, that's why it's all going to be in the way you

deliver the information. But I do think we just need to have those conversations so that the expectations are going to be the same.” It would appear that kindergarten and first grade teachers experienced the stresses of preparing students to succeed on the state tests to a significantly lesser extent than the other teachers. In fact, Ms. Hilton, Harry’s first grade teacher, felt that she had a lot of freedom to ensure that she could place the interests of the children in the forefront, and that since legislation did not always work in the best interests of children, she still tried to implement its requirements in ways that she thought were the best for her students. The principal’s dilemma lay in recognizing this while simultaneously directing her and other teachers towards the expectations of the district.

I think the challenge right now for me, is [that] our kindergarten and first grade teachers are so developmental, which is wonderful. Yet at the *end* of first grade, *I* believe we need to up our expectations just a little bit. In the sense [that] I don’t think there is anything wrong with expecting all first graders at the end of the year to be writing complete sentences using capitalization, punctuation, just so that by *second* grade hopefully they can learn to write a paragraph. Because by *third* grade they have to write 5 paragraphs in an essay form ... [laughs] you know what I mean? My goals this year, in our conversations and stuff is to have, especially the first and second grade teachers, see what it looks like; actually when the test is here and it is locked in the counselor’s office, [for them] to go in on their plan time and look at what is expected just two years from now for those kids.

Ms. Hilton’s emphasis on caring for her student’s developmental needs over legislative priorities certainly found expression, as detailed later in the chapter, in her

strong commitment to the concept of “family” that structured her classroom.

Nevertheless, this focus sustained its impact on those students in large part due to many school-wide practices that promoted an interest in the social-emotional welfare of the students. Describing the community-building emphasis in the school, Ms. Hilton said:

I think, within this building, it’s just a huge focus for everybody. And I know that we all probably spend the first month and a half, focusing on those community building things. You know, we did a puzzle, “we are all different but this is how we fit together.” You can see those in the halls. I think that that’s a building focus. So I do see it throughout the building. I think people approach it in different ways and I am a little bit more ... I think humor is so important [laughs]. And I like to have those funny moments with those kids because I think it allows them to see me as just a person instead of their teacher. And you know we are kind of playing back and forth and it is fun. I think it contributes to that sense of family; you do those things with your family.

At the institutional level, the principal stated that the school, like many others in the district, had embraced a program of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). With the help of PBIS trainers and facilitators, the school had collectively generated the four “universals” for the building: “be safe, be happy, be respectful, be responsible.” These principles were echoed not only through classroom conversations, they were visible as printed guides posted on the hallways and in the bathrooms. The Shining Star program was a school wide program where students both singly and collectively were recognized for their participation in those school universals. Any staff

member could award any student/group a Shining Star for laudable behavior. The names of those students would be read out to the whole school during Morning News that was telecast to all classrooms. The process of integrating PBIS principles had not been free of challenges. Describing the discomfort aroused by a behavioral plan that had been instituted for a specific student, the principal exclaimed:

Well the whole idea of this positive behavioral supports is [that] you meet the kid[s] where they are, you know what I mean? There are probably I would say maybe three [or] four [teachers] in the building who would still disagree on how that [student] was handled. But we did a lot of reading and discussions [and] I think people finally realized, “Ah-ah!” It isn’t that every child has to be treated the same, you know. Fair doesn’t mean equal. And we’ve got to give kids what they need. So I think that’s really made a difference in the way staff as a whole looks at kids and that was not how they looked at them my first year [laughter].

One of the sites within the school building that offered such support to staff and students alike was the Learning Center. At first glance, it appeared no different from a traditional “resource” room where students identified as requiring special educational services received assistance from certified special educators and/or therapists. Special education staff used this room both as their office and instructional space when they worked individually with students who were pulled out of their classrooms. However, it served other purposes as well. As Ms. Hilton noted:

The learning center is ... it’s so many things. It’s academic support, it’s a safe place emotionally. I had a student who would run from the building.

If he was feeling very upset, he could go down there. They had a bean bag.

You could sit there and decompress.

Kristen Hanson, the special educator who was also Harry's case manager and a primary staff member in the Learning Center, agreed. She explained that her responsibilities extended coverage of services to both "IEP" students (special education students with Individualized Education Plans) as well as any student who needed assistance. So her instructional groups were sufficiently flexible to allow both kinds of students to participate. She attributed this expansion of her role to the district's priorities.

That kind of goes back to Oakland and their philosophy, with wanting to have special educators be a real part of general education, and that flex grouping. So they are trying to stay away from those stereotypical names also that people use. "O, Resource room—that's where kids go who have IEP's." We have a *Learning Center*—that way we are trying to make it feel more open and welcoming to everybody.

Interestingly, when the principal mentioned the Learning Center, she did so while attempting to draw attention to the fact that there was no self-contained special education classroom in the building. So only students with greater needs, "who are far below the regular curriculum" used this facility.

"School families" was another school practice in which students participated throughout the year. Every student in the building belonged to another group of students drawn from different grades in the building. On a pre-specified day and at a designated time during the day, these groups collected with the teacher assigned to that group. During those occasions, there was usually some "fun" and enjoyable event in which all

students participated. So, on the days when school families met, Ms. Hilton for instance, would experience an afternoon with a group of students that she may not have come to know otherwise. Students too had an opportunity to become familiar with other adults in the building as well as to develop relationships with students from other grades.

Other traditions in the building that attempted to draw the families into the school culture included the Ice-cream Social, book fairs—the Barnes and Noble Book Fair, where a certain percentage of the proceeds at the store on a certain night went to the school, and the Scholastic Book Fair—Trivia Night, Family Fun Night. These were mainly organized and implemented by the Parent Teacher Organization. Turnout during the Ice-cream social that was held on the same day as the Scholastic Book Fair during the Fall was impressive. Many families began their evening in the cafeteria where ice-cream was served and then proceeded to the gymnasium for the book fair which their children had already visited during the school day. The number of families—frequently both parents—grew rapidly as the evening wore on till the line of people waiting to purchase books extended from one end of the gymnasium to halfway down to the other end. The librarian confided that the company had instructed that this be designated a “premium” fair. Consequently, not only were there books for children, but for adults as well. The books were displayed more attractively than the same fairs that are routinely conducted in other institutional settings. Several books and other media that might be part of the main catalog but not necessarily included in such fairs were also actually on display and available for sale.

Halloween was another occasion that saw eager families participating with their children in the school celebrations. During the week, the gymnasium was converted to

incorporate some of the Halloween themes and PE instructors organized activities during PE to celebrate the spirit of Halloween. This routine was particularly popular and many students eagerly anticipated this event. The primary attraction however was undeniably, the school-wide Halloween parade. Students were encouraged to bring their costumes to school and in the afternoon with the assistance of families, usually mothers, the children dressed themselves up in the room. The entire costumed school population then filed out from one door in the building to the outside. Accompanied by the cheers and applause of the numerous families—mothers and fathers alike—lined outside and anxiously clicking their cameras, the students walked around the block with their teachers returning to the school campus via the playground area, once again received by their beaming parents. This was followed by a Halloween party in the classrooms, usually organized by the mothers that included games and food. More than half the students' mothers in Ms. Hilton's classroom attended and/or organized such parties. While parties were inevitably facilitated by the mothers, other classroom events organized by Ms. Hilton such as "Writer's Celebration" drew a healthy turnout of both fathers and grandparents.

The traditions instituted by the PTO reflected the values and ways of living of this suburban community. As the principal pointed out candidly, "It's all white women who don't work pretty much." Much of the community-building effort by the PTO was instituted along lines that might not necessarily encourage participation from all members of the school community. The principal described the deliberate lack of participation from some members of the community:

Well, I invited the PTO to come to our conferences in the city and to help me recruit some of the parents who had showed up and invite them to

come to our PTO meeting. [Pause] Ready for this? Each one of the four executive members that year, all called me the day of [the conferences], [with] some silly reason, “my refrigerator repairman is coming,” [and] “I forgot I had a dinner date tonight.” I was ... [wordless, astounded expression on face]. I shared my story with some of the other principals and they [said] “We have tried different things, that’s just how it is.” I was real sad, I thought they *like* being elitist, you know [laughs] and yet they *do* control a lot, they control all the fund-raising money, so their voice is there, you know. That still is the loudest voice, yet is not representative of our population, which I think is sad. I would love to hear more of a voice from the parents of our city children. That’s 25 % of our children.

She also mentioned that some of the families in the area had organized themselves into a group that called itself West Creek Cares and raised money for “under-privileged children who don’t have money to buy clothes, or food for the family ... the charity thing, basically.” Fund-raising efforts included cocktail parties where “you show up and drop a hundred dollar check in a bowl.”

The staff members in the building that I interviewed expressed deep satisfaction with their work environment and appeared to be strengthened by it. Commenting on her prior experiences at a middle school where teachers were reluctant to include disabled students, Ms. Hanson noted that “this school is just really so open to trying different things.” This was her first experience at the elementary setting and that itself was a challenge. “But I really enjoy it and a lot of the reason is because of the people that I work with.” Ms. Hilton was no less appreciative of this environment. After describing the

events that led her to her first teaching placement at this school, Ms. Hilton noted emphatically, “And I love it. This is a great place for kids.” She never expressed dissatisfaction with any of the institutional arrangements during the period of data collection. She continued to feel supported in her efforts to accommodate students with different learning needs.

A Typical day at West Creek Elementary School: Some pictures

On a typical morning, the two lanes in front of the school building might be lined respectively with buses emptying out scores of students or minivans as families drop off their children. The two lanes are separated by a grassy median that situates them at different levels. Students might scamper up the steps from the lower level waving hasty goodbyes to their families, as they headed to the main entrance door of the school building beyond the line of standing buses. Flanking the drop-off lane at the lower level are two more lines of parked cars, that offer spots for visitors, as well as the principal and the “teacher of the year.” Cars and minivans carefully maneuver their vehicles within the tight space, making the smooth and injury-free movement of vehicles in all lanes appear almost miraculous.

Leading all the buses in the “bus” lane is usually the smaller, specialized bus that brings Harry to school. On any given day, as the larger buses draw up behind the specialized bus, a few students might be seen emerging from the crowd and moving towards this bus rather than the front of the building where most students appear to be headed. These are some of Harry’s friends who will wait expectantly for the bus-driver to step out of the bus and execute the routine with which they have now become deeply

familiar. They watch in fascination as the driver, smiling indulgently at the group of children, manipulates the controls that will first raise the mechanical platform to Harry's location on the bus floor. An aide on the bus assists Harry onto the platform and with another whirring sound that indicates the mechanical movement as it is lowered, Harry is delivered somewhat bemused, his glasses often awry, to a group of enthusiastic young boys and girls crying "Harry!" "Harry!" or "Harry is here!" Standing behind the group, but never far away with a similarly indulgent and even proud smile on her face, is Ms. Cisneros, Harry's paraprofessional in school. She watches as the students position themselves behind Harry's wheelchair and one of them begins to push him up the ramp towards the entrance door to the school. Along the way, she might try to explain gently to a disgruntled student in the group, why another student was entitled to push Harry's chair today.

Inside the building, the hall resounds with the shouts and chatter of students as they scatter towards their classrooms. The main lobby leading from the entry door directs the visitor to the office on the other end, even as the large glass panels on one side inevitably draws one's attention to the many and luxuriant green plants that flourish in the natural light. On the far end of the lobby, large doors adjacent to the office provide a glimpse of the wooded area behind a large paved surface. Students passing the office might get a glimpse of the secretary, obviously pregnant, seated at a large desk, looking up as she spoke to a tall, slim young woman with long curly hair. The students might recognize her as the principal and continue without any other passing thought, past the large cafeteria down any of the two hallways that lead to the third, fourth and fifth grade classrooms or the kindergarten and first grade classrooms. Students in second grade

access their wing directly from the main lobby without passing the office. Back in the kindergarten and first grade hallway, students might be busy hanging their backpacks on the hooks located on the wall before entering the classroom. Teachers can sometimes be seen standing at the doors sharing a laughing comment with other teachers across the hallway, or exchanging brief pleasantries with a parent who might have walked their children into the building, or greeting the students as they walked into their rooms.

Ten or fifteen minutes might quickly elapse as slower buses bring in more students. Others in the classroom settle down to carry out the morning activity that the teacher might have suggested, or indicate their lunch choices on the board while the teachers carry out other routine administrative tasks. At the end of this settling-in period students gather on the carpet around the classroom TV and the morning news is delivered to the entire school. Two students might appear on the TV to report on the weather, the principal might have some important information for all the students and the counselor might read out the names of those students who had received Shining Stars for exemplary behavior. Sometimes a classroom might be cited as receiving a Shining Star for exemplary behavior. It lasts only a few minutes, and usually ends on a cheerful, encouraging note. Following the news, students might stand to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Classes rapidly get under way and for the next couple of hours there is little activity in the hallway, except the occasional line of students proceeding to another classroom or an occasional student rifling through his backpack. Outside some classrooms, there might be an individual student working with an adult at a desk in the hallway. Sometimes, Grant, the kindergartener with Down Syndrome can be seen

walking the hallway with an adult by his side. He might look at you intently with a half-smile on his face as you pass him in the hallway. From the kindergarten/first grade hallway, one can glimpse women in the cafeteria getting ready for the first influx of boisterous students as they work busily behind the counters. There might also be some students working individually or in small groups with an adult in the cafeteria.

By mid-morning, the first group of students who will be headed to lunch shortly can already be glimpsed participating in recess. These are the first graders. The bulk of the play area is a large paved surface that can be directly accessed by several classrooms through their back doors. There might be one or two groups of students playing T-ball on this surface. The group comprises both boys and girls with the former predominating. Sometimes there are smaller groups of students playing together on this surface, while still others are “walkers.” These are students who have a “walker’s” card that is punched by one of supervising teachers each time they complete a full coverage of the four sides of this paved surface area. Frequently, Harry who is also a first-grade “walker” is accompanied by a student who will push his wheelchair as he/she also has his/her own card punched. From a distance, one is likely to see the figure of Harry in his wheelchair in the midst of a group of three or four committed little “walkers” with Ms. Cisneros following at a careful distance behind them (there is a nasty slope along one end of the square), as they complete at least one, if not two or more, laps around the paved area. The group might disperse then, but there might be at least one persistent student who might push Harry further up a ramp-like inclination to the newly re-modeled playground area where many of the students are already engaged in exploring the various playground equipment that include swings, slides, tunnels and structures for climbing and balancing.

As Ms. Cisneros stands by Harry, a student might come up and ask her something about him, or somebody else might bring him closer to the equipment and as she hung upside down from it, might call out to him “Harry!” Harry’s responses are not always definite. He may or may not “speak” (the enthusiastic sounds with which he can often engage his listeners). He might blink uncertainly and turn towards the speaker when (s)he might seem to address him. Sometimes he might jerk his head and throw it forward and down as he appeared to respond to something in his environment. If Ms. Cisneros spoke to him, his response might be significantly more instantaneous and immediate. He would turn to look at her and say something, his eyes widened behind his glasses, the beginnings of a smile filling his face.

Around 11:35 the cries and shouts of the children might be interrupted by a sharp whistle that rings across the playground. Almost instantly, there can be seen a stream of students making their way to the large doors leading to the school. They collect there under the supervision of the teachers, eventually emerging as two separate lines leaving the rest of the play area empty. Harry might be seen leaving the play area through the first grade classroom back door with Ms. Cisneros, as the other students get ready to enter the building. Excited and high-spirited voices ring through the hallway as the first grade students enter the cafeteria. Lunch bags which are conveniently placed in large baskets near the cafeteria door are claimed by their owners, while those who will avail themselves of the items offered in the cafeteria proceed to the lunch counter. Opposite the lunch counter the lines of tables are gradually getting filled, as students decide where they should sit. The names of each of the first grade teachers are placed on separate tables and students belonging to their classes are expected to sit at those tables. On Fridays, the

rules would be different. Denoted as Friendship Fridays, students may sit wherever they want. Today, however, their choices are restricted. While some may have seated themselves and calmly begun to eat, still others might stand undecided holding their lunch trays and seeking faces or places that they may not always be able to name.

At the far end of the table that bears Mrs. Hilton's name, Ms. Cisneros might be standing over Harry, using gloved hands to pour something from a can into a cup that is connected by a short tube to Harry's stomach. She is intent on her task, but is not averse to answering the curious questions of students who might stop to ask her what she was doing. Other students who might be seated on either side of Harry might continue chatting among themselves, occasionally darting a glance at Harry. Sometimes, Andrea, a long time friend of Harry and seated near him, might pick up his hand and play with it for a few seconds, before dropping it and resuming her conversation with her neighbor. You might overhear Maddie playfully questioning the boys; "What is $200 + 200$? What is $400 + 400$? What is $1000 + 1000$?" The boys might dutifully answer her and smilingly join in her game. Mark might be seated next to Harry, as he continually directs his comments at Andrea, Maddie and Teresa seated opposite him. The girls may giggle among themselves as he plied them with questions or remarks. At the other end of the same long table might be Melissa, sitting on an adapted chair looking for company as she begins to nibble at the tray of food in front of her. A tall dark-haired woman might sit next to her, or maybe at another empty table beside her. Melissa's walker stands not far from where she is seated so that she can reach it easily. Tiffany, seated somewhere in the middle might be discussing U-Gi-Oh (a popular cartoon character) with Kevin seated next to Mark. Teresa might direct a teasing comment at Tiffany "You really like a lot of *boys'* stuff!"

At the next table, there might be other loud and excited voices of other first graders. At one end of this table, there might sit Alice, a petite girl with Downs Syndrome. She has straight, short hair and peered at the world through a pair of glasses that gave her a serious look belied by an engaging grin that seemed to instantly disperse the food generously smeared on her face. Hovering over her might be Jill, her paraprofessional, punctuating her admonitions of the other students with reminders to Alice about appropriate eating behaviors. There might be several students seated on either side of Alice, though they may be watching her, rather than talking to her. At other times Alice might sit separately with Jill at another table. Jill can often be seen in conversation with many other students whom she is either reprimanding or firmly praising. There are at least five long tables that are filled with chattering students. Some of the boys are clustered by themselves. At another table, Gabby might look seriously at Cristo, whose face is determinedly turned elsewhere and ask with great concentration as she searched for the right words, “Cristo, you—me—amigos?” Cristo might be busy reaching over to Dominic next to him and fail to respond, a fact that does not seem to deter Gabby. Staff members might come by the tables checking on students, offering assistance to those who needed it. As the hands of the clock on the wall approach 12 noon and the faces of the teachers appear in the doorway of the cafeteria, students are urged to put away their lunches and as each teacher’s name is called out, they file out of the room. Harry might take a little longer before he joins his classmates in the hallway and back in the classroom.

The excitement of recess and lunch might culminate in a quiet period of reading in first grade followed by renewed academic activities. During this time, Harry might

visit the Learning Center with Ms. Cisneros, where he and frequently a few other students, might receive instruction from the speech therapist or from the special educator. This might be when Ms. Cisneros gets some time to herself. The Learning Center is in the same hallway as the first grade classroom. A quick glance reveals that among the four first grade classrooms, only one class uses student desks, unlike the others where students are seated at round tables. It is during the afternoons that students attend “specials.” Students are escorted to various locations in the buildings for Art, or Music, or PE. Melissa, a first grader in Harry’s class might be seen walking briskly in the hallway with her walker to get to the “specials” classroom, accompanied by a “helping” partner from her class, just as Harry’s wheelchair too might be pushed by his “helper” of the week, with Ms. Cisneros never far behind. Walking to PE takes the students through the second grade wing, usually quiet and uneventful as students worked at their desks. Heading to Art or Music will direct the students through the third and fourth grade wing, down a longer and broader hallway, where one might occasionally get a glimpse of a daring third grade classroom that still used tables to group its students. Another room offering special education services is housed in this hallway.

Back in their classrooms from specials, students especially in the first grade might find themselves selecting their preferred activity during choice time as they played either singly or frequently in small groups of two and three. Harry might be escorted by his aide well before the dismissal time to receive another feeding before he is delivered to the bus that will take him home. In the meantime, his classmates, having completed their activities, might be gathered again on the rug, their belongings collected and awaiting further instructions from Ms. Hilton before they lined up at the door. Ms. Hilton might

walk her students to the bus lane, ensuring that her students headed to their appropriate buses. Despite the inevitable flurry of activity and commotion during this time, she never fails to smile at the students as she watches them depart.

Who was Harry?

The first time I saw Harry, he was lying prone on the carpet surrounded by a group of children. It was in the morning while the students were still working on a reading/writing/drawing activity assigned by the teacher. They had not yet collected together for the first time as a group for morning meeting. By the time I had deposited my belongings and found my way back to the group, Ms. Cisneros his paraprofessional, had already picked him up and carried him to the front of the circle that was forming on the rug. The following excerpt from my notes recalls an image that would be played out repeatedly in the days ahead.

Ms. Hilton, seated in her rocking chair, began to read the story “Smelly Socks” to the group of students gathered expectantly in front of her. Harry swayed unsteadily as he balanced himself while seated on the floor. Still holding himself precariously in that position, he turned towards Andrea and gazing at the side of her head, said “Ahhhh” loudly and clearly. She turned to look at him and may have said something like “Shhh.” I noticed her reaching out for his hand even as she redirected her gaze and attention to Ms. Hilton. Harry paused and then turned to Steve also sitting close to him and directing his gaze fully and determinedly at him, vocalized loudly to him in a similar vein. Steve, completely absorbed in the story, made no

response. Harry continued to sway back and forth and with the same sharp jerky motion turned his head repeatedly to the children on either side of him, delivering a loud and continuous “Ahhhhhh” all the time. At one point, Ms. Cisneros, his aide, who was sitting further behind him, leaned forward and said “Shhh.” Ms. Hilton did not make any comment and continued reading the story punctuating it with some brief questions/comments to maintain their interest. None of the other students reacted in any but the most cursory manner to the sounds that Harry made.

It was fairly evident from the beginning that Harry derived his greatest pleasure from the company of the other students in his classroom. In a group activity, such as the one described above, Harry was continually engaged by the presence of the others. On the days that he was alert, he would spontaneously initiate interactions with them through the sounds he uttered. If he happened to be in his wheelchair during this time, he was less likely to “talk,” though he would throw his head forward, his eyes huge behind his glasses. His head rarely hung down. He might show signs of drowsiness and then his head would fall back against his wheelchair. During the times when he was seated on the floor, if he displayed the same drowsiness, Ms. Cisneros might lift him up and place him in his wheelchair. There was a period during the latter part of the study when Ms. Cisneros, who was kept informed about parents’ health concerns for Harry, attributed that drowsiness to seizure activity. But early on when Harry could be observed failing to be responsive to his classmates sitting around him, Ms. Cisneros would say knowingly that he was just bored. So if the students were not at his eye level, despite the fact that he was at their table, he might still remain disengaged from them.

On other occasions, Harry seemed to understand the purpose of an activity long enough to disengage himself from his peers and commit himself to the completion of the task that was valuable to the group. In one activity, Harry led the group by pressing his Big Mac switch. This activated a recording that announced the first line of the poem. This was the cue for the others to immediately begin reciting the poem in chorus. The last lines of the poem required the students to improvise other rhyming words. Ms. Hilton would select one student to do this, and after that the procedure was repeated. Harry once again activated the voice recording and the other children recited in chorus. Harry's participation in this activity was unmistakable. Each time he responded to the choral recitation of the class that was prompted by his action, by jerking upright in his chair, smiling and delivering a confident "Ahhh" sound. However, during the recitation, he did not persist with the sound. He fell quiet, he seemed to be listening intently until the request "Press the switch, Harry" was applied to him again, at which juncture he carried out the action all the while accompanied by the same "Ahhh" which subsided again when the class began to recite the poem. It seemed quite evident that Harry's "talk" was just that, sounds that communicated a certain intent and required confirmation from those present. Further, he seemed to show recognition of the difference between "talk" between individuals and "talk" between an individual and a group.

While Harry might unabashedly show his interest in his classmates by "talking" loudly to them even during times that other members in the room may not have considered appropriate, he was selective about displaying physical expressions of engagement. Certainly Harry's response to Ms. Cisneros's voice was immediate and unmistakable. Standing over him, a little off to his right, if she spoke gently to him, he

would jerk upright and turning his head almost completely to the side to gaze in her direction, he would look intently at her, his body tensed and his hands stretched out on his tray. Yet the only person with whom he consistently initiated a physical interaction was Cristo. On more than one occasion he was seen to slowly, but confidently, reach out his arm and place it around Cristo's shoulder. The first time, Harry merely extended his hand out to Cristo. Cristo immediately put his arm around Harry's back and brought his face very close to Harry's. It was only for a brief moment after which Cristo, with no verbal comment, reverted to his upright position. On the next occasion, Cristo responded to Harry's overtures by an immediate and similarly affectionate response, so that again for one moment they were sitting on the carpet with the group, their shoulders interlocked as their arms hung loosely around each other.

While Harry frequently reached out with his hands to other students, it was Cristo with whom he seemed to seek something more. Interestingly, Harry was not seen to show such physical demonstration of affection with Ms. Cisneros, despite the length of his relationship with her and even though his affection for her was evident in his responses to her. Harry was also observed on different occasions responding loudly to Andrea when she interacted with him. Frequently, her initiatives took the form of making funny faces, gesticulating wildly with her hands in front of him, or simply toying with his hands. Even as she searched for other explanations, Andrea's mother still felt somewhat certain that he "knew" her.

We saw each other once or twice over the summer and then it was just like the first day of school, back to normal you know. They are right next to each other again and you know, to his credit, [he] recognized her right

away, knew exactly who she was. Sometimes I think [laughing] her hair is so white blonde that you can't really mistake her. There's like one other child in the whole school that has that white hair and I just think he can't really mistake her for anybody else. I have said that to Carolyn [Harry's mother] before, that maybe it's her bright white hair. And she's like [in a lower voice denoting disbelief] "O, It's not her hair, honey." [laughter] OK. Who knows?

Harry seemed to be clearly discriminating between different kinds of relationships in his life.

Harry's depth of participation varied depending on the setting, the activity, the other members of the setting, as well as his own physical state. On one occasion, during my first observation in the Learning Center, Ms. Hanson was attempting to teach Grant, a kindergartener with Downs Syndrome and Harry to respond appropriately to "Stop." Grant, who was non-verbal, but very focused on seeking his own interests in the room cooperated little with Ms. Hanson's goals. She worked vigorously to keep him focused and engaged, maintaining a steady and exhausting stream of conversation to secure his interest. She punctuated this with comments addressed to Harry who was seated next to her a little distance from Grant. Placing the red switch on the tray, she tried to bring the switch into his field of vision to attract his attention. Harry looked away, as his hands moved purposelessly on the tray, accidentally touching the switch. He did not bring his hands down on the switch, but Ms. Hanson did that for him thereby triggering the music from the Boom Box. Harry's face did not register any change in emotion when the music started. Ms. Hanson manipulated his hands to start and stop the music several times.

For the next several minutes, she vigorously tried to put Harry and Grant through the motions of dancing to the song that was being played. When the words “Freeze” in the song boomed out she would hold up the “Stop” sign and get Grant to freeze. With some strong reservations, I took her cue to carry out the same activity with Harry. There was little in his demeanor to indicate that Harry was enjoying this activity. A little further into the session, Harry seemed to have found a more stimulating moment. When the activity drew to a close, Ms. Hanson took out a large can from the back of Harry’s chair which she referred to as his “done” bucket. For the first time during this session, I saw some animation on Harry’s face. He shifted his gaze more rapidly from the bucket and Ms. Hanson, and thumped his chest with his right fist several times. It was an infectiously exuberant and joyous gesture. With Ms. Hanson’s assistance, he started to place the Stop sign into his “done” bucket. It was difficult not to infer that Harry was relieved, if not excited, when this activity ended.

If it was the setting and the participants (or the lack of) that might have rendered the above activity unexciting for Harry, inside the first grade classroom, Harry might not display that animation all the time. However, his engagement with his peers left one in no doubt that they stimulated him to stretch himself physically, socially and emotionally. The therapists who “pushed-in” their services with Harry inside the classroom made no attempt to hide the fact that they tried to use this interest to entice Harry to complete some of their therapeutic exercises. They could often be found on the carpet in the center of the room in the midst of, or at least close to, a group of students, whose presence, the therapists hoped, might stimulate Harry to raise his head. The strategy did not always work, but it certainly provided Harry a genuine impetus to complete the task at hand.

When participating in a group math activity, Harry, his face configured in an expression of deep concentration used his switch effectively albeit with some prompting from Ms. Cisneros, to keep the game progressing smoothly. He continued to stay animated, his hands simultaneously creating movements in the air that were not immediately comprehensible. Yet that animation was not always predictable. Other activities that might just as easily have induced a similarly engaged response were less successful. Or, he might enjoy using a crayon on a paper affixed to a slant board during Art class and vigorously manipulate his arm to create confident etchings, but remain quite unmoved when the same crayon was placed in his hand after he had arrived in the classroom in the morning.

Harry did not demand that others acknowledge his presence, even as he clearly sought their engagement. Perhaps that was why his peers sometimes forgot him if he was not there. Ms. Hilton referred to this phenomenon as “out-of-sight, out-of-mind.” Cristo, as mentioned earlier, was the only student with whom Harry had been observed to consistently express an emotional preference. Might further sustained opportunities to develop that relationship have revealed other emotions hitherto unseen by his peers in this classroom? In the absence of any other such similar relationships, Harry continued to display traits that Ms. Cisneros and Ms. Hilton described as being sweetly appealing and endearing. Even Mark, his classmate, pointed out that he was “never mad.” True enough, even during his moments of obvious discomfort, as when he was placed in a cross-legged position on the floor by the vision therapist, he might moan softly, but this would inevitably pass and he would return to his usual curious self. His eagerness to interact

with others made it easy for his peers and other adults to engage with him and importantly, to take risks in doing so.

While many of these interactive endeavors may not always be perceived as appropriate by adults—for instance, the infantilizing, high-pitched “Ha-rry” used most frequently by girls and the equally unflattering patting on the head—nevertheless Harry received these overtures with equal grace and participated with interest in the creation of that social moment. In perusing my field notes, I discovered that moments such as the one described below were representative of early student engagement with Harry even as it defined the parameters of his own performance.

As the class began to finish this activity, children started milling around various spots in the room. One of those attractions was Harry. A group of girls had gathered around him. The group included Tammy and Maddie who were on his right side. Andrea stopped by and stood beside him, contemplating him in her characteristically thoughtful manner, for a few moments. Then, without any comment, she moved away. Tammy and Maddie were engaged in trying to “catch” his hands that repeatedly swiped the air. Harry was not averse to participating in this game. Very soon, Maddie called out, excitedly: “Look, Andrea, he held my hand!” Andrea turned around to look, but did not say anything. After that rush of excitement, Maddie moved away, while Tammy stayed behind. She continued to play with his hands, a contented smile playing around her lips. She stood beside him for several minutes, touching his hands as he

tried to swipe at hers, all the while accompanied by loud and persistent “talking.”

Describing a classroom community

Arrangement of space. When Ms. Hilton was asked to identify the driving force behind her teaching practice, she commented:

I think the biggest one is that I want this to feel like a family, like a school family. Where the kids can come and know that this is a safe place and it's OK if you make a wrong guess that nobody is going to laugh. And I think that before any learning can happen that has to be in place.

That “family” feeling that was almost tangible in this room emerged collectively from its physical and social arrangements. It was not a particularly neat or tidy room. The door leading from the hallway focused the visitor's gaze on the back wall that was lined with large windows that both permitted the entry of a generous amount of natural light as well as provided a tantalizing glimpse of the playground. Immediately below the windows were long shelves stretching the entire length of the wall filled with baskets of books coded by different levels, and board games, puzzles and creative blocks. Student mailboxes could be found on the end of the wall close to the door leading to the playground. Students left notes for each other in their mailboxes at different times in the day.

In the center of the wall, was a book display stand that presented various titles coordinated with current curricular themes. Peering at the chart pasted on the wall at the corner, the visitor might notice the classroom behavior rules that had obviously been

drawn up by the students and signed by each of them. Turning at the corner, one would encounter another upright book display in this area with more attractive titles. This ran parallel to the main white board, which formed the backdrop for the group during the moments when they were collected together on the carpet. On one side was a rocking chair that looked comfortable, if not particularly attractive. It generated a comfortable distance for Ms. Hilton as she read to the group collected at her feet, but it was also inviting for students who volunteered to read their work to the class, to seat themselves there and face the “constructive criticism” of their classmates. Stepping around some boxes of supplies behind the chair, one noticed the teacher’s desk, cluttered with papers and miscellaneous items that found a home there. Ms. Hilton rarely sat at her desk during instructional periods. She was more likely to visit it to grab a drink or to hastily scribble herself a note. Above her table was the classroom TV which delivered the Morning News beside the movies, or films that might be used to entertain or edify the students gathered on the carpet. This described the corner of the classroom that juxtaposed the white board and the wall facing the hallway.

From her desk here, Ms. Hilton had a complete view of her classroom. Turning to her right, her glance could take in a round table with 3 or 4 students sitting at it, a straight table holding a computer with an adapted chair in front of it and the cluttered area of materials and two computers that lined the wall overlooking the hallway that ended at the classroom door. The glass panels on this wall were filled with student drawings and notes. Shifting her glance to the center of the room, she might wonder if the medium-sized shelf containing student writing folders, journals, paper of different sizes and types (ruled, unruled, partially ruled) in the center of the room contained all the supplies her

students needed for writer's workshop. This was a heavily used site during that period and students converged onto it from their locations in different parts of the room. The shelf also formed a backdrop for the whole group when they were collected in front of the rocking chair. As they attended seriously to Ms. Hilton, it effectively blocked the view of the sink situated behind them on the opposite wall. Students and even visiting adults sometimes found it convenient to lean back against it as they listened to Ms. Hilton. Sometimes, a student might get up as Ms. Hilton addressed the class and find a more comfortable location closer to the shelf as she was talking. This was not considered inappropriate in this classroom.

The shelf also served as a focal point for the class with students dispersed around the four tables that were located on either side of it or behind it. Students at one round table found themselves comfortably in the midst of the bookshelves and the book displays but still appreciably close to the shelf, while at another round table in front of the sink, students could access the writing supplies just as readily. This remained true of the large semicircular table which backed a little uncomfortably up to the listening corner, not far from the back door. This cramped space boasted two chairs, a desk and a tape recorder with large headphones. The arrangement of the classroom allowed a significant level of movement of both adults and students that was actively encouraged by Ms. Hilton. Students moved freely between tables, sometimes conversing with them across tables depending on the nature of the activity. Fifteen minutes of whole-group instructional time would inevitably be followed by a return to the tables. At any given time, even as students worked with concentration, there might be some who were engaged in helping other students at a different table or consulting with each other.

Adults who entered the room such as therapists or assistants, blended readily into this structure so that without much hesitation students would approach them, regardless of their degree of familiarity with them, for assistance.

Building community: we are different, we are the same. While the structure afforded students a significant amount of “play” in the way they managed their own behaviors, there were few, if any, moments when its flexibility dissolved into an unproductive chaos. Ms. Hilton might be observed reminding students to stay focused on the tasks assigned to them, but on no occasion was any student reprimanded harshly, isolated from his/her group, or subjected to any form of negative means of control. In fact, no behavioral system of rewards and punishments was utilized in this classroom. Ms. Hilton paid careful attention to infusing a system of care within the room, so all students could feel “safe in their bodies, and safe in their hearts.” An important way in which she sought to build this sense of collective security in the students was through literature. On my very first day of participant observation, I found her describing her concerns to the group about how some students had hurt another’s child’s feelings. She declined to identify the students but proceeded to read a book to the group about friends. She then asked them to identify some “nice” words. As students began to call out their responses, Ms. Hilton began to note them on a paper affixed to a free-standing board, which she could reach from her chair. She continued the emphasis on being “nice” by bringing out another book “Mean Soup” that she read aloud. Following this, the students were urged to return to their tables and write/draw something that would serve as an ingredient in a “Nice Soup.”

She reported the use of the same technique on a later occasion to draw out some of the tension that had been brought to her attention between some students in the classroom. She read a book about bullying and once again expressed her dismay to the group that some students were experiencing insecurity in the room. Apparently, spurred by the conversation, Steve (it was his mother who had informed Ms. Hilton that he had expressed unwillingness to come to school lately because he had been teased) rose and had “started talking.” Much to the shock of the other students he had confessed that he wished he could go to another school. With Ms. Hilton’s facilitation, he chose to resolve the issue himself with the culprits in the hallway, and apparently he had emerged satisfied. Again, on a further occasion, she had used a book to demonstrate to a student the implications of his insensitive behavior. Ms. Hilton described the events to me with great excitement. James, the student had been unwilling to greet Melissa in the morning (each student picked the number of another student whom (s)he would specifically greet) and had confessed that he wished she was not in his class the next year, leaving Melissa quite upset. In Ms. Hilton’s words:

So later in the day, I read a book called “You are special” by Max Lucado. Have you heard it? Basically, the moral of the story is that if others say mean things it’s like giving a grey dot, but if you don’t listen then it can fall off ...the grey dots are the negative things. So, during choice time, I pulled him over and I tried to explain it in that framework, “What do you think you did to her [Melissa] this morning ? Was that a grey dot or a red star?” So, he said “Oh, I think it was a grey dot” and he had questions about her and cerebral palsy and didn’t understand what it was. I think he

actually thought it was something he could catch. And so we had this big discussion, just the two of us, about how it's from birth. So, once we talked about that, he came in the next day and started helping her to do stuff. It was so exciting. He is sort of helping her do stuff. He has to be her partner during reading, and the kicker of the whole thing is that he pulled her number again ... he had the same number at morning group and he walked over and shook her hand. I wish you could have seen it.

Among all other students Jamie was most likely to receive more frequent reminders about his ability to maintain rules of classroom behavior. Rarely, if ever, was Ms. Hilton observed to reprimand him harshly or subject him to other means of control. If unable to restrain himself, he (or anyone else, for that matter) was urged to move a little away from the group, compose himself and return when he was able to do so. The timing of the return to the group was frequently determined by the students not by Ms. Hilton.

While Jamie might have occasionally posed a challenge, Ms. Hilton was also confronted with drawing a Spanish-speaking boy into the classroom community. Several pieces of furniture in the room were labeled in Spanish. She would herself speak in some halting Spanish. If unable to progress further, she would turn the conversation over to Ms. Cisneros who served as Cristo's interpreter. Cristo's reliance on Ms. Cisneros to help understand classroom activity, kept him in hers and Harry's company for extended periods of time. In keeping with the notion of a "family" and acutely conscious that she had at least two students who were even more obviously different from the rest (Melissa who used the walker and Harry in his wheelchair) she introduced the book, "Its Okay to

be Different.” It was incorporated into the book display and came to be used by the students during reading workshop, along with other selections. Class discussions were always an important corollary to the literature when she sought to drive home some principles.

“Deaf Moses” was another story that generated some exchanges with students drawing on their personal experiences with disability. Ms. Hilton too shared a personal story of her father who did not sign, but who could lip-read. In facilitating these conversations, the emphasis was to familiarize students with disability as another life experience, albeit different. Progressing naturally from this objective, the community-building efforts in the classroom actively perpetuated the belief that despite our differences, we were all the same. This was enunciated not only through literature but through other subtle ways in the room. As further analyses will reveal, the following incident offered a telling picture of the ways in which the notion of “family” was constructed in this classroom.

Ms. Hilton had just gone up to the board and begun talking about upcoming activities in the classroom. All of a sudden, a boy dashed into the room giggling loudly. He went straight to the corner of the room, where the books were located and picked out a book still laughing. He was a tall boy, appearing to be a fourth or fifth grader. A moment later, he was followed into the room by a tall heavy set man who strode into the room and took him firmly by the arm. Ms. Hilton, who had first appeared startled, recovered herself to say calmly and politely “Hi,” and the man responded with equal equanimity, “Good morning, Mrs. Hilton.” He quietly asked the boy to return the book he had taken and led him from the room. None of the students had reacted with more than a

glance at him. It had happened very quickly and Ms. Hilton had not shown any exaggerated reaction either. When they had left, the students simply turned to look towards Ms. Hilton and waited for her to continue speaking. She turned to the class and announced that she was going to give the class a Shining Star “for being so good and so focused on what we were doing.” The subsequent class discussion about the incident proceeded as follows. As she seated herself again in her rocking chair, Mark asked her who that boy was. “That’s Adam,” said Ms. Hilton. “I know that he has a brother just like him. Adam has something that is called autism. Autism is when your mind does not work the same way that ours does.” She began to probe the students on their reactions to Adam.

Ms. Hilton: What do you think he was doing?

[No response from the class].

Ms. Hilton: Do you think he was in control of his body?

Class [in unison]: No.

Ms. Hilton [nodding]: Just like we are not sometimes, right?

Class: Yeah.

[Melissa has had her hand raised by this time]

Ms. Hilton: Yes, Melissa.

Melissa [haltingly]: My neighbor is a boy who has autism.

Ms. Hilton: What is his name?

Melissa: John

Ms. Hilton: And do you play with him?

Melissa: Yes.

Jesscia: And is he cool?

Melissa: [nodding her head].

After this discussion, she returned to the assignment of various jobs for the week. The message was clear. We might look and act different from others but it should never be forgotten that we were still the same. While Ms. Hilton encouraged students to share their own stories, the family ethic that bound this class emerged less from a joint exploration of the meanings of family values and more from a decision from above that this was the preferred form of co-existence in this classroom. To the extent that students benefited from the security within the group and the comforting predictability of interactions between students and between teacher and students, they were strengthened by this powerful thread. Yet Ms. Hilton's actions still appeared to hold the response of the class as being superior to the strange behavior of Adam. Subsequent sections will speculate on the impact of Ms. Hilton's efforts on student understanding of disability.

Ms. Hilton's own ways of interacting with Harry and Melissa instantiated the message that she hoped to transmit to her students. She greeted him spontaneously and unfailingly in the room. She incorporated him into the conversation as an agentive member "I think Harry spelled that word correctly" (when he was with a partner), or "Let's give Harry a hand" or "Harry is not here with us today." Or, she might use his name in an example that she wrote on the white board. She reminded students when their behaviors, however well-intentioned, infantilized him or did not adequately respect him as a person. She made certain that Harry was paired with a partner during some academic activities. She may not always have been convinced that this was necessarily benefiting Harry, especially as the students' skills increased by the end of the year, and

consequently might not have been able to direct Ms. Cisneros adequately to enable Harry to participate. Often, Ms. Cisneros would draw him away to work with him on something else. Ms. Hilton described him as “sweet” and that he had the inexplicable capacity to transform the class through the manner in which he drew the students towards him. She was also respectful to Melissa in the manner in which she offered her assistance in the room. She was called upon to respond in a group as frequently as any of the other students. The only occasion when Melissa may have been unwittingly infantilized was during a fire drill when she was hastily picked up from the floor by Ms. Hilton and carried in her arms out of the room with the rest of the group.

Helping as a Classroom job. Ms. Hilton did not facilitate interactive encounters between either Melissa or Harry and the other students. To a great extent, the practices in the classroom precluded the need for her to do that. Students were given the option of choosing their partners for various activities, with the restriction that it had to be someone that they had not worked with before. It was not a rigidly enforced rule. I believe she merely kept track of how students were choosing to ensure that all students had partners at all times. Only sometimes, did she have to intervene to assign partners. Harry never lacked for partners. Each student chose a “job” for the week from a list of options that included Library Assistant, Boy Line leader, Girl Line Leader, Lunch-time Helper, Wagon-puller (for Melissa), Harry’s helper. Again, students freely selected these jobs without being coerced in any way, except by the restriction of doing something that they had not done before. Inevitably, Harry was “helped” by almost everyone in the classroom except for one student, Jamie.

Being Harry's "helper" entailed maneuvering his wheelchair each time he left the room, to go to "specials" or to the playground. Once that "job" had been completed, the helper was not obliged to spend any time at that location with him. They could certainly do so, if they wished, and many students did avail themselves of that opportunity to "do" things with Harry. Gabby proudly reported that she had stayed with Harry during the entire PE period because none of the other students had wanted to do. Ms. Cisneros understood the actions of students as "conscientious" when they chose to freely interact with him beyond the pale of the "job" that they had assumed. In the following account, Ms. Cisneros described Jeremy's attitude to his role as Harry's helper. Unlike those who might feel they had done their duty and "now I can go off and run with my friends" Jeremy stayed by Harry's side.

He even asked me, I think, where I thought Harry would like to go, and so he took him to different areas and kept walking with him. Even though they weren't doing walker's club, he decided to still make some circuits. But other kids came up and wanted to push Harry and he didn't answer them and I said "Well, what do you think Jeremy? Do you think maybe, you know, after you might get tired, that Hannah...?" [Assuming Jeremy's voice] 'Well, I'll think about it a little bit.' So after a little while he said "Well, Hannah, you can have a turn now." But then he still hung around and then Hannah ran off to join some friends. He said "Well, I guess she left and she is not pushing him." So then he continued.

At the end of the week Ms. Cisneros enlisted the helper to complete a simple form that reported to parents the kinds of things that Harry done that week and/or the activities

that he had enjoyed. The “helping” relations configured for the course of the week by this role often remained restricted to that week for some. Ms. Cisneros reported that Maddie had been so “sweet” because during the period when she had been his helper she had given up playing with her friends to be with Harry. In fact, Maddie even received a Shining Star for her committed and responsible behavior. On the day her name was announced over the Morning News Maddie was observed exchanging a quiet smile with Ms. Cisneros. However, after that “helping” period Maddie was not observed engaging in more frequent or pronounced interactive encounters with Harry. Nor had she demonstrated the same, prior to her role as “helper.” In fact, during Halloween (before her “helping” week), Ms. Cisneros had commented that she was one of the few students, along with Melissa and Jamie, who had not really interacted much with Harry.

However, there were others for whom the “helping” experience served as an opportunity to explore relations with Harry. This was the week when Stan was Harry’s helper and they had just returned to the classroom after a walk in the woods during PE. Stan’s actions in many ways spoke to the power of “helping” routines as facilitating increased relations with Harry.

Inside the classroom, Stan wheeled Harry over to the rug where the group was beginning to collect. He sat half-kneeling next to the wheelchair looking up at Harry. He continued to gaze at him for a few moments. Then, he stood up and started to talk to him. From a distance he seemed to be telling him something in the calm, matter-of-fact way of speaking that I had come to associate with him. He looked directly into Harry’s face as he spoke. A few moments later, I heard him say “Harry, Harry!” in the same

high-pitched sing-song voice that others had been observed to use with him.

The moment was interrupted when Ms. Hilton announced that they were going to get some extra time for centers. So the students scattered to find the activities that interested them. Stan and Kevin came over to the table at the back of the room hoping to create some paper airplanes. Stan asked Ms. Cisneros if Harry could make planes with them. Ms. Cisneros agreed and brought him over to one side of the table, only to find that position somewhat inconvenient for Harry. So she wheeled him around the table so that he was at its center. Eventually due largely to the awkwardness of the arrangement of the table and chairs, Harry started to play with Mark instead who also arrived at the same table and inquired of Ms. Cisneros if Harry could be his partner in the game. Yet for Stan, it seemed to be a continuation of his earlier activity as Harry's companion. In the days following his "helping" experience Stan was observed loitering around Harry's chair; he also began to receive Stan when he arrived in the morning merging with the group that took over the responsibility of getting him from the bus to the classroom inside the building. During one occasion when the class was offering their questions and comments to Andrea who, as she often did, had volunteered to read her work, Stan edged closer to Harry and lifted his hand. In response to Ms. Hilton's question "Does Harry have a question?" Stan responded in a high-pitched falsetto "I liked your pictures."

A similar extended effect could be noted in Steve's behaviors with Harry. Prior to the week when he was Harry's helper, Steve was already emerging as a member of the group of boys that was often clustered around Harry, either during less structured moments in the classroom, such as choice time or music, or during lunch time. When I

accompanied him one afternoon as he guided Harry's chair down the hallway after PE, I asked him casually if he thought that Harry knew he was pushing his chair. Steve nodded and noted matter-of-factly "Yes. I told him." Later, Ms. Cisneros excitedly narrated an incident about him that had occurred the day before.

Yesterday, during choice time, Steve asked me, "Now what would Harry like to do?" You know, I always thought of Steve as somewhat of an immature boy. But then, he brought this box of dominoes and said "Maybe Harry would like to do this." And I thought that was very thoughtful.

One student, Jamie, during the entire period of the study did not volunteer to assist Harry as his helper. In keeping with her overall approach to allow students as much choice as possible, Ms. Hilton did not compel him to take on this role. In fact, as Ms. Cisneros proudly noted, students always freely chose to assume this role. However, well into the second semester, Ms. Hilton had noted some changes in the ways that students had begun to respond to the choice of being Harry's helper.

Usually, that's [Harry's Helper] the first job picked. Everybody is just gunning for that job and today *nobody* No... And I said "Well, has anyone not done it? Not had a chance?" And Jamie raised his hand and I said "Do you want to do it?" and he said "No, I don't want to do it." So, Dominic ... it was Dominic's stick that was left and Teresa who was absent. And I said "Well, Dominic, do you want to do it or do you want Teresa to do it, when she gets back tomorrow?" And he said "O, I'll do it." But normally, it's like "I want to be Harry's helper, you know." Even before line helper, Harry's Helper is usually filled.

However, this lapse in interest did not necessarily diminish their motivation to work with him as a partner, as Ms. Hilton pointed out. The obstacle appeared to lie in the nature of the interactive context demanded by the particular academic activity. Ms. Hilton:

They still choose him for a partner and today we had writing partners and I put Harry with Cristo and Mark. And they were really interactive with him. But right now, we are doing shapes and so [with] something like tangrams, the kids are each working on their own puzzle and so it's harder for somebody to be interactive. It's not necessarily a partner situation. I think also as they are progressing in their academics for some of them it kind of slows them back. And they don't want to take that pause. They want to solve the tangram puzzle quickly.

Ms. Hilton seemed to suggest that while the sharing and helping disposition of the classroom as a whole certainly could thrive unassisted for some time, inevitably at some juncture it would require a more "directive" hand to facilitate its continued practice.

However, being Harry's helper was never "directive" in this classroom, thereby creating a dilemma for her during that inevitable moment when students no longer volunteered to assist him.

Instructing the learners. Did the instructional strategies employed by Ms. Hilton contribute to the "family" thread that flourished in her room? To a large extent, the collaborative nature of academic activity that she set in motion, maintained the sense of community in the room. Students were never formally tested nor their work ever scored. When they were assessed for say, spelling, they worked with a partner, collectively came up with a solution and all groups then offered their "answers" on mini-white boards that

they raised along with everybody else. It was non-threatening and students appeared to enjoy displaying their knowledge, limited or not. Any public display of student work was not to announce individual success but to instantiate classroom effort. Public sharing of individual work was voluntary. Students who wished to read what they had written to the class were encouraged to sign up to do so and then, at the designated moment, assumed the teacher's position on the rocking chair and delivered their "story" themselves. The rest of the class contributed to that effort through what Ms. Hilton labeled as "constructive criticism." They were permitted to ask the author two questions and offer two comments on his/her work. Students were likely to be as generous in their praise as they were pointed in their comments. I did not witness any student make derisive or negative comments during this exercise. The academic climate in the room, therefore was less likely to pit students against each other in competitive ways, and more likely to encourage students to take risks, either in words or in action.

Ms. Hilton conducted mini-lessons within a whole-group format, when students collected together on the carpet as she demonstrated a game or activity often using the freestanding white board to illustrate her words. Whole group sessions rarely exceeded 20 minutes. It usually ended with students scurrying back to their tables to work with their peers seated at the same table. Or, they might select different partners and work at different locations in the room. In math, Ms. Hilton sought to encourage exploration of numerical concepts through the structure of games that might involve a paper grid, dice and "counters." They were conducted in a largely non-competitive manner. There were no prizes for the group that finished first. The novelty of the game was often sufficient to sustain their interest and concentration. Math facts were revised with the group as a

whole rather than drilled individually. Sitting in relaxed positions on the carpet, students were given many opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge. They were encouraged to verbalize the strategies they employed to solve math equations. Often these strategies were suggested to others as offering them possibilities for easier computation as well. Ms. Hilton continually utilized higher-order thinking skills to enable all her students to derive their math facts. By the middle of the first semester, students had steadily and comfortably progressed in their addition beyond the sum of 10 and had begun to tackle more complex facts such as $8+9 =$. A particularly noteworthy feature of her math sessions was that students were not observed to exhibit any signs of stress. Students vied with each other to answer the problems she posed. Her response, if they happened to offer inaccurate answers, was never to judge their efforts as much as to redirect their approach to the problem.

Reader's and writer's workshops were similarly configured to allow students sufficient opportunity to collaborate with partners as well as to express their thoughts either in words or pictures. It was not uncommon to witness students engaged in drawing/coloring activities as they created their books for Writer's Celebration (a classroom event to which parents were invited) or book covers for Literacy Night (a school-wide event for parents). There were several opportunities during the day, whether journal writing on Monday morning or letters to their parents on Friday, for students to practice their creative writing skills. While Ms. Hilton would provide a model during whole-group occasions and suggest topics to write about, students freely disregarded that to discover and draw on other sources to stimulate their writing. During these writing sessions, the classroom buzzed with activity as students interacted with their peers,

collecting supplies, sharing thoughts, exchanging notes, and reading each other's work. During reader's workshop students were required to read silently by themselves for a portion of the period before they could read to a partner. As I discovered when students plied me to be their partner, they dearly enjoyed the opportunity to read to others. Although the shelves were lined with books in trays labeled with different numbers, students were encouraged to select books of their own choice and were not restricted to certain books. The numbers represented the district's guidelines on the levels at which students in this grade were expected to read.

By the middle of the second semester, Ms. Hilton was already expressing her satisfaction in the growth that she had begun to perceive in her students. She was also invigorated by her own increased level of participation at the building level. Most importantly, she felt thrilled with the little community that she had helped create in the classroom.

I feel so good. This class, more than any class ... I enjoy interacting with them *so* much. And I have loved my past previous classes, but I don't know if it's because I am further into my teaching experience or if it's just a mix of the children. I don't know exactly what it is, but I love interacting with them. We did something today. Umm ... I forget what I said. But they all responded in unison about how excited they were about something and that is *so* motivating to me. I love it. We've just congealed into this unit and I love it. *I love it*. I do. They're amazing and they are coming along really nicely. I am feeling really good about this year and how everything's been.

Locating the instructional “fit” for Harry

Harry’s status within this community was clearly facilitated by the overall approach that Ms. Hilton brought to all her students. Her commitment to create an environment where students would feel safe to learn extended easily into a desire to learn about Harry’s emotional needs from his family. Describing the valuable information that she had acquired from an instructor in a course intended to prepare educators for the inclusive classroom, she commented:

I think he got my heart ready. Because I think as an educator who has so many things going on, you can look at it as “O, my goodness. I’ve already planned my whole week and now I have to think about [this]. And I think that too often people forget [the] component of the people in this person’s life. And the hopes and the dreams they have for this person that are beyond what’s happening in this room. I asked Harry’s mom to come in. I just wanted to talk to her ... I wanted to do this with Melissa’s mom too but they had trips planned and I didn’t get to. I asked her “What are your fears about this year, what are your hopes for this year?” so that I knew (even more so than IEP goals), how is she feeling? What is she afraid of? What does Harry like to do, what does he not like? How do I know when he is happy?

As the year progressed, she continued to remain cognizant of the ways that students were responding to Harry. She might convene a meeting when he was not there in order to point out that students needed to show respect for him by not treating him like a baby or by being careless with his equipment.

While she seemed to welcome Harry as a member of this classroom, she was not unaware of the challenges posed to her in meeting his cognitive needs. Her continued preoccupation with adapting the activities for him led her to the frustrated conclusion that what he required was not a modified curriculum but a “replaced” curriculum. This approach not surprisingly led to few avenues for Harry to participate in the classroom besides unstructured occasions when academic goals were not the primary emphases. Ms. Cisneros might read quietly to Harry for a short while during reader’s workshop, but this was also the period when he left the room to work with the special educator in the Learning Center. On several occasions, during reading/writing/math, Ms. Cisneros was observed to place him in his stander and encourage him to walk to the sink, which she had filled with sudsy water. So, Harry would stand, his back turned to the classroom, his hands immersed in the water, glancing down at the foam, not “talking” as loudly as he had been noted to do on other occasions. Ms. Cisneros reported that he enjoyed this water play.

Harry participated during some of the math activities in a few different ways. He was seen to use his switch to activate a dial that indicated a certain number. This would be the cue for his partner(s) to complete the game. So when it was time for a number to be selected, Harry would be urged to “Press the switch” and when he successfully completed this portion of the task, the rest of the group carried the game forward. On other occasions, Harry was seen to use a pair of large dice. He did not always throw it when requested to do so and Ms. Cisneros might have to physically manipulate his hands even as she urged him to do so. Sometimes, his partner, in this case Dominic, would help him manipulate the dice as well. Harry was not observed to participate in other ways

during these lessons. By the end of the first semester, Harry had also started collecting cans for recycling from the classrooms in the building, during the times when other students were engaged in “academic” activities.

Within the classroom, there were few ways for him to participate with other students when they were seated at tables working on independent problem-solving tasks. During those times, Ms. Cisneros would make the decision to offer him an alternate activity such as the water play or other unrelated material (she had been observed using some green and red apple cut-outs. It had not been immediately clear what the objective of the activity had been). It was during the periods of “choice time” when students freely selected their own centers that Ms. Cisneros could find the greatest opportunity for Harry to engage with his peers. She would selectively roll his wheelchair to a location that she judged would be most suitable for him. This might be based on the students who made up the group or the activity in which they were engaged. Or, she might have him lie in the prone position on the carpet in the middle of the room and very soon, he would have attracted some students who might want to read to him.

Drawing a picture of Harry's peers

Despite the limited means of participation available to Harry during activities designed exclusively to achieve academic gains for other students, there were sufficient opportunities at other times for them to configure their relations with him in different ways. While I have chosen to describe those relations in terms of student location within the circles of relationship surrounding him, it must be emphasized that many students moved intermittently between the groups, especially the inner and outer circles.

The inner circle. By far the most persistent members of this group were Cristo and Dominic. Dominic's relations were more readily visible in large part due to the fact that Cristo was a Spanish-speaking boy who had not developed fluency in the English language as yet. He was not heard speaking to anyone except Ms. Cisneros who was bilingual and fluent in Spanish. Dominic's persistence in seeking out interactive encounters with Harry might certainly have overshadowed my own observations of the ways in which Cristo attempted to explore relations with Harry. Nevertheless, Dominic was seen to select Harry as his partner on numerous occasions. He would frequently ask to play a game with him during choice time or early in the morning before morning meeting. Dominic used the reassuring presence of Ms. Cisneros to pursue encounters with Harry in different ways. During a math activity where Dominic and Harry were partners, Ms. Cisneros assisted Harry in rolling the large dice, as Dominic computed the math to progress on the grid. Harry was particularly restless and droopy and seemed unwilling to perform the throwing action with the dice.

Eventually Dominic took over the task of enabling Harry to knock the dice over. He stood up, took Harry's hands in his own and began to manipulate them to knock the dice over the tray. He was gentle and persuasive as he worked Harry's hands to make contact with the dice. "C'mon Harry," he coaxed and Ms. Cisneros sitting at Harry's side did not demur and smilingly watched him do it.

He did not however, seek him out in the playground or in the lunch room. But he did write a book about his experiences pushing Harry's chair when he had been his assistant. The first page carried the compelling line, "The first time I met Harry, he was grabbling

me.” This was immediately followed by “In the next week, I was Harry’s helper. We went to the room.” And finally, “And then we went outside for recess, and then we had lunch in the cafeteria and then we had to go to the room and then we went to reading workshop.” On one occasion, he left a note for Harry in his mailbox inviting him over to his house. The note read: “Dear Harry, can you come to my birthday? We don’t have ramp. My room is red and my brothers room blue.” Dominic was a consistent member of the group that received Harry in the morning as he arrived in his bus and was once observed to be visibly upset when he had to accede to another student’s request to push Harry’s chair. Dominic’s consistent attempt to make a connection with Harry for much of the period of the study warranted his position within the inner circle.

Cristo’s proximity to Harry was somewhat inevitable due to his reliance on Ms. Cisneros for interpretation in Spanish. Still, it blossomed from a tentative exploration of the sides of his chair as he sat next to him on the carpet to reaching out in a few weeks and locking shoulders with him as they sat next to each other on the carpet. He too, like Dominic, began to seek him out in the classroom during both unstructured and “academic” activities. He too became a consistent member of the group that would receive Harry in the morning. He would take him into the classroom and once there, direct him to the white board, where with the assistance of Ms. Cisneros he selected the lunch option for Harry. Following this, he might ask Ms. Cisneros where Harry was to be taken and escort him there. He was seen to join Harry at the sink when the latter was playing with water. Not much conversation took place between him and Harry during those moments. Or, he might turn to Ms. Cisneros and say “Ms. Cisneros, look!” but rarely more than that. Cristo too, chose to write a book about his friendship with Harry

during Writer's Workshop. It was titled "Harry + Cristo", and below that in large letters "FRIEND." There were two stick figures on the page, followed by "BY CRISTO." The subsequent pages had each of the following sentences: I HELP HARRY RED (2 stick figures, one with a book, the other in a seated position. I SHO BOOK TO HARRY (drawing of an open book). I PLA GAMS WETH HARRY (2 stick figures, one seated the other standing, a ball between them). Interestingly, Harry's wheelchair that Cristo had drawn when creating the Halloween parade during Art, was absent in this piece of work. His mother confessed that she could not really explain Cristo's reaction to Harry, it was new to the family. She reported that he had never seen a child like Harry before, because in Mexico one would never see a child like that in school. She believed that Cristo helped him because he could do more than Harry and therefore treated him almost as if he was fragile. Cristo was the only student in the classroom who listed Harry as someone with whom he worked well.

Cristo and Dominic emerged as key figures in the group of boys who were often seen to cluster around Harry. These included Stan, Steve and Mark. On one occasion during Music when the girls were at the piano with the teacher, Ms. Cisneros wheeled him over to the boys Stan, Cristo, and Kevin who were working together on a puzzle, on the floor. The following account, which describes Harry's connection with the boys, is just as much an example of increasing evidence of Ms. Cisneros' role within the choreography of events that enveloped Harry.

Cristo looked up from the floor, and said "Harry" in his characteristic singsong voice. He said very little to Harry beyond his name. When Ms. Cisneros heard him, she voiced aloud the idea that maybe Harry would

like to be on the floor with the boys. She seemed to be responding to Cristo's wordless request. She got Harry down from the wheelchair and placed him with the group. Harry sat swaying unsteadily. One of the boys immediately held out a puzzle piece towards him. It was Kevin. Harry, his gaze riveted to the piece, did not reach for it. Kevin continued to keep his hand extended. Ms. Cisneros kept urging Harry to reach for it and eventually took it herself. Harry continued to sit for the remainder of the time that the boys were completing the puzzle. He seemed perfectly contented to be where he was, even though every time he heard the piano he would turn slightly towards the sound of the music.

Several minutes later, having remained animated and "talking" throughout, he began to lightly pound his chest with both fists. Immediately Stan and Cristo sat up straight and their backs slightly extended began to enthusiastically pound their chests with their fists. They looked at each other as they did so and seemed to derive genuine enjoyment from this action. Harry's connection with the boys and especially Cristo and Dominic became a noteworthy phenomenon that both Ms. Hilton and Ms. Cisneros found interesting and enjoyable to witness.

In the cafeteria, however, Harry's immediate environment of girls and Mark had seen little change. Until one day Ms. Cisneros, bursting with excitement, shared an incident with me that occurred in the lunchroom one day. She informed me that on that day, because some of the girls had been sick, Harry had been seated all by himself. Cristo must have seen him from where he was, because he came running over to say 'Harry! Harry!' and sat down next to him. He was immediately followed by Dominic who came

and sat down on the other side of Harry, opposite Cristo. Several other boys followed and before long the table was “full of boys.” So, now to Dominic’s right was Stan, to whose right was Kevin and next to him was Mark. Ms. Cisneros noted that Steve was part of the group also. Speaking in a very excited voice she said, “Harry had both his friends Dominic and Cristo on either side of him and he was stretching out his hands and reaching out for them.” She added, a touch of pride in her voice, “I do think Cristo and Dominic are his best friends.”

Though initially, Mark featured intermittently in the group of boys who clustered around him, by the end of the year he was steadily engaged in participating in specific activities with him, whether the boys were present or not. Very early on into my observations, it was brought to my attention by both Ms. Cisneros and Ms. Hilton that Mark asked questions about Harry in ways that had been perceived by both as being rather negative. On probing further, the offending questions had been along the lines of “But Harry will not be able to ever do that” Or “How come Harry gets to use these and we don’t?” or “I don’t think he really understands this” Mark’s comments differed from the others in that they appeared to question the premise that Harry was just another student in the classroom. However, even as he expressed his doubts, he was observed sitting next to Harry in the lunchroom (though the presence of Andrea in that location might have very well have been the main attraction), he was a member of the group that walked him around the playground, and he even invited Harry to be his partner during choice time. Towards the end of the semester there were noticeable differences in the remarks he made or volunteered about Harry. Ms. Cisneros reported that as he set up the game to which he had invited Harry, he remarked “I am not sure he even understands

the game, but that's okay." Several weeks later, as the group collected before Thanksgiving to express appreciative thoughts about each other, Mark was heard to corroborate another student's description of Harry as "special" by saying "Yeah, so what if he can't respond. He can still laugh."

By the end of the first semester, there was a distinct difference in the others' perceptions of Mark's relations with Harry. Late in January, Ms. Cisneros took me aside and observed, "You know, I just wanted to tell you that I think Mark has been more positive." She reported that he had been interested in the kinds of foods that Harry could eat and speculated on the kinds of choices available to him besides the tube-feeding. She also noted that he now consistently received Harry in the morning as he alighted from the bus. Ms. Hilton had begun to notice the change as well.

I think he has been more supportive. Like today, he was in his writing group, writing partner group, and I said to the kids "How did you feel about writing partners today? How did things go? What was your consensus, was it helpful?" And Mark raised Harry's hand and he said "Harry gave me a great suggestion about using periods at the end of my sentences." Which Ms. Cisneros *had* pointed out, but he used that so Harry could be a participant.

Well into the second semester, Mark appeared comfortable talking about his experiences with Harry. He noted to me one day, "Harry is like the new kid." I pressed him to tell me more and he said "Harry is like the new kid because he has been gone for a week." He seemed anxious to replay his experiences with Harry that morning. Excerpting from my notes:

He proceeded to use his hands and body to demonstrate to me how he had pushed Harry that morning from the bus, “Yeah, pushing it up the ramp and Jeremy was on the side going ‘Ha-rry!’ “Then I pushed ...” he used his hands to indicate that he had brought him into the building, through the hallway, and then into the classroom, all the way to the whiteboard. “Basically I am his helper till then ...” his voice drifted away.

As more students streamed into the room, he called out “Hey, Teresa, Harry is here.” Teresa did not provide any verbal response to him. He called again, “Melissa, Harry is here. He was gone for a week.” He called to Melissa again, who finally responded, somewhat testily, as she came to the white board “*I know!*”

Not surprisingly, when Harry brought his adapted bicycle to school, Mark was part of the group that clamored to push him on the playground during recess.

Andrea’s relations with Harry were almost legendary in the school. She had appeared in the city newspaper with Harry the previous year. The author of that article had been her father who had described in strong affirmative terms the friendship that his daughter had with Harry. Her relations with Harry were undisputed to the extent that parents of other students approached her for suggestions for a birthday present for Harry. Andrea’s popularity with the adults in the building rested partially too, on her own rather mature, confident disposition that hoisted her apart from the rest of the class who still clearly displayed the impulsivity in words and actions not uncharacteristic of their age. Like Mark, she had been identified as one of three or four students in this classroom as being “gifted” and pulled out of the classroom to receive specialized instruction. She was

quite popular in the classroom, but more importantly, there was an unspoken acknowledgment of her connection to Harry. As the following incident demonstrates, Andrea had clearly acquired an understanding of Harry through past engagement with him, something her first grade classmates might have just begun experiencing.

It was time for the Pledge of Allegiance and the students raised their somewhat lethargic bodies upright from various positions on the carpet and turned to face the flag that projected itself into the room from the opposite corner. Harry sat in his wheelchair, his head almost completely bent over his tray. A group of girls, Tiffany, Tammie and Andrea drifted towards him clearly with the intention of getting him to raise his head. Tiffany and Tammie gently patted his head. They might have murmured his name softly. After watching for a moment, Andrea intervened to stretch her hand out confidently and place it under his chin. Inexplicably, the other girls immediately moved away from Harry's side, allowing Andrea to pursue their objective. Andrea kept wiggling her fingers under Harry's chin, till eventually he lifted his head up and started "talking" loudly. In the same calm and unhurried manner, she then took his hand and placed it over his "heart" and facing the flag herself, joined the choral recitation of the Pledge.

Andrea's placement within this inner circle of Harry's experiences during the current year was more a reflection of that inherited status rather than the interactions in which I had actually seen her engage during the course of the study. She did not participate in the infantilizing, high-pitched "Ha-rry!" in which many girls and boys were

seen to engage, but she did not actively seek him out during different classroom activities. In fact, this diminishing of interaction between the two had not gone unnoticed by either Ms. Hilton or Ms. Cisneros. I had also frequently seen her standing in front of him, playing idly with his hands, making funny faces at him and then just as aimlessly, drop his hands and walk away. She did however, write him notes and she frequently sat next to him during lunch time. She was less likely to do so on Friendship Fridays when students could choose to sit wherever they pleased. Her mother, however, had no doubt that Andrea was still deeply attached to him. She recalled the intensity with which Andrea had reacted to her decision to keep her at home because she was running a fever:

But the only thing that really upset her when I told her I was going to keep her home from school was that Harry had been out for two or three days, maybe sick or on a vacation or something. But he was coming back the day that I was going to keep her home. And I mean the *tears*, I have never seen her so upset about something in my life, and maybe it was because she was running a fever and not feeling good. She was so upset because she had *missed* him you know. I don't know ... just missed his company, I guess.

Yet as the academic focus in the classroom heightened, Ms. Hilton reported that Andrea was interacting significantly less with him than before.

What I see her mostly doing now is, if she finishes something early, then she'll go over and show him what she has done. Umm... but I used to see her at choice time, she'll engage with whatever he was doing. Now she's

more with girls her own age doing artistic things and I don't see her interacting with him nearly as much ... hardly at all during the day.

Ms. Cisneros was inclined to adopt the same line of reasoning. The maturity that Ms. Cisneros attributed to Andrea who could come over and ask Harry "Harry, how do you spell 'name'?" in order, Ms. Cisneros believed, to get him to raise his head, was also her explanation for Andrea's infrequent interactions with Harry. Andrea's growth as she acquired new skills and knowledge limited those interactions that she had been known to seek out earlier. Yet, around the same time, Andrea informed me that she and her family had been invited to dinner at Harry's house and she seemed, in her characteristically calm and matter-of-fact way, to be looking forward to it.

In some contrast to the apparent inconsistencies in Andrea's relations with Harry, Gabby seemed to adopt the more direct approach of the boys in her relations with Harry. Her first public statement about her feelings came spontaneously one day when she was on the rug, completing a writing activity that Ms. Hilton had assigned as part of writer's workshop. Ms. Hilton had just read the book "Its Okay to be Different" to the group. Harry was on the floor stretched out with Ms. Cisneros beside him. A book had been placed in front of him. Ms. Hilton too, happened to be seated on the floor at that time. From a few feet away at a table where I was seated with another group of students, I overheard Gabby voice out aloud: "You know, I didn't think I was going to like working with Harry, but now I think I really do." She continued, in the same breath, referring to the book that had been read to the group. "The author says whether you have short hair or long hair, whether you are a different color Some people use walkers, some people use wheelchairs, its OK because God made you that way." As she voiced aloud her

thoughts to the group of students and adults scattered on the carpet engaged in various tasks, she periodically talked to Harry in the high-pitched cooing tones that other students often used with him, occasionally using the tip of her finger to touch his head as he lay outstretched on the floor.

Subsequently, Gabby was observed seeking him out at different times, most often during choice time and before Morning Meeting. She also consistently sought a turn in pushing Harry on the playground. She did not necessarily invite him as partner in games or other “academic” activities. She enjoyed reading a book out aloud to others, as I found out very early on, when she would seek me out persistently during reader’s workshop. Reading was also an avenue for her to interact with Harry. On one occasion when she had persuaded me to be her audience and we had settled ourselves on the carpet, Ms. Cisneros who seemed a little tired wandered over towards us and enquired if Harry could be part of our group. Gabby thought for a moment, and then smilingly asked if she could read to him. Ms. Cisneros was delighted and with some assistance from Gabby removed him from his chair to place him on the floor. She stood for a few moments, explaining her lack of energy to me. In the meantime Gabby, taking the initiative, interrupted us to ask politely “Should I use his little table on the floor?” Ms. Cisneros confirmed that as a good idea and Gabby promptly brought it over to Harry, and enthusiastically began to read to him. On another occasion, when students were required to generate a question to carry out a survey among the members of another first grade classroom, Gabby’s question was “Do you like Harry?”

When Gabby chose to be Harry’s helper, she took her role seriously and needed no reminders to station herself behind him as the class lined up to leave the room. Ms.

Cisneros described in glowing terms the commitment displayed by Gabby when she had stood by Harry throughout a PE session, while all the other students stood along the walls of the gym. Later in the year, when she had occasion to be his helper again, she proudly reported to me, “I did PE with Harry the whole time because none of the other kids wanted to!” On the morning that the physical therapist (PT) “pushed-in” to the classroom, she sat opposite them watching in fascination as the PT supported him from behind in a sitting position, waiting her cue from the PT to start reading to him. The PT was glad to use her as a means to motivate Harry to raise his head. Gabby’s increasing levels of comfort in interacting with Harry coincided with her spontaneous description of Harry to the group as they gathered around before Thanksgiving. Harry was not present and Ms. Hilton asked Ms. Cisneros to speak for him.

Ms. Cisneros said: “I am thankful for Harry because he is always happy, and loves to learn and be with you guys. And I am thankful for all of you.”

Gabby added: “But Harry is most special.” Ms. Hilton asked her what she meant. Gabby replied, “He’s different from us and that’s OK. He is not the same as us, but he is still special.”

To Gabby, Harry’s differences should not diminish his membership in their little community, even if she was not quite clear why his difference made him “special.” Interestingly, Gabby’s own position within the classroom may not have been quite secure. At least 7 students listed her as someone with whom they did not get along and only 2 students said they worked well with her. (Ms. Hilton had asked students to list out the names of three students with whom they worked well and three students with whom

they did not get along. The children turned in their responses to her on individual sheets of paper).

The outer circle. If the inner circle was distinguished largely by the direct and sustained encounters that students generated with Harry, the outer circle was populated by those whose direct interactions may be sporadic or infrequent, but who nevertheless at different times, might have articulated notions of disability or Harry himself in different ways. For instance, Steve and Stan usually found themselves in the group of boys that clustered around Harry. Stan's actions/words often emerged from that group experience. When the group of students, Stan, Jake, Cristo and Dominic, who had received Harry as he alighted from the bus, began to move him towards the building, Stan volunteered to Ms. Cisneros and me, "This is fun." He remarked later as he examined Harry's face, "I think he's starting to wake up." The day before, he had informed Ms. Cisneros as he stood by Harry with Cristo in Music that "Harry is concentrating on me today." On some occasions, he did voluntarily ask to push Harry within the classroom. Stan was a quiet, soft-spoken boy who articulated his words slowly and carefully in a monotone. Steve was more gregarious, enjoying interactions with both girls and boys. Andrea described him thus during the Thanksgiving celebrations. "I am thankful for Steve because he reminds us of the right thing to do." Steve was not observed to actively seek Harry out, but was usually present within the group of boys when they collected around Harry. On the playground, Stan and Steve were never part of the group that walked with Harry, nor did I observe them interacting with him in the lunchroom. They were seated at a different table and during Friendship Fridays sought out boys from other classes as well.

One girl, with whom Gabby, by her own admission, did not work well, was Tiffany. A soft-spoken, petite girl, Tiffany seemed to “get along with” most of her classmates. She was the only one in the class who had used the term “disabled” to describe Harry and Melissa. She voluntarily described to me some of the disabled individuals whom she knew. Her mother reported that due to the advocacy services she performed for the foster care system, Tiffany and her brother had frequently met other disabled children and youth. Tiffany’s journal writing reflected this experience. Like Andrea, she was not observed to engage directly with Harry often, though she might occasionally have cooed “Ha-rry!” like some of the other girls. However, she did drop a note (it had a red heart on it, and signed with her name) on his tray and when she was his helper, she extended a commitment not different from the boys or Gabby and Andrea. She also seemed to display an awareness of his location within this classroom. She pointed out his friends in class to me, listing Cristo, Dominic and Andrea among others. Interestingly she did not include her own name in that list. During the Thanksgiving sharing, when Mark pointed out that Harry never got “mad”, she smiled and vigorously agreed “Yeah, he is never mad.”

Among the other girls Maddie and Tammie were observed doing little more than the petting and the cooing. As described earlier, Maddie had been “conscientious” as Harry’s helper, even though she had few encounters with him before or after that. Ms. Cisneros had on more than on occasion had drawn my attention to Tammie’s interest in Harry, but I had observed little more than Tammie playing with his hands or touching him gently, even gingerly. Less explicable was Teresa’s relations with Harry. Ms. Hilton described Teresa’s response to Harry as driven more as a matter of convenience. She

seemed to suggest that she was not inconsistent. Teresa had even invited him to draw with her one morning as the students were straggling into the room, but after that invitation which was called out to Ms. Cisneros from across the room, there was little attention paid to whether he actually did or not. Indeed, I had seen Teresa interacting little with Harry, even though she sat near him in the lunchroom with some of the other girls. During one whole group session, Ms. Hilton had used Harry's name in a punctuation exercise on the white board, adding affectionately that the 'H' in his name required capitalization "because he is special." Teresa immediately took this up and declared rather flamboyantly to the whole class "he is very, very, very special because everybody loves him." Yet on another occasion on the playground Teresa exhibited some of that same flamboyance in a manner that was not overtly disrespectful of Harry, yet lacked any real purposefulness. With a willing Andrea by her side, Teresa chanted repeatedly "Ha-rry!" several times, giggling and swaying in front of him. Andrea, continually looking at her, participated in the giggling and swaying. Harry looking somewhat bemused was not "talking," though he remained alert.

Teresa too, did write a book for writer's workshop, describing the events in Harry's birthday party. (The entire class had been invited to the party). Of the ten pages that comprised her book, there was only one direct reference to Harry himself: "Maybe he would like my presents or not." This was accompanied by a picture of children at a table. Teresa pointed out Harry to me, as the figure at the head of the table sitting in a wheelchair. There was another similar picture with Harry at the table with a cake and candles. All other pages reflected the food and activities (such as hitting the piñata,

making a photo frame) that constituted the party. It appeared to have been a typical birthday party for a 7-year old familiar to most middle-class suburban homes in this area.

Jeremy was another boy who was infrequently observed in interactive encounters with Harry in the classroom. Yet, there was a period when Ms. Cisneros reported that he was a consistent member of the group that received Harry in the morning outside the building. He seemed like a pleasant boy and it appeared that there were as many students in the class who reported that they worked well with him as there were those who did not. Along with Andrea and Mark, he received specialized service for being a Gifted Student. Early on in the year, Ms. Cisneros described an incident to me that related to him.

O, I wish you had been here this morning. I told myself 'I wish she had been here to see this.' You know the boy in the blue shirt on the floor, Jeremy? During reading time this morning, he sat down next to Harry and he put three books in front of him and then asked him, 'Now which one of these do you want to read?' Just like a teacher. It was so-o-o-o cute! And Harry smiling, it was so-o-o-o cute!

While Jeremy may have occasionally initiated such encounters, he was less likely to consistently take on other roles with Harry in the room.

The periphery. There were few students who were not observed participating with Harry at all except for maybe one or two occasions. Jamie, the student described earlier who had confessed to Ms. Hilton his fears about the condition Melissa had, never partnered with him nor interacted directly with him. He was one of the least popular of the students in the class and possibly the one with the most behavioral challenges in the room. He was not mentioned by any of the students as someone with whom they worked

well. Also there were eight students who said they did not get along with him. He had similarly avoided Melissa, the student with cerebral palsy in the room. Melissa herself had demonstrated little overt interest in Harry. Ms. Hilton noted to me that in the beginning Melissa had expressed some feeling of abandonment that she was experiencing because of all the attention extended to Harry. This had been conveyed to Ms. Hilton by her family. She and Harry had been in different classes the previous year. For much of the first semester, Melissa remained largely outside Harry's immediate circles. She was not observed to initiate or participate in any activity with him. Given that her participation required to some extent the facilitation of the adults in the room, this might not have reflected Melissa's own decision-making. Also, since she herself was listed as a recipient in the class list of jobs, she may not have perceived herself as a helper for Harry, and therefore not requested it. However, by the end of the first semester, she had begun to show signs of interest in interacting with him and was observed reading to him.

Lisa and Kevin were the only other students who seemed to conduct their classroom experience independent of Harry. Kevin probably did this to a somewhat lesser extent than Lisa because occasionally he might have been a member of the group of boys who collected around Harry. He was a shy, quiet boy, ready to smile, who was described as being able to work well with by the most number of students. He did not figure in any disputes in the classroom, but he was also not visible in other ways such as reading to the others during Writer's workshop. He consistently sat near Mark (on Harry's right) in the lunchroom, but had not been observed to talk to Harry or comment to the others about him. He did not seek him out in the playground either. Lisa was one of the youngest students in the classroom. Ms. Hilton had been concerned about the ways she processed

what she heard. Her responses during conversation often suggested a lack of clarity in her reasoning. During the period when she was Harry's helper, Ms. Cisneros expressed her good-humored resignation about how she expected this experience would turn out. She reported later that Lisa had required many reminders in carrying out her "job." She was a pleasant girl, however, who did not appear to lack for company. She had little interaction with Harry during classroom activities or during lunch and recess. However, in a conversation with me and Tiffany about friends, she did inform me as Tiffany reeled off a list of Harry's friends, that everybody in this class was Harry's friend.

These circles of relations were fluid. Except for Jamie and Lisa who remained on the periphery, at least overtly, most other students were at some moment or the other located within any of the other circles, especially the inner or the outer. Their placement in one specific circle in the foregoing discussion was determined by the nature and frequency of their responses to Harry during the period of participant-observation. The grouping is deliberately broad to accommodate the fluctuations inherent in the process of relationship-building among children as well the limitations of research method. As diligently as I might sample times and days, I still would not capture *all* the moments that instantiated relational responses to Harry. Some students such as Teresa may have "started off" in the peripheral location early on in the study. However, if there was sufficient evidence in the subsequent period to suggest greater involvement on their part, even if it was not sustained till I eventually left the field, they were placed in the inner or outer circle. I did not track their movement between circles as much as describe their activities within them. These circles then, represent a snapshot of the relations that existed in the classroom at a given point in time.

The paradigmatic narrative at West Creek

What was the narrative?

The foregoing description of the first-grade classroom at West Creek generates the elements that can be pieced together to suggest the paradigmatic narrative that informed this setting. I have sought to write out the main story line that along with other supporting ones became the paradigmatic narrative in this classroom.

The “Family” Narrative

The first thing a student learned when he entered this first-grade community was that he would rarely work alone. He would read, write, compute, draw, think, and work with other students. He was rarely expected to carry out a classroom assignment without collaboration with a partner. He may not have known many of the other students when he entered the classroom, but before the end of the year he would have partnered/played with almost every one of them at some point or another. He learned to think of himself as a member of a larger family whose main goal was that students should demonstrate care and respect for each other. His role was to exercise care in the ways he talked and in his actions with other students in the room. He would find out that even the smallest violation of this rule was not permitted. Those who did violate the rules of caring found themselves severely rebuked by the teacher. It didn't matter that he could carry out his “academic tasks” well. What mattered to the teacher in this room was if he was able to get along with most students and if he was liked by most of them. As part of the effort to instill this value, the teacher held frequent discussions with the whole group about being a good friend, about being nice to each other or becoming aware of different kinds of people in

society. He discovered that if he wanted his peers in this classroom to like him, he was going to have to follow this rule that the teacher had made.

The students who made up this class brought many kinds of differences. They might include students with physical and intellectual disabilities, as well as students from different racial backgrounds. This diversity was a driving force in the ways in which this community was maintained. So regardless of the fact that a student might really not be able to do the math activity like all the others, they still had to treat her with respect and care. Caring for each other also meant that the some questions about why a student might look or act differently were not always acceptable, though the teacher did often share such information with the group. Community-building activities were frequent and dispersed. One instance of this was reflected in the jobs shared by all students that kept the classroom routines working efficiently. Everyone at all times, including students with disabilities, had jobs. Most of the time, they could choose the jobs they wanted.

The student learned to accept the atmosphere of a “family” in this classroom. There were few incidents of behavior between students, and between students and teacher that were unpleasant or that could not be handled by the teacher within the walls of the classroom. He had many opportunities to choose his friends and develop relations with them. In the process, he might discover that he was not afraid of talking to and interacting with students who looked and/or talked very differently from him. He didn't always understand what they said or did, but he understood that they were supposed to be here. It was also true that there might be other students who despite having spent the whole year in this classroom might never have had a single meaningful conversation with them. Still, together they formed this community that was held together by the teacher's

firm belief that they should all learn to get along with each other. By the end of the year, the student was supposed to not only have demonstrated growth in academic skills, but to have learnt the core values of respecting other members of the group and working peaceably with them.

It was evident that the commitment to the creation of a “family” within the classroom was foremost among Ms. Hilton’s goals for the classroom. Recognizing the inter-relatedness of social growth and academic learning, she insisted on a code of behavior that resonated with this goal, allowing little room for violations of any kind. Ms. Hilton’s commitment to creating a unified community in her classroom was not an isolated phenomenon in the building. As noted previously, school-wide practices that embraced the notion of positive behavioral supports and a strong focus on building relations with the larger community of families, provided an effective backdrop for her efforts within the classroom. The two main story lines embraced within this family narrative were:

1) *We are the same, we are different*, (i.e.) despite our differences, we are really all the same

2) *Being safe in our bodies and safe in our hearts*—physical and emotional security.

While the former was a school-wide conversation that could be expressed in artistic form and displayed in the school hallway, the latter appeared to be a particular emphasis that Ms. Hilton brought to her room. What were the unique elements of the “family” narrative in Ms. Hilton’s classroom and how was it implemented?

Implementing the narrative via classroom discussions

Ms. Hilton sought to infuse these principles both through her style of classroom management as well as her instructional strategies. She seemed to favor the use of literature in illustrating some of these concepts. The discussion that preceded or followed these books offers a glimpse into the manner in which she approached these central story lines. The following descriptive account centered on a discussion immediately following a reading of “Deaf Moses.” One morning as the children gathered on the carpet around the rocker, Ms. Hilton, in her characteristically expressive voice, spoke to them about her father who could lip read, but who was deaf and who did not know sign language.

Melissa raised her hand to ask haltingly “What is sign language?” Ms. Hilton explained by opening up to the back of the book that she had just finished reading to show how one could “speak” with one’s hands. She spelled out her name using the signs for the different letters. Several students now began to raise their hands to volunteer their own stories about sign language. Teresa announced with some self-importance, “When I went to The Muny [theatrical production company] I had much more fun watching the people at one side who were using their hands to sign [she gesticulated with her hands] than the play itself.” Stan said when he was in kindergarten he knew a girl who lost her voice and could not speak for sometime. Dominic reported that he knew someone who could not see.

Ms. Hilton permitted each student who raised their hands to share their experiences in turn, sometimes with a quick acknowledgement, sometimes without any response. In encouraging students to share their personal narratives with the whole class, Ms. Hilton

validated their contribution to both the content and the community. The enthusiasm with which students volunteered their personal stories spoke to the “safety” of the environment in which they found themselves.

To the extent that these stories furthered the goal of raising the awareness of students to differences that might be outside the pale of their everyday experiences and illustrative of the nature of a “family,” their expression was permitted and even necessary on these occasions. However, as Ms. Hilton’s restrained participation during these “tellings” suggests, her goals did not extend beyond this objective. The purpose was not to *understand* the nature of difference, but to accept its presence within a family. When Melissa shared her connection with a boy who had autism during the class discussion described earlier, Ms. Hilton’s probes were specific, not open-ended. There was a certain finality to Ms. Hilton’s questions that clearly discouraged any other thoughts that Melissa might have harbored. The message was sent clearly and uncompromisingly to both Melissa and the rest of the class. It didn’t matter that Adam was different. His difference, however incomprehensible it might appear to be at first glance, was really not disconnected from our own everyday experience. And so, his difference was to be unquestioningly accepted under the rules of living as a family.

It was also important to continually reiterate that different members of a family had different needs which should be respected. She did not hesitate to have open conversations with the group to promote greater understanding and respect for the specialized tools or behavioral supports that some students required. These conversations were often framed around “how would you feel if ...” questions which sought to connect the commonplace experiences of the students with the uncommon routines of those who

appeared to be different. Ms. Hilton sought to provide the class with the linguistic and intellectual tools that could empower them in those situations and in doing so believed that she intensified the sense of “family” within the room.

I think, kids at this age are so accepting anyways naturally that to give them some background on why it was happening made them more understanding and made them kinda want to help. You know, “I know you are angry. Why don’t you go to the safe place?” So, teaching them the kind of language they can use, so that they feel more in control of the situation. I think it helped to settled everything out, and bring us together.

Normative values within the narrative

This willing, even determined, embrace of differences continued, however, to be intertwined with an unproblematic acquiescence to a normative framework that postulated some actions/behaviors as more desirable than others. In the episode when Adam, the boy with autism, ran into the room, Ms. Hilton instantiated the primacy of that normative framework when she unhesitatingly rewarded the class with a Shining Star immediately after Adam had been hastily ushered from the room. Her expressed rationale for this was the generally “good” behavior of the class when Adam had rushed unannounced into the room. The class’s response had been incredibly muted embodying a *lack of response* to Adam’s giggling outburst. By rewarding the class for *not reacting* to Adam, she threw into relief the behaviors that were *not* desirable, namely, Adam’s actions which flouted the rules of “normal” classroom behavior. That normal classroom

behavior, for which the class was generously rewarded, denoted that differences could be ignored even as they were to be acknowledged.

Perhaps one scenario where the attachment to the normative narrative was repeatedly evident was in what I refer to as the “Shhh” story. It was no secret that Harry’s loud “talk” communicated through an extended and animated “Ahhhh” delivered into the face of the addressee expressed his pleasure at social interaction. Harry’s overt participation was most definitively and frequently reflected in that “talk.” It was equally evident that Harry did not “talk” only during those occasions when it was legitimate for students to do so freely, as in choice time, group activities, etc. It was not uncommon for him to utter a prolonged “Ahhhhhh” in the midst of a whole group session, as Ms. Hilton instructed a quietly listening group of students. Harry would characteristically lean forward, turning his body/face sideways to seek the attention of the boy/girl seated next to him and then “speak” loudly and enthusiastically. Ms. Hilton’s response during those moments was always consistent. She did *not* respond to it, but largely ignored it and continued her instruction. Students responded in one of two ways. They, too, might ignore it or barely pay any attention to it. Or, they might, turn to him and mimicking both the facial expression and tones of a teacher, firmly say “Shhh” simultaneously placing a finger on their lips. Boys and girls alike took this liberty of reprimanding Harry, though not without affection. Harry’s responses varied. Sometimes he stopped “talking,” at other times he seemed prompted to do more. Usually, however, it did not continue to the point where Ms. Hilton had to intervene.

Or, perhaps Ms. Hilton’s intervention was pre-empted by the actions of Ms. Cisneros who offered an understanding of Harry’s undisputed need to interact with other

students, but found no acceptable means of recognizing this in the context of whole-group instruction. Her own decision to remove Harry from the group found implicit support from Ms. Hilton, who might have encountered the same dilemma.

But Harry, when he is happy he is very verbal as you probably noticed [laughs]. That can be a real distraction for some kids. Some kids can handle it, and they can just concentrate on the book that is being read or whatever activity is going on. But others, ... if he starts shrieking they will all turn to him and go “Shhhhhh” [laughs]. A couple of times I’ve just had to move Harry back, you know, move him farther away from the group. And one of the goals I guess that we had said last year was to try to get Harry to understand that there’s a quiet time and there’s a time that we can be vocal.

Both Ms. Hilton and Ms. Cisneros, and not surprisingly the students, tacitly upheld the normative assumption that if Harry was to be a member in this classroom, he must necessarily conform to the rules of acceptable student behavior. Abstinence from talk when the teacher held the floor was the primary foundation for building appropriate student participation in the classroom. Harry’s disregard for this rule, however explicable, needed a response that upheld that rule. Ms. Hilton was released from this responsibility because Ms. Cisneros’s concern embraced not only Harry, but the other students as well. In the absence of any other direction, Ms. Cisneros assumed that placing *their* educational needs (a distraction-free learning environment) as prior to Harry’s need to be socially acknowledged was the acceptable thing to do. In unquestioningly accepting her decision, Ms. Hilton upheld the primacy of that assumption.

Configuring Harry's "academic" membership within the narrative: Fielding norms

Ms. Hilton's commitment to underlining Harry's membership in the classroom did not easily resolve the disparity in cognitive levels evident between Harry and his classmates. Consequently, the benefits of his inclusion within the room would always be judged against the capacity of the environment to offer him "real" benefits. She acknowledged the difficulty of identifying meaningful activities for Harry within the room, but the meaningfulness was determined by the academic nature of the activity. Therefore, she could state:

I think with Harry, the biggest challenge is mainly that cognitively he is on such a different level. And so trying to adapt things that we are doing, ... it's almost a replaced curriculum and not a modified [one]. And so at times [it] can be challenging to try and think back to something that I would have planned for maybe a preschool classroom or something.

Approaching his participation from this perspective, she could describe Mrs. Sandstedt's (Harry's mother) wishes for Harry during the forthcoming academic year as being "unrealistic" even as she hotly protested the actions of the second grade staff who, anticipating Harry's arrival, had contested his inclusion taking up the issue on a district-wide level. Ms. Hilton acknowledged the wide differences that were inevitable within the classroom and her anxiety to meet the needs of all students even those who had not been "diagnosed." So the challenging task she assigned herself was in "identifying where everybody is at and then trying to hit them in that perfect spot that is going to get them to the next level."

However, she also seemed to suggest that Harry's "diagnosed" needs appeared to fall outside the pale of normal differences that could be expected in any classroom. So, from her perspective, the disconnect between Harry's cognitive level and the increasingly "academic" nature of the subsequent grades precluded the possibility that the general education environment could offer him real benefits. It was also evident that resolving this division would require too much change on the part of the general classroom to make it a "realistic" option. It was not surprising to learn by the end of the study, that the school had decided during the forthcoming academic year to limit Harry's participation in the general education classroom to the afternoon sessions only (when a significant portion of the time was devoted to "specials" or non-academic classes). During the mornings, Harry and several of the more severely disabled students in the building would attend the Learning Center to receive instruction from the special education staff.

The special education piece: Reinforcing norms.

Even as Harry was accepted as a member of this classroom, nevertheless his participation drew heavily on the special education narrative that claimed responsibility for a significant portion of his educational programming. For Ms. Hanson, the special education teacher assigned to Harry, participation for her significantly disabled students centered on the development of skills that would enable them to be successful within the "normal" environment. Ruminating on an ideal scenario, she suggested that a half day program in a self-contained setting followed by an experience within the general education environment would be most effective for the students. The "intensity" of services provided in the former would ensure the development of "functional" skills—

skills that would ensure greater integration within “normal” environments—that could not be effectively addressed within the general education environment devoted largely to academic pursuits. However, the general education experience would provide those opportunities to enhance other skills, mostly social, that were unavailable in a self-contained setting. So, instead of crying, students could be taught to use a switch to communicate their needs.

The appropriateness of the education that disabled students received therefore (within or outside a specialized setting), was determined by the norms that prevailed within the general education setting. Consequently, she could assume a somewhat apolitical stance regarding the publicly controversial issue of including students with severe disabilities in the general education classroom.

Yeah, I worked with parents at Benton [self-contained special education school], who no way Jose, would their child ever be in a setting like this. And then vice versa. People here are like, no way I’d go to *that* setting. So, I think it was very good for me to work at Benton. Because I got to see both sides of it. Because if I’d had only stayed at Benton, I would have thought “Well, OK I know what these parents are talking about” but being out in the LEA, it’s like “O, I can understand why you don’t want your kid there.” So if anything I think it has helped me be a little bit better advocate for both sides.

As long as it was the normative framework that defined the curriculum for students with significant disabilities, it really didn’t matter *where* the education was delivered. The activities might differ, but the premise underlying the selection of tasks did not. Harry

was required to develop the abilities that would place him *somewhere* along the spectrum of “useful” living. So, projecting “down the road” (Ms. Hanson used this phrase nine times during the course of a single 45-minute interview), it seemed consistent to plan currently for “functional” activities such as watering plants, feeding the fish or helping with the dusting, activities that Harry might be involved with either at home or in the classroom. True enough, well into the study, Harry began to visit classes in the kindergarten-first grade wing of the building to collect recyclable cans. This would also give him the opportunity to use his switch purposefully. Operating within this “usefulness” framework, it was not surprising that the scenario conjured up by Ms. Hanson for Harry “down the road” to illustrate the rationale for her emphasis on certain activities, involved “counting pills.”

Because I guess in my mind I am always thinking, should something happen to Mom and Dad, and he can't advocate for himself, we want him to at least be able to count, you know, one, two, ... two pills. Things like that [which] he'd be able to maybe communicate with somebody down the road. You know, “That's the pill I take, two pills” ... or something like that.

The normative assumptions that informed her thinking about Harry obscured the possibilities for his future that could counter the assumptions of dependence, even custodialism, accepted within this framework. It was not illogical for her to presume then that the only significant life partners for Harry could be his parents.

Mrs. Hanson (and her special education colleagues in this building) welcomed, appreciated and utilized the community-building efforts of the school to include students

like Harry, but in their unproblematic acquiescence to the normative assumptions inherent in those efforts, they not only accepted the primacy of those values, but rendered their incompatibility with community and family goals invisible. As we will similarly discover at Truman High School, the special education story at West Creek served to intensify the normative component of the institutional paradigmatic narrative. It was no wonder, then, that while teachers and parents alike reveled in the successes that they perceived in the current efforts to include Harry, *all* of them anticipated a sharp decline as Harry and his peers grew older. While Ms. Hilton's and Ms. Cisneros's immediate concerns related to resolving the discrepancy between Harry's perceived needs and the overall cognitive level in the classroom in which he was included, Ms. Hanson and the principal pondered ruefully on the changes that, however unfortunate, were somehow explicable. Ms. Hanson:

My guys who were wheelchair users with severe disabilities, I was with them probably through third, fourth and fifth grades. [When] we went to middle school the girls were still kind of nurturing, the guys who had been really good were maybe good through sixth grade. But what I see is that as they get older, sometimes they pull away. Not because they don't like him, [and] I don't think it's because it's not cool ... for whatever reason they have got other interests. So that's my concern. ...

The principal at West Creek corroborated Ms. Hanson's fears.

It has been sad for me to see, I watch on the playground, you know, I have had conversations ... In the primary grades, it's like they embrace it, they all want to help Harry, they all want to help Melissa. They want to be

around, but when they get to that age when it's fourth, fifth grade, the peer thing starts happening and..., I don't know, it just starts changing.

But she also drew attention to a much more damaging element in the struggle to sustain the inclusion of Harry in the classroom.

The other sad thing about the inclusion piece, I see for the future of the students is, the way the middle schools in Oakland district currently are doing things. *We* [the elementary school] might leave them in the class, but once they get to middle school the way their schedules are going to be made, they'll be back to self-contained. So that will affect them.

The implication appears to be that the community framework within which Harry's inclusion was even conceptually possible in the elementary school would weaken in the upper grades, leading to his exclusion from the general school community. Importantly though, this projected weakening rendered Harry's experiences in the elementary school equally vulnerable. In describing the reverse trend operating upon entry into middle school, she regretfully commented on "all the hard work" that went into making the process of inclusion successful in the elementary setting. The unspoken inference was clear. In the absence of continued commitment to Harry's inclusion within the overall general education setting, his level of participation in the elementary grades would be determined by the vagaries of personalities, philosophies and ideologies of individual educators.

Reward systems within the narrative: The practice and relations of helping

In ensuring that Harry, and Melissa, were required to assume classroom “jobs” like all other students, Ms. Hilton was faithful to the plot structure of “we are the same, we are different” story line. Harry might require assistance from Ms. Cisneros to complete his tasks, but whatever differences he might bring, he could still discharge his responsibilities as a member of this community. Yet, Harry and Melissa were the only students who were themselves “jobs” for the other students. Assisting Melissa required pushing her in the wagon when leaving the classroom to go to the playground (she used her walker independently within the building). Harry’s assistant pushed him in his wheelchair during whole-class movement within the building and leading to the playground. During the moment of job selection, Ms. Hilton would hold up a chart that displayed the various assignments. As she called out their names, each student would indicate their preference for the week. It was certainly noteworthy that not until towards the end of the year was it necessary for Ms. Hilton to *assign* a student to either Melissa or Harry. There was no dearth of students who volunteered for these positions. However, unlike anyone else, it was Melissa and Harry who remained vulnerable to the whims of other students in determining to a significant extent, their school experiences for that week.

Understanding the process of assistance as a “job” created a unique framework from which to understand both Harry and other students. As described earlier, it prompted Ms. Cisneros to characterize students as “conscientious” when they executed their jobs with enthusiasm and commitment. This commitment was exemplified not only in simply carrying out the requirements of the role—pushing his wheelchair—but in

placing his needs above one's own. So Maddie and Jeremy deserved praise for staying with Harry throughout recess, even though this was not called for by the job description. Not only was Harry (as possibly Melissa) firmly situated in this framework as *requiring* help, such help brought the other student a heightened social standing within the community. Within this perspective, there was little room for Harry to be viewed as having the capacity to help others. It was no coincidence that Gabby announced proudly to me "I did PE with Harry the whole time because no one else wanted to." While *helping* was an integral component to the family narrative instantiated in Ms. Hilton's classroom, it fostered a hierarchical set of relations that limited Harry's ability to define the ways he could be understood by others.

Student voices within the narrative

Not surprisingly, students' descriptions of disability were couched in similar comparative terms where the implicit point of reference was a set of norms embodied in themselves. When Tiffany described her friend Tony who was "paralyzed" to me, I asked her if he talked like Harry. She responded "No, he talks like us." On another occasion, I was seated at a table with Tiffany and Lisa during "choice" time. As they worked on their drawings, I read "Its Okay to be different" to them. Ms. Hilton had already read this aloud to the group a few days earlier.

The first page in the book said "It's okay to have a missing tooth (or two or three)." This immediately drew the conversation to the teeth that were missing in Tiffany's mouth. Lisa pointed out that it was okay to

miss one tooth but not two or three. Tiffany used this moment to interject the name of her friend John.

She said “He can’t speak, but he is till my friend. He says my name (she says “Tiffany” in a high-pitched voice) but that’s OK.”

When I asked her to tell me more about John, she said “He’s like Melissa but a lot worse.”

I asked her “What do you mean “worse?”

She looked at me straight in the eye and said seriously “Badder.”

In comparing her friend John to Melissa, rather than Harry, Tiffany clearly distinguished between physical and cognitive disability. Earlier, she had noted, as she, Dominic and I sat at a table, drawing, that “disabled” kids could not go on rollercoasters. Tiffany’s understanding of disability clearly imbued her own self with the “normal” capacities unavailable in some others. On another occasion, when Andrea identified the student whose screams in the hallway could be heard from within the classroom, she said matter-of-factly “That’s Alice. She’s like Harry, but she can walk and she can talk.” Dominic informed me that Moses and his deaf friends (from the book “Deaf Moses”) could enjoy a rock concert because of the vibrations that moved from the stage to their feet. But he stoutly believed that his grandfather who was blind could not watch TV. When I reminded him gently that Moses was deaf but still enjoyed music, he argued that, unlike his grandfather, Moses and his friends could still *see*.

Student actions and words might appear to reflect an emerging consciousness of the impact of disabling conditions and an assessment of their values based on an acceptance of norms that had little opportunity to be explored. Yet, it was not always

clear that the primacy of those norms was immutable. When Cristo created a drawing that listed all the boys in the classroom with Harry's name at the very top, it was not immediately apparent that Harry was being judged against norms, nor that that was the only framework which might have operated in Cristo's mind. When Cristo, unabashedly enthusiastic, participated with Harry after completing his work in water play at the sink while the rest of the class remained at their tables, his enjoyment in partnering with his friend in this activity preceded any judgment of values associated with it. When Stan asked Ms. Cisneros if Harry could please make planes with him, it was not clear that he was using any norms to prompt his question. This was in sharp contrast to Mark, who commented, albeit politely, when he invited Harry to play a game with him, "He probably doesn't understand, but that's okay."

Dogged as it was by normative assumptions, the family narrative offered mixed benefits for Harry. To the extent that it propelled him into the general education classroom for extended periods of time, it offered him the opportunity to engage in relations with peers that might illuminate aspects of his own personality as well as that of his peers. It presented avenues for participation that might be unimaginable in other settings. While the mechanics of such participation challenged his teachers, it was welcomed by his classmates. It offered Harry and his peers, to some extent, the opportunity to build friendships that were not premised on the act of caregiving, though it certainly included that component. However, to the degree that it qualified his participation with normative expectations, it limited his ability to fully reveal his own potential, and others' abilities to offer enabling narratives of him that could be sustained as they grew older. Those normative expectations in turn, reified educators' beliefs about

the future of the relations between Harry and his peers, concomitantly offering a tacit intellectual framework to define (limit?) his present and future levels of participation in particular ways.

How did this “family” narrative differ from the institutional narrative that prevailed in the High school setting in which Michael, a tenth grader, was included? I will begin that project by first describing the setting.

Truman High School

Truman High School, was one of two high schools located within the large Hazlett School District that served about 12,000 students. Ten elementary schools, four middle schools and one Early Childhood Center, comprised the other facilities within the district. Located in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area, it encompassed at least four unincorporated communities. Annual income in this area ranged from \$35,000 to around \$68,000. A predominantly White region (91%-97%) other racial groups included Hispanics and some African-Americans. Examination of the data on the educational degrees held by residents, property values and other related demographic information posted on the websites of the communities, suggested that this was a largely working class region.

Truman High School, whose origins stretched back to over 150 years, offered as its mission the commitment to provide “a positive learning environment where student achievement creates responsible citizens.” It declared a total strength of 2025 students, 81% of whom were categorized in state records as White, 14% as Black, with Asian and Hispanic students constituting the remaining numbers. At least 20 % of the students were

identified as being eligible to receive Free/Reduced Lunch. The graduation rate was about 80% with a 3.8% drop-out rate that was shared by both Blacks and Whites. Almost half of the graduates proceeded to attend two-year colleges, though at least 36% headed to four-year institutions. The state “Report Card” for the school indicated that the school had not met its goal for Annual Yearly Progress as defined by the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*. Results of the State Assessment Program for the previous year indicated that in Mathematics, only about 14% of students were considered “proficient” i.e., they had demonstrated the desired level of achievement as required by State standards. In Communication Arts, the number of proficient students was somewhat higher at 22%.

Inside the building, the school resembled a typical large suburban high school that has become a familiar feature of the American cultural landscape. The large gymnasiums, the long hallways interspersed with classrooms, science and food laboratories, the sprawling cafeteria, the industrial arts rooms, the expansive library (though distinctly small given the size of the school) the specialized offices (of counselors, the athletic directors, the many principals’), security officers patrolling the halls,—these markers were all clearly present at Truman. The main entrance to the building directed one immediately to the reception, from where visitors, duly identified and tagged, dispersed to other locations in the building. The school day began at 7:20 am ending for most students at 2:05 pm. Each day of the week was designated an “A” day or a “B” day with four different blocks of instructional time, each block lasting for about 90 minutes. A half-hour lunch period interrupted one of those blocks. Though students might be members of any of the 24 listed clubs, other activities outside the purview of these clubs which took place after school were not uncommon.

On “B” days, the second block was described as “Academic Networking Period” (ANP). During this time students were expected to work collaboratively with teachers and with other students to complete tests, make up incomplete work, execute joint projects and other academic pursuits. Students were permitted, carrying the right identifying paperwork that could be verified by the teacher in the receiving classroom or monitoring the hallway (“yellow cards”), to travel between classrooms to meet other students/staff. The 90-minute block was punctuated with 5 minute “passing” times when students could be found in the hallways. During the rest of the period, they had to be stationed in the classrooms. While many students did no doubt find this period of time extremely useful, it was also not uncommon to notice groups within classrooms, talking idly to each other, sleeping over their desks, or using the opportunity to just converse with their friends. Teachers in the classroom monitored the arrival and departure of students from their rooms, but held little responsibility over what they did during that time. Not surprisingly, I was advised by the school administrators to utilize this period to carry out interviews with students. Some ANP classes were used school-wide for a specific purpose such as sharing report card information. During those days, students did not travel between classrooms. This was also the time when assemblies for specific groups of students (freshmen, seniors, etc) might be held for a specific purpose. For example, an assembly describing the Special Olympics was held during this period. All freshmen were required to attend as well as anyone else who was interested. Some groups that were organizing a specific school-wide event might also meet during this period. I learnt later in the study, that the school was going to abandon this practice during the next academic year.

Inside the classrooms

Examining the World History and Foods class in which Michael participated can provide a window into the nature of classrooms within this building. While acknowledging that the content of these subject areas did not adequately reflect the variety in high school curricula, nor the variability of teaching styles, the pedagogical practices evident in these two classrooms still did not differ strongly from those glimpsed in other classes. In the History class, as in almost all other classes in the building (not inclusive of laboratories and other rooms imparting content not strictly considered “academic”) students sat in chair desks in two sections within the room. The two groups faced each other across a narrow pathway between them. When the teacher addressed the groups, (s)he would actually be facing the wall as (s)he talked. This back wall might have a white board, with a screen to display Power Point Presentations. Each room was equipped with two TV monitors that flanked the screen on either side and which provided a clear view to each group of students. Almost all classes uniformly used the same arrangement of student chair-desks. The only feature that might be different was the location of the teacher’s desks. Classroom doors were almost always closed during the instructional period. Any student entering late would not only have to interrupt the space taken up by the teacher, but might have to cut through the visual space of most students in the room as (s)he sank into his/her own seat. Figure 1 presents a fairly typical layout of a classroom at Truman High.

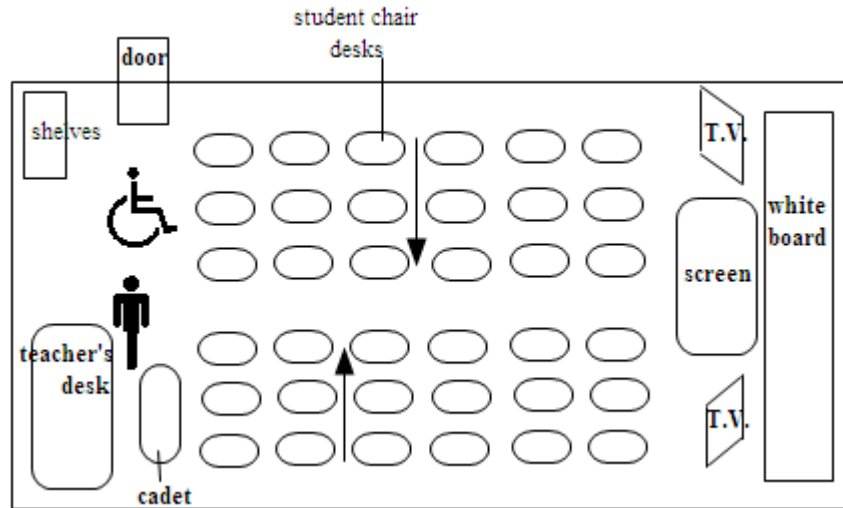


Figure 1: A typical classroom at Truman High School

The Foods Class, as expected, was set up somewhat differently. Students sat at tables in groups of 3 or 4. The walls of the room were lined with cabinets holding the various cooking utensils. These were punctuated at various junctures by a cooking range and a washbasin, around which each group converged. There were at least 6 such cooking stations in the room. When students were not actually engaged in cooking, they were seated at the tables completing assignments drawn from the Foods text or watching a film on the portable TV positioned near the entrance door. The science laboratory was similar in structure, with comfortably large square tables that still did not seem to clutter the generous space afforded by the room.

As the physical arrangement of these classrooms might suggest, whole-group instruction was the norm in these classrooms rather than the exception. There did not appear to be any significant flexibility in this structure. The teachers controlled and dictated the content of the classes and students responded within this framework in

characteristic ways. While some students remained visually engaged with the information displayed on the screen or the teacher's oral delivery, it was not unusual to notice students bent over their desks with their heads in their hands, their eyes closed, oblivious to the teacher's monologue. Still others relieved the monotony of uninterrupted lecture/presentation by dipping into their purses to extricate a modest make-up kit. A quick look in the mirror, a touch up to one's face, a careful adjustment of the hair—and the kit was discreetly replaced in the diminutive purse. The absence of sustained engagement was notable during the long films/videos with which students were often presented. The 90-minute block of time afforded by the schedule seemed particularly conducive to these extended audio-visual presentations and it was not unusual for students to spend 45 minutes or longer watching them. Some teachers interspersed the presentation with comments/questions, but these rarely lead to extended discussions in the classroom. By and large, the showing of the film was unbroken and frequently followed by further lecture or a written exercise. During the film, students were encouraged to take notes using a guide provided by the teacher.

Student participation in these classes appeared minimal. They rarely raised their hands to ask questions, or offer comments. They were not usually called upon to share those thoughts/comments. Questions that were posed to them were more factual in nature and occasionally, a student, might respond to the challenge. During my observations, I did not notice any public sharing of student achievement in the classroom. There were few, if any, opportunities for students to talk with each other in the classroom, except during collaborative activity that was restricted to "labs" as in the Foods class. Both teacher and student movement in the classroom was restricted. Besides the occasional trip

to the bathroom (they had to get a pass from the teacher to do this), or to the corner of the room which held the box of tissues, students did not get up from their chairs during the classroom period. This was especially true of a class like World History. Even teachers remained confined to one end of the room, from where they delivered their lectures. They were the only adults present in the room, unless it was a co-taught classroom, in which case, a special education teacher was present. The content and objectives of the lessons were predetermined. Students were rarely, if ever, invited to share their curricular interests. Students may be asked if they would like to see the rest of the film that they had been watching. Any other significant choices were not offered to them. Testing was frequent with multiple-choice questions being the norm rather than the exception. In PE, every day's effort was graded for each student. The PE teacher carried a clipboard to grade students for every item on the particular period's list of activities.

The conversational pattern between teachers and students was frequently characterized by good-humored "ribbing." The teacher's tone might be mocking, sarcastic, and students responded with good humor, without overstepping the limits of the respect that they were obliged to extend to them. During the class, however, there were very few opportunities to engage with the teacher. Teacher statements were mostly directive, with a very brief exchange of words. It was rare to find students "hanging" around a teacher when the class was obviously over even if the bell had not rung as yet. Students did not seem to seek the teachers out. They did not have the opportunities to engage them in conversations unrelated to academic content. Teachers addressed students by their first names only and terms of endearment were not included. Students addressed teachers respectfully with a Mr. or Ms. before their names.

Some seniors reported less authoritarian relationships with their teachers. Some of those teachers were observed to extend greater respect in the manner in which they addressed them. Seniors also appeared to enjoy greater autonomy over their schedules. This was demonstrated in the authority with which students described (and determined) their own availability or unavailability during certain times of the day. Some seniors described themselves in ways that drew attention to their greater level of maturity and responsibility than other student groups (freshmen, sophomores, etc.) The deference accorded to these seniors was of course, most evident, when “teacher cadets” were present in rooms. These were seniors who could assist teachers in other classrooms and receive credit for doing so. They could be found in both general and special education classrooms. In the World History class, the cadet would assist in handing out papers, making copies, helping with Power Presentations, entering student data, etc. The cadet in the special education classroom where I was an observer was not noticed to participate in any significant way in the instructional process.

Where was Michael?

In the general education classrooms. Michael was a tenth grader with significant disabilities who was considered an “inclusion” student by the special education staff. The term usually indicated that the extent of disability was severe and that *despite* the severity of the disability the student was included in the general education classroom. This would imply that with 8 separate blocks of time, he might attend 8 different classes with approximately 20 different students in each class, allowing for some overlap. As it turned

out, I learned that introductory letters explaining my study were mailed to about 150 families. These were the families of all students who attended any class with Michael.

Yet, these numbers did not represent the general education population with whom Michael actually shared class. The World History class (with at least 30 students), the Foods class and PE (another large group that broke into smaller groups, with the girls in aerobics and boys in other sports) were the only two classes that were strictly general education classrooms. Even though he was assigned a specific class to attend during ANP, due to its unstructured and unpredictable nature, that period was utilized by his paraprofessional to practice his walking. Michael could be found either walking with Ms. Jackson using his walker or stationed in the hallway outside the Special Education Office as he waited for her to complete some clerical duties. It would be safe to conclude that he did not have any sustained interactions with any of his general education peers during that period, unless they sought him out in the hallway, an infrequent event. The Language Skills class in which he was enrolled was a course intended for students with mild/moderate disabilities and was designed and implemented by a speech language pathologist. Everyday English and Everyday Math were also courses that instructed students with mild/moderate disabilities in functional academics. Even though the Science class that Michael attended was offered by the general education science teacher, it was also designed exclusively for those who were identified as receiving some form of special educational service and who were unable to keep pace with the regular curriculum. The pool of general education classroom students with whom Michael was supposed to be included in his educational program emerged from a total of three classes (out of eight), less than half of his instructional time.

In the World History class, Michael (usually the last to enter the room and frequently later than others) was stationed near the door. This implied that he was visible to one half of the classroom (the section seated opposite him) and not the other. Ms. Jackson sat in the outermost chair of the section in the first row with Michael positioned beside her at an angle that left him with a larger view of her face. As the lecture/presentation wore on, he remained seemingly content in his chair, relieving the passage of time by examining Ms. Jackson's actions. The following excerpt from my notes describes an event that repeated itself unvaryingly during the course of the study.

Michael is sitting in his chair angled to her right such that while not completely facing her, she can look easily into her face. During the lecture, Ms. Jackson seemed to be busy writing on the same study guide that the other students were using. I wonder why she did that. Was she trying to communicate something to Michael or did she do it, to keep herself from getting bored? Michael followed her actions closely.

Occasionally, he would take the pen from her and try to use it on the paper. Once she said, "No, put it down." At one point, he leaned forward and then turned his head so that it was thrust directly in front of her face. His eyes were crinkled into what I had come to recognize as a sign of amusement, while his lower lip was puckered. Ms. Jackson appeared to barely notice this intrusion into her visual field. He did it two or three times during the span of five or ten minutes. On two of those occasions, he put his arm out and rested it on her shoulder. He stroked her hair and toyed lightly with her ear. On another occasion, putting his arm around her neck,

he appeared to draw her closer. She looked into his face and said something inaudible to him. He remained in this position for a few more moments.

Ms. Jackson had often been observed to instruct Michael “Be nice” when he put his arm around her neck/shoulder because she reported that he was unaware of his own strength. She might have used the same command on this occasion as well. In any event, it was Ms. Jackson who engaged Michael during the class and who appeared to provide the focus for him within this room. If Michael was in the company of some other assistant on the days that Ms. Jackson was absent, he remained upright and unperturbed in his chair, his face not registering any significant emotion for the entire 90-minute block. He might idly flip the pages of the textbook placed on his lap, but he maintained his upright view of the classroom, not reacting to the sights and sounds there. Occasionally, he might seek to relieve the monotony by stretching out his arm and placing it on the shoulder of the assistant who smiled at him indulgently.

For the most part however, neither the activity introduced by the assistant (scribbling with markers on a dry-erase board) nor the unbroken nature of the lecture taking place simultaneously, seemed to engage him sufficiently. There was little evidence either in his facial expression or in his body movements to suggest otherwise. If the students were taking a test, Ms. Jackson would wheel him out of the room and return when it was complete. Some of the students in this class reported to me that on one occasion, Michael had actually pulled himself out of his chair and with Ms. Jackson’s help, seated himself in the chair desk. Another student described an instance when he had been involved in a group activity in this class. However, during the period of participant-

observation, students were never organized into groups in this classroom. (It must be noted that the teacher during most of this period was substituting for the actual history teacher, Ms. Hymes, who was away on maternity leave). By and large, Michael remained, literally and figuratively, on the periphery of the classroom.

Michael's physical and metaphorical location in the classroom did not differ in the Foods room. He was positioned at the table close to the door. Sharing his table was another student, Brett, who received special education services and two other girls, both of whom were juniors. Ms. Jackson always sat next to Michael at his table, even as she assisted Brett with the classroom exercises. Unlike the History class that comprised of sophomores, the Foods class brought together an unlikely combination of sophomores, juniors and seniors. The nature of Michael's participation remained similar to the History class. As the rest of the class watched a video/film, he too remained stationary at his table. If students were given a test, Ms. Jackson left the room with Michael. If the Foods teacher, Mrs. Wilson, informed her that no other activities were scheduled for the class that morning, she would not return. (During such times, Michael could be observed idling in his chair either in the hallway or in the special education office). When students worked on assignments drawn from their texts, he sat patiently by Ms. Jackson as she too worked on the same task, waiting to be asked by her to stamp his name on her paper.

It was during the "labs" when he, like the other students, found room for greater participation. The two girls at their table carried out the actual cooking with little involvement from either Michael or Brett, who remained under the supervision of Ms. Jackson as she assisted/directed them to complete various tasks, such as washing the dishes, laying the table, pouring the lemonade in the glasses, etc. During that time, there

was little interaction between Michael and Brett and any of the other students. The students at each of the 6 tables had constituted themselves into the same groups and separating the tasks of cutting/cooking/washing dishes among themselves, were immersed in the preparation of food. The groups were relatively relaxed, enjoying light banter between themselves as they worked. There were exchanges between groups, but by and large, they worked independently. After the recipe was executed, the groups sat down at their tables to consume what they had prepared, sometimes rather reluctantly!

Due to the structural arrangement of this class, Michael's presence in the room was somewhat more pronounced. The arrangement of tables left all students more visible to each other than they might have been in a class like World History. The pace of the class was more relaxed; as the first block of that day, students often brought snacks/drinks to the class, which they consumed while watching the film/video being shown. Frequently, when they had completed their assignment, students were permitted to work on assignments related to other subject areas. Some students however, merely idled, watching others, or dropping their heads loosely in their hands as they bent over the table. This might have triggered an occasion for students to casually observe Michael and his relationship with Ms. Jackson even if they did not directly seek out encounters with him. Such an opportunity would have been less likely within the tight framework of the History class. During these moments, Ms. Jackson's responses and her own interactional patterns with Michael were thrown into relief. Her voice, firm and uncompromising, rung out clearly in the room. The Foods teacher, Mrs. Wilson, too, was often seen to walk up to their table and speak to Ms. Jackson. She even addressed Michael directly several times.

If the Foods classroom offered Michael the potential for greater participation than the History class, the PE session just framed it differently. During the first approximately fifteen minutes of PE, the entire group of both boys and girls took part in a warm-up exercise, where they had to alternately walk and run around the gymnasium. Michael, urged by Ms. Jackson and the PE teacher from the sides, rolled himself along with the others. Sometimes, Tim, another teacher assistant who often relieved Ms. Jackson during this time for about fifteen minutes, would run ahead of Michael, urging him to catch him. Michael's responses varied. Some days he would be spurred by the challenge to impel himself forward with enthusiasm for at least a short distance. On other days, he remained somewhat lackluster and wheeled himself listlessly around the gym with the others.

During the second (and longer) period within PE, Michael and Brett were included in an Aerobics classes which they shared with at least 25 other girls. There were no other boys in this class. Michael and Brett were always placed in the very front of the group where a television rested on a stand playing a video that the students followed closely as they carried out the same movements displayed on the screen. Michael was frequently, though not always, removed from his chair and placed on the floor. Ms. Jackson, if she was present, physically put him through some of the actions depicted on the screen. Michael, often found this exercise hugely entertaining. He would break out into a short burst of laughter as Ms. Jackson kept directing him to perform an action, which he continually failed to demonstrate. Some of the students positioned on the floor near Michael, could not fail to observe him closely.

One of the students in this class, Arianna, was familiar with the special education teacher assistants, but also seemed to interact easily with Michael. As she greeted

Michael, she engaged with the assistants easily as well. I learnt later that she received special educational services as well. Apart from her, none of the other students in this classroom engaged with either Michael or Ms. Jackson. As more than one student sheepishly pointed out to me, they didn't know who he was when I mentioned his name. This was another classroom where there were students from all grades, including freshmen. In the large room, many students tended to stay within small groups. Consequently, there was little opportunity for groups to interact with each other. After the video was complete, they would sit in their groups on the floor, their postures relaxed, chatting idly, till they were dismissed. On at least two days in the week, Michael did not attend the aerobics class. Instead he was taken to an office at the back of the library where he received speech therapy.

Inside the special education classrooms. Besides these three general education classrooms, Michael spent at least three blocks in classrooms designed and implemented by special education teachers. His participation, as of other students, varied significantly in these rooms. There were fewer numbers of students in these classes (approximately 10 or 12). Students might be seated in groups or at separate tables/chair desks. Even if their desks were grouped together, the activities themselves were not designed for them to work in groups. It was still largely independent work. While students continued to lack choice in the selection of content, or in the activities of the session, there were longer verbal exchanges between students and teachers. Students talked/joked freely and without fear of reprisal. Even if they were reprimanded, they didn't seem to take it very seriously. Students were expected to take part in discussions and were offered time and encouragement to do so. There were at least some students who remained disengaged

from the classroom activity, their heads on the tables, hoods covering their heads and some of their faces. Once the class had got under way, the teacher eventually demanded a response from them. Teachers were often observed to address their students with terms of endearment such as “honey” or “sweetie.”

Interestingly, teacher assistants seemed to find their “voice” in these classrooms. They no longer took their cues from the teacher as they did in the general classrooms, but asserted their positions quite authoritatively. They inserted comments and questions to the class without prompting from the teacher and one might even suggest openly to the teacher, as Ms. Jackson did, that she “wanted” a particular student’s location in the classroom to be changed. Teachers did not appear to be unduly disturbed by such requests. When Ms. Jackson assisted the teacher in the room, her actions were synchronous with that of the teacher. She did not receive specific instructions but seemed to be quite familiar with the ways of complementing the teacher’s instruction. She wrote out key words on the white board as the teacher spoke, interjecting freely to call out students by name in the middle of the teacher’s instruction. The two might occasionally confer in the room, but it seemed that instead of being assigned to specific students, Ms. Jackson’s role, by design, was as the *classroom* assistant rather than simply Michael’s aide. It was also clear that the teacher deferred to her when communicating with Michael.

In interacting with the students in these classrooms, Ms. Jackson and at least one other aide, appeared to follow a code that differed sharply from the ways they interacted with other students. They participated freely in the disciplinary measures adopted in the classroom, their statements often more directive in their tone than that of the teachers’.

Their patterns of speaking with these students were inclined to be infantilizing and often punitive in nature. Ms. Jackson resorted to ways of enforcing discipline that were intended to shame the students publicly, such as listing their names on the board. Such methods of maintaining control were not observed in the general education classrooms. The special education students did not appear to regard such measures with any great respect, often reacting with suppressed giggles and snide comments under their breath. Sometimes they might react to her statements with good humor. Ms. Jackson had also been observed talking to some of Michael's classmates in his Foods class demonstrating a marked difference in her interaction with them. (She was a "track coach", a role that she played during after-school activities). She was respectful of them, even if they were sullen or unresponsive and her words might be described as supportive and non-directive. She might tease some of the students, imitating the sarcasm of the classroom teacher, but was never punitive in her comments to them.

The two other assistants to special education students who might assist Michael during different times in the day were Tim and Jason. They tended to be much less strident in their tones than the two women described thus far. While Tim interacted gently and humorously with both Michael and the other boys in the special education classes, Jason was quieter, but evidently just as popular. Neither of them were seen interacting with students in ways that might be characterized as punitive. Tim appeared to be more respectful in his manner of conversation with them. Jason might have appeared less confident of his actions, but was never heard raising his voice with the students. All the assistants coordinated their schedules impressively, smoothly taking over students

from each other during pre-specified times. I did not observe any incident when Michael and Ms. Jackson were kept waiting for another assistant to lead him to another location.

Michael seemed somewhat more animated in these classes. He was called upon more frequently and was asked to move himself to different locations within the room. He might be seated near Jared or David, who were both loud, engaged in a great deal of good-humored banter with each other, and who obviously had difficulty concentrating on the task assigned to them. Each of them would periodically turn to Michael and interject a comment or question. Jared, in particular, had developed a routine with him that was a source of great amusement in the class. In Jared's words:

Yeah ... he's always teasing me. He has a thing where I like always sit down and he will be like "UP!" So I'll stand up and then he'll go "DOWN!" He'll make me sit back down. And he always does that to me, or if I am sitting on a desk, he'll be like "DOWN!" and then I'll have to stand up and then he'll make me get down and

Jared, obviously, felt compelled to participate in this exercise that Michael dictated and he was observed doing so on more than one occasion as the others, staff and students alike, watched in amusement. Most of the time, Michael, his eyes characteristically crinkled, a smile playing around his lips, seemed in no hurry to bring this activity to an end. In these classes, he was never left on the edge of the room, even if his desk was the one closest to the door. He was frequently pulled to the center of the room, depending on the activity.

To the extent that Michael's location threw him intentionally into the midst of the other students, Michael's experiences here were in sharp contrast to those in other general

education classrooms. However, to the extent that the nature of the activity itself in which he was engaged offered no greater ways for him to participate, the significance of that location was diminished. He might continue to scribble or color on a paper, somewhat randomly or simply look around the classroom. He did not actively work *with* any of the other students. The notable difference in this room however, was that even though he continued to remain on the periphery of the activity itself, Ms. Jackson could continually draw him into the classroom conversation with questions or instructions that invested him with a greater presence in the room.

Describing some of Michael's peers

The classmates of Michael who were eventually selected for the interviews offer a glimpse, albeit a tiny one, into the world in which Michael was inserted. Their selection emerged from a complex interplay of factors. During the initial period of intense participant-observation that was conducted everyday for over 3 weeks, not a single student in his general education classroom was observed, interacting directly with Michael, besides a rare greeting, delivered in passing. Consequently the initial criteria set for the selection of students were completely abandoned. I decided to base the subsequent selection of students in part, on my observations of them and/or Ms. Jackson's recommendations or that of the classroom teacher. I suggested that Ms. Jackson use the criterion of prior interaction with Michael in offering her choice. Besides a couple of names, Ms. Jackson herself was stumped by the task. Ultimately I used my own observations in the classrooms to a greater extent than any of the other means. My selection was based on maintaining some gender balance, maintaining some racial

balance, balancing strong and weak students, popular and retiring students, these being assessed through their activities and responses in the classroom, as well as teacher interactions with them in the classroom. The following were some of the students who participated in this study.

The World History class comprised only of sophomores like Michael. There was little opportunity for students to stand out in the classroom. Lecture-style presentations dominated the instructional atmosphere of this classroom. Bill, an African-American student, however, seemed to be quite popular with those who sat around him. He was frequently observed teasing others and being teased by the teacher herself. He regularly and intentionally, it seemed, asked provocative questions not always related to the text and received deliberately tongue-in-cheek answers in turn. He was usually ready with a smile and continually engaged the students around him in some form of interaction—wordless gestures, smiles, written notes—regardless of the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the moment. I had not seen him interacting with many other students but other African-American students were usually silent participants in the laughter he provoked. While he may show alert behaviors, he was just as likely to pay little attention to the video presentation, for instance, but look around constantly.

A large, heavy-set African-American girl, Chantal sat next to Bill in the front row of one of the two sections. I had often seen Bill turn toward her and engage her in silent interaction, an activity in which she did not seem averse to participate. In fact, on one occasion, Bill, Chantal and another student several chairs behind Bill, were engaged in a three-way silent conversation while the video was on, but without attracting any attention to themselves. She did not display focused attention on the video presentation but when

at the end of one video presentation, the teacher asked the class questions, she volunteered answers three times in a row. She was also seated next to the chair in which Ms. Jackson sat, so there were frequent, if brief, interactions between the two. From her position, though, Chantal would not have had a very useful view of Michael at all.

Sitting several chair desks away from Bill was Colin. I had noticed on more than one occasion that he responded to the teacher's questions in a way that suggested he was engaged with the material. He appeared more focused on the activities in the classroom, and was not as distracted/disengaged as many of the other students. He was more inclined to focus on video and other visual presentation with concentrated interest. On one occasion, when the grade reports were handed out, I noticed him giving a little hoot of delight and with a triumphant "A!" gave a hi-five to the student sitting in front of him. I was not aware of his grade patterns but made the reasonable assumption that he was not alienated from the classroom content and that academic success to him was a worthy goal.

Nina sat across the room from Michael (who was positioned near the door) closer to the TV monitor in the first row. She was a quiet student who did not say very much. I did not see her interact with many students but had noticed her watching Ms. Jackson closely as the latter interacted with Michael, for example, when she placed a tissue under his nose and urged him to blow. The other two students in this classroom were Daniel and Shelley, both of whom sat in the same corner of the room as Nina but much more removed from my view. Ms. Jackson, had in fact, suggested Daniel because of his prior contact with Michael in elementary school. She did not share anything about Shelley but approved of her selection. Besides my observation that Daniel seemed like a serious

student who stayed focused on the presentations to a great extent, I had no additional knowledge of either of the two students.

The students in Michael's aerobics class were recommended by the PE teacher who simply looked at her roster and randomly picked out some names. My own observations in this room had yielded little information that could help me determine which students could be selected. The teacher could offer no substantial reason for her choices though she seemed to suggest their commitment to the class as determining her selection. Besides Vivian who often worked out next to him on the floor in the front row and Jennifer, a quiet junior, the others were freshmen who clung together as a group at the back of the room. They were all girls, this was an all-girl class. None of them had had any interactions with Michael prior to the study. The only other student whom I had seen frequently come up to Michael and greet him, interacting simultaneously with the teacher assistants who were with him and Kerri (the other significantly disabled student in this class), was Arianna. She was a senior and, as I learnt later, received special education services. The teacher assistants engaged her in easy banter which she seemed to enjoy. She seemed a friendly girl and eager to get to know me (we discovered that we shared cultural ties).

The students in the Foods were a much more of motley group. Like the PE class, the group comprised of students at all grade levels. Drake was recommended by Mrs. Wilson, the teacher. She seemed to like him and evidently perceived him as being mature. He sat at the table that was closest to her desk. A short, muscular boy, he exuded a confidence that bordered on arrogance. He spoke little, refraining from interacting with students other than those at this table. Across the room from them, near the door was the

table at which Michael sat. Besides Brett, another special education student, there were two other girls, Jodie and Pat at the same table. I had seen little noteworthy interaction between them and Michael or Brett, but both Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Wilson seemed to think they might be good choices. Their sheer proximity to Michael was a sufficient condition for me to concur with this. They were often seen with their heads on the desks and like many others in this room, mingled little with other groups. Janet's position in the class gave her a full view of Michael's table. She was a senior and her only partner at the table was a red-haired boy Fred, who spoke very little. Hoping that he would open up in an interview setting, I invited him to do the interview. However, he was very uncommunicative during the interview and later I was surprised to learn that he received special education services as well. Janet, who stayed aloof from the others, seemed comfortable being his partner during cooking lab. Lisa, at another table, was a friendly enough when I assisted her group during a cooking lab. Surprisingly, she said little, if anything at all, during the interview.

Colette and Paul were the senior cadets in the World History and Special Education class respectively. Their status as cadets was a sufficient reason to invite them to participate in the interview. I had observed Colette converse a little with Ms. Jackson, but neither cadet had been observed interacting with Michael himself. Jared and Mindy were the special education students who eventually became part of the study. They were in two separate classes which they attended with Michael. Mindy was a gentle, shy, soft-spoken girl who could often be observed monitoring her appearance. After I had established some connection with her (invited her to participate in the study), she would, unlike the others, greet me and was not averse to chatting with me. She shared stories

about herself and seemed to enjoy the attention I gave her. Jared was in the special education Language Skills class with Michael. He was a cheerful boy who also frequently got into some trouble. On at least one occasion during the study, he was suspended from the regular academic routine because of misbehavior. He seemed to enjoy the relaxed atmosphere of the special education classroom, and remained engaged in its activities. He seemed to especially enjoy interacting with David, another gregarious student who too was prone to actions that landed him in trouble with the school authorities. He too was in suspension at the same time as Jared.

While the students in the study were for the most part a randomly selected group, the lack of variability in their observed interactions with Michael seemed strongly reflective of the collective response of his peers in the classrooms that he attended. Given this situation, it seemed challenging, if not impossible, to use their observable behaviors to describe their relations with him in any meaningful way. On the contrary, the limited nature of their engagement with him, suggested only the *absence* of any meaningful relations. The subsequent pages will reveal, however, that observable student behaviors did not always correlate neatly with their own spoken narratives.

The paradigmatic narrative at Truman High School

Given the design of the study, it was less likely that a paradigmatic narrative at Truman High would be readily identified. The study did not call for the extensive participant observation at different sites within the school that would have enabled me to unearth such a narrative. The emphasis of this site, as has been pointed out earlier, was to conduct interviews with Michael's classmates and to contextualize them, to as great an

extent as possible through participant-observation in the classrooms which he attended. However, several weeks of observations in this setting did indicate that there were some large implicit expectations imposed on *all* students by this setting. These expectations assumed that students learned in similar ways; that students were receptacles that needed to be filled with information; that students would recognize their place within a larger, faceless system that had little connection to their individual lives; that success in high school was determined largely by demonstrating academic proficiency through test scores; and, that not being able to fulfill the standardized expectations rendered one different in unworthy ways.

While the study did not unearth data about patterns in the ways in which students appropriated these assumptions, it was certainly apparent that this standardized image of the typical student was operative in both student and staff behavior that I observed in the classrooms in which Michael was included. The school had undeniably committed itself to including students with special needs within the general education setting (the large special education department within the building attested to the seriousness afforded this mission). But Michael's participation depended on the ingenuity of the special education teachers to meet his specialized goals in a setting that clearly upheld a standard, non-specialized student as the norm. Not surprisingly, such a challenge repeatedly defeated his teachers and assistants, leaving him to endure long hours with little or no interaction with students/staff and with little meaningful activity with which to engage.

For these reasons, I have, for the purposes of this study, chosen to regard the assumptions behind this notion of the standardized student collectively as the paradigmatic narrative within this setting, entitling it the "normative narrative." In the

following pages, the voices of students and staff members will unearth the elements of that narrative that assumed relevance *for them* in making sense of Michael's presence in this building.

Institutional embrace of the "normative" narrative

Michael's experiences embodied the commitment to the normative framework that was shared by both special and general education staff. Joanne Mosby, Chair of the Special Education Department at Truman High, laid out the elements of the classic special education "success" story. It began with the first encounter with a "troublesome" student whose reputation as a difficult student ("horror stories") and refusal to cooperate with special education staff preceded him. This student discomfort with being in a special education class was both indulgently acknowledged and unproblematically accepted. The fact that "he wanted no part of any class that said 'Special ed' behind it" did not stimulate questioning of special education practice itself. On the contrary, its undesirability was part of its story that recognized the primacy of other norms. In this student's case, this distaste was actually used as a means to generate the first attempts at resolving the impasse. The certainty of his failure within the "normative" framework would be used to bring the student into the fold of the special education narrative. Joanne worked out a "deal" with him: "I am going to let you try it on your own. But if after the first semester you are failing some of these classes that you think you can do, then we are going to do it my way." "My way" would then require the student to accept the premise of the "normative" story—that learning differences could not be addressed in the mainstream

setting, but had to be explored and understood within a specialized environment and recognized as being subordinate to the standards of the “normative” environment.

Ms. Mosby’s conviction in the value and purpose of the special education class for the student was strong enough that after the student’s anticipated failure in the general education environment, she had no qualms in “finagling” his schedule so that in order to get into the cherished (and highly desired) driver’s education class, he would have to end up taking the study skills (special education) class. As she had anticipated, he “did really well” in this class and was “starting to open up a little bit more.” Eventually, he began to show the signs that would contribute to a growing sense of professional gratification. “He would get to a point he would come find me in the building and any time he had a problem he would come to me.” And then the crowning moment:

And I remember the night of graduation, because I went to graduation.

Umm ... the teachers form a line on either side and the kids walk through [to] the end. And he came up and he gave me a big hug and he goes

“Thank you so much.” And that was ... you know, really *really* neat.

The student had traveled from hostility towards a stigmatizing relation with special education to a grateful acknowledgement of its value in achieving an important student milestone. As a typical “success” story this framed the experiences of all other students, general and special education, leaving professional practice untouched. When normative assumptions had been embraced by “different” students, special education promised the successes that the general education environment was unable to offer.

This success story, however, offered little when those “differences” fell too far below the norm. “Inclusion” students dominated this category. When the severity of

disability strained the special education professional knowledge base to deliver its promises, the same normative assumptions required that “success” be framed differently for those students. It was an inconvenience that there were no uniform standards of success for such students. Citing her experiences with some families, Ms. Mallory, Michael’s case manager, expressed her frustration at having to suppress what seemed to her to be obvious “normal” sentiments.

Well, we had a Down syndrome girl at Murdoch High who would self-stimulate herself and eventually masturbate sitting there in the chair in French class. We talked to the parents about this. Father is an attorney, mother is a physician. They were one of the first to really push inclusion. He said “Well, you need to redirect.” Do you think the other students were focused on their lesson when that was occurring? I think we have to weigh the numbers—if there [are] 25 students in the class, maybe this is good for the one but if it’s detrimental to 24 others, why are we just singling out the one? We are throwing the other 24 out for this one. If there were kids drowning in a lake and I walked up to it, and there [was] a bunch on one end and one on another end, what end are you going to jump into? That’s just to me commonsense.

Ms. Mallory’s frustration stemmed from the persistent disregard of the obvious facts in order to implement an ideologically-driven agenda that was doomed to achieve only minimal success. She appeared to be resentful of the professional response required of her in this situation: ignore the facts and humor the family. Her thinking was framed by normative standards—the self-evident facts—and unable to abandon that framework, she

could only question the validity of including of a student who could not meet those standards.

Mrs. Wilson, the Foods teacher expressed her similar doubts about the advisability of even trying to meet Michael's needs within the general education setting. "I just think they [significantly disabled students] need to be someplace else. You know, in a different room where he's learning things that he would really use." Embedded within a normative framework that prescribed specific goals for all students, Mrs. Wilson failed to understand how they could be meaningful for someone like Michael. It was logical to suggest then that Michael could only succeed in a setting that was designed around his specialized needs.

Disability largely remained an isolated event in the building testified by the frequent sight of either Michael or Kerri (a senior severely disabled student) stationary in their wheelchairs in the empty hallway outside the special education office in the company of a paraprofessional. There was only one other school-wide event during the study where disability entered the school conversation: The Special Olympics. One of the assistant principals in the building apparently brought some experience as a special education administrator. It was at her instigation that the Special Olympics had been instated at Truman High. This was an annual event where disabled students from various schools in the area converged to participate in a variety of activities on the school premises. Under her guidance, students organized themselves into various planning committees that would be responsible for the implementation of the event. The meeting to recruit volunteers for the event took place in the gymnasium one day during ANP (Academic Networking Period). Students (mostly freshmen who were required to attend)

filled the room to listen to a small group of students gathered around a large screen at the center of the room. After the initial introduction by a senior who earnestly described the event as “lots of fun” though they “have to be open about everything,” the assistant principal addressed the group, noting that she recognized that some students might be afraid because it was “a lot of responsibility.” But, along with the responsibility, she added that they would get a “feeling of accomplishment” and fun, and that it would be “worthwhile.” Several students who had formerly served as Buddies (volunteers) in previous years came forward to share their experiences. These were some of their comments:

“It was so much fun ... They are so appreciative and their teachers are so appreciative.”

“We are real lucky to be healthy and functioning ... for them it’s a once-in-a-lifetime event.”

“You are making a difference in their lives.”

The normative narrative upheld within the school could certainly acknowledge those who failed to meet its standards, but only after that difference was clearly established.

Students were encouraged to extend themselves to be a part, albeit temporary, of those disabled lives, to cement their own locations within the normative framework.

The relation of the normative narrative to the special education story

This paradigmatic narrative, found expression in the words and actions of both teachers and students. Drake, an articulate senior, who had few, if any, interactions with

Michael, was unable to tease out a purpose to Michael's school experiences that worked at odds with the ostensible purposes of schooling.

I don't understand what the point is other than exposing him to the other people, I don't see what the point is of bringing him into the regular class, because that is not aimed for him... and it's aimed for people that can comprehend and do their own work and stuff

However, Jodie and Pat (in his Foods class) and Daniel (classmate in World History) recognized, even if somewhat vaguely that Michael's presence in the classroom served the purpose of "socializing." Jodie still articulated some surprise that he could be placed in a class like World History, given that "kids with Michael's situation" could be quite a "distraction" and could "intimidate people." Michael did not really belong in these classes, but his presence could be tolerated as long as it did not interfere with the goals, in this case, academic, valued by the normative framework. As further conversations with these and other students brought to light, not only was Michael firmly situated within a story separate from their own, they had also learned to utilize elements of *that* story to understand him. Jodie points out: "I think he needs somebody, just to make sure he is doing what he is supposed to, instead of just wandering around the school, or ... not getting into any trouble. [To] keep an eye on him." The supervision, even control, extended by the teacher assistant, was *necessary* for Michael, unlike other students. Bill, mentioning that his sister worked in a sheltered workshop, projected that as a better future location for Michael than a place like Walgreens, because the former was more "supervised."

The special education story, running parallel to the normative narrative secured Michael's position outside the parameters of the latter, while simultaneously leaving its pre-eminence unproblematic. Indeed, the former even provided the means by which actions that might seem incomprehensible within the normative framework could be explained. In the following exchange, it is Bill who interprets the baffling response of the teacher assistant (Ms. Jackson) as reasonable within the special education narrative. The teacher, Ms. Hymes had dropped a book, causing Michael to burst out laughing. Despite Ms. Jackson's admonishment to stop, he continued to do so. Chantal described the reactions of the class.

Chantal: Shelley [another student in the class] laughed and then Ms. Jackson blew up. She was just laughing along with him and then she [Ms. Jackson] got really mad. She's like [imitating the authoritative tone of Ms. Jackson] "you don't laugh unless he laughs" and everybody's like [in an incredulous voice] "he was *laughing*." So we don't know, we don't know why she got mad.

Bill: She just felt that it wasn't an appropriate time. Ms. Jackson felt that he wasn't supposed to throw the book on the floor and they [were] teaching him that it is OK to do it, by laughing at it. He may think it is funny but he is not funny to her ... she's got to deal with it.

Bill interjected his words firmly, appearing to try to quell any further debate on the legitimacy of Ms. Jackson's actions. He argued for the validity—normalcy—of the seemingly "abnormal" reaction of the teacher, thereby inadvertently ensuring that Michael's difference will be cemented as non-normative as well. He seemed to deliver

his thoughts here and elsewhere with a certain authority; he volunteered a little later that his sister was “handicapped” and worked in a sheltered workshop, a site designed for the employment of mostly disabled workers.

Construing staff-student relations within the normative narrative

While students variously characterized the relationship between Ms. Jackson and Michael most frequently as mother-child, they were less clear that they would seek the same kind of relationship for themselves with their own teachers. Being treated like somebody’s “kid” did not seem particularly attractive. As Chantal pointed out, she went to school “to get away from her mom” and Bill rejected relations with adults who had “too much authority.” While they were clear about the ideal relationships they shared or sought with certain teachers and which were not premised on being treated like a kid, they appeared unwilling to suggest that Michael might desire that as well. Bill distinguished his idealized notion of relations with a teacher from an adult-“kid” relationship, suggesting that what *he* expected from his teachers was something “real.” There seemed then, to be a make-believe quality in Michael’s relationship with Ms. Jackson. Not only was it located far outside the norm, but there was an implicit skepticism regarding Michael’s capacity to participate in such a relationship.

The students were appreciative of the fact that the teachers and other staff members embraced Michael “like his family or something” and talked to him or greeted him. As Bill pointed out confidently, “Nobody really mess with him.” In the light of these observations, their unproblematic description of Ms. Jackson as treating Michael as her “kid” does not conflict with their rejection of such a relationship with a teacher for

themselves. The standards set for Michael's ability to make social progress were so low that mere acknowledgment of his presence spoke to the success of the efforts to include him. Consequently, they found no discord between their approving characterization of other's responses and their own admission that none of them (Kevin, Bill, Chantal, Nina who were interviewed together) had had any direct interaction with Michael despite sharing the same class during this semester. Others' favorable responses demonstrated that the normative environment could accommodate Michael, but they themselves were not necessarily implicated in that process.

Drake on the other hand clearly indicated that while an ideal relationship between a student and teacher was based less on authoritarian and more on democratic values, this might not be applicable to Michael. Within "normal" relations, students and teacher get to know each other in nuanced ways so that they can anticipate their responses in different situations.

Now, Michael, he probably doesn't have such a relationship with his staff.

They might have some relationship but I doubt it is to the extent of you know, they know each other well enough to know what makes the other unhappy.

The reluctance on the part of students to categorically condemn an obviously unequal and even inappropriate relationship between Ms. Jackson and Michael reflects both an unquestioning acceptance of certain norms—in this case, the nature of relations between staff and students without disabilities—as well as some uncertainty about configuring Michael's own identity. Interestingly, for students receiving special education services, not only was this relationship unproblematic, it actually worked to Michael's advantage.

Mindy, Michael's classmate in Everyday English and Aerobics, found it exemplary and found no reason to fault Ms. Jackson's manner of speech to Michael, because she addressed her, Mindy, the same way. Yet Ms. Jackson was able to draw so much out of Michael. Describing Ms. Jackson's relations with Michael, Mindy notes:

Umm ... it's good. I think that it's amazing how a person of his condition ... umm ... can learn like everybody else. Some people look at him and they think O, he can't learn. But he can and she talks to him and he, like, talks back but without talking. Neat. Awesome. I wish I could do that.

Jared, another student who attended special education classes, appeared indulgent of Ms. Jackson's interactive manner with students, rating her as "one of the coolest teachers here probably," despite the sarcasm that she displayed in her interactions with the students.

Both Mindy and Jared, operating within the special education story, found nothing unproblematic in the relations between Ms. Jackson and Michael, because it described their own relations with her. Unwittingly, their responses only served to heighten the normative narrative and secure themselves within the special education story that ran separate and parallel to it. To the extent that such relations were rejected by Michael's peers, this second narrative carried a distinctly lower status.

Conflicting values upheld by the narrative

The institutional embrace of the normative narrative ensured that it played out without opposition in the hallways and classrooms. As we shall see later, this did not by itself extinguish counter-narratives, but there was little institutional support to foster them in any significant way. Michael's presence in the school might have been understood as

determined by legal guidelines, but neither staff nor students could comprehend a real value to this event. In the meantime, they would engage in a collective pretense that Michael really belonged in this institution, while simultaneously suggesting through their words and actions that such an event was impossible. Within this structure, there was neither incentive nor opportunity to challenge the authority of the normative narrative. Drake implicitly faulted the system for failing to provide the opportunities to interact with Michael, but simultaneously upheld the normative paradigm by suggesting that Michael could not intrinsically attract others' interest in engaging with him.

As sad as it is, I would say that they mostly ignore him just because umm.... I think most people don't know how to act around him, you know. I don't necessarily ignore him, but I don't interact with him really. If I *had* to interact with him, I would. And I guess most people see it that way, they don't *have* to interact with him.

Within such a perspective, the only way to frame the responses of those who *did* interact with him is to suggest that they originate in pity, even though "they," (disabled individuals? significantly disabled individuals?) didn't want anyone to feel sorry for them.

They want to be viewed as *you*, as a normal person. And I know I probably would do too. Because you having pity for him is just like reiterating that they *are* different and they don't want to be viewed as different ... even though they are.

Drake's likely confusion in making sense of Michael is reflective of the conflicting values generated by the normative framework within this building. While the inclusion of

Michael in the general education classroom announced the value of diversity in ability and experience, the nature of his participation within those classrooms disparaged the difference that *he* brought. While his legitimacy as member of this community was not questioned, the extent to which he remained on the periphery damaged his standing as a member. As Bill and his classmates pointed out, he was never treated with disrespect within the building. Yet, it was not respect or camaraderie that he could earn within this structure, but pity for the role that he played in this community. If Michael's presence in a general education setting instead of a specialized institution sought to dispel the assumptions of excessive dependence, fragility, even infantilization, that has traditionally accompanied the segregated lives of severely disabled individuals, the institutional reliance on the paraprofessional to implement the act of inclusion inadvertently secured those same values for Michael (as well as the other severely disabled student in the building).

Instructional practices were not spared the confusion emerging from conflicting values and value systems. As Ms. Mallory emphasized, the instructional goals of a normative setting ran counter to the educational priorities of students with disabilities. She expressed her frustration at the details that hindered progress on individual goals. The time required for Michael to learn important skills was simply unavailable in a setting which frowned on delays and interruptions. This was first and foremost an "academic institution" where the main goal was to "educate the kids." Michael, Ms. Mallory suggested, did not belong in an academic setting, since the goals of his education must necessarily differ from the purposes of this setting. The pace of the "real" world hindered the adequate provision of services, requiring a more specialized environment

where space and time constraints were eliminated. For Michael, then, the “real” world assumed the form of a “specialized” world where there were no explicit normative expectations of him. However, even within this idealized, secluded world, Michael’s educational progress was determined in terms of the “functional” skills that he was able to acquire. Michael’s “functioning” would be closely tied to the very same normative assumptions that characterized the general education setting. Describing the courses Everyday English and Everyday Math as “functional” math and English, she offered the example of designing a visit to the grocery store and framing it appropriately for her students.

Where would you find eggs? In the dairy section. And it depends on the level of the student in the class. For our lower students, just finding an appropriate person to ask help from versus a stranger, just [to] locate the restroom may be their goal for the day. Whereas others are trying to compare the cheapest price between 2 cans of green beans, and where another one is trying to locate your basic items and have a clue as to where [inaudible] is located. So we individualize a lot, because we need to in those classes.

Michael’s (and other disabled students’) educational progress was assessed on his ability to carry out tasks that would situate him as closely as possible in the world of “normal” individuals going about their everyday lives performing actions useful to themselves and to others. Perhaps the Foods teacher best articulates the confusion experienced by all as they, willingly or unwillingly, staff and students, participated in the

baffling process of engaging with Michael and other significantly disabled students within this setting.

And one time, I can't remember which child it was, I asked the counselor how this child was put in Advanced German., because it was a very low functioning child. And the counselor said to me "Well, that's the only class." He said, "We have to put them in an upper level class, so that they don't get made fun of you know," ... *That's* kind of interesting [eyebrows arched]. And I had a little girl named Hilary and she could not talk, you could not understand what she said at all. And they had her in *choir* last year. [Pause] I just don't *understand* all this.

The paradigmatic narrative in each setting emerged from the particularities that characterized that setting: classroom/building climate (stemming from its core values), curricular approach, instructional strategies, and teacher characteristics. As discussed in the opening pages of this chapter, these dominant institutional narratives inevitably become integrated with the self-stories of individual participants in those contexts thereby embodying the process of *narrative induction*. This process that has been presumed to occur within the settings just described may be represented in the following figure.

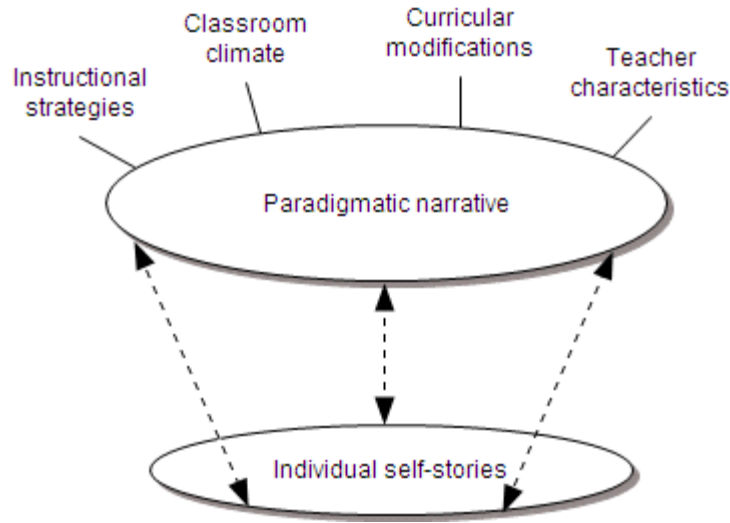


Figure 2. “Narrative Induction” at West Creek Elementary and Truman High School

Participants within each setting appropriate the elements of the institutional narrative making it relevant to themselves in different ways. In the next chapter, I will attempt to extend the meanings of Linde’s construct to accommodate the engagement in practice that is necessarily implied in the notion of narrative induction. How did the paradigmatic narratives play out in the ways students interacted with each other? To this end, I will scrutinize the modes of participation that were made available to Harry/Michael and their peers via these paradigmatic narratives and the nature of student relations that resulted as a consequence. It is in the context of those relations that the significance of peer narratives to the formation of Harry’s and Michael’s identities can emerge.

Chapter 5: Stories in Action

Modes of Participation

The impact of either narrative described in the previous chapter may be analyzed in terms of the possibilities for participation that it afforded not only Harry/Michael but also their peers/classmates. What were the modes of participation generated by these narratives for Harry and Michael? How did they enable students to demonstrate their understandings of severe disability? What kinds of relations did they foster between Harry/Michael and their classmates? Three primary ways of describing Harry's and Michael's participation emerged from the data collected in both settings. They are described quite simply as *Onlooker*, *In the middle*, and *Valued member*. Descriptions of each of these categories were generated by closely examining several elements that spoke to the ideal of membership in the classroom. These included (a) the physical location of Harry/Michael at any given point in time, as well as the opportunities for interaction promoted by those locations; (b) the nature of the activity in which Harry and Michael were embedded within those locations and the curricular assumptions that it revealed; and, (c) the roles played by their social partners within that activity. In order to add greater depth to the examination of Michael's participation at the high school setting, I have made extensive use of the voices of Michael's peers.

Onlooker

Both Michael and Harry frequently remained on the periphery of social and instructional events within their classrooms. While Harry, unlike Michael, might certainly have experienced many other kinds of moments in his school day where his

status gained greater depth and involvement, nevertheless as the year progressed, it was clear that the existing conditions could not sustain that. Instead, he was increasingly, placed in situations that were marked by an absence of interactive engagement between him and his peers (or even his teachers). On those occasions, it was Ms. Cisneros, the paraprofessional who assumed the status of primary social partner for Harry and who made instructional decisions in an effort to invest his presence in the classroom with some meaning. She recognized the efforts Ms. Hilton made to find a place for Harry within the activity, but also realized they were not adequate. She then resorted to her limited repertoire of “replacement” activities that would designate Harry in some way a student within the classroom.

I had observed Ms. Cisneros position Harry on a stander in the classroom, facing a large sheet of paper, as he stamped colored shapes on it with a sponge. This had occurred during a testing session when the class was being screened for detecting students who might be eligible to receive enrichment services with the Gifted and Talented program. However, this form of defining participation for Harry had also been observed on other occasions when the class was engaged with written/oral work that involved worksheets, reading books etc. Harry’s activities as designed by Ms. Cisneros signaled the vast divide between his academic goals and that of other students. Not only did the juxtaposition of water play with the “academic” work of his peers pronounce the unbridgeable nature of the disparity in cognitive levels between the students, it also diminished Harry’s own potential to contribute meaningfully to the classroom activities of his peers.

Harry's peripheral location could also be understood by the frequency with which he was pulled from the classroom for other activities that included resource time with the special education teacher twice a day for half-hour. (During the week he participated in a half-hour one-on-one session with the music therapist. Physical therapy was sometimes provided during PE and at other times the physical therapist "pushed-in" to the classroom, as did the occupational therapist and the itinerant teacher for visually impaired students). He also left about half-hour earlier at the end of the day, as Ms. Cisneros delivered one more tube-feeding before getting him ready for the bus. To the extent that his removal from the class reminded students that he attended classrooms unknown to them with teachers who remained largely unfamiliar to them, these experiences might, albeit momentarily, have enhanced Harry's status as onlooker rather than as member within the classroom. Still, Harry spent a significant portion of instructional time in the classroom. And the students in this class seemed accustomed to the adults who devoted their time in the room to him. However, while the "push-in" efforts of these therapists sought to situate Harry within the room rather than outside of it, their "specialized" activities might have furthered the disparity between him and the other students.

The following episode described the "push-in" instruction delivered by the occupational therapist to Harry. Students were scattered all over the room, as Ms. Camasta searched for a suitable location in which to work with Harry. Eventually, she positioned him on his back over a large wedge handing him some textured sticks from an assortment of attractive toys that she had brought with her. From where I was seated, I overheard her singing softly to him. A few minutes later, she informed Harry that they were going to join the group on the floor beside them. The students in this group were

Andrea, Dominic and Stan, who were making long lists of words which they had put together. Ms. Camasta tried to enter the conversation as she supported Harry who had his head bent and was lying prone on the floor.

“Holy cow” she said, “You are making words.” Harry had not raised his head from the floor even after having been brought closer to the other children. Ms. Camasta urged him “Come up tall, Harry, Come up tall!” As he showed little sign of obliging, she added, encouragingly, “I thought your friends would motivate you.” Andrea, who had been watching Ms. Camasta silently with Harry, moved her work towards him so that she was now facing him. She made no comment, but remained absorbed in the activity of the therapist with Harry.

Ms. Camasta now produced out a toy that was shaped like a large open bowl suggesting the illusion of a fish floating inside it. It was brightly colored, provided moving visual effects and Harry did eventually raise his trunk to look at it. As Ms. Camasta praised him generously, I noticed both Andrea and Stan, pausing from their work and silently watching the two of them. As Ms. Camasta began to sing “Let’s catch the fish” Harry, who had dropped his head again, slowly began to raise it. Eventually, Dominic, too, who had been largely impervious to this interlude thus far, halted his activity to gaze mutely at Harry as the latter appeared transfixed by the fish in the bowl.

Even as Harry’s physical location placed him in the midst of classroom activity rather than on the periphery, the nature of the scenario designed by the therapist might actually have produced unintended results. Strangely enough, it was now Andrea, Stan and Dominic who had assumed the status of onlookers. This particular unfolding of

events draws attention to the inevitable complexity of including diverse members within any community. As much as Harry, during other moments, might have appeared to be on the outside looking in, on this occasion, he was on the inside looking out. Conversely, as much as Andrea, Stan and Dominic as undisputed members of this classroom community might have been on the inside looking out at Harry playing with water at the sink, they were on this occasion on the outside looking in into the experience within which Harry was to be understood. On either occasion, it was not the location of the students that necessarily determined the success of the inclusive process but the pathways (or, as in this case, the absence of them) that could connect the experiences which seemed to be so widely disparate. Interestingly, Andrea's almost instinctive response to move closer to Harry, communicated her immediate grasp of Harry's educational goal to raise his head and her recognition of the role that she and other students played in facilitating his responses. However, the continued actions of the therapist that seemed to install Harry within a framework outside the realm of experience of this classroom, even infantilizing him significantly, might have offered her little room to create the bridge that could draw Harry into her world. Harry's waterplay at the sink described previously might have physically separated the social worlds inhabited by him and his peers. However, the incident with Ms. Camasta also ensured that physical location, while certainly a determining element in the project of including members, could not by itself ensure that it produced the desired effects.

The classroom was not the only site which forced Harry's participation into the periphery. PE in the gym challenged Ms. Cisneros significantly as she sought to draw Harry into the fold of the current activity that intrinsically offered very little room to do

so. The Adaptive PE teacher who worked with two other disabled students during the same period, might (although Ms. Cisneros never overtly mentioned it) have prioritized her limited time with them given the less severe nature of their physical disabilities.

In the absence of any direction from the teachers, she used her own initiative to simply bring out equipment that she presumed Harry would find enjoyable, because, as she noted “...the important thing for him is to get him out of the wheelchair and doing something else, anything.” Ms. Cisneros’s resourcefulness could be stretched only to a certain level, however. As the gulf between Harry’s capabilities and the demands of the educational environment grew wider, she seemed to accept as probable, if not necessarily inevitable, that Harry’s participation would be peripheral. Unless, she suggested, they could find other things for him to do, Harry’s involvement would be limited, “still being in the classroom maybe ... but kind of being alongside rather than *in* the group.”

Ms. Cisneros’s characterization of Harry’s current and likely future participation bore a strong resemblance to Michael’s actual participation at Truman High School. The numerous occasions when Michael sat silently in his wheelchair at the corner of the room near the door, placed him both literally and metaphorically as an onlooker in the room. During those times, Michael who was almost completely disengaged from the instructional activity, sought to derive some meaning from his predicament by finding ways to engage with Ms. Jackson such as caressing her, playing with her pen, thrusting his face into hers, etc. Ms. Jackson in turn, while striving to maintain a standard of professional responsibility by discouraging these actions, seemed compelled at the same time to invest these monotonous, inactive periods with her own meanings of why Michael was here. She would conscientiously fill out the study guide assigned to the class finally

offering it to Michael so that he could stamp his name on it. Michael might be silently offered a dry-erase white board as the lecture wore on, where he was encouraged to write with a pen. As the assistant held the board, Michael might make some random lines on it, pausing every now and then to return his gaze to the rest of the class. Other students, oblivious to this tableau, remained focused with varying degrees of concentration on the video clip or PowerPoint slide that was displayed to obtain their attention. Or, in the middle of an activity, Ms. Jackson would stride to the corner of the room where the box of tissues was stored and returning to Michael, would in full and unproblematic view of the room hold it to his nose, and urge him in a no-nonsense tone to blow his nose. Michael responded obligingly and Ms. Jackson completed the remainder of the actions, rubbing his nose vigorously with the tissues, before she disposed them in the trash can. Frequently, Michael's classmates watched curiously, without making any comment. The teacher usually remained impervious to this interlude.

The nature of Michael's participation in the classroom was not surprising, given the "add-on" nature of his educational programming to the services that were already available. So, though he was thoughtfully placed in the Foods class not only because of the practical skills that he could acquire but also because of its "hands-on" nature, there was no significant change in his status within the room. During the days when there were cooking "labs" he and Brett remained under the supervision of Ms. Jackson. On those occasions, Jodie and Pat (juniors at the same table) actually prepared the food by themselves consulting only with each other on the ingredients and the sequence of events. There was little interaction between them and Michael who, along with Brett was directed by Ms. Jackson to carry out supplementary activities, such as carrying plates to

the table. Given the absence of inter-group interaction during this activity, Michael remained outside the pale of general classroom interaction.

In all the general education classrooms that he attended, Michael's physical location in the classroom was not supportive of significant social interaction. He was either near the door to facilitate easy entry and exit or, as in Aerobics, so far in front that for all intents and purposes he remained unknown to other students in the room. As one freshman in that class pointed out rather sheepishly to me, she did not know who I was talking about until I described Michael to her. The implications of Michael's physical location in the classroom did not go unnoticed by his classmates. In different ways, his peers described their responses to the curricular goals implicit in the manner in which Michael's process of inclusion was implemented. In affording primacy to their voices over my observations and interviews with staff (unlike my approach with West Creek), I have sought to extend naturally the fundamental argument of this study examined in both settings—that the narratives of other students are central to the identity formation of their severely disabled classmates. While it was the enactment of those narratives by Harry's peers that remained my focus at West Creek, it was the articulation of those narratives in students' own words that became my primary source of data at the high school. The following sections describe some meanings generated by his "onlooker" status.

Instructional implications of Michael's locations within the classroom and in the building. When students considered changes to his program, it was almost always his location in the classroom that first received attention. Colette, the senior cadet in Michael's World history class, perceived Michael's location in the classroom as disadvantageous to himself. She understood that it was damaging for Michael to remain

hidden from the rest of the classroom because no one could see how much he really did pay attention. In doing so, she demonstrated recognition of other students as important partners in Michael's learning. While Michael's very presence in the building purported to acknowledge the same, his mode of participation left him in actuality on the sidelines with little meaningful contact with other students. Shelley, a sophomore in the same class, articulated a similar wish for Michael:

Like, even if we are just working on an individual paper or something ... he sits over there by himself with his teacher and she does the paper for him and stuff. He always sits on the edge of our class. I'd like to see him in the middle of the class, in on the action a little bit more. And be able to like, work with us and stuff.

However, it was not just Michael's physical location in the room that students perceived as restricting his participation in the classroom. Students were not unaware of the ways in which his participation was compromised, or at least significantly influenced by instructional design. One of the means by which he appeared to be situated outside the realm of general student participation was the disparity between the demands of the setting and the perceived abilities of Michael. Jennifer:

Like the aerobics class, there's a lot of stuff that we can physically do that he can't do and I can tell like when he is watching us, he wants to be able to do it and I feel bad coz I know he *wants* to get up and do it with us, but he can't. I don't know, putting him in that situation seems its kinda not fair, like its kinda mean to do [that] to somebody...

There were other, more suitable options, she pointed out, like Lifetime Sports where activities like archery and Frisbee would be more accommodating of Michael. To Jennifer then, the error in educational planning lay in a lack of judgment of the nature of the activity involved in the class (Aerobics) in which Michael was placed, (besides the glaring fact, as Erin a freshman pointed, that it was an all-girl class). It was not Michael's abilities that precluded more effective participation in the class, but the nature of the class itself. It would have been far more appropriate, therefore, to place him in a setting that afforded greater opportunity for him to carry out some of the demands of the class. But she also implied that those settings that she favored for him were structured to foster greater interaction and cooperation between all students, rendering it more compatible with Michael's perceived educational goals.

Elizabeth, a freshman in Michael's aerobics class, voiced this implicit recognition of Michael's needs that seemed to conflict with the uncompromising cognitive goals of classes such as algebra.

In my algebra II class... really, I don't think there would be a place in this class because there wouldn't be that much interaction, and my teacher wouldn't be able to do either because he is trying to teach it to all of us who don't get it. But in English class, I think that'd be fun because we face each other and we talk a lot. We discuss. I think it would be more fun to put him in that type of class then a class that's really focused on really hard [content]

When Elizabeth rejected Michael's placement in algebra, she did not point to the incompatibility between his abilities and the goals of that course, (though she might have

presumed that) but to the absence of any real opportunity for the kind of social interaction that Michael needed and which could be more readily met within more malleable subjects such as English.

“Normalcy” and the quest for independence. While Michael’s peers appeared to be acutely conscious of his current status as lying on the periphery of mainstream classroom experience, they suggested that the disparity in experience lay in the inability of his program to draw him into the fold of “normal” high school experience. Bill and Chantal expressed satisfaction in seeing Michael being encouraged to sit independently at his own desk, because that “really let him be more into the class and stuff” or “[made] him feel more normal.” In fact, it was the absence of “normalcy” in the actions enveloping Michael that seemed to underscore the distance from his peers. It also seems evident that students held the staff responsible for creating those conditions in which Michael could be invested with “normalcy.” Furthermore, for many of these students, the construct of “normalcy” carried the notion of independence. Several students pointed out that many of the instructional practices that they witnessed with Michael bred dependency. Chantal wished that maybe the staff could “let him do things for his own a little bit more.” Bill echoed this sentiment in suggesting that he could “be more independent.”

Shelley, another sophomore in Michael’s World History class, viewed Ms. Jackson’s authoritarian practice as not only negating the value of independence but as also denying Michael’s need to stay connected with others.

It would be cooler to see her instead of just doing stuff for him, even though he might not understand to explain it to him and tell him what’s

going on a little bit more. Even though he might not understand, I think that that would be cool to see her communicate with him more.

In allowing for the possibility of comprehension on Michael's part, rather than assuming the certainty of his inability, Shelley questioned the very foundation that seemed to premise Ms. Jackson's practice with Michael. Like any student, Michael would benefit from explanations, from the assumption of "normal" functioning. This fundamental connection with all students is also emphasized in the vision of teacher interactions with Michael shared by Colette, the teacher cadet (senior) in Michael's World History class. Offering the World History teacher Ms. Hymes as an example, she explained how teachers could include him:

Colette: Well, like just saying his name 'Cause when he hears his name, he knows that he is being talked to. And [just] like how an ordinary teacher will pull out another student and be like "Are you awake, so and so?" it could easily be like "Michael, do you understand that?" or just something as simple as that to include him in the classroom.

When asked how such strategies helped other students, she added:

I think they notice it more and they look. I think it's better to tell the students that he's a normal person and he can be talked to... just like everyone else can.

Colette's vision of normalcy did not necessarily encompass the need for independence, but highlighted its capacity to keep individuals connected. In presuming understanding on the part of Michael, like she would with any other student, a teacher like Mrs. Hymes not only drew him into the practice of a "normal" classroom, she also allowed Michael to

demonstrate aspects of himself that might not be otherwise noticed by others. Colette seemed to suggest too that other students required a mediating influence in understanding Michael and that the teacher's ways of interacting with him embodied that purpose.

While some students aspired for greater independence for Michael, others actively spoke out against the harmful effects of breeding dependency in Michael. Janet, an outspoken senior in Michael's Foods class, rejected the relationship between him and Ms. Jackson as not only violating the rules of teacher-student relations, but as inhibiting Michael's own learning. Characterizing Ms. Jackson's method of interaction with Michael as "mean" she observed:

I don't like it at all. I think that she should be nice to him, especially because she doesn't really ... I mean I guess she *knows* him but it's not like [he's] part of her family or something, so its not like she has been around all his life. And I just don't think that anybody should be mean to him.

Janet insisted that Ms. Jackson's relations with Michael were detrimental to him, not just because of its inappropriate nature, but also because it inhibited his capacity to benefit from his environment through the "abnormal" restrictions placed on him. For example, by doing "too much for him" she prevented him from exploring the room, which Janet considered a typical student activity. But while she held Ms. Jackson responsible for teaching Michael to be dependent on others, she also extended a far more agentic role to Michael suggesting that he might like the benefits brought about by such a state. But he also needed to be educated about the higher benefits of *not* being dependent.

Michael's distance from mainstream classroom seemed configured by the relations that enveloped him (in this case, with Ms. Jackson) rather than any specific qualities that he may have brought. In critiquing the dependency that characterized Michael's relations with his teacher, Ms. Jackson, Janet questioned the "normalcy" that premised his placement in this classroom. "I have a good relationship with all my teachers, but they don't do my work for me." If Michael was here because he was really like everybody else, then why did he receive the kind of treatment that none of the others did and which had been clearly established as harmful for students everywhere? Yet, it is *because* she remained situated within this perspective, that she could also suggest that Ms. Jackson need not be his only assistant. It would be much more "normal" for him to have other classmates offer him assistance.

Drake, a senior in Michael's Foods class, was much more categorical in his characterization of the value attached to independence. Having observed that Ms. Jackson frequently seemed to talk *at* Michael, rather than *to* him, he was quick to note that that was not his own experience. "They talk *to* me, because I think people that can help themselves demand a certain amount of respect." It was not immediately clear that other students shared Drake's perspective on the inordinately high social value that he placed on independence. Many of the girls who were interviewed were just as likely to seek and appreciate other qualities in Michael that might have less visibility but carried significant value, such as the ability to make others happy. Or, perhaps Drake articulated an idea that might have occurred to the others even if they could not express it as clearly themselves. Nevertheless, their frequent references to the dependency displayed prominently in the relations between Michael and Ms. Jackson, did suggest that it played a critical role in

situating him on the periphery of mainstream classroom life. It might be safe to infer that configuring those relations would be an important factor in the successful inclusion of significantly disabled students in general education classrooms.

Inside special education. Michael's experiences in the special education classes only partially removed him from the margins. As Ms. Jackson carved herself a very different role within these classrooms, she could extend the benefits of that to him as well. She was not just Michael's assistant, but a classroom assistant as well.

Consequently, she professed a familiarity with many students, most of whom were not as significantly disabled as Michael. She seemed to move in rhythm with the teacher who seemed in no way to be disconcerted by Ms. Jackson's assumption of authority. From this vantage point, Ms. Jackson included Michael into the classroom conversation, posing questions to him to which she knew he might be able to respond in some perceptible way. In fact, her vigilance in doing so seemed to release the teacher from the responsibility of having to do the same. Ms. Jackson was clearly considered the expert on Michael.

Yet, the disparity in experiences between Michael and his peers that was markedly evident in the general education classrooms was only somewhat diminished in these special education rooms. On one occasion, when I entered the Language Skills class (a course designed and taught by the speech pathologist for students in a variety of grades but with similar language needs), I found the other students working independently on writing tasks while Michael sat at his desk with two books by Eric Carle open in front of him (The books by Eric Carle are particularly popular in preschool and early elementary grades). When the class was assigned "packets" requiring written responses, he too received one. But his task was to color on it using colored pencils "one at a time."

Michael drew a few random lines on the paper, then stopped and allowed his gaze to wander around the room. At Ms. Jackson's behest, Duane, another student sitting beside him encouraged him "C'mon, Michael, color." The speech pathologist, Ms. O'Brien, confided to me that Michael was really here for the socialization. Consequently, though she did not directly address him when instructing the whole group, she called out to him "Michael, are you working on your packet? Duane, tell him "good job!" She came over to his table and noting the random colored lines created by him, used a marker to write "Good Job!" with a flourish on his paper, while talking to him encouragingly about his drawing at the same time.

If socialization was the primary purpose for Michael's presence in the room, there seemed to be stronger evidence here that this goal was being realized. Jared, one of Michael's classmates in this room, seemed convinced of Michael's status in this location. He was confident that "everybody in the whole class love[d] Michael" and that Michael enjoyed being in this class. Paul, a senior teacher cadet in the same class, made a similar observation about Michael's status within the room. "In the classroom ... everybody goes as a group to him. He talks to everybody in the class. He participates and does activities with everybody in the class. He basically gets along with everybody in the class." Despite this recognition of Michael's popularity within the room, Paul himself had little or no contact with him, though his role was to assist the teacher in the room. "I just don't really do much with him, because he's always over there with Ms. Jackson. Jared is over there, or somebody else is over there." Not only was he removed from Michael's immediate experiences within the same room, there was little incentive to pursue relations outside

the class. In a rush of candor, he confessed, “I really honestly never see him outside of class.”

Paul’s role in the classroom did not appear to be strongly defined. I had observed him sitting at a table with a few other students, chatting with them or listening to music, or at the computer assisting another student. But his duties did not appear to place him as a prominent figure in the room, unlike Colette in the World History class. If Paul’s location within this room was intended to get inside the special education experience to some extent, it might appear to a casual observer that he remained clearly outside of it. Paul’s exposure to Michael was frequent and occurred within a setting that comprised less than 15 students and which was much more conducive to one-on-one interaction than the rigid structure of the general education classrooms within this building. Yet, to the extent that Michael still remained on the fringes of Paul’s experience, the special education classroom did little to build connections between the two worlds within this high school building, leaving Michael, rather than Paul, as the onlooker.

In the middle

While Harry, like Michael, often experienced the onlooker status within his own classroom, it certainly did not characterize the nature of his placement within the first grade classroom at West Creek. Many of the concerns and suggestions raised by the high school students were implicitly acknowledged within the classroom at West Creek Elementary. The pursuit of “normalcy” as desired by students such as Shelley and Colette, was well in place in Harry’s room and actively implemented by both Ms. Hilton and her students and of course, Ms. Cisneros. Each time Ms. Hilton greeted Harry in

front of the others or included him in her conversations with the group, she endowed him with normalcy. Each time a student raised Harry's hand to suggest his preference or his response, Harry was being enveloped with normalcy. Each time Ms. Cisneros explained matter-of-factly to a student as she tube-fed Harry what kinds of foods he liked, she forced them to view his specialized needs as "normal." Except during the moments when neither Ms. Hilton nor Ms. Cisneros could find ways to connect him to the academic task presented to his peers, Harry was almost always in the middle, literally, of the group, either in his wheelchair or sitting on the floor, flanked on all sides by his classmates. In these and myriad other ways, many of which have been described earlier, Harry's classroom determinedly sought to invest Harry with legitimate membership and to firmly draw him into the middle.

Given the strength of the "family" narrative in place in Harry's classroom at West Creek, it was not surprising that I recorded many events and episodes where Harry was a participant in the activity at hand. In order to better describe the nature of Harry's participation, I have categorized it in the following ways: 1) Harry as part of the group and *doing the same thing as the others in the group*, and 2) Harry as part of the group, *but not doing the same things as the others in the group*. The first category prescribed Harry's actions in specific ways just as it did the others'. Students were required to participate in specific ways and Harry was no exception. It also implied direct interaction between Harry and other students. In the second category, Harry's membership in the group might be connoted not because of his engagement in a specific activity as much as the social interplay between the members of the group. It did not always imply direct

interaction between Harry and the others. In the subsequent pages, I will draw extensively on my notes which captured the moments that best illustrate these categories.

Harry as part of the group and doing the same thing as the others in the group.

To a significant extent, every time Harry sat down on the floor with the others during “circle time,” he was engaged in a similar experience as the others. He may not always participate in a manner considered appropriate—it was difficult for Harry not to enthusiastically greet his neighbors—but he remained seated and besides the occasional inevitable moment when Ms. Cisneros might draw him away because he was too loud, he appeared to be listening to Ms. Hilton, like the other students. Student interaction with him during these moments was sometimes accidental, sometimes intentional. These group instructional periods were short, not more than about 15 minutes and though students participated by raising their hands to offer their stories, it was largely Ms. Hilton who controlled the conversation and activity.

Activities at the tables that were carried out both individually and in groups were more challenging. Harry’s experiences as a participant doing the same thing as the others during such times, were made largely possible by the instructional modifications that Ms. Hilton and Ms. Cisneros implemented with Ms. Hanson’s help. The principal means to accommodate Harry into activities entailed the use of the switch and the dice described earlier. Participation in Music occurred without the aid of any specialized equipment. Either Ms. Cisneros or another student assisted Harry with the musical instruments that students used under the supervision of the teacher. If the music was accompanied by large movements, then Ms. Cisneros would get Harry off the chair and put him through the actions as instructed by the teacher. Art was the other “special” where Harry found a

comfortable niche in the group. Even if he was not working on the exact art project that the others were involved in, he enthusiastically participated in painting/coloring on a paper affixed to a slant board placed in front of him.

As noted earlier, it was during “choice” time that Harry and his peers enjoyed interactions with fewer structural limitations. Usually some student might come forward and either offer to read to Harry or invite him to participate in some other activity. Harry’s position on the carpet seemed to proclaim his availability to others, an opportunity that was not often missed. The students would turn to Ms. Cisneros and ask “Can Harry do ___ with me?” Most of them seemed to understand that it was Ms. Cisneros who would be actually playing the game, but they never failed to mention Harry’s name, rarely articulating what his role might be. Other students simply utilized this opportunity to interact with Harry. Cristo might get down on the floor so that he was at Harry’s eye level and stay in that position for a few minutes. Tammie might stop by, ostensibly to read to him though inevitably it might lead to just watching him swipe at the book with his hands, an activity she seemed to enjoy hugely. Unrestricted movement between tables and within the room as well as unhampered conversations between students characterized this period of activity in the room. Cristo’s and Tammie’s actions did not in any way contradict the patterns of group activity at this time.

Harry as part of the group but not doing the same thing. During my observations, I retained several snapshots of moments that seemed to suggest that being a group member did not necessarily imply doing the exact same thing as other members.

On one occasion, during “choice time,” Mark had just completed a game with Harry and had wandered off to watch Stan and Colin making planes. Barely a few

minutes later, Dominic and Cristo appeared and converged on Harry. They did not appear to be actually thinking about playing the game, though the board stood on Harry's tray with the chips nearby. They continued to hover around Harry, seeming to express an unspoken comfortableness in being with each other and in his presence. Ms. Cisneros happened to be assisting another student at the same table at that time. When I invited them to play with Harry, they readily agreed. Cristo chose to be Harry's partner and very soon, the two boys were engaged in placing the chips into the slots on the board. Harry immediately reacted to the presence of Dominic and Cristo. He fixed his gaze on them intently, his body tense and leaning forward. Cristo might have manipulated Harry's hands a few times to place the chips in the slots.

As the game proceeded between the two boys, Harry continued to display an intense absorption in the game, his glance moving rapidly from the game to the boys, his body jerking periodically and his hands gesticulating involuntarily. He was not "talking" but it was clearly evident that he was engaged in the actions of Cristo and Dominic. Cristo and Dominic were playing with Harry in one sense, but they were not playing *with* him in another. After all, they were the ones actually carrying out the game. Yet, Harry seemed to experience his own level of *belonging* within that moment, making it irrelevant for him to know how to play the game. As far as Dominic and Cristo were concerned, they were playing with Harry and did not appear to find any contradiction between the goal of *playing with Harry* and their own actions. Harry's involvement in the game was atypical perhaps, but nevertheless could still be brought under the rubric of participatory play.

Though interaction with other students was clearly Harry's widely acknowledged "stimulus" Harry himself might not have relied only on that to experience his own sense of belonging within the classroom. Conversely, the "inclusion" practiced by students with Harry might defy conventional ways of describing desirable student behavior. One afternoon, as the classroom readied itself to watch a movie, Harry's movements were directed by his peers. Drawing from my field notes:

Cristo wheeled Harry over to his table to collect his belongings. As he did so, Harry remained seated, quietly waiting. Cristo appeared to remember something that he needed to do, and unhurriedly walked away from him. Gabby who was also at the same table, rose and came over till she was behind Harry's chair. She maneuvered the chair around so that Harry was now facing the television hanging from the corner of the room. By this time, Cristo had returned. Somehow the wheelchair changed hands again, and Cristo now proceeded to move Harry towards the center of the carpet closer to the TV screen. A little later, with the lights dimmed and *The Magic School Bus* filling the TV screen, I noticed that Harry's immediate companion was now Andrea. Without saying anything to him, she simply sat down next to him.

In the midst of his silently watching peers, Harry seated in his wheelchair, remained excited. He jerked his head back and forth several times as he appeared to scan the area in front of him. As students watched the TV screen, they were not engaging in any direct way with Harry. They simply assumed his location (literally and metaphorically) in the classroom and acted in ways that corroborated that. Some of those ways might have

implied greeting him, or directly acknowledging him. But it was just as likely that they might not. However, implicit in those ways was a sense of ownership of Harry's experiences that precluded the need for Ms. Cisneros to take sole responsibility for his activity within the room. And importantly, Harry himself appeared to be experiencing a degree of comfort with his location in the group.

There were numerous other occasions particularly in the lunchroom when similar forms of participation by both Harry and his peers were displayed. Even though Harry was not directly involved in the conversations that swirled around him, in subtle ways, he appeared to be as much as a participant in that group as anybody else. Each of those occasions was a unique moment, with no guarantees that it might appear again in the exact same form. However, examining these snapshots does reveal some attributes of the participation of Harry and his peers within the group:

- not all students interacted with him directly, but there were always some students who *did*
- Harry was not just physically located in the middle of the group, he was embedded in its social activity; on several of those occasions an adult was present to facilitate this aspect
- Harry's participation was not defined by the group in terms of his ability to carry out the activity at hand; it was less clear how they *did* describe his participation
- Students responded to Harry's overtures, but did not appear to require it for their own continued participation with him
- Students also interacted with other peers/adults during those moments

- In almost all the moments described above, Harry was animated and appeared to enjoy the company in which he found himself. Even when this level of animation was diminished, his intent gaze still communicated an interest that was difficult to miss.

While the students in Harry's class enacted their understanding of their participation with him in the ways illustrated above, some of the students at Truman High, while acutely conscious that Michael was *not* "in the middle" nevertheless conceptualized various scenarios that might place him in such a position. Drama and fashion show were sites of participation that recurred frequently in their speculations. Mindy observed that "you don't have to speak to be an actor" just as she also visualized him in a fashion show.

They could dress him up, he can sit in his wheelchair and then he can roll out. "This is Michael, he is wearing such-and-such" and then he could get his picture taken and then go back." Yeah, definitely.

While Mindy might have used the framework of the activity to suggest avenues for Michael's participation, Colette used the benefits the event would offer Michael to assess its feasibility.

Well, he always smiles and he laughs a lot and I think that like, with the crowd's involvement in the fashion show... I think everyone there would think that was awesome too and I think he would enjoy seeing everyone clapping and everything.

Arianna might visualize a limited role for Michael in a play, ("watch, and laugh and have fun") but Shelley was less restrictive.

Whether he is able to communicate... whether he is able to physically tell us what he thinks about it or whatever, you know that he is going to be able to communicate what he thought about it. And it is cool to see people's feedback on the plays that we do, on the plays that we see and all the stuff that we talk about.

Not only could Michael be valued for the feedback that he could offer, his participation in the play itself was easily achievable, given that all roles did not require speaking lines. Moreover his reliable ability to "lighten the moment" could offer further opportunities for him in the enactment of the play.

On the whole, however, the paradigmatic normative narrative that restricted Michael's participation to an onlooker status within his educational setting, severely constrained the abilities of his peers to speculate on avenues of participation that went beyond the same. They might tolerate the idea of his presence in sites that were integrated, but were less effective in conjuring up images of Michael that could place him "in the middle." During the interviews, I confronted students with the task of imagining Michael in their own sites of work/interest. Their attempts to configure alternate scenarios for Michael restricted him to the sidelines where he could "have fun" by "watching people" or "cheer at games." While Jodie might suggest doubtfully that "we could find *something* for him to do" in the band, Pat regretfully announced that she could not see him participating at McDonalds where she was a manager. For most of the high school students I interviewed, the "ability"-requirements dictated by the normative narrative offered few leads to configure Michael's participation differently.

Only two of the high school students that I interviewed offered an image of Michael that was unusual. Jared, Michael's classmate in the special education class, reflected on his experience with Michael in Belloch Middle School. He recalled an event called the Belloch Blowout.

Everybody was out on the field, you know, just messing around and Michael was out there and he was I could see him rolling around his chair ... They [had] this big old ... air things that you can slide down, just jump around on in, just have fun. He was rolling around with everybody, just laughing, having fun, drinking soda... He wasn't on the [inflatable] stuff, but some of the stuff that he could do There [was] a bunch of kids playing with him. Everybody will walk by and be like "what's up Michael?" you know

Among all the snapshots of memories with Michael that students were invited to share, Jared's was the most descriptive in its account and instead of describing a response that he might have made (which was the basis of others' responses) to an event such as the teacher dropping a book, Jared's picture encompassed *an event*, and included *all its* participants.

Vivian, a freshman who shared Michael's aerobics class and who was often positioned on the floor next to him, offered her own unique perspective on him. Emphatic that he could take care of somebody else, she reiterated that he was "just like anybody else" with feelings and emotions. Her understanding of the care he could provide others conceptualized his worth differently.

Like I could see him helping other people a lot, even if it's just coming into the room and you know, just being there. ...'Coz whenever I see him I just get all happy. He is a really nice kid.

Vivian's understanding of Michael ran counter to the ability-dominated normative narrative that seemed to have left others with very few ways of conceptualizing his participation. Vivian, on the other hand, could do so because of the value she attached to attributes that did not figure prominently within this paradigmatic narrative. So, Michael "in the middle" was framed by the valuable quality he brought of simply lifting others' spirits through his presence.

Not all of Harry's experiences *in the middle* as was noted earlier, were made possible by compensating in some way for the absence of a required ability through instructional modifications. Harry's membership within the group often stemmed from other less readily recognizable possibilities that defied precise description of specific behaviors of the participants or elements of the immediate setting. Harry's membership in that room was owed in some part to the albeit inarticulate recognition of the other students to values that did not necessarily stem from a notion of normative ability. At the high school, however, most of the participatory scenarios envisioned by the students centered on Michael's capacity to deliver the ability-needs of the selected environment. In the absence of a genuine family/community narrative that would presume structural changes in the environment rather than only seek changes in the individual, Michael's participation would remain vulnerable and subject to continual variability. It was no coincidence that as students speculated on the kinds of group participation that would benefit Michael, they fell back on individual characteristics.

Jennifer: You have to like set up a class with certain students that would *want* to interact with Michael,

Erin: ... that would like, *want* to help. Because some people like my friend Janice who couldn't be here today, she is insane about school, she *has* to do everything perfectly and she is a very nice person, don't get me wrong, but she may be too involved in her studies, to want to like [help]...

It was proximity to certain *types* of students that could ensure the success of a program to include him in the general education classroom.

Valued Member?

While participation *in the middle* certainly can be reflective of one's membership in the group, there are other opportunities when members can demonstrate a value that goes beyond simply holding a position within the group. This may not be observable as a continual or sustained occurrence as much as discrete opportunities when students displayed some strength which during that brief moment, elevated their status within the group. Each time Tiffany, Andrea or any other student went up to sit in the teacher's chair to share their written work with the class and receive their comments/questions, their standing in the group was recognized as superior. When individual students received a Shining Star they experienced the glow of being a member highly regarded in the group. When Ms. Hilton called on individual students to demonstrate a particular skill/strategy that would benefit all students in the group, those students were being momentarily accorded a superior status within the group. Each of those discrete moments enveloped the individual student for that moment with more than a sense of belonging

within the group. It expressed the collective value ascribed by the group to the individual's specific abilities/talents/characteristics.

Were either Harry or Michael considered valued members of their respective groups? While it may be safe to say that no events were recorded which illustrated such a standing for Michael within the group, Harry might have experienced some, if not many, such events. Each time I observed Harry leading the group in its choral recitation of rhymes, the participation of the *other* students during that event suggested that Harry had a distinctive standing in the group. In structuring the situation so that it offered Harry a key role in the group event, Ms. Hilton allowed Harry to emerge as more than just a classmate. His contribution was *necessary* for group functioning. To that extent, perhaps Harry achieved some status as a valued member. She also assigned him classroom "jobs" that situated him along with the others as performing duties important in the classroom. However, as mentioned earlier, Harry and Melissa were the only students who were themselves "jobs" for others who might receive Shining Stars for their efforts. There were fewer opportunities, if any, for Harry himself to receive a Shining Star that could acknowledge his contribution as an individual to the group.

Students had little opportunity to ask questions of Harry's experiences that might have been recorded in the Big Mac. (Ms. Cisneros and Ms. Hilton had repeatedly expressed their disappointment that Harry's family had not utilized the switch effectively for this purpose. Due to the sparse communication with the family, Ms. Cisneros would sometimes record some statements herself in order to draw Harry closer to the group). Not only did Harry's experiences outside school remain largely unknown to the group, there was little opportunity for them to express their ways of understanding those

experiences. Consequently, the group could not draw on those to generate a different framework in which to understand Harry's worth so that it was not linked only to the "academic" or the specific "helping" goals of the classroom. While Harry's classmates clearly understood and enjoyed him at more than just an "ability" level, their appreciation of his *worth* that could denote a superior status, albeit a temporary one, remained restricted to some extent by the normative strings that were attached to the family narrative in the classroom. Harry was still largely a recipient of others' individual interest, care and enjoyment. He was not necessarily viewed as offering those same benefits to the group as a whole.

Student fascination with Harry's various adaptive equipment items might suggest an interest in Harry that went beyond an ordinary member in the classroom. However, even if students temporarily sought him out eagerly to push his wheelchair or his adapted bicycle, or his stander, not only was this interest transient, it did little to illuminate other ways in which he could be understood. Harry might get to use things that were "cool" but those things had little meaning in the lives of other students to assign them lasting value. They remained attached to the unique nature of his experiences in the classroom.

Some indication of this nebulous, even shaky nature of his standing in the group may be found in Ms. Hilton's puzzled reflections on student interest in Harry, which she characterized as "out-of-sight, out-of-mind." While they might be delighted to see him and greet him with genuine pleasure, they were just as likely to forget to register his absence/presence.

You know, if he wasn't here on Friday, usually the kids right off the bat would ask me where he was. [But] they didn't appear to notice, until I said

something at morning meeting. If [he's] sick, I'll say "Our friend, Harry is not here today." And the kids will be like [in high-pitched voice] "O yeah, Harry isn't here." I mean he doesn't have a voice when he is here. I think they have to hear, you know, or notice that they want to invite someone to play, and that they are not here.

It may be legitimate to question Ms. Hilton on whether any student is usually missed by the whole group. Frequently, those who are seated close to the absent student, or who carry out some routines with him/her on a daily basis would actually miss his/her presence. So even if Harry's absence was not registered by the group, it may not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in him or as she suggests the indistinguishable nature of his presence in the room. Ms. Hilton's comment indicates rather that the others may not be engaged in activities of significance with him. In his absence, their routines could remain unaffected. This in turn, implied that Harry's location in the classroom was tenuous at best and illusory, at worst.

Interestingly, the vision articulated by Shelley at the high school, carried a valued membership status for Michael, even if the specifics of her suggestion were not immediately clear. Michael was conceptualized as a participant who contributed in ways not dissimilar from others. The engagement that she presumed Michael would experience in drama was *interactive*. He was not there simply to watch and enjoy a play. He might certainly do that, but her expectations of him included not only making sense of it in his own way, but importantly sharing those meanings with the others—giving "feedback" to the rest. The use of the term itself ascribed a valued membership status to the named individual, in this case Michael. The activity of providing feedback offered the individual

an opportunity to make a contribution of significance to the group. Shelley valued this activity for *all* students and did not presume to exclude Michael from its benefits.

The status of valued member may be extended to and received by students in different ways, some accompanied by fanfare, and others integrated almost indistinguishably with classroom routines. Michael's actual distance from such an ideal position within the classroom was indisputable, Harry's less so. The significance of such membership for both lay in the opportunity this provided other students to rethink common assumptions that could lead to deeper connections between *all* members of the group. When Shelley described Michael's participation in terms of "feedback" she expressed a more nuanced understanding of communication that was not restricted to conventional speech. One might hypothesize that requiring Michael to participate in such activities might force all students to do the same, i.e., not merely judge Michael by the standards they used for themselves, but to utilize Michael's efforts to interpret the same standards differently.

Examining curricular approaches to understand student participation

While the modes of participation offered to Harry/Michael and their peers that have been described thus far might have been engendered by the paradigmatic narratives within each setting, they simultaneously implicated in significant part the curricular emphases of their educational programs. As the preceding chapter has shown, the narratives emerged in the context of the curricular and instructional practices in those settings (along with other elements such as values, teacher characteristics, etc.). In this section, I briefly examine the nature of some of those practices to illuminate their impact

on student participation and student relations. While Harry and Michael had vastly dissimilar educational experiences, the same normative thread informed both their programs in each separate setting. The functional approach to curriculum that Ms. Mallory, Michael's case manager, upheld was echoed by Ms. Hanson, Harry's special education teacher, who repeatedly stressed the importance of skill acquisition for Harry as a means of insuring his future. In fact, the paucity of those futuristic scenarios that emerged from my conversations with them seemed to correlate strangely with the intensity of emphasis on teaching functional skills. The spontaneous vision of Harry's future that Ms. Hanson proffered involved him communicating to unfamiliar adults the number of pills that he needed. His skill in using a communication device such as the Big Mac was therefore a critical element of his education. Ms. Mallory's unfulfilled yearning for the resources that would enable her to provide a more effective rendition of the Foods class in which Michael was currently included, revealed her anxiety to make his curricular activities genuinely "functional."

Ferguson (1987) has long since pointed out the particular socially valued goals implicit in this functional approach to curriculum for students with severe disabilities that have characterized their education for many decades. Rejecting the "readiness" criterion of earlier developmental approaches, the functional emphasis, she documents, sought to identify the skills required by the student to function in different environments. The overarching philosophy that guided this approach was the production of citizens who could effectively contribute to larger societal goals. Productivity and economic value were the yardsticks for measuring the worth of these individuals, as it undoubtedly was for other members of society. In fact, the legitimacy of a special education program

rested on its promise to deliver individuals who would demonstrate increased levels of social and economic independence. Ferguson notes that not only did this preclude skills that served no obvious functional purpose it also implied that as students grew older, much of their education would be carried out in non-school settings, which they were expected to frequent in their hazy futures beyond school. Not surprisingly, instruction in these non-school community settings removed these students from the opportunities to engage in, and develop, relationships with their peers. The requirement to project futures for these students left their teachers in dogged pursuit of these functional skills. “It is not enough just to articulate a future productive and contributory role. Students must learn to cross actual streets, ride actual buses, and perform actual work tasks that will fill their adult lives” (Ferguson, 1987, p. 84).

The commitment to this approach naturally placed it at odds with the goals of the general education classroom. Ms. Hanson, Harry’s special education teacher, ruefully described the faster pace of the general education classroom that inhibited the satisfactory implementation of special education instructional goals. Ms. Mallory, Michael’s case manager, flatly rejected the effectiveness of the general classroom environment for the specialized setting, because of its inhibitory pace and its built-in characteristics that compromised the goals of special education. Yet, both Ms. Mallory and Ms. Hanson’s efforts show little cognizance of the increasing trends in the education of students with severe disabilities that offer ways to access the general education curriculum for Harry and Michael (for example, Cushing, Clark, Carter & Kennedy, 2005; Kennedy & Horn, 2004; Downing, 2002; Fisher & Frey, 2001; Palmer, Wehmeyer, Gipson, & Agran, 2004). Harry’s curricular efforts might reflect some acknowledgement of the importance

of participation rather than acquiring pre-determined functional skills (he had begun to visit other classrooms with Ms. Cisneros to collect recyclable cans), but these were isolated incidents that seemed to embody a need for Harry to do *something* while his peers were engrossed in academic work, rather than a commitment to engaging with the general education setting. The direction of his program for the subsequent school year noted earlier which called for increased time spent in a special education location within the building and interaction with general education peers restricted to afternoons, provides some substance to this argument.

The increasing emphasis on aligning student goals with state-wide standards and outcomes for *all* students (Clayton, Burdge, Denham, Kleinert & Kearns, 2006; Cushing et al, 2005, Jorgensen, 1997), has spurred greater research into more effective means of including students with significant disabilities into general education classrooms. In fact, the term “functional” has itself acquired a new purpose if not necessarily a new meaning. Cushing et al (2005), draw its meaning from the ability of a skill/adaptation to be effective in helping students access the general education curriculum. Ryndak & Billingsely (2004) too suggest that the original strictly “functional” approach was not intended to enable the participation of disabled students in the general education curriculum, thereby underlining a changed perception of its objectives. (It’s fundamental meaning, however, defined by these authors as those skills “that increase the student’s degree of independence and enable the student to control the environment” (p. 39), appears to have undergone little change). Michael’s curricular emphases which seemed to have retained the original purpose and meaning of “functionality” appeared to intensify his exclusion from the general education community. For Harry, the isolated focus on the

switch as the only route to classroom participation, limited the opportunities to engage in different kinds of content-area activities with his peers.

It has been suggested that achieving access to the general education curriculum can occur through collaboration between educators, reconfiguring personnel roles and services, utilizing general education methods adopted for *all* students, and appropriate accommodations (Ryndak & Billingsley, 2004). Case study reports (Fisher & Frey, 2001; Grenot-Scheyer, Fisher, & Staub, 2001) indicate that it is the creative and committed use of the above strategies that ensures the successful inclusion of students with severe disabilities in the general education classroom. There is also an accumulating body of work that connects peer supports with gaining access to the general education curriculum (Fisher & Frey, 2001; Carter et al, 2005).

While Ms. Hilton viewed the resources made available to her through Ms. Hanson, Harry's special education teacher, as very helpful and Ms. Hanson felt welcomed by Ms. Hilton in the classroom, there was little to indicate that they collaborated closely on examining the ways and means by which his participation could take effect. Both Ms. Hilton and Ms. Hanson seemed to implicitly acknowledge that opportunities for Harry's inclusion within the classroom agenda that was growing increasingly academic in its emphasis were limited. Furthermore, the skills that he needed—the functional skills—could only be taught elsewhere, preferably in a more specialized setting. Some of the therapies that Harry received did acknowledge the importance of the general education environment, at least in their delivery. “Push-in” services by therapists offered the means for embedding Harry's specific IEP (Individualized Education Program) objectives within classroom activities. And Ms.

Hilton did utilize Ms. Petersen, the physical therapist, to educate the students in the classroom about Harry's equipment and specialized physical needs. However, for the most part, while therapists might have embedded their *services* within the general classroom, their *goals* for Harry continued to remain disconnected from the experiences of the other students in the classroom.

More and more, the literature points to the need for differentiated instruction for *all* students, as a means of meeting varied needs not specified by disability (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006; Ferguson et al, 2001; Tomlinson, 1999). Research shows increasingly that when teachers use strategies that allow room for students to receive instruction in different ways and demonstrate their understanding through different modalities, they simultaneously generate the conditions that work to the benefit of disabled students. Including students with significant disabilities within these contexts can be actualized more easily than in contexts dominated by traditional one-size-fits-all approaches. The concept of Universal Design in Learning (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose & Jackson, 2002; Acrey, Johnstone, & Milligan, 2005; Villa & Thousand, 2000) is one of those ways of conceptualizing instructional practice that can simultaneously meet the needs of diverse learners. Ms. Hilton's classroom certainly offered many of the advantages not available in traditional classrooms: students grouped in threes and fours around tables; minimal whole-group instruction (usually not more than 15 minutes at a time); there *were* opportunities for students to emphasize their strengths in the products that they created (some were better artists than writers) and students weren't held to an arbitrary standard of perfection (their work was never scored). Yet during intense content-area activities such as math games, *all* students were charged with completion of the same task.

Furthermore, there were few modes of accessing information besides the printed word. With all tables essentially carrying out the same level of activity and accessing information through the same means, there was little room for Harry to gain entry. So, despite the commitment of staff members to Harry's inclusion within this classroom, the instructional practices employed with *all* students might have left them inadequately equipped to make this a successful enterprise.

Describing student relations

The kinds of membership status fostered by the different paradigmatic narratives operating within these two settings generated a set of relations between Harry/Michael and their peers that could be described in different ways. In keeping with the overarching theme of narratives and the metaphors that it spawns, I have chosen to categorize those classmates' relations with Harry/Michael in three different ways: Illustrators, Narrators/Editors, and Readers. As in earlier representations of student relations, these categories are not intended to be rigidly separate. They do not imply that those who are Illustrators cannot be Readers or vice versa. Their description as one or the other emerged from the frequency of relevant images of student relations that characterized the period of the study. The use of this metaphor is based in part on the assumption that efforts to make sense of something themselves constitute narratives that are continually being created, modified, or replaced. While students work with the narratives that are offered to them through various facets of the setting detailed in the foregoing pages, in designing the contours of their own practice they express their own stories. If one could conceptualize student engagement in the classroom as a collective act of creating one/many stories, then

by extension students themselves can be understood as playing different roles as illustrators, narrators and readers. However, these arbitrary roles still presume that *all* students are both readers and writers. I have chosen to describe the practice of those students who were representative of these categories to the most significant extent. Inevitably, much of the following analysis draws on the observed relations between Harry—rather than Michael—and his peers.

Illustrators

The term *illustrate* is defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “to make clear by giving or by serving as an example or instance.” Illustration may serve the purpose of both clarifying and adorning, but the significant fact is that illustrators are engaged in the act of providing those visual features that will serve to explain something. Students whom I have described as *Illustrators* were those whose relations with Harry represented their efforts to carve out in concrete terms how they were making sense of those relations. These students initiated and engaged directly with Harry in various activities during the school day. Many of those activities were not set in motion by a teacher or adult. While these students may also actively “narrate” their experiences with him through their speech/writing/drawing, the predominant image generated by their relations with him, centered on their compulsion to interact directly (sometimes with at least one other social partner) with Harry in events/moments often created by them. These students were the *doers*, who deliberately sought out opportunities to partner with Harry within the classrooms as well on the playground and, with the supportive presence of an adult such

as Ms. Cisneros, would engage in activities ranging from reading, to water-play, and games. They might also simply utilize available moments to socialize with him.

Not surprisingly, students as *illustrators* were more clearly visible in Harry's class at West Creek than at Truman High School. They included prominently Cristo, Dominic, Gabby, and even Mark. All these students were seen involving themselves directly with Harry in various ways. As the foregoing pages have already described, Cristo and Dominic consistently sought opportunities to interact and/or work with him in the classroom, receiving him at the bus and writing/drawing about him. Cristo's emerging skills in the English language might have accounted for the absence of direct speech about Harry to others, besides Ms. Cisneros who was fluent in Spanish. Yet his drawings and increasingly his writing, made frequent references to Harry. Perhaps the superiority of Dominic's language skills over that of Cristo's made his interest in Harry more visible. Cristo emerged more slowly and subtly into the horizon, whereas Dominic's involvement became readily apparent more quickly. As recorded earlier, almost simultaneous with their interest in Harry, was the relationship that burgeoned between Cristo and Dominic themselves. Gabby's connection to Harry seemed to be framed along the same lines as Cristo and Dominic. While she may not have partnered with him as much as Cristo and Dominic, she engaged with him in other ways, pushing his wheelchair on the playground or reading to him during in the classroom. She took it upon herself to assume almost the role of a spokesperson for Harry in the ways she expressed her thoughts about him publicly and as described earlier, she performed her role as "helper" with commendable enthusiasm, participating over and above the demands of the role.

The role of being Harry's helper certainly afforded many, if not all, students the opportunity to engage in direct practice with Harry. But if such engagement remained a largely isolated event determined by the routines in the classroom and not initiated by the student (s)he could not be considered an *illustrator*. Cristo, Dominic and Gabby, as illustrators, demonstrated a comfortableness in taking risks in "doing" various things with Harry when they were not strictly called upon to do so by virtue of the classroom designation of Harry's helper, or by being placed in the role of partner. Many other students engaged in isolated events of "illustration" where they might "pet" him, by patting his head or cooing to him in a gentle voice as they cried sweetly "Ha-rry! Ha-rry!" To the extent that they too were creating the shape of their own practice with Harry, they were no less *illustrators* than Cristo or Dominic. However, the fleeting nature of their actions and the absence of any sustained effort to engage with Harry, diminished their significance as writers of Harry' story even as the collective impact of those actions temporarily influenced its course.

Cristo and Dominic, on the other hand, conscientiously utilized the presence of Ms. Cisneros as well as the elements of this particular classroom climate to acquire, first-hand, information about Harry and then used that information to design their practice with him. Their significance as *illustrators* is related to their efforts to give concrete form to the stories of Harry that they seemed to be creating. This is not to deny them the role of *narrators*. As *illustrators*, they were certainly as much storytellers as were the *narrators*. However, their efforts in engaging with Harry were akin to the sense of "real-ness" or clarity produced by lines and forms that depict the action intended by word meanings. In

putting their emergent stories into real action, Cristo, Dominic and Gabby played a unique role that differentiated them from those who might be mostly *narrators/editors*.

It was difficult to assess whether any of the High school students whom I interviewed had ever assumed the roles of *illustrators* during their earlier experiences with Michael, such as in the elementary school. Among them, Daniel was the only one who talked briefly about having performed a “helping” role as when he had helped Ms. Jackson make some tape-recordings for Michael, or when he helped him with his belongings. Besides this, there was little evidence, if any, to suggest that any of the students whom I had talked to could be described as *illustrators*.

Narrators/Editors

The dictionary informs us that to narrate is to either “tell in detail” or “to provide spoken commentary for something such as movie or a show.” To the extent that *narrators* were commentators, they were removed from the direct engagement that so markedly characterized the illustrators. However, the level of engagement in the story, and the extent of involvement in the creation and shaping of the story that may not be subsumed by the notion of narration, can be better expressed through the analogy of editing. Again, the Merriam-Webster dictionary offers “to alter, adapt, or refine especially to bring about conformity to a standard or to suit a particular purpose” as a possible meaning for “edit.” As *editors*, students might be engaged in piecing different parts, or articulating their emerging ways of making sense of Harry that conformed to their own unique experiences within the classroom. Instead of direct interaction with

Harry, these students' sense-making efforts might be more clearly indicated in the ways they talked about him and their relations with him, as well as their writing/drawing.

Foremost within this group, was Andrea, who once had the school-wide reputation of being Harry's best friend. Whatever her past nature of engagement with Harry, during the period of the study, she was not seen to interact much directly with Harry. Yet, it was no less apparent that she had not removed herself from the practice of engaging with him, sitting next to him, writing notes to him, and talking about him.

Tiffany and Teresa might both be considered *narrators/editors* in the distant engagement that they displayed with Harry. Tiffany's role stemmed from a more generalized interest in disability which she articulated either directly to me, or in her writing. She did not seek out encounters with him, but would write notes to him and when asked, seemed content to either speculate about him or to offer information that she had gathered about him, such as a list of his friends in the classroom. She was observed, however, to partner more frequently with Melissa or seek out her company. Teresa's involvement was less consistent, emerging in sporadic comments that ranged from a dramatic declaration of how much she had missed him to an emphatic statement that he was loved by everyone. Ms. Hilton was skeptical about the sincerity of many of her statements. My own observations of Teresa certainly did not suggest any deep commitment of interest in Harry.

Placing Mark and Stan in one or other of the categories was far more problematic, even allowing for the cautionary point raised earlier that such placement did not preclude students serving both capacities at different times. Mark's role as *narrator/editor*, however, seemed inextricably linked to his practice as an *illustrator*. Early in the study, it

was Mark's persistent questioning and the doubts he expressed about Harry's abilities that characterized his engagement, even as it aroused Ms. Hilton's annoyance. However, as his comments continued to reflect this challenge to the community spirit fostered by Ms. Hilton within this classroom, he simultaneously sought out opportunities to interact directly with Harry. A few months into the school year, he had begun to interact with Harry in a much more direct way. By the end of the year, though Mark's conviction that Harry would not be able to do many of the things that others did had not disappeared, (when Harry brought his adapted bicycle to school during the last month of school, Mark made a comment to the same effect) he continued to display a sustained interest in engaging in activities with him.

Stan's location in one or the other category was equally problematic given that his role as *narrator* was most evident during the times when he was engaged in being an *illustrator*. Stan's period of engagement was as sudden as it might have been temporary. By the beginning of the second semester, I was hearing fewer stories about him though he might have continued to remain part of the group of "the boys" who had come to be linked with Harry. Stan's practice with Harry did not propel him into individual spotlight. The encounters where he interacted individually with Harry were isolated moments when he was seen to seat himself near his wheelchair, softly calling his name a few times. During other moments with Harry at least one other boy or adult was present. He was observed raising Harry's hand during a group conversation in the classroom to indicate that Harry had something to say. Stan also seemed to use the adults near Harry as a means of articulating some of his reactions to the activities that surrounded Harry. Unlike the others, Stan's comments, though few in number, differed somewhat from those made

by other students in that while the former described the engagement that those students had with Harry, Stan's expressed an interpretation of Harry's state of mind. The others might have offered similar kinds of statements when prompted to do so, but Stan's comments were completely spontaneous. Stan's practice might have been more subtle, its visibility dependent on the facilitation of others including adults, especially if, unlike Cristo or Dominic, he lacked the means by which to engage effectively with Harry as an *illustrator*.

To the extent that students at the High school were deliberately placed in positions where they were encouraged to verbally share the ways they made sense of Michael at a certain time, they were all identified as *narrators/editors*. But observations of their practice in Michael's classrooms did not suggest in any way that such a description could characterize the ways they participated with him in the classrooms. Given the almost total absence of interaction with Michael in the classroom or his exclusion from mainstream classroom experience, it was not surprising that there were no opportunities to configure student relations with him in these terms. In fact given this unresponsive environment in the face of some of the insightful statements made by the students during the interviews, it seems more likely that they could be described as *readers*.

Readers

The description of students as *readers* (again with the cautionary note that such categorization was not rigid) is intended to denote their distance from the actual creation of the stories that embodied students' sense-making experience, while underlining at the

same time their inevitable participation in that process. These students were *not* engaged in carving out the elements of actual practice with Michael that might suggest they were actively involved in the creation of stories, such as being *illustrators*. They were also *not* noted as offering a description or commentary on any aspect of their practice with Michael. Yet, as members of the classrooms in which Harry and Michael were placed, they were inevitably engaged in a meaning-making process that necessarily involved him and by extension themselves. Hence the analogy to readers who, as they read the given text, are simultaneously engaged in the inevitable process of creating an alternate one (Polkinghorne, 1988). While Cristo, Mark and even Andrea might be observed in the various acts of doing so, students who were *readers* demonstrated little evidence of such active participation.

Almost all the students interviewed at Truman High could be described as *readers* with the possible exception of Jared, Michael's special education classmate who was observed in several direct interactions with him and whose own stories about Michael corroborated that. Yet Jared could not quite be understood as an *illustrator* given that those interactions were neither sustained nor dispersed over several situations. They were most likely to occur within the classrooms holding special education students and maybe, in the hallway outside the special education office. To the extent that such a scenario implicated the institutional structure, Jared might be understood as having little opportunity to interact otherwise with Michael. (That itself adds weight to the argument that student relations were set in motion through the modes of participation made available to them within the framework of the paradigmatic narrative that informed the educational setting). The participation demonstrated by the students (most, not all) during

the interviews, suggested that these readers were clearly mulling over the ways in which the actual implementation of his inclusion shaped Michael's identity and his relations with others.

At West Creek, the class of *readers* was somewhat more cleanly distinguished from the *illustrators* and *narrators*. Melissa, Jamie and Lisa were the students who had been observed to have the most minimal contact with Harry. While Melissa by the middle of the year had begun with willing assistance from Ms. Cisneros, to experiment in her relations by reading to him, Jamie studiously and stubbornly refused all contact with him. When Ms. Hilton gave him the choice of being Harry's helper since he was the only one in the class who had not yet played that role, he declined without hesitation. Lisa, beside the telling comment that she delivered early on in the study, "Everybody in this class is his friend," was similarly distanced from him during all classroom activity. Besides her brief role as his helper, she was never observed either making public declarations of him like Gabby or engaging directly with him like Dominic. Yet Lisa's comment did suggest that she was engaged in her own meaning-making endeavors, even if she did not avail herself of the opportunities to enact that process.

Jamie's determination to remain as uninvolved as possible with Harry itself suggests that he might have been grappling with the process of making sense of him in ways that he might or might not have been able to readily articulate. Furthermore, his distance did not preclude him drawing certain conclusions about Harry. One morning, during lunch, Jamie, Harry and I happened to be seated at the same table. Jamie and I were both several students away from Harry though we could see him quite clearly. The table alongside us had students from another first grade classroom. My back was towards

that table, while Jamie sitting opposite me had full view of those students. Excerpting from my notes:

As we sat there nibbling our lunches absentmindedly I observed Hannah from the other table calling softly to Harry. Leaning back, I turned to her, smiled and said “If you call a little louder maybe Harry might be able to hear you.” She repeated her call, a little louder this time but evidently not strongly enough. Harry still remained impervious to her calls. I realized that Jamie must have been observing us closely, because when I turned back to face him at our table, he commented directly to me “Harry is not going to hear her. She is not loud enough.” I said, “Really, you think so?” He nodded, turned in the direction of Harry and without warning barked a loud “Harry!” Almost instantly, Harry’s head jerked up noticeably. Without hesitation, Jamie turned to me and said meaningfully, “See?”

Whatever the extent of Jamie’s interaction with Harry, it was clear that Harry did not remain completely outside the realm of Jamie’s school experiences. It would seem however, the “community” framework that prevailed in this classroom, however broad its parameters that enabled certain students to take risks in interacting with Harry, did not invest Jamie with the same power. He appeared unable to utilize the opportunities offered within this framework to understand Harry, preferring instead to be an observer. His “story” therefore remained largely obscured from public perception, as it evolved outside the scope of everyday classroom experiences.

The search for descriptors of student relations: some distinctions

Given its central importance to this study, the subject of peer relations with Harry/Michael can be better understood when placed within the context of efforts to promote such relations. How has the practice of fostering relations between significantly disabled students and their general education peers been conceptualized in research and what are their implications for practice? Inclusion for Michael was openly and repeatedly justified on the grounds of “socialization” by the special education staff at Truman High School. The same might not have been as explicitly true of Harry’s experience, but the significance of social relations between him and his peers was recognized and acknowledged by staff members in the building. While the term “socialization” remained somewhat nebulous—who is being socialized into what?—nonetheless, the unspoken inference seemed to be that in the absence of any predictable progress in other areas of development, Michael and Harry might derive *some* indefinite social gains in the presence of their general education peers. Furthermore, in Michael’s case, this approach upheld the assumption that his progress in this area required the interaction of other students with him, even as it simultaneously acknowledged in practice that their lack of involvement with him was completely understandable. Whatever the rationale and assumptions employed by the educators, the goal appeared to be to foster the kinds of relations between Harry/Michael and their peers that would be empowering for them.

This emphasis on social benefits for severely disabled students had been a critical element in the drive to remove students from segregated settings and place them instead in general education environments (Murray-Seegeert, 1989). The goal of *integration* (Murray-Seegeert, 1989) then, as the early movement supported, naturally required a focus

on fostering contact and relations between the two groups of students thereby remedying negative attitudes held by those without disabilities. The subsequent focus on *inclusion* rather than *integration* has continued to examine the ways in which those relations might be fostered but instead of assuming the parallel co-existence of special and general education strands, has sought to understand those relations within the context of general education experiences. Therefore, rather than seeking ways and means by which connections can be made and strengthened between the two (Murray-Seegert, 1989), more recent approaches support the dissolution of strict boundaries between the two and assume that the disabled student's experiences will be determined by the nature of the general education setting (Meyer, 2001; Downing, 2002; Fisher & Frey, 2001). Fisher and Meyer (2002) used control and experimental groups of students to demonstrate that social competence of students with severe disabilities gained as a function of placement in inclusive settings. Research also continues to show that such inclusion has little, if any, adverse effects on students without disabilities and on the contrary, there is evidence that parents of non-disabled students were supportive of such educational arrangements for their children (Peck, Staub, Gallucci, & Schwartz, 2004).

However, the curricular emphases for achieving social outcomes for severely disabled students have not differed dramatically. Developing social skills in severely disabled students to foster relations with their peers remains a significant component of their instruction as does the focus on facilitating social interactions between the two groups (Kennedy, 2004; Batchelor & Taylor, 2005). These recent studies also examine the ways in which the natural features of general education contexts might be utilized to support those relations. So there is an increasing emphasis on extensively utilizing peers

as supports through peer-tutoring (Kennedy, 2004), peer interventions (Carter, Cushing, Clark & Kennedy, 2005,) and peer buddies (Carter, Hughes, Guth & Copeland, 2005). Other studies call for evaluating locations and times in the building to identify the ones most conducive to fostering relations (Kennedy, 2004) and for enabling access to the general education curriculum (Clayton et al 2006; Cushing et al, 2005, Jorgensen, 1997). Peer supports were not evident in Michael's setting (beside the special education students who escorted him to the cafeteria and then left him to eat in solitude). In Harry's classroom they were subsumed under routine classroom practices, an approach that actually worked to his advantage. It would seem that in both these settings, however, the perceived barriers in accessing the general education curriculum prohibited a more focused examination of various contexts within these environments and an exploration of ways to foster increased relations between Harry/Michael and their peers.

Current descriptors

What are the frameworks utilized by current research to describe relations between severely disabled students and their non-disabled peers? In this section, I will explore some of them and address their significance to the findings in this study. I will simultaneously use this discussion to address the issue of reciprocity within those relations. The description of relations between students with and without disabilities has been approached in different ways by researchers. Meyer, Park, Grenot-Scheyer, Schwartz, & Harry (1998) and Meyer (2001) have used the lens of friendship to suggest the different positions that students with and without disabilities might adopt in inclusive classrooms. Meyer (2001) describes six different frames of friendship that encompass

relations between *all* students: Best friend, Regular friend, Just another child, I'll Help, Inclusion child, Ghost/Guest. They point out that students, and even adults for that matter, experience all six frames of friendship at different times. However, the practical implications of being situated within those frames might result in less favorable outcomes for those with severe disabilities. For example, students might remain "Ghosts" forever, when they may be physically present in the classroom but minimally included in its activities. Or, when they are limited to receiving help instead of being able to offer help to others. In Meyer's (2001) framework, Michael's experiences would be characterized predominantly by the Inclusion Student frame. He was greeted by staff and students alike, but had no regular or best friends. In fact, he was almost always a Ghost, with few, if any, spontaneous "I'll Help" encounters with his peers. Harry, on the other hand, experienced all six frames. To the extent, as Meyer suggests, that this is typical for most of us, Harry's experience was not remarkable. He was enjoying the benefits of classroom membership like any other student. So, if engaging in "normal" patterns of social relations constituted a significant rationale for the placement of Harry in this first grade classroom, then the inclusion program might be reasonably understood to have been successful for him, thus far. Yet, given that Harry's placement for the subsequent year would be more restricted to special education settings, one might assume that that goal had become subordinate to other concerns, or was interpreted very differently.

The work of Carter, Hughes, Guth & Copeland (2005) represents research that seeks to understand the nature of relations between severely disabled students and their peers by using a more quantifiable approach. The authors isolated various elements characterizing the interaction between severely disabled students and their peers. These

included 1) whether prompting for interaction was provided 2) functional communication level of the participant 3) reciprocity of interaction 4) frequency of social interaction 5) quality of the interaction 6) conversational topics, among several others. Each of the constructs being observed and assessed was systematically defined. Interactions were defined as “initiation-response sequences comprised of verbal or motor behavior within the context of a mutual activity” (p. 370). Quality of interaction between a participant and a conversational partner was based on “the frequency, duration, overall affect, and reciprocity of exchanges between partners and peers” (p. 370), where affect was understood to be comprised of behaviors that either discouraged interaction (frowning, crying) or encouraged interactions (smiling, laughing, eye-contact).

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to place the images of Harry’s classroom experiences described in the preceding sections within a framework, such as the one postulated by Carter et al, to understand the nature of his relations with his peers. On many occasions, there was little direct evidence to suggest whether Harry was either encouraging or discouraging an interactive moment. Yet he did not appear to be unaware of the actions of the other. The authors define reciprocity in terms of “the extent to which the participant and general education peer being observed equally initiated social interaction during an observation session” (p. 369). While Harry was certainly seen to initiate social interactions on several occasions, it was not always clear in my observations in the classroom that reciprocity in the immediate context played a significant role in regulating the actions of his peers. (Even though the study was conducted on high school students, it does not seem inappropriate to question the viability of the constructs used in the study with the population represented in Harry’s

class). The constructs proffered by Carter et al suggest a picture where a student might approach Harry, initiate a verbal or motor action, and wait for a response. In the presence of a response from Harry, the interaction might continue, in the absence of any response, such initiation will be discouraged suggesting that the peer might eventually abandon the enterprise.

Interestingly, in the descriptions of peer interactions offered in the preceding sections, such a sequence of actions was rarely recorded. Andrea might make funny faces at him and walk away after a few moments, but she was just as likely on another occasion to approach him and extend another overture. During many of those encounters with her, Harry was alert, animated and seemed to be focused directly on her, clearly expressing a preference to continue the interaction. The subtlety in the ways in which students demonstrated their acknowledgement of Harry as a member through their interactions with him, and the ways Harry expressed his participation in those interactions, actually defied precise analysis. In many instances, peers were interacting with each other, yet seemed to be “including” Harry even with out any direct verbal or physical contact with him. In other instances their responses might be directed *towards* Harry if not addressed directly *to* him. They might have directed their actions—verbal or physical—to Ms. Cisneros, even as they continued to engage in some imprecise way with him. They might have stood by his wheelchair or have been seated at a table with him as they worked on a group activity, or stood behind his wheelchair as they got ready to take him to another location. It does not seem an unwarranted leap to suggest that interaction at the high school level could occur with the same subtlety and variety that I found at West Creek.

Yet assuming an approach similar to the one adopted by Carter et al might give limited results.

In her ethnographic study of a high school building which included a self-contained classroom with severely disabled students, Murray-Seegert (1989) described the different types of interactions and different types of relations between severely disabled students and their general education peers. Drawing on existing literature, she classified the interactions as proximal, helping, reciprocal, mediated and negative. *Proximal* interactions signified situations of “sensory contact” (p. 88) where both groups were simply present at the same time within a certain space. *Helping* interactions were defined mostly by the actions of peers helping the disabled student. *Reciprocal* interactions were those that resulted in “mutual, though not necessarily similar benefits” (p. 89). *Mediated* interactions occurred when a “helper” without disabilities “promoted proximal or reciprocal contact between another nondisabled student and a severely disabled student.” When the situation resulted in injury, or in emotions like fear, dislike, or anger expressed by any of the students, it was characterized as *negative*.

As the author contended, documenting that different kinds of interactions were possible between severely disabled students and their peers would certainly have been an advancement of existing knowledge. Yet it was just as evident that the contexts in which those interactions were embedded were structured in ways that might have significantly determined the scope, frequency and nature of those interactions. All the nondisabled peers in her study, whose interactions with severely disabled students were studied, were employed as tutors in the high school’s Internal Work Experience program. That itself might have circumscribed the opportunities for interaction in ways not observed as in say,

Harry's classroom where "helping" was not the only frame in which relations with him could be practiced. Consequently, when Murray-Seegert proceeded to examine the dyadic relations within those interactions, three of her six *types* of relations were premised on this role as tutor. Her descriptions of relations factored in the roles played by participants, the nature of the engagement of the tutors and the presence of reciprocity within that relation.

Again, while the classification of student relations into types generates useful knowledge about possibilities, it obscures the mechanisms that allow them to occur in the first place. For example, Murray-Seegert defined reciprocity as "mutual coordination of activity" that took both verbal and non-verbal forms. But, in her descriptions of the different types of relations, it was the *perception of reciprocity* by the peer that determined her analysis of each type. While she herself did not explore this phenomenon it clearly suggests that reciprocity could not be understood as a specific set of behaviors such as the description that Carter et al (2005) postulated. The central argument of this study—the importance of peer narratives to the identities of severely disabled students—implies a focus instead, on the *process* by which this perception of reciprocity occurs, a task that might not have been well-served by a detailed exploration of types.

Furthermore, Murray-Seegert's types of relations frequently seemed to describe types of *students* as well, which might lead to misleading conclusions about certain types of students promoting certain types of relations. Also, could not students of one type have other *types* of relations? For example, in Harry's classroom while "helping" was an opportunity that all students were afforded, it was not the only occasion to explore relations with Harry. So students might have been his partner in an activity (Murray-

Seegert's relation Type IV: working/sociable) yet also on several occasions remain tentative or unmoving (Type I: observational). It was not just the nature of the relation but how it afforded them the opportunity to express themselves and how such expression enabled Harry to express *himself* that determined the significance of those relations.

Illustrators, narrator/editors and readers: more than types

In the light of these different approaches to understanding social relations between severely disabled students and their peers, how does the description of Harry's and Michael's peers as *illustrators, narrators/editors* and *readers* differ from the others offered in the preceding pages? In what ways is its purpose different from these other approaches? Revisiting briefly, the "frames of friendship" framework postulated by Meyer et al, it seems that though the authors refer to their framework in terms of "friendship" their descriptions appear to denote locations of membership within a setting. In that sense, their categories might refer to positions of individual members along a certain spectrum ranging from Ghost/Guest to Best Friend. The categorization of students offered in this study does not quarrel with that but directs the focus to specific students only, namely the peers of "included" classmates. It is not intended to describe either patterns of friendship or locations of membership within the classroom. In some ways it directs our inquiry to activities that might be conceptually prior to those events. After all, it is in the practical engagement with Harry/Michael that either friendship or membership can be understood and enacted.

Kennedy (2004) in exploring the importance of social relationships between severely disabled students and their peers addressed the different stages which frame the

general development of social relationships. He described the second stage as focused on establishing “mutually preferred interaction contexts,” when students (after the first stage of the initial encounter) seek out different activities with one another in different settings. He stated that this stage *precedes* the final stage which is centered on establishing “durable relationships.” The hallmark of this last stage is observed when students fall into certain routines or patterns of engagement with each other. The relations that I have sought to describe through the use of the categories of *illustrator*, *narrator/editor* and *reader*, particularly describe the *activities* of this second stage, but encompass the activities of *all* stages in an attempt to uncover their impact on both Harry/Michael and their peers. As emphasized earlier, the focus of this inquiry was not to unearth patterns of relationships but to examine the activities that inscribed a certain set of relations with Harry/Michael.

Generating knowledge of the *types* of student relations such as the ones identified by Murray-Seegert has useful, though somewhat limited implications. The descriptors in this study suggest that such knowledge cannot be effectively utilized without examining peers’ interaction with the values and goals of the setting, their relation to the activity in which they were engaged with the disabled student and their own purposes for participating in that setting. It may also be argued however, that the descriptors offered in this study are equally *types* that carry the same risk of minimizing the complexity within such relations. However, as I have repeatedly pointed out in the earlier section, these were broad and fluid descriptors, that were not intended to be rigidly enforced. Students who were *illustrators* were just as likely to be *narrators/editors* at other moments, depending on the activity in which they were embedded at that time. Even as these terms

described a certain kind of role that students assumed *for that moment*, the focus implicit in those roles was the nature of the activity in which they engaged with Harry/Michael.

The emphasis on peers over Harry and Michael through these descriptors is not intended to diminish their participation in this process. On the contrary, many of the excerpts included in the preceding sections clearly illustrate the ways in which their responses, especially Harry's, contributed to those interactions. However, it was also evident, that Harry's contribution was inevitably entangled with the activities of peers who sought to engage with him. As peers enacted their unique self-stories in their engagement with him, Harry came to enact different stories of himself, and in that process came to be understood in a certain way by his peers. The absence of Harry/Michael within these descriptors does not suggest that they remained uninvolved in interpreting the texts presented to them. Yet, it was clear that their articulation of such interpretation was contingent on others' recognition of their efforts as well as their ability to act on such recognition.

So what larger benefits did this categorization offer Harry or Michael and their peers? Firstly, it offered an immediate pulse of the contexts in which they were embedded. It was obvious in examining the contrasting social environments in which Harry and Michael were embedded that they benefited the most when a greater number of their peers could be described as *narrator/editors* and *illustrators* rather than as *readers*. Michael remained far more "invisible" to his peers than was Harry in his first grade classroom. Therefore, it could also be suggested that these categories constitute as much a marker of the nature of the educational environment as they group students in specific ways. A setting that is characterized largely by *readers* suggests a "closed" environment

where instructional practices offer little room for *all* students to demonstrate authentic learning. When Andrea and Steve watched mutely as the occupational therapist used attractive rattles and toys to motivate Harry to raise his head, they were forced at that moment to interact simply as *readers*. There was little, if any, room to make the connections between their own 7-year old experiences and the scenario presented to them, to act in alternate ways that might still endow Harry with the status of a peer. Yet Andrea and Steve were also *illustrators* and *narrator/editors* on several other occasions. So this form of categorization inevitably draws the nature of the learning environment into the equation without focusing only on dyadic relations or specific kinds of interactions between students. It has been a persistent argument in this study that goals and values implicit in the workings of the educational environment and the specific practices within it are inextricably intertwined with the relations experienced between students.

Secondly, the descriptions of social relationships offered by Meyer et al, Carter et al, and even Kennedy (2004) all implicitly assume the importance of reciprocity in sustaining them. Kennedy (2004) even addresses the need to facilitate *reciprocity skills* in students with severely disabled students. Identifying and teaching specific skills such as responding to a greeting, he suggests, can assist students in developing “social competence,” an important outcome for all students, thereby facilitating the building of social relationships. Social competence refers to the student’s ability to effectively interact and maintain social interactions (Kennedy, 2004), also understood broadly as “social skills.” Reciprocity certainly is an important element in the development and maintenance of relationships. However, the data in this study suggests that reciprocity

might be understood differently by different individuals. It was not always clear that Cristo, Dominic, Andrea or even Steve and Stan were using specific reciprocal cues from Harry in order to pursue relations with him. Even if Andrea's interactions with him seemed to demonstrate some bafflement, she continued to seek him out. When Dominic consistently volunteered to be his partner, it was not evident that he was basing his actions on some observable aspect of Harry's behavior. When Tiffany or Mark raised Harry's hand to indicate that he had a comment and then proceeded to relate what they thought he would have said, there was no record of any specific behavior on Harry's part that might have stimulated such an action. Reciprocity, at least as far as Harry's peers were concerned, seemed a much more subtle, less easily defined concept that did not rest on specific skills of "social competence" demonstrated by Harry.

It must be added, however, that Ms. Hilton did express her opinion that some of the waning in the interest in Harry might be due to this fact—"they need something from him." At the high school, too, Michael's peers clearly sought some level of response from him that might correlate with Kennedy's analysis. Yet, their observations emerged in a context where Michael had little opportunity to develop meaningful relations with his peers. And, even as Ms. Hilton commented on the "something" that other students needed from Harry, they were still continuing to raise his hands and offer a comment/question on his behalf. Ms. Hilton was not unaware of the significance of this act—her descriptions of classroom events often registered this action performed by Harry's peers. But she may also have used the same information to reinforce her belief that they needed something from him. On one occasion, when Stan raised Harry's hand in the classroom to offer his comment, she teased him gently for being Harry's "mouthpiece." In other words, to Ms.

Hilton, this act might have been viewed as part of a “pretend” narrative. Since the students needed “something” from him, they pretended that he *was* giving them something.

The focus on reciprocity circumscribes the analysis of student relationships such that not only does it become imperative to teach severely disabled students specific skills to sustain them, but it also leaves them vulnerable to the somewhat predictable and changing interests of their peers. The waning of interest in them could always be attributed to their limited “social skills” that set them apart from their peers or to the absence of mutual interests stemming largely from the superior skills of peers. This approach reinforces a perspective that understands student relations on the basis of “needs” that are met within that relation so that in the absence or decline of the successful fulfillment of those needs, the relations will also melt away. Furthermore, existing relationships will always remain under the cloud of possible disruption of those needs, so that if and when that does occur, it can be easily explained. While this study does not argue against the fulfillment of needs within relationships, it has sought to redirect the focus of inquiry to the activity setting in which relations between students occurred. The use of the categories of *illustrator*, etc. describes the *activities* of these students and in doing so, illuminates the roles of other participants, the cultural expectations and values within that setting, the patterns of behavior “normal” to that setting and the relation of Harry/Michael to the above. Reciprocity, then, can be understood less as emerging from a skill that must reside *within* the student and more as an attribute of the context within which participants exist in certain relations with each other.

Thirdly, these descriptors implicitly highlight a critical element of all social relations—the formation, maintenance and practice of identities, a subject that will be addressed in greater length in the next section. As students interacted with Harry in various ways, they created new texts for themselves and for Harry, enabling him to experience himself in different ways. Harry’s deliberate and intentional act of placing his arm around Cristo’s shoulders necessarily implicates Cristo’s relations with him as well as the environment in which they both found themselves. As Bruner (1990) notes, we all need contexts in which to “practice” our Selves. For Harry, forming and practicing his Self emerged in the context of his relations with his classmates in this classroom. When Mark could declare confidently that Harry was “never mad” he (Harry) emerged as a peer with a perpetually pleasant disposition which in turn might have stimulated further interest in him. When Gabby, struggling with words, yet confidently asserted that Harry was different and very special, she was using the context to publicly verbalize her understanding of Harry in ways that resonated with her actions with him. As students carved out their relations with him in different ways, they allowed themselves and Harry, opportunities to express their unique Selves.

The emergence of specific student relations in this study have been represented in Figure 2. The modes of participation as described, were available to all students within Harry’s setting. Of particular significance to this study, however, were the ways in which such participation prescribed Harry’s relations with his peers.

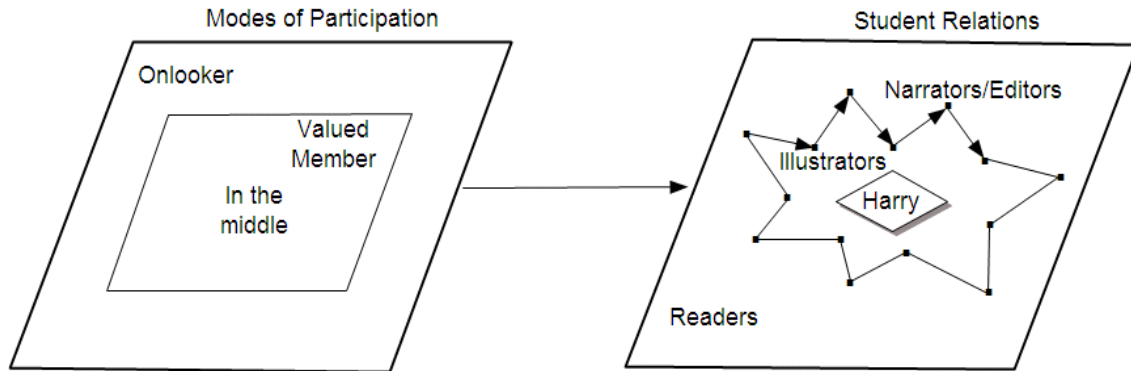


Figure 3. Linking modes of participation for Harry (and Michael) with types of student relations

Returning to narrative induction; moving to “participatory appropriation”

My purpose in categorizing student relations with Harry in the ways just described was to make the argument that their narratives-in-progress were an integral piece of the process of “narrative induction” that was taking place within this classroom community. Referring back to Linde’s (2001) construct, one notes that a significant part of the way in which the paradigmatic narrative within the company was sustained was that individual agents saw the narrative as relevant within their own lives. I offered the idea of self-story to indicate this phenomenon. In other words, those agents integrated the paradigmatic narrative with their own self-stories and in the enactment of that integration, ensured the perpetuation of the particular paradigmatic narrative. Each student’s status as an *illustrator*, *narrator/editor* or *reader* embodied not just the narrative that (s)he was creating in the act of engaging or not engaging with Harry. It also recorded each student’s attempts to make the classroom paradigmatic narrative *of which Harry was an important part* relevant to him/her self. To what extent did the elements of the “family” narrative that prescribed Harry’s inclusion within the classroom integrate with the self-stories of

each student? What were the likely connections between the narrative and their own stories that informed their practice with Harry in specific ways? Were there certain conditions that promoted the development of those connections?

In other words, what were students actually *doing* with the paradigmatic narrative? How were they *appropriating* this narrative in the classroom? What other narratives co-existed with this family/community story? The concept of appropriation itself is not quite unproblematic. How does one describe the act of appropriation supposedly undertaken by these students as they brought their encounters with various narratives into their practice with Harry? In posing these questions, I am not implying the occurrence of a process parallel to the notion of narrative induction as much as suggesting that they might be two sides of the same coin. While the construct of narrative induction centers our focus on the institutional structures that enable the preservation of specific narratives, the notion of appropriation directs our interest to the important, if less understood, process of making those narratives relevant to oneself. The categorization of student relations leads us directly into an attempt at describing that process.

Before embarking on an exploration of the term “appropriation” it might be worthwhile to direct renewed interest to the term “participation” that has been freely used in this description of the two educational settings of the study. The use of this term has been generated by a reliance on sociocultural theories of learning, which seek explanations for learning not merely in the acquisition of mental representations in the individual learner but in the nature of the activity in which (s)he is embedded (Rogoff, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991, among others). It is not just “learning by doing” as much as “learning *in* doing.” Learning, traditional theories suggest, occurs as the result of the

manipulations of internal structures by the individual, situating the process within the individual. Describing learning in terms of participation distributes that process among the co-participants within that learning context. As Lave and Wenger point out, it may be the individual who is most transformed in the process, but other elements of the ongoing activity are also changed. Understanding learning in terms of participation, then, immediately renders the construct of “appropriation” problematic because it implies the very process of internalization that the “learning-in-doing” approach rejects. The act of “taking somebody else’s words and making them one’s own” as appropriation is sometimes understood to mean (see Aukurst, 2001), continues to situate the process within the individual learner.

Rogoff’s notion of “participatory appropriation” offers a means to understand the process in more concordant ways. Participatory appropriation “is the personal process by which, through engagement in an activity, individuals change and handle a later situation in ways prepared by their own participation in the previous situation” (1995, p. 143). In engaging in an activity, individuals are making ongoing contributions. So, participation itself is the process of appropriation. Rogoff explains how her term contrasts with the notion of internalization suggested by traditional theories of learning. Internalization implies the movement or transfer of something from an external to an internal plane. Yet attempting to describe the ways students thus “internalized” the paradigmatic narratives available to them might not be easily achievable. However, Rogoff (1990) suggests that when learners are conceived as co-participants in activity, “with the interpersonal aspects of their functioning integral to the individual aspects, then what is practiced in social

interaction is never on the outside of a barrier and there is no need for a separate process of internalization” (p. 195). She goes further to add:

To act and communicate, individuals are constantly involved in exchanges that blend “internal” and “external”—exchanges characterized by the sharing of meaning by individuals. The “boundaries” between people who are in communication are already permeated; it is impossible to say “whose” an object of joint focus is or “whose” a collaborative idea is. An individual participating in shared problem solving or in communication is already involved in a process beyond the individual level. Benefiting from shared thinking thus does not involve *taking* something from an external model. Instead, in the process of participation in social activity, the individual functions with the shared understanding (Rogoff, 1990, p. 195).

Students who are engaged with their peers in the practice of shared problem solving with Harry/Michael are already enacting their appropriation of various narratives. Their process of learning about Harry is not separate from the act of *doing* with Harry. As participants and active observers, students are thus appropriating aspects of the activity in which they are already engaged. Consequently, examining student practice—the ways in which students participate with Harry—might offer us clues to recognizing the means by which they make connections between the paradigmatic narrative(s) and their own self-stories. Towards this end, I have scrutinized the “stories” of several of the students at West Creek using this construct of “participatory appropriation” and attempted in that process to shed some light on the subtleties of making a story relevant to one’s own.

Utilizing the paradigmatic narrative: An action-based approach

Student relations with Harry described in the preceding pages embody in part their attempts to use the paradigmatic normative family narrative that was promoted in their classroom. A closer analysis traces their ways of making sense of Harry through practice with him, in order to understand the process by which narratives about him were generated in this room.

In many ways, Cristo, Gabby, Dominic and Mark were distinguished from the others by their adherence to a *doing* framework that saw them actively seeking out opportunities to interact directly with Harry and participate in different activities with him that may or may not be set in motion by Ms. Hilton. Cristo's initial responses to Harry were largely exploratory, simply sitting or standing next to him. Yet, quite early in the study he began to emerge as one of Harry's "friends." Ms. Hilton speculated that Cristo might have felt comfortable with Harry because he too lacked expressive language which enabled him to take certain risks in socially engaging with Harry. However, it was noticeably clear as the weeks wore on, that even as his proficiency in English grew, Cristo continued to display a sustained degree of involvement in Harry, clearly deriving pleasure in not just doing things *for* Harry but in doing things *with* him. Without a doubt, his relations with Harry were mediated by the presence of Ms. Cisneros, who was strongly supportive and encouraging of Cristo's attempts to interact with Harry. True, her fluency in Spanish drew him into the company of Harry far more frequently than the others but there were many other unaccompanied moments when he was observed initiating contact with Harry, or simply electing to be near him. Cristo's growing friendship with Dominic appeared to be inextricably tied to their interest in Harry. Like

Cristo, Dominic, too, sought opportunities to *do* things with Harry, and also like him, utilized the non-threatening presence of Ms. Cisneros to experiment with ways of doing so. Both boys were already independently exploring relations with Harry before their own friendship began to emerge.

Both Cristo and Dominic stood out in their non-questioning acquiescence of Harry's presence in the classroom. Neither Ms. Hilton nor Ms. Cisneros, or even their mothers, reported any significant inquisitiveness on their part about Harry. Within the community narrative prevailing in the room, they accepted Harry's membership and proceeded to enact their interest in him. They both appeared to experience a simple and uncomplicated pleasure in interacting with him. When Harry tried to initiate an interaction with Cristo (as when he reached out to place his arm on his shoulder) Cristo responded unhesitatingly to the emotion behind the act—overtures of friendship from Harry. He too stretched out his own arm and placed it around Harry's shoulders. He did not appear to be finding explanations for Harry's actions within the framework of "normal" behaviors. He did not appear to be looking for greater meaning behind Harry's action beyond the affect that it carried. Dominic's response to Harry, on the other hand was strongly revelatory of his own affective response rather than Harry's. His persistence in carrying out the tasks of greeting him in the morning, taking out items from his backpack, wheeling him into the room were outside the domain of the "helper" role. He seemed particularly anxious to have the opportunity to carry out those actions. On one occasion, when it was another student's turn to push Harry's wheelchair, Dominic was deeply upset to the point of tears. During activities in the classroom, where they were

partners, Dominic was usually gentle and persuasive with Harry as Ms. Cisneros stood by encouragingly.

Dominic and Cristo appeared to have little need to engage in verbal exchanges with Harry. Like many other students in the class, both girls and boys, Cristo might occasionally look at him and say “Harry!” a couple of times (without the infantilizing overtones noted in others’ talk) but he rarely appeared to make that a condition for his interactive encounters. Similarly, Dominic spent little time seeking a response to verbal interactions. In fact, in embracing an action-based interactive framework with Harry, both Cristo and Dominic diminished the importance of verbal exchanges as necessary to relate to him. Adopting such a framework might have been the preferred approach of both boys to relations with *all* students in the classroom, or even more generally typical of boys than girls. Looking for other elements in their relations with him, they were able to expand the opportunities afforded by the family narrative and use them in ways that actually worked to Harry’s advantage. It was noteworthy that among all the students (and Ms. Cisneros) with whom Harry had frequent contact, it was Cristo and only Cristo to whom Harry voluntarily extended his arms to enclose him in a hug.

Among the girls, it was Gabby who also relied heavily on an action-based approach towards Harry that was encouraged by the family narrative within the room. She too, found many, if different, occasions within the structure afforded in the classroom to engage with him. Gabby continued to locate her own opportunities to interact directly with him, relying less on structured opportunities as a partner and more on her own selection during “choice” times. Like Cristo and Dominic, Gabby did not seek a particular response from Harry to sustain her own actions with him. She was less likely to

seek verbal exchanges with him even as she continued to *do* things with him. In fact, even though Ms. Hilton may have ascribed the apparent lull in student interest in Harry in the classroom to their need to receive *something* from him, this may not necessarily be representative of the ways Cristo, Dominic, Gabby and maybe others understood him. The absence of Harry's "voice" certainly made building relations a complicated process but students might configure that "voice" differently from the way Ms. Hilton did suggesting that some other process might be operating in the room that would explain the seeming dissipation of interest in Harry. In a sense, Gabby's interaction with Harry (and possibly Cristo's and Dominic's as well) was all about finding *her* own "voice" rather than allowing Harry's to emerge. (Though, as we shall see later, the two events are not quite separate but closely intertwined). Gabby described Harry's difference as "special" without being able to explain how that was so. This may not help her to know what to do with this difference, but it was evident she was going to do whatever she could to try and find out. She was able to conclude therefore that he liked something because he "screamed" (an obvious reference to Harry's loud, wordless talk). She might be building her own knowledge of Harry that could not be represented accurately through the words at her disposal.

Andrea at this stage was *not* using the action-based framework. Whether she had used it in the past when she became his best friend in kindergarten, was not known. However, this year, as my own observations and the comments of Ms. Hilton and Ms. Cisneros indicated, she was seen to interact much less with Harry than she apparently had before. Yet, as the preceding pages have described, whatever the parameters of her interactions with him in the classroom, her affection for Harry had not, at least according

to her mother, abated. And importantly, her status as someone very close to him still prevailed both within and outside the classroom. While she may not have sought opportunities as his partner in the classroom, she also did not participate in the infantilizing cooing that some of the other girls were observed doing. Harry this year seemed to leave her more nonplussed than anything else. The same sense of being at a loss was evident during the following event when, as Harry's helper she was getting ready to wheel him outside. As the students lined up at the back of the room, walker cards were being distributed to those who intended to be walkers during recess. From my notes:

Jeremy called out in the direction of Harry, but not looking at him, "Is Harry a walker today?" His question was delivered to Andrea who was standing behind Harry's chair. Andrea thought for a moment, shrugged her shoulders and throwing out one hand, turned to Ms. Cisneros and asked "Does he want to be a walker?" Jeremy persisted, looking at Andrea directly, "Are *you* going to be a walker? Because you are his helper." Ms. Hilton intervened smiling at Ms. Cisneros over the heads of the students and said "Well, the real question is, Ms. Cisneros, do *you* want to be a walker?" Ms. Cisneros smiled in her gentle, somewhat uncertain way and said something to the effect that Harry would like to be a walker and he was duly given a card.

Andrea's indecision in the face of Jeremy's conviction about the strategy to use for decision-making appeared to be more expressive of her changing relations with him than the absence of direct interactions with him that the others had noted. By immediately

deflecting the question to Ms. Cisneros, Andrea was demonstrating her disengagement from the action-based framework that others like Cristo and Dominic were utilizing. She sought instead to rely on the experience of Ms. Cisneros to determine her own course of action as well as an interpretation of Harry's wants. This was in some contrast to the ascription of individual agency to Harry by Cristo as well as some other students in the classroom who might raise Harry's hand to indicate that he had a question/comment and then proceed (sometimes in a high-pitched voice) to state it. Andrea had never been observed participating in that kind of response.

In the following incident, Cristo and Stan illustrate their commitment to the action framework that also enabled them to acknowledge Harry's agency. During one Music class, Stan and Cristo had another opportunity to express this understanding of Harry. It was just before Thanksgiving and in the Music room there was a chart with several turkeys that was pasted on the back of the piano. The teacher would play a piece and each student, one at a time, would come up and express the rhythm of the piece by tapping on each turkey on the chart. When the student finished he would select the next student from the eager group, who would then come up to do the same. After Cristo had completed his turn and it was time for him to select a student, he took a moment to survey the group in front of him. While most were seated on the carpet, Stan was standing behind Harry's wheelchair to one side of the group. His voice rang out urgently "Cristo!" Cristo turned immediately in his direction and unhesitatingly called out the name of the student he selected: "Harry!" and Stan unhesitatingly wheeled Harry over to the piano.

Cristo's immediate and unquestioning recognition of Stan's tacit attribution of agency to Harry described their participation with him in ways that differed significantly

from that of Andrea. In all likelihood, it emerged from that action-based framework that Cristo and the boys had been observed to utilize with Harry. There were no recorded instances when Andrea had actually extended the same kind of agentic moment to Harry, and it had already been noted that she was *doing* so much less with him this year. Yet Andrea's actions did not completely eliminate the element of Harry's agency either. After all, she did write notes to him and there was an occasion when Ms. Cisneros reported that she had come over to ask Harry "Harry, how do you spell 'name'?" in an effort to get him to raise his head.

Andrea's non-participation in activities where Harry could be *presumed* to be doing/indicating something that was not directly communicated by him to the others through recognizable means actually bears close resemblance to Mark's actions and questions early in the study. His repeated questions and comments about Harry that suggested that he really did not think Harry could do many things had led him to be branded as "negative" by Ms. Cisneros and Ms. Hilton. Yet he was not averse to partnering with Harry during games. Mark's dilemma can be more readily perceived in the following exchange that we had during the course of playing a game. Mark had invited Harry to play a game with him and I had offered to be Harry's partner.

I stood by Harry's chair and manipulated his hands to place the chips in the slots. Mark was not averse to playing with me. As we played, I would ask "Do you think *Harry* is going to win?" And he would respond with a half-smile, somewhat unsure but appearing confident, "No." At one point I asked, curiously and somewhat teasingly "What makes you so sure?" And he pointed to the stand and said "Because of what *you* are about to do." He

found out he was wrong, though, and he did not win the first round. I asked Mark to come over and be Harry's partner so the two of them could play against me. He came over and stood by Harry and began to assist him. He worked his hands and said "C'mon Harry, C'mon Harry" as he exerted some physical pressure to coax Harry's fingers to pick up and drop the pieces into the slot. He repeated this dutifully throughout the game. As the game proceeded, he commented "I think *I* am going to win." I did not comment, but during my next observation I purposely said "You guys" to denote the parties in the game. Mark continued to respond with "*I* am going to win" or "*I* win!"

Like Andrea, Mark could not readily attribute agency in situations where clearly the actions were not being performed by Harry himself. Yet by the middle of the year, Mark had begun to do exactly what Cristo, Dominic and Stan were able to do effortlessly. He too began to raise Harry's hand to indicate that Harry had something to say and then proceeded to make the statement attributed to him. While one can understand Mark's early "negativity" as a refusal in a sense, to participate in a game of pretense where the reality of Harry's inability was apparently being ignored, Andrea's non-participation might have had stemmed from something else. If she had already participated with Harry in the action-based framework the previous year, she had probably already experienced the comfortable and unproblematic familiarity with him that seemed to characterize Cristo's interactions with him. Her restraint in extending an agentive role to him in actions that he clearly did not author seemed almost simultaneous with her disengagement from the same action-based framework this year. Conversely, for Mark, it

was in the light of his persistent pursuit of the action-based interactions with Harry that his comments began to be perceived less and less as being “negative.” Not surprisingly, he too began to participate in acts that connoted Harry’s agency.

At the high school, the action-based framework employed by the students appeared to be limited in both scope and frequency. This was not surprising given the nature of the paradigmatic narrative that prevailed in that setting. The kinds of actions that most students reported having undertaken with Michael themselves or observed others doing could be collectively encompassed under the rubric of play. Whether it was about playing with a ball, toy ducks, or water-bottles, students reported few other instances of active encounters between themselves and Michael. Almost all of them noted that they had observed *others* greeting/smiling at him even if they themselves might not have participated in the same. Sometimes the actions were mediated by the staff members in different ways. Some of these simple play activities were actually conducted by teacher assistants with Michael, often in full view of other students. Students, like Jennifer, might be asked to push Michael around the gym during PE. Others like Jodie and Pat would take their cues from Ms. Jackson in Foods to determine to what extent Michael could participate with them in the actions of cooking. There were no other activities in which students were observed engaging with Michael inside and outside the classrooms. Given the inadequate collection of activities in which Michael was embedded, student speculations about Michael’s alternative kinds of participation frequently remained at the level of play, of merely “having fun” (as opposed to participating in the creation of the fun) or simply watching the activity. In other words, he remained child-like in their present as well as their projected experiences.

Students were aware that *doing* things with Michael led to increased knowledge about him. As Paul confessed when asked if Michael recognized him in the classroom “I don’t really know ... I don’t know for sure. I think he knows I am there, but ... I don’t really do much with him, because he’s always there with Mrs. Jackson.” But in the absence of a structure that promoted stronger interactive involvement with Michael, students fell back on relying on verbal exchanges to know him only to find that problematic as well.

Janet: Well, you can’t really hold a conversation with him, you know. So you don’t really have anything interesting, you don’t know if he is interested, he can’t tell you. So ... you really don’t know what to say to him because you don’t know anything about him.

Without practical engagement with him, Michaels’ peers could not generate knowledge about him and he himself could not share that with them. This frustration of not being able to “know” Michael was evident in Colette’s wish for more information about him.

I think that if students knew more about Michael that they’d appreciate him more and look at him more differently because I honestly don’t know everything about Michael and Kerri. I just know that they are both happy people and when you say “hi” to them, they smile and laugh and ... not knowing is like the worst thing because you don’t really

If meaningful action with Michael remained outside the purview of this paradigmatic narrative, then the only way to garner any information about him was through verbal exchanges, however difficult or limited that might be. The images of Michael’s participation in the building conjured up by the students centered on the nature

of those one-on-one verbal exchanges. Mindy attributed the success of the relationship between Michael and Ms. Jackson to her ability to make him “talk.” Bill and Colin appreciated the ways that other students and staff members treated him as a “normal” student because they talked to him and greeted him. Vivian recognized the benefits of such interactions for Michael: “He just acts happy if someone’s talking to him, I guess.” Daniel and Jodie were convinced that one of the central ways in which he had changed over the years was his ability to communicate.

Daniel: He used to just say “ball” and “sissy.” That’s all he could say before. And now you can like talk to him.

Jodie: And he understands. If you say “Stop” he will stop doing something.

This growth in communication was cited by these students as evidence of Michael’s overall “improvement.” Interestingly, even as the students focused on this aspect of relations with him, more than half of them who were interviewed admitted to not having any direct interactions with him. The dearth of opportunities to act meaningfully with Michael and the lack of resolution afforded to students given the problematic nature of communication with him, ensured that student attempts to configure Michael within this setting—their alternate texts—would diverge little from the normative values embedded within the larger institutional text. There were few, if any, pathways to allow the free movement of personal narratives within the larger story in this setting.

The juxtaposition with other narratives: locating a usable path

The “family” narrative, however, that upheld Harry’s location in the classroom inevitably touched other narratives both synchronous and conflicting that accompanied students. For instance, Gabby came from a strong religious background. Her parents were involved in missionary activities and her mother had reported that during the previous summer, Gabby had accompanied her family to Mexico to participate in missionary activity with them. She was also observed wearing a cap that carried the caption “Member of God’s team.” She argued for the acceptance of those who were different because “God made you that way.” (There was no specific reference to God in the book to which she was referring on that occasion). Perhaps the religious narrative brought by Gabby to her interactions with Harry may have assisted her in ways not immediately or clearly observable. Perhaps the ill-defined “specialness” that she ascribed to him may have been drawn from the same.

Whatever the ways that the religious narrative to which Gabby was unquestionably exposed informed her understanding of Harry, clearly it found a hospitable place within the family atmosphere in this classroom. In other words, the family narrative afforded the structure and the space for Gabby to utilize other narratives that she brought to this context. Regardless of the stories that she heard about Harry at home (the religious explanation) or that he is “one of us” (classroom membership), if the classroom was designed differently where students were pitted against each other rather than helped to understand their interdependence, if the environment was designed differently (desks in rows rather than tables), if Harry’s presence in the room was framed differently (less as an equal member and more as a peripheral figure), Gabby may not

have had the opportunities to articulate the story about Harry that she had been able to do thus far. Alternatively, her “appropriation” of either or both narratives might have been evidenced quite differently. Gabby’s recorded experiences, then, instantiates the opportunities afforded by the family narrative which allowed her the ways to make it relevant to her own evolving self-story.

Andrea’s experiences are not so easily explained. Her reputation as a sensitive, caring and kind girl was unquestioningly accepted by others who included staff members and other students’ mothers. Her mother, while overwhelmed by the school-wide reports about her daughter, hastened to assure me that she was really no different from any other child of her age.

I am always hearing these compliments about her and she is a normal child at home. She doesn’t clean her bedroom, she doesn’t eat her vegetables, you know, she scratches the little mosquito bites on her leg till they just look war-torn, you know. She’s just a normal child, but then I am constantly running into people who are telling me, “O she is so sweet” and [that] someone got hurt on the playground and she just sat out her whole playground time to sit with them. I am just always hearing these things about her.

Even as her mother remained cognizant of Andrea’s “normal” behaviors, she was not unaware that there was something innately “special” about her. Andrea, I found out, had been in inclusive settings from the time she was 6 months old. Her mother reported that she seemed to be drawn to children with special needs. “From 6 months old on ... I mean she was always sitting next to the child who was rocking back and forth and screaming

all day, you know. And she would just sit there with them, you know.” Even after she moved to the Early Childhood Program within Oakland District, she continued to remain interested in children “with IEPs” whom she would prefer to assist instead of taking the required naps.

Did Andrea’s sustained experiences within inclusive settings at a very early age propel her into the relationship with Harry that captured everybody’s attention in kindergarten? Or, was Andrea innately “special” in the way that she was drawn to children who were different? In the absence of any data on the nature of the “community” narrative in the kindergarten classroom, one has to assume that perhaps both those factors played a role in the relationship that grew between Andrea and Harry. Though, given the “community” emphasis within this building, it is probably safe to say that those values would have found expression in some, if not necessarily the same, form in that classroom. A chance visit to that classroom during earlier field experiences indicated that some of the structural elements were similar (tables instead of desks, classroom jobs, etc). However, data to suggest the ways in which Harry was drawn as a member in that classroom were not available. In any event, does the progression of events in their relationship as they moved to the first grade, continue to implicate these two factors mentioned above? Did Andrea’s continued experiences in inclusive settings (this term might have been realized differently in each setting) sustain her interest and ability to engage with the “difference” embodied in Harry? Could her presumed innate qualities continue to offer the means to share relations with him? Alternatively, was Andrea able to integrate those facets into meaningful ways of interacting with him?

Examination of Andrea's relations with Harry this year suggests that answers may not be readily available. While her mother reported that there did not appear to be any changes in the ways she felt about Harry, both Ms. Hilton and Ms. Cisneros, as reported in previous sections, had observed that she was interacting much less with him as the year rolled by. My own observations of Andrea did not seem to suggest the comfortable familiarity that I perceived in the actions of Cristo. It suggested rather, a puzzlement of not knowing *how* to enact her understanding of him. Ms. Hilton and Ms. Cisneros were both convinced that her increasing skills were widening the gap between the two, resulting in reduced interest on her part in spending time with him. In other words, this new "academic" narrative seemed to conflict with the ways she had brought meaning into her relations with Harry thus far. Yet, she had not completely abandoned those ways of interacting with him. She continued to write him notes; she still approached him to greet him; and, she sat with him during lunch, albeit less frequently than earlier in the year.

To what extent was Andrea's apparent reduction of interest in Harry an artifact of teacher perception? Given the published article by her father about her relations with Harry in kindergarten, did the adults in school have heightened expectations of her that placed "normal" patterns of behavior as being noticeably different? Also, what opportunities did Andrea have to demonstrate those feelings, that her mother insisted had not changed, in school? In other words, did the activities in which Andrea participated in school preclude the need for Andrea to demonstrate her understanding of Harry? So the only moments when she could interact with him were after she completed her "academic" chores, which left her fewer choice of activities with which to engage him. Andrea's distance from Harry might be equally reflective of *Harry's* physical and metaphorical

distance from her and the rest of the classroom. The irony is that in the absence of interacting with him in different structured academic activities—where students are assigned different roles—she had not developed any new kinds of knowledge about him that she could use with him when she engaged with him in those “non-academic” unstructured moments. So she fell back on playing idly with his hands, or making faces at him.

Andrea’s difficulty in interacting meaningfully with Harry was evident even in the face of the opportunities afforded by the family/community narrative to which she was exposed in school. In ways not easily describable, Harry’s location within this narrative could not be unproblematically reconciled with her own self-story. Andrea’s mother also pointed to a certain core difficulty with self-esteem that she believed characterized some of her relations with her peers. She was afraid that Andrea’s desire to be seen as “cool” might prompt her to undertake actions that she might not have otherwise. This description of her behavior resonated with some of my observations of Andrea with Harry, when she was present with Teresa, a student who had been described by Andrea’s mother as “too cool for school.” On those occasions, Andrea’s actions were characterized less by the gentleness and maturity that one had come to expect from her, and more by an inexplicable loss of control that conflicted with her established reputation as his best friend. Peculiar as Andrea’s actions were, they were still strangely synchronous with her own individual actions when she made faces at him during occasions when she was alone with him. Andrea’s relations with Harry this year appeared to have less to do with the community narrative than with the struggles she seemed to have in making sense of her own relations to him. This narrative that others like Cristo

and Gabby found more empowering appeared to offer her little room to expand on her relations with him in any meaningful way.

Perhaps the most visible and interesting metamorphosis that occurred during the course of the study was presented in the relations between Mark and Harry. In a sense, his refusal to implicitly accept the adult narrative about Harry had garnered him the reputation of being “negative” of Harry. However, Ms. Hilton’s disapproval of Mark’s responses to the “story” of Harry was situated within a larger narrative that carried her reservations about the values that he brought from his family. She perceived these values as being reflected in his questions and in the ways that he related to *all* the students in the classroom. She described his tendency to “police” other students straining his relations with them. (Interestingly his mother pointed out a similar trait of “bossiness” in him but described it differently suggesting that it stemmed from his compelling need to ensure that everybody played by the rules and his difficulty in understanding how others could tweak them). Ms. Hilton used the same word “policed” to describe how *she* felt in the presence of Mark’s parents. On many occasions during the study Ms. Hilton would draw attention to various actions of his mother that conflicted with the ideals that she, Ms. Hilton, brought to the classroom—community, trust, sharing. Their behavior at the parent-teacher conference, she informed me, had been thoughtless and inconsiderate; her words to Ms. Hilton communicated her suspicion of the school, and her concern for Mark seemed to place undue emphasis on his needs. Not surprisingly, she viewed Marks’ own behavior as stemming from a foundation of values that ran counter to the community narrative in the classroom.

Mark's relations with other students left him somewhat unpopular. He was not seen to consistently "hang out" with a single group of boys or girls. He did sit at lunch every day next to Harry and opposite Andrea, Maddie and Teresa. His mother had told me that he liked Andrea, even though he was fairly certain that she did not like him. This had apparently not dented his self-image or deterred his ambitions to seek her out. (It was later in the semester when Ms. Hilton reported that Andrea had complained to her about Mark). Despite Mark's apparent difficulty in establishing sound relations with others, he seemed more tuned into the thoughts and intentions of others. When Steve brought up an incident where he had expressed being hurt by the actions of some other students, Mark's response (as described by his mother) was that Steve was merely trying to get out of school. In this (as in his questions of Harry) Mark appeared to challenge the community narrative that Ms. Hilton took so much effort to continually infuse in the classroom. Interestingly, Ms. Hilton did not connect Mark's superior intelligence (like Andrea, he received Gifted Education services) to the questions he raised. She juxtaposed him against Jeremy, another Gifted Education student, who contributed significantly more to the community structure of the room. So Mark's questioning was associated with the values he brought rather than his intellectual abilities.

Ms. Hilton's "story" about Mark was embedded in the values that she attributed to him and to his family. She might have accurately understood and described those values, but they might have served more as a backdrop for Mark's actions as he struggled to arrive at a meaningful understanding of his relations with Harry than as directly causing it. His persistent questioning might have arisen from his perception of stories that appeared to be a blatant cover-up of what Harry could *not* do, a point continually raised

by the “ability” narrative implicit in the values he brought from home. Alternatively, the community narrative either glossed over or simply ignored that ability component—having superior ability did not take precedence over other values. Mark seemed unwilling or unable to ignore its importance. Then how did Mark get from here to the point where he began to receive Harry everyday at the bus, to ask questions that were now considered by Ms. Cisneros to be more “positive” and to raise Harry’s hand in the group to indicate that he had a comment to offer? What was the shift that occurred that saw Mark participating willingly and actively in the very narrative that he had questioned a few months ago?

Ms. Hilton speculated that it might have been the result of the effect of the community represented by this particular group of students. Could the community narrative as practiced in this room simply have squashed out the effects of the values that Mark brought with him and/or his innate tendencies to be less generous to others? Why did he come to adopt the narrative about Harry that had seemed to run counter to his beliefs? Perhaps it *was* driven by his own need to be accepted as a member of this classroom—admittedly, he had been having trouble getting along with his peers. By accepting Harry, he might have been attempting to secure his position within this community in which Harry was understood as a member. Or perhaps, he was interacting with Harry to score points with Andrea. After all, he did sit next to Harry to be closer to her for the better part of the year. Yet the persistence and independent experimentation that was evident in Mark’s actions suggests that it might have been much more than that.

Perhaps Mark’s emergent interest in Harry was about learning to bend the rules a little. As mentioned earlier, his strict adherence to rules might have accounted for some

of the occasions when he was described as not getting along with his peers. It might also explain some of his intense questioning of Harry. Harry, in one sense, had broken all the rules as Mark might understand it, by being in this room. While the others seemed to have accepted this break from canon, he could not do so. The community narrative did not resolve this non-canonicity for him in a way that he could seamlessly accept his presence. So, perhaps, Mark's "new" behaviors might be construed as evidence of him learning to work around a strict interpretation of rules. He might also then be perceived as borrowing from the "community" narrative to do so. While community membership entailed the recognition and implementation of rules, it might also require a more nuanced interpretation of the same rules and perhaps Mark was beginning to discover the ways to do so. Whatever the means by which Mark was able to make the family narrative meaningful for him so that he could pursue relations with Harry, he seemed to be ultimately using it in ways that others had done more effortlessly. As much as Harry, Mark too had become a legitimate member of the classroom.

The juxtaposition of other narratives at the high school was much less evident, though not entirely absent. When Shelley speculated on his participation in drama where his feedback would be useful, she was certainly articulating a vision for Michael that differed sharply from his present educational program. This was equally true of Mindy as she visualized Michael participating in a fashion show. When she, as Vivian, Jennifer, Janet, and others described him as "funny" "cute" someone who "makes me happy" or "makes me laugh," they certainly surprised the flow of the institutional narrative, even if they did not directly challenge it. When Vivian suggested that Michael was fully capable

of being taught to take care of others, she too countered the dependency fostered by the normative narrative.

However, much of what students actually brought to the interviews seemed much less at odds with it. When Pat and Jennifer confessed ruefully that they could not see Michael participating in their work settings in any way, their experiences did not offer them any different ways of thinking about Michael. Bill's experiences with his intellectually disabled sister and his physically disabled uncle seemed synchronous with his understanding of Ms. Jackson's responses, even though some others might dislike her actions or find them incomprehensible. When Drake wondered about the meaning of Michael's placement in the school, he was corroborating the normative structure already operating in this building. (Interestingly, when urged to speculate students could proceed much further in their conceptualization of his possible participation than their answers to questions about his present participation might suggest).

Do the narratives of the students suggest that the "normative" narrative had become relevant to their selves, their own self-stories, so that they could unproblematically remain only peripherally aware of and interested in Michael? Perhaps the values espoused by the narrative really did not conflict with the emergent values that they were beginning to claim as their own. Yet, despite the apparent seamlessness between the institutional narrative and the ones verbalized by the students, it cannot be forgotten that those confirming narratives were being articulated without the opportunity for practice. In other words, in the absence of any substantial, practical engagement with Michael neither the paradigmatic narrative, nor the personal narratives that accompanied student responses could be questioned, tweaked, altered or displaced. These personal

stories were “untested” narratives that were genuine to the extent that their authors were known and real, but inauthentic insofar as they did not emerge from the active explorations of individual students seeking to make sense for themselves.

How did the institutional paradigmatic narrative in the High School co-exist with the likely inauthentic nature of the student narratives? What impact did this dissonance have on student identities? It would be difficult to explore these questions without examining student participation with Michael in other contexts. The operation of the “normative” narrative after all, required certain structural elements which were contained in this setting. How would students respond to Michael in settings that lacked those elements? Such data was outside the scope of this study. However, one piece of information shared by Michael’s family might provide some inkling of the importance of this question. Michael’s parents and his sister (a senior at the same school) mentioned, somewhat bemusedly, that when they took Michael to community sites like the mall, they continually encountered young people who would stop and greet Michael. They were inevitably people whom Michael’s parents could not identify.

Dad: We don’t know. Just kids. They are from his school. Yeah. Or parents.

Mom: Like if you are going through the mall, people walk by “Hi, Michael, how are you doing?”

Dad: Like we are not even there. [Laughter]

Mom: Sometimes I have stopped them and asked them who they are. One of the [inaudible] stopped by him one day. She says “Is that Michael?” And I am looking, I am going “Who is this?” and after she talked to him

for a while, I asked “Excuse me, how do you know Michael?” [laughs]. “I went to school with him 2 years ago” or something. She graduated... she remembers through elementary school, you know [the] different times that she has run into Michael. But you know, it’s like she wasn’t talking to me, she was talking to him. So I finally asked “how do you know him?” [laughs]. It’s kinda strange because he can’t tell us. So they just remember him over the years. And they come up now. And it’s funny because they no longer talk to us.... We just feel a little strange that everybody knows him.

Setting aside the analysis of the family’s disconnect from Michael’s social partners, their description of the actions of his peers who, over the years continued to greet him freely outside the school setting, is notable. It was true that several students did report that this happened even within the school building. However, students were also just as likely to indicate that on most observed occasions, Michael’s social partner was an adult, the most prominent of them being his paraprofessional. Most of his peers did *not* describe Michael being in the company of other peers. Whatever the elements within the building that inhibited students in greeting Michael freely, they *may not* have been operational in a setting like the mall. This, in turn, would suggest that their self-stories were not as easily reconciled with the institutional paradigmatic narrative in the school as their spoken accounts might imply.

The preceding discussion on the nature of student relations that emerged within this setting and the process of “participatory appropriation” implicit within those relations are graphically summarized in Figure 3.

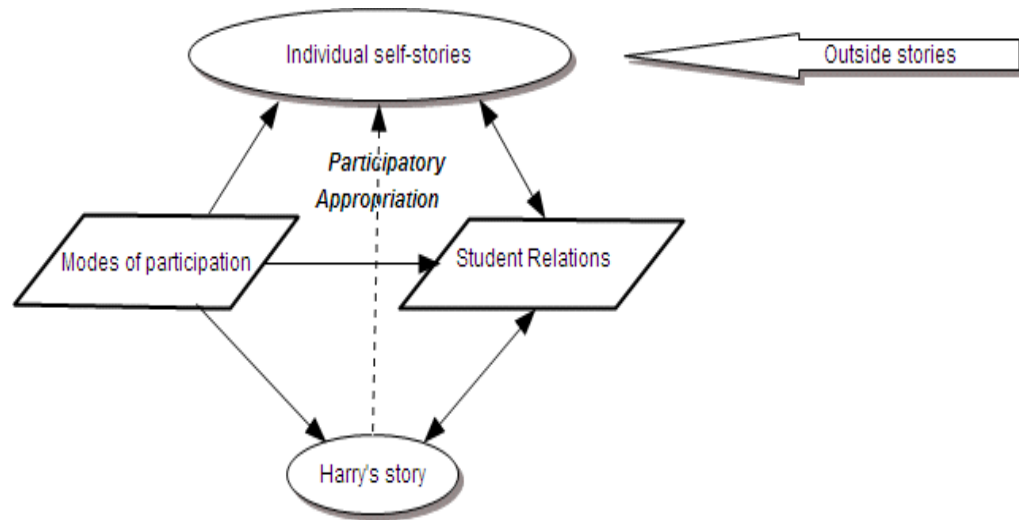


Figure 4. Generating Harry's story

I have hypothesized that this process of *participatory appropriation* occurs simultaneously with the process of *narrative induction* discussed in Chapter 4. The process of making the paradigmatic narrative relevant to one's self-story, i.e. *narrative induction*, generated the ways that Harry could not only be understood by others, but also the ways that *he* could articulate himself. Alternatively, Harry's story came to be defined to a significant extent by the activities of his peers. As students enacted their continually evolving self-stories in practical engagement with him, they afforded him the possibilities to transform those same stories.

Chapter 6: Taking stock—Future directions?

The constructs of “narrative induction” and “participatory appropriation” that were employed to understand the data generated in this study suggest a new framework for examining student relations. The process of “story-making” that emerges from the analysis presented in the previous chapters may now be collectively represented in Figure 5.

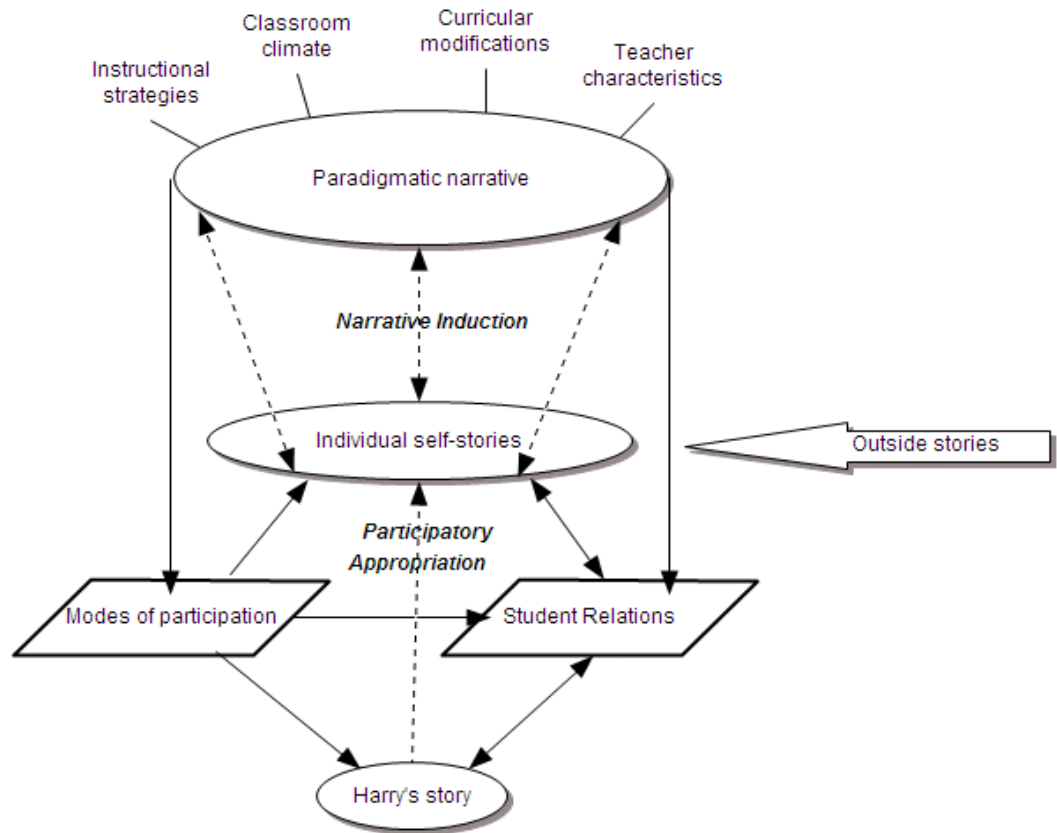


Figure 5: A process of story-making

The ways in which the paradigmatic narratives influenced the outcomes of student participation, student relations and student self-stories have been addressed at length, and

the significance of those self-stories to Harry's and Michael's own stories have also been noted. The intertwining of the elements clearly suggests that any examination of the participation of significantly disabled students cannot ignore the ways in which the participation of other members of that setting is contextualized. The study quite unmistakably showed that the "family" narrative predominating in the first grade classroom offered greater promise for Harry to express himself in engagement with others, than the "normative" narrative that prevailed at Truman High offered Michael. Yet it was also clear that the "family" narrative, despite its capacity to draw Harry into the fold of the classroom, either left some students disempowered in carving out their relations with him, or held out the near-certain possibility that they might experience that state in the future. Nor was it certain that *all* the relations that Harry experienced with his peers, would continue to expand the scope of his participation.

In speculating, then, on the implications of the above findings for the education of Harry/Michael and their peers, I have sought to pursue two lines of inquiry. Recognizing that the notions of care and community were implicit in the paradigmatic narrative that operated within Harry's classroom, I begin by scrutinizing the construct of "caring communities" and its significance for students with severe disabilities. I will lead from this to a study of the learning theory that framed the experiences of this classroom community and its potential to offer a caring (as well as critical) pedagogy for Harry. Simultaneously, I will suggest the advantages of adopting a sociocultural approach to learning that can empower both Harry (and Michael) and his peers.

Care and Community

For at least a significant part of this past century, schools have been managed more as organizations rather than as communities (Callahan, 1962; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The use of one or the other as a guiding metaphor has inevitable implications for the ways in which schooling is theorized, researched, and implemented (Sergiovanni, 1993). Sergiovanni notes that the emphasis on schools as organizations has spawned practices that conflate hierarchy with expertise and moral superiority, encourage self-interest over common goals, and intensify the severance of connections between people within the system. Increasingly, however, there have been sustained calls to re-envision schools as caring environments in order to reclaim the student populations that have grown disaffected and alienated from the schools (Sizer & Sizer, 1999; Kohn, 1999). Researchers now urge schools to prioritize students' sense of belonging as critical to the process of learning and encourage the implementation of practices that will restore those connections between students and other members of the school community (Villa & Thousand, 2000; Kluth, Biklen, & Straut, 2003).

Sergiovanni defines communities as collections of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are together binded to a set of shared ideas and ideals. This bonding and binding is tight enough to transform them from a collection of "I's" into a collective "we." As a "we" members are part of a tightly-knit web of meaningful relationships. This "we" usually shares a common place and over time comes to share common sentiments and traditions that are sustaining (1993, p. 9).

The interconnectedness of members within a community is its distinguishing characteristic. It is also evident that the nature of a particular community is inevitably determined by the core values of its members. Schools are increasingly attempting to create communities within their buildings that are premised on respect, sharing and interdependence, using specific instructional strategies to promote these values (Kluth, Straut & Biklen, 2003; Villa & Thousand, 2000). Still other classrooms and buildings pay heightened attention to the values of caring, equity and diversity (Erwin & Guintini, 2000). In fact, *community* itself has become synonymous with *care* making the creation of “caring communities” a desirable outcome for educational efforts (Wentzel, 2003; Collier, 2005; Sapon-Shevin, 1999). Not surprisingly, more and more research in embedding students with significant disabilities in general education classrooms, has implicated the prerequisite of communities that are premised on care for *all* students (Meyer et al, 1998). Successful inclusive schooling practices, such research has suggested, necessitate the adoption of the metaphor of *community* where care and diversity are understood as critical values.

As the preceding sections have illustrated, the presence or absence of a community logic within a school setting has deep implications for the ways in which individuals conduct themselves in that setting. Individuals derive their understanding of themselves and others through the larger narratives prevalent in their setting, even as they in turn sustain or limit its scope. To the extent that the students at West Creek were encouraged to live in relations of community they were empowered as a group to act in ways that furthered their own growth as well as that of Harry’s. Furthermore, as Ms. Hilton’s responses to Mark continually emphasized, individual empowerment could not

come at the cost of community. Mark would not be encouraged to perceive himself as a more valuable member than Harry (presuming that that had been his intention). At Truman, the alienation that students evidenced in their classroom behaviors left them as disempowered as Michael, who was offered little room to partake of the benefits of the environment in which he found himself. This inevitable tension between empowerment and community that also resonates in Sergiovanni's definition recorded earlier, prompted Pedlar, Haworth, Hutchison, Taylor and Dunn (1999) to suggest the construct of "empowerment-in-community" as a much more useful means of understanding the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities within a community.

In effect, we are announcing our commitment to two ideas: empowering the members of a community enhances the value of the community, and helping a group of empowered persons to come together as a community enhances the value of their empowerment. ... That is, if we want to enhance the quality of community in our lives we will need to empower ourselves as well; and from the other side, we will have little success empowering ourselves if we neglect the quality of community in our lives. That is to say then, that empowerment and community are mutually enhancing and mutually supportive (1999, p. 10).

As Pedlar et al (1999) point out, in the light of the above description, empowerment for individuals with developmental disabilities does not simply mean getting them out of self-contained institutions and placing them in "normal" environments. If others in that community could not exist in genuine relations with them, it could not be an empowering experience for either. The students in Michael's classrooms at Truman High school

offered little if any, expression of engagement with their own setting. As several students pointed out, it was not unusual for students to remain unknown to each other within the classrooms that they shared for an entire semester. By and large, they inhabited small, locked worlds that might have provided some security from the threat of complete anonymity implicit in the vastness of the high school system. In the absence of such connectedness it did not seem incongruous that they were unable to locate the pathways to connect to Michael. To the extent that Michael had even fewer resources to develop such coping structures, the situation left him far more vulnerable and disempowered than the rest.

Ms. Hilton's classroom "family," on the other hand, fostered an environment where students could experience physical and emotional security and take risks with not just the academic content but in learning about each other as well. Cristo, Dominic and Gabby clearly experienced empowerment as they experimented with interactions with Harry whose own actions—reaching out to give Cristo a hug—could not have occurred in the absence of those relations. Mark's transformation, as it might be construed, and its concomitant implications for Harry, is perhaps more strongly illustrative of this concept of empowerment-in-community. It is particularly important if considered in the light of Ms. Hilton's conclusion that it occurred as a result of the classroom community in which he was embedded. Ms. Hilton's inference was that the power of this community lay in ensuring that students chose community membership over individual empowerment. The need for Mark to remain in meaningful relations with the others in his classroom, she implied, might have prompted his gradual abandonment of questioning Harry's presence and replacing it with an acceptance of him as a "real" member of this classroom. It was

also no coincidence that this community offered him the tools to arrive at this knowledge of both Harry and himself. Even if Mark's purpose in actively engaging with Harry did not stem from his need to solidify his position within the community, nevertheless its structure offered him the possibilities to change his mind about him. It's important to note that *for Mark*, (as for Cristo, Dominic, and Gabby) this was a sufficient condition for finding ways to interact with Harry. This was not necessarily true of Jamie, Lisa or Melissa who appeared to have utilized such opportunities to a much lesser degree. Their specific stories might reflect less of a struggle between individual enhancement and community membership, and more perhaps, of a reluctance to place themselves in positions characterized by some vulnerability.

The Elements of Care

Whatever the ways that students utilized the possibilities afforded by the community narrative, they all seemed to be cognizant of the key element that held it together—care. On numerous occasions, Ms. Hilton reiterated in different ways the importance of caring for each other. A vast amount of literature has accumulated on the benefits accrued by all students when they are embedded within caring school communities (Noddings, 1992; Wentzel, 2003; Sapon-Shevin, 1999, among others). Not only have they shown that they contribute to the social-emotional well-being of the students thereby preparing them to be receptive to the “academic” component of classroom experience, but they have also had positive effects on their academic performance itself. Much of that literature emphasizes the critical role played by the

teacher in effecting this caring environment. Noddings (1992) describes four ways by which teachers can establish a caring climate in the classroom.

1) *Modeling: By modeling care in the ways teachers relate to students and others, students learn how to care for each other.* Ms. Hilton embodied most of the traits that have been identified as marking a “caring” teacher (Wentzel, 2003; Collier, 2005). Foremost among her aims was the strengthening of relations between students, and between herself and her students. Her style of classroom management was respectful of all students and used few if any punitive mechanisms. Students were rarely publicly reprimanded, with rewards usually earned by the class as a whole, rather than on an individual basis. She was never heard to raise her voice in anger and she approached student conflicts in ways that encouraged them to resolve the situation by themselves rather than prescribe collective punishment. Her instructional practices encouraged students to work together in groups rather than pit them against each other.

2) *Dialogue:* Drawing on the Freirean notion of dialogue, Nodding writes: Dialogue permits us to talk about what we try to show. It gives learners opportunities to question “why” and it helps both parties to arrive at well-informed decisions. Although I do not believe that all wrongdoing can be equated with ignorance, I do believe that many moral errors are ill-informed decisions, particularly in the very young. Thus dialogue serves not only to inform the decision under consideration; it also contributes to a habit of mind—that of seeking adequate information on which to make decisions.

In true dialogical relations, there is a common quest for understanding. While the classes at Truman High were characterized by a singular absence of dialogical relations between staff and students, the same was not true of Harry's class at West Creek Elementary. Ms. Hilton did attempt on several occasions to initiate classroom discussions on various aspects of living in a community—on belonging, on friendships, on families, even on disability. To the extent that the outcome of these discussions was already determined by Ms. Hilton, they were not truly dialogical. It was not the *process* of seeking information, for example, on disabled adults, that was made prominent in the ways these discussions occurred, but the acquiescence to a predetermined social goal, in this case, the unquestioned presence of disability within a community. Desirable as that goal might be, the absence of exploring this goal *together* had several implications: students could not bring divergent experiences to the discussion which meant that their connectedness to the goal was diminished to some extent; the classroom acceptance of this norm was not “authentic” to the extent that it did not emerge from a collective act of reflection; and, in the absence of such authentic understanding, the likelihood that students could carry this goal to other communities now and in the future might be compromised. The presumption implicit in Ms. Hilton's approach ran counter to Noddings' emphasis that dialogue can stimulate students to seek information around which to make decisions. In this classroom, knowledge might even be seen as threatening the spirit of community.

3) *Practice: the opportunities to practice care.* As described in detail in the preceding sections, students in Ms. Hilton's classroom were extended multiple and sustained opportunities to develop a caring attitude towards members of their group. These occasions permitted students to experiment with ways of caring. Caring, as

Noddings points out, is as much about being in a certain kind of relation, as it is about practice. What kind of caregiving relations did this community generate with Harry? Noddings insists that the “cared-for” must offer the caregiver some indication of acknowledgement which would sustain the caregiver’s efforts. Ms. Hilton hypothesized that it was the very absence of that reciprocity that explained the decline in interest in Harry. She accepted as inevitable that Harry might not be able to offer those reciprocal actions, but instead faulted the family for not utilizing the means available to them to enhance Harry’s experience for other students. In other words, the community narrative she tried to implement presumed that students could only exist in a certain kind of caring relations with Harry—he as a care-recipient and students as committed, goal-driven caregivers. This did not conflict with her approach to building the community in the classroom—a top-down directive rather than a common quest for understanding.

Viewed through this lens Harry might temporarily benefit from the rush of interaction brought on by these opportunities to care, but in the longer run, it might limit the ways in which he could be described by these students which in turn might leave him holding an “onlooker” status for extended periods of time. Yet, it was also clear that some students did not appear to define their relations of care with Harry in the same way as Ms. Hilton might have. Perhaps Gabby might have basked in the role of “carer” but Cristo and Dominic were evidently “receiving” something from Harry in their relations with him that defied such categorization. In the absence of a genuine dialogue in the classroom about the family/community narrative, these other ways of being in relation with Harry might never become available to other members in the classroom. Harry would continue to be framed by the care-giving activities in which he was situated as

would the responses of other students. They could then be described approvingly as “conscientious” helpers or their waning interest perceived as understandable. Either way Harry’s status as care-recipient remained immutable. Vivian, a freshman in Michael’s aerobics class, clearly articulated an uncommon description of Michael that perceived him as entirely capable of not only learning to take care of others but also of demonstrating “care” for others through his very presence. It need hardly be mentioned that there were few opportunities to discover this quality of Michael within that high school environment.

4) *Confirmation*. This refers to the act of affirming and encouraging the best in others. Again, in Noddings’ words:

When we confirm someone, we spot a better self and encourage its development. We can only do this if we know the other well enough to see what he or she is trying to become. Formulas and slogans have no place here. We do not set up a single ideal or set of expectations for everyone to meet, but we identify something admirable, or at least acceptable, struggling to emerge in each person we encounter.

Students both at Truman and at West Creek instinctively identified an emergent self in both Michael and Harry that required their confirmation. When Chantal, a junior in World History expressed her outrage that Ginny had unnecessarily reprimanded Shelley, a classmate, for joining in laughter with Michael, she was in a sense, describing Shelley’s confirmation of Michael’s sense of humor that had so little room for expression within the confines of that room. When Shelley herself described Michael during an interview as being strongly communicative of his desire to have relationships with others, she was

identifying his need to extend himself beyond his present circumstances. When Arianna, a senior in Michael's aerobics class, described him as "smart and intelligent" she was confirming him in ways denied by his environment. So, ironically, despite the conspicuous absence of an exhortation to care within this educational setting, students could still articulate the elements of care for Michael even as they had few opportunities to practice them.

Confirmation was more readily evident in the interactions between Harry and his classmates. While it might have been implicit in the relations that they had with him, their interpretive remarks about him were probably most strongly illustrative of this. When Stan reported that Harry was "concentrating on me today" he was clearly suggesting that he had spotted something in Harry's self that needed to be affirmed and in communicating his response to another—in this case an adult—he was actively confirming this. When Steve broke the breathless silence of the group after Harry had visually located the switch he was to press, with a relieved but triumphant "I think he's saying 'I see it now!'" he was articulating the compelling urge to affirm Harry's efforts. Confirmation, in Harry's and Michael's case, implied a tacit recognition of a quality unsupported or intermittently supported by the environment—agency. Alternatively, in their spontaneous interpretive efforts of Harry, students were practicing relations of care.

Narrativizing as "caring" practice

Conscious interpretation, or "narrativizing" then, may be perceived as a route to demonstrating care. In fact, the two most prominent sites of such "narrativizing" in this study were in the stories shared by the mothers about their children in this classroom and

Ms. Hilton's own spontaneous attempts to analyze the actions of her students. In her examination of the ethic of care as a route to building teacher efficacy, Collier (2005) cites Ruddick to illustrate the similarity between mothering and the caring role. This similarity was embodied in the goals that the two groups shared: protecting the life of the child, nurturing the growth of the child and shaping a moral being. The actions of the mothers in this study as they ruminated, explored, theorized and generated explanations for the actions of their own children differed little in intensity, commitment, earnestness or depth from the attempts of Ms. Hilton as she actively sought ways to interpret their behavior in the classroom. For the mothers, the opportunity to unravel their understandings of their children was equally an opportunity for them to demonstrate their relations of care with them. What better way to confirm their children as thoughtful, agentive beings than to explore and describe the stories in which their children were the principal actors.

Similarly, Ms. Hilton's commitment to nurturing healthy and upstanding students was also articulated in her practice in the many ways described in preceding sections. For her, the need to generate stories about her students stemmed from her commitment to the family narrative which was based on building and sustaining caring relations between members. To understand student behavior in a "confirming" light implied looking for explanations outside of the immediate context. Regardless of the inevitable fact that the explanations that Ms. Hilton generated were sometimes at odds with the belief systems that some mothers brought to the setting, she was no less practicing relations of care with her students.

The confirming act of narrativizing then is a conscious literary act that of necessity places the author at a certain distance from the person/event being considered, even when they were mothers talking about their children. The work of writers who have examined the nature of texts as offering keys to forms of existence offers another lens to understand the significance of the act of narrativizing, especially in relation to students with severe disabilities. Holquist (2000) attaches a significant value to the kind of literary project implicit in the “narrativizing” described above. In his analysis of the dialogism associated mainly with Bakhtin, he addresses the power of language to bring order to a seeming chaos of events.

The effect of order which language achieves is produced by reducing the possible catalogue of happenings, which at any moment is potentially endless, to a restricted number that perception can then process as occurring in understandable relations. What happens in an utterance, no matter how commonplace, is always more ordered than what happens outside an utterance. (p. 84)

Relating this connection of language to life, he reminds us that it is an inevitable element in the construction of one’s self. We see ourselves and the world through the eyes and words of others even as we continually make sense of others in the world by turning our responses into a text. Paradoxically, we are able to create meaningful texts through our utterances *only* by restricting the variety of meanings possible within that experience. Everyday utterance inevitably reduces the meanings that might be possible within an event. In literature, however, authorship is understood as creating utterances that “*least* restricts the world’s possible meanings” (p. 85, italics added). So the difference, Holquist

assures us, between the everyday authorship implicit in our everyday utterances and the conscious literary act of the novelist/artist is simply one of degree. However he extends primacy of status to the latter because of its ability to leave the possibility of meanings in one's actions unconstrained. This description of literature and life, as it were, suggests that these concepts are not oppositional in nature, but simply two different types of utterances.

In some respects, this analogy to the relation between literature and life is reminiscent of Bruner's notion of subjunctivity (1986) as a hallmark of good writing, discussed in an earlier section. Subjunctivity, he explains, can be achieved in writing through the use of various grammatical elements. The effect of those elements is such that it offers greater scope for the reader to generate alternate texts. Writing that is not characterized by subjunctivity proposes clearly circumscribed, pre-specified meanings and offers little room for stimulating alternate meanings. The interpretative efforts of students as they confirmed Michael and Harry in different ways were especially valuable, over and above the declarative statements about their condition and /or their needs that might typically be shared with them by conscientious teachers. Those statements while bearing the stamp of authoritative knowledge provided firm boundaries to the ways in which Harry or Michael could be understood. Not surprisingly, students themselves had come to attach little significance to their subjective knowledge, valuing instead the objective information given to them by adults.

However, the practical significance of such information was not always clear. Colette, the senior in Michael's World History class, sought more "information" about Michael as a means to facilitate the process of interaction with him, but simultaneously

seemed to acknowledge the limitations inherent in this request. She recalled the benefits of having received such assistance through a mini-assembly about another student who was a wheelchair-user. “It made it easier to associate with her and say hi, and talk to her knowing that she did understand us.” With Michael, she seemed less certain.

Sometimes it makes me curious what Michael actually has ... and stuff like that. And what all does he comprehend when you say [something] to him. Some of that stuff we might not even know but ...

Colette was also the student who had been reported earlier as expressing her frustration of “not knowing,” presumably referring to the difficult task of making sense of Michael. In many and often indirect ways, this project of “knowing” Michael emerged as an important subject in students’ understanding of him. How could one know Michael? Some individuals, students suggested, like Ginny, seemed to know him better than others because of the sheer longevity of their relationship. Knowledge of Michael might be expressed in terms of the “improvements” that he had made, as Daniel and Jodie, his classmates in Foods, suggested. Of course, Daniel and Jodie also had had their relationships with Michael extensively mediated by special education professionals. Knowledge of Michael might also be illustrated through the ways he responded to the individual. According to Mindy, a special education student, Ginny seemed to be able to use her knowledge of him in ways that elicited responses from him that were unavailable to others.

Jared, who also shared a special education class with Michael, acknowledged that there were different kinds of “knowing” and was convinced that he “knew” him. He explained how he came to “know” Michael.

Jared: I know him a lot better than I did when I first met him. I mean he wasn't shy. He's never shy about anything. But I just didn't know him, so I never went over there to say "hey, what's up Michael," you know, but now... now I know him as well as I do, I can just go up to him and be like... "what's up?" and he knows exactly ... yeah.

Jared's conviction that he knew Michael much better now than he did before was determined by the actions that *he*, Jared, took in relation to Michael. Interestingly, while my question was intended to elicit an image of Michael drawn by Jared, it was an image of his own self that Jared generated. Jared's belief in the strength of his own knowledge of Michael convinced him of *Michael's* understanding of his, Jared's, actions. So even while Colette may wish for a fact-providing presentation that would help her "know" Michael, students were already utilizing or speculating on the other ways one could come to know Michael. However, given the subjective nature of such knowledge and its probable lack of legitimacy within the "normative" framework, it was the authoritative nature of "facts"—the circumscribed meanings of utterances lacking in subjunctivity—that was understood as offering the resources to make meaning of Michael's experiences.

Ms. Hilton at West Creek might explain the unique circumstances of Harry by utilizing the analogy of different "needs" for different members of a community. Yet, it was still the interpretative act of the students creating the connections between him and their own unique perspectives that endowed him with the richest variety of meanings. Witness this "teachable moment" when Ms. Petersen, the physical therapist, was conducting "push-in" services within the classroom. Harry had remained without a social partner for several minutes as Ms. Petersen seated on a chair on wheels, supported him in

a standing position. He did not appear to resist her efforts, but appeared alert and animated, his head jerking in different directions.

Noticing the absence of activity around him, she gently rolled with him towards the table where I was seated with several other students, commenting jokingly that his friends had abandoned him. As she held him upright against the table, he leaned forward and deliberately reached out and pulled the bucket of supplies in the center of the table towards himself. Cristo, who was seated across from Harry and had been engrossed in a word search activity, looked up immediately and spluttered in his excitement “Harry! ... Mrs. Cisneros ... Look! Harry” Ms. Cisneros, who was several feet away in another part of the room looked up and then, following his gaze, nodded smilingly to Cristo. Ms. Petersen noted very emphatically to nobody in particular that it was definitely a very “purposeful” act. Cristo continued to gaze mutely at Harry, transfixed, as Harry stood with Mrs. Petersen’s support, swaying unsteadily on his feet with his hands over the bucket.

Ms. Petersen’s satisfied description of Harry’s action as “purposeful” certainly confirmed his efforts. However it was Cristo’s spontaneous expression of surprise and joy that offered greater *potential* for suggesting images of Harry that might be different from the mundane event conjured up by the therapist’s words. Phyllis’s description added little meaning to the rush of excitement that Cristo was obviously experiencing in witnessing Harry perform an action that he, Cristo, had not seen before. Cristo was, in fact, expressing the strength of his connection to Harry which is required for any act of

confirmation (Noddings, 1992). In this case, however, confirming Harry also required the adults present to explore *with* Cristo the significance of Harry's actions. Did Cristo feel excited when he saw Harry reach out for the bucket? Why? What did Cristo think Harry was doing? Had Cristo seen Harry do something like this before? Cristo's excited response, if probed encouragingly, might have offered Ms. Petersen another way of describing Harry. Granted Cristo's limited English skills might have interfered with this activity to some extent, but it might also have spurred him to say more, or drawn the other students at the table into the conversation. The deliberate act of collectively searching for an interpretation of Harry's actions might be characterized as the work of literature that "least restricts the world's possible meanings" (Holquist, 2000). Ms. Petersen's utterance, on the other hand, describing Harry's act as "purposeful" might be perceived as the everyday authorship that clearly circumscribed the way he could be understood. It was not the "truth" factor that distinguished the two, but as Holquist points out, the degree to which a variety of meanings were permitted. Facilitating Cristo's interpretation might also have offered the other students at the table a means to trigger further descriptions of Harry that might not have occurred to Cristo himself.

The normative narrative that operated within the high school setting came with no obvious "caring" strings attached and the nature of relations that prevailed between all students, between students and teachers, between Michael and other students, reflected some negligence of this ideal. For Michael, the effects were not only more conspicuous but debilitating. They left him unavailable to others, as others were made unavailable to him. Ms. Hilton's classroom, in contrast, offered rich examples of the ways in which a caring community embraced its members such that they could emerge as distinct

individuals. It was not a coincidence that as a participant-observer, I came to know Harry with much greater depth than I could Michael. I learned to distinguish between his different moods, expressions and emotions as I observed them in the context of his peers. I learned about the situations or contexts in which he demonstrated enthusiasm, interest, boredom, or sheer pleasure. I learned to distinguish the individuals, students and staff, who elicited his interest and affection and how that influenced his own actions. I learned that Harry would take risks when associating with specific students, in this case Cristo. I learned that he differentiated in his relations with various individuals. Michael, on the other hand, remained somewhat of an enigmatic figure. Most of my observations of him were inevitably mediated by the presence of Ms. Jackson and the particular nature of their relations as well as the absence of any meaningful interactions with other peers. I saw evidence of humor, his responsiveness to Ms. Jackson, his affection for her, and his respect for her. But there was little else that I garnered about him that I could carry away from this setting.

If the caring community at West Creek offered students many and varied ways of expressing themselves, did it also provide Harry a genuine and sufficient context in which to “practice” his Self (Bruner, 1990)? Within a few months of consistent and predictable relations with Cristo, he had already begun to initiate a social response (reaching out to hug him) that he did not direct to any other student or even to Ms. Cisneros whom he had known for more than a year. What other kinds of intentional acts might Harry be spurred to demonstrate in the context of continued and deepening relations with Cristo within such a setting? What other emotions besides being “never mad” might he display within the context of such predictable and serious relations?

Could other facets of Harry emerge as his relations with others deepened? The deepening of such relations could only occur when the instructional practices in this context continued to encourage students to interact in varied and meaningful ways with him. It seems inevitable that the decision to restrict Harry's interaction with his peers during the afternoons only for the subsequent year would only diminish the probability that this might occur. A "caring" pedagogy that sought to enable *all* students to experience meaningful relations with each other must necessarily endeavor to accomplish the same for Harry and Michael. Relations between Harry/ Michael and their peers were interwoven with the nature of the environments that they shared.

The decision to alter Harry's educational experiences quite significantly for the subsequent year raises the question: what lasting benefit did the "caring community" instantiated to a large extent by Ms. Hilton's classroom within this particular school building, offer Harry? Was the "caring" pedagogy implicit in this environment enough for Harry to attain the same benefits as his peers? To explore these issues, I will first examine the learning theory that characterized Ms. Hilton's approach and the implications it carried for describing Harry's relations with his environment. I will then speculate on the potential afforded by that approach to supporting not only a "caring" but a "critical" pedagogy. *Critical* pedagogy that draws on the writings of Freire (2000) among others, acknowledges and problematizes the particular histories that inform relations between groups of people, in this case those with and without disabilities, and seeks to bring about change that will achieve a measure of social justice. Implicit in a "critical" pedagogy is the exhortation to care. Harry's experiences within this setting were inevitably and concretely interconnected with historical practices that perceived

individuals with intellectual and severe disabilities as requiring a certain kind of societal response, namely, segregation from mainstream life and culture. The presumption of a “caring” pedagogy for Harry and Michael can hardly fail to be cognizant of this larger socio-political narrative in which they were embedded.

I will use the following section to explore these questions: How did the learning theory implicit in the “caring” pedagogy of this classroom inform the ways peers carved out their relations with Harry? Did it respond adequately to the unique biographies that students brought to the classroom and offer them the means to make and sustain connections with Harry? Did it offer opportunities for Harry to be recognized as a legitimate member of the classroom?

Reconciling learning theories with critical (and caring) pedagogy

The constructivist approach

Ms. Hilton openly and proudly acknowledged that her practices drew on the philosophies of both Piaget and Vygotsky. She believed that most of the first grade teachers at West Creek were, like her, constructivist in their approach. She emphasized the importance of allowing students to work in groups and on several occasions reiterated her conviction that learning occurred in the interactions with others. Her classroom certainly displayed some of the critical elements of a constructivist classroom. The principles delineated by Fosnot and Perry (2005) as instantiating a constructivist focus might be helpful in describing this classroom. Teachers adopting this approach allow learners to “raise their own questions, generate their own hypotheses and models as possibilities, test them out for viability, and defend and discuss them in communities of

discourse and practice” (p. 34). The classroom was generously and accessibly equipped with materials that students could freely draw on at their own initiation. Even as students were guided at specific times to read books at specific levels (to meet district benchmarks) they were simultaneously urged to explore books of their own interest. Students were encouraged to draw on their own interests and experiences in completing written projects. There were frequent opportunities for students to share their experiences, thoughts and questions with their peers. Whole-group sessions were characterized by a comfortable give-and-take as students displayed no anxiety in asking questions and when Ms. Hilton seemed to engage students in a sustained manner. Students worked at their own pace and while there were ample opportunities for public display of their work, their products were never scored openly.

“Disequilibrium facilitates learning” (Fosnot and Perry, 2005, p. 34). There were occasions of “challenging, open-ended investigations in realistic, meaningful contexts” (p. 34) where students had the opportunities to explore many possibilities. One example was the collective effort of all first grade classrooms where students generated their own survey questions and then proceeded to carry out the actual survey with their neighbors across the hallway and collected data. The authors note that “allowing reflection time through journal writing, representation in multisymbolic form, and/or discussing connections across experiences may facilitate reflective abstraction” (p. 34). As noted earlier, journal writing and writing projects where students centralized their own unique experiences over prescribed topics were commonplace in this classroom. Frequently writing projects were as much an exercise in artistic exploration as students created various written forms and means of illustration. As a “community of discourse” there was

certainly ample room for student participation, and Ms. Hilton did not hesitate to involve the whole group in discussions that would further the aim of building cohesiveness within the classroom. Yet, as earlier discussions have already brought to light, the quality of dialogue that Fosnot and Perry ascribe to such communities might not have been quite clearly present. The dictum that “ideas are accepted as truth only insofar as they make sense to the community” was less readily practiced in this classroom. While students might have had generous opportunity to acquire content-area concepts through games, puzzles and other activities that stimulated independent construction of those facts, other elements of shared activity such as the notion of “community” were presented to them as inflexible constructs that they were required to support unquestioningly.

Of course, constructivism itself is not quite so cleanly and conceptually separated from other approaches such as that postulated by sociocultural theorists. Some assume that Vygotskian principles are subsumed under the rubric of constructivism (Knight, 2004). Others like Cobb (2005) have suggested that both theories are implicit in each other with one foregrounding the individual and backgrounding the sociocultural context, while the other does the reverse. Still others like Miller (2003) have sought to blend both theories of learning in their approach. The controversy within the debate might revolve around the fundamental question of whether the mind is “in the head” or “in society.” Cobb (2005) offers a pragmatic approach to this conflict by suggesting that researchers acknowledge the use of one or the other as driven by particular reasons. For example, I could make the argument that this study is framed by a sociocultural approach to learning because the construct of an actively cognizing individual may be a difficult one to utilize with severely disabled individuals. So employing a sociocultural perspective then deflects

primacy of concern from the individual to the nature of the setting. However, sociocultural theorists themselves insist on the fundamental intertwining of the two planes—personal and social—that challenges the attempt to separate them by resolving an apparent conflict. In other words, the difference in the way learning is theorized in both approaches cannot, it would seem, simply be dissolved by pragmatic means. Rogoff (1995) and Rueda, Gallego & Moll (2000) suggest that while foregrounding and backgrounding might be necessary for a particular analysis, a complete account of learning and development has to consider both planes as well as a third one postulated by Rogoff (1998), the institutional plane, which included shared history, languages, rules, values, beliefs, and identities. Any account of learning should assume the inseparability of all three planes.

The limitations of constructivist approaches for Harry

The significance of the two approaches for Harry's classroom centered on how he was understood by this setting (students and educators) and how this understanding was facilitated by the teacher. While Ms. Hilton certainly mediated peer understanding of Harry through conversations about his specialized equipment, through instructional practices that included Harry as a classroom member, and through directives on how *not* to treat him, to a large extent, she also left students to construct their own understanding of Harry in the context of routine activities in this classroom. While this practice by itself, is not unusual or problematic—it does after all, concur with a strict constructivist approach—in the case of Harry it charged students with the complex task of making sense of him without the availability of traditional means of communication and

engagement. In the absence of immediate comprehensibility of his actions, as well as the limited guidance offered in interpreting them, students attempted as the preceding section has described, to configure their relations with him in ways that resonated with their own unique histories. To the extent that such histories evolve in myriad ways, those relations (as many others) too, will develop along different trajectories. Students routinely enter into relations with their peers, sustain them, modify them, or abandon them throughout the course of their school careers. It would be a fair assumption to make that the same might be true of their relations with Harry.

Yet, Harry brings a unique set of contextual elements that posit an important set of questions regarding his relations with his peers. What kinds of relations predominate in the circles that Harry is embedded? What effects do those relations have on him? How do they enable him to express himself? Are some relations more desirable than others? How can those relations be nurtured? Why is it important to do so? These questions may be embraced within any theory of learning and development. After all, social relations between all members within a setting are intertwined with issues of learning, membership and belonging. But, unlike other students, Harry's legitimacy as a member of this setting was never taken for granted. The particular history and traditions of special education practice that framed Harry's inclusion within this setting highlight the political nature of the decision-making process that permitted his placement within this setting. This was still the only accessible elementary school in the district that Harry could have attended. (His mother tearfully recalled the disappointment she had experienced when the district realizing its mistake in naming a different elementary school at first for Harry, hastily withdrew that as an option). In other words, Harry's opportunity to belong in this

classroom would be constrained without an honest appraisal of his location within the larger community. In reflecting on the data collected at West Creek, it is these questions that draw attention to the possibilities afforded by a sociocultural approach in implementing a critical pedagogy.

Using methods of qualitative inquiry, Skattebol (2003) examined children's construction of identities in the context of building relationships between Aboriginal children and those of Anglo-Australian origins within an early childhood setting. In her analysis, she repeatedly draws attention to the limitations of constructivist teaching where the expectation is that children will construct their own knowledge of difference while the teacher merely provides the information necessary to do so. She argues that if teachers, afraid to impose their own value systems, seek only to facilitate a conversation by transmitting "accurate" information, then they simultaneously avoid examination of power relations that are implicit within any discussions of difference. Her description of the day care center in which she carried out her study bears an uncanny resemblance to the conversation on difference implemented in Ms. Hilton's classroom. "The pedagogy at the long day care center was more concerned with affirming difference in ways that address negative stereotyping than with negotiating the meanings and values associated with those semantic markers of difference" (p. 160). Ms. Hilton's insistence on a family-based community within her classroom affirmed the difference brought by Harry, Melissa and even Adam who ran into the classroom in an unexpected and incomprehensible manner. Adequate information was provided at regular intervals to their peers about their specific needs. Yet while it was important to explain that Adam had autism which meant that "your mind did not work very well" Ms. Hilton did not look for opportunities to

engage students in an examination of why he was in the hallway with another adult while his peers were in class. To undertake the latter would have required her to abandon the role of neutral educator and share her own beliefs and values.

As Skattebol (2003) points out, this refusal to shed neutrality might be spurred by a compelling belief in the innate “innocence” of children who do not actively engage in enacting relations of power. While Skattebol proceeds to debate this point by arguing that the construct of innocence suggests that children are acquiring their identities through passive absorption of societal influences, the presumed innocence that she notes might also be alternatively conceptualized as children not being developmentally ready for certain kinds of knowledge. This stance locates itself within an understanding of developmentally appropriate practice in the education of young children that is derived from the early work of Piaget (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Edwards, 2003). Piaget laid out the different stages of child development which spawned a specific set of educational practices in early childhood settings. Fosnot and Perry (2005) point out that these models of practice were misinterpretations of Piaget’s work that erroneously implied a maturationist theory of development. However Piaget’s contribution to such practice might be analyzed, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in the education of young children became a largely unquestioned and pervasive approach (Edwards, 2003).

Revisiting Vygotsky’s constructs

A sociocultural theory of learning and development, drawing on the work of Lev Vygotsky offers a different perspective (for a more detailed review of his work, see Chapter 2). Integral to this theory is the construct of the zone of proximal development

postulated by Vygotsky. While he defined it as the distance between the actual performance of the child and his performance when assisted by a more capable adult, its significance to development and learning has been far-reaching. He used this construct to suggest that developmental processes actually lag behind learning processes, resulting in the creation of zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore educational practice that was oriented towards developmental levels that had already been reached was ineffective. Instead it must aim for a new stage of developmental process. This practice then would continually create new zpd's in a spiraling sequence of learning and development. Briefly, while constructivists drawing on Piaget's constructs of accommodation, assimilation and equilibrium (for a more detailed explanation of these constructs see Fosnot and Perry, 2005) emphasize that learning *is* development, Vygotsky proposed that learning marches ahead of development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky's theory then centralizes the role of the educator in the process of development. Students' readiness to receive instruction in specific concepts is not determined by arbitrary stages in development, but in recognizing their zones of proximal development within that area of learning. Educators build on what students already bring to the concept and then scaffold them to the next level of development. A critical element of this process is in the context within which it takes place. Vygotsky reminds us that learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement. (1978, p. 90)

It is within “communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) comprising students and adults engaged in specific kinds of relations, that students grow to acquire new levels of knowledge.

Returning to Skattebol’s critique of learning approaches that afford primacy to individual construction of knowledge as being unhelpful to exploring inequities in power within social relations, can Vygotsky’s theory of learning offer greater possibility? There are some implications for teachers in the theory that he proposes that might help to answer that question. The teacher’s role is more than a facilitator who provides information within an environment that is rich in resources. The teacher actively shapes the development of the learner through the values and beliefs that she enacts in her instructional practice. The curricula that she implements are not value-free, but are directed towards specific ends and goals. Students, therefore, are not merely constructing their knowledge, they are actively enculturated into specific kinds of knowledge. So, for example, even if Ms. Hilton was attempting to provide value-free information about autism when Adam ran into her classroom, in her immediate words of praise to the class for having remained unresponsive to his incomprehensible behavior, she was already enacting the values that upheld one behavior as more acceptable and “normal” than the other. Or, when she ignored Harry’s “talk” during her instruction, she might be intentionally attempting to project a non-judgmental view of Harry. (He might be interfering with her instruction, but the nature of his difference ensured that he could not help himself and the “family” ethic in the classroom required that she did not attach a negative value to this). But she also simultaneously offered Harry’s peers the acceptable and normative option of ignoring him if they could not understand him.

What implications would a Vygotskian approach have for Ms. Hilton's classroom in relation to Harry? It would allow Ms. Hilton to set her own goals for student learning of difference and/or disability. This would naturally emerge from her assessment of where students were positioned regarding this concept and through dialogical practice she could probe the limits of their understanding. During the study, conversations with individual students unearthed their ways of describing disability that were largely idiosyncratic, in that they were based on individual perceptions of experiences. So it was not uncommon for a student to describe a disabled person as "he is not like us" or as Andrea described Alice for me "she is like Harry, but she can walk and she can talk." Tiffany recognized Harry and Melissa as belonging to a specific group by describing them as "kids like Melissa and Harry." Tiffany was also the only student in the class who used the term "disabled" to describe Harry and Melissa, yet her use of that descriptor did not seem to have afforded her any new ways of understanding Harry. (These words were almost certainly supplied by her mother who had informed me that she actively tried to instill awareness of disability in her children).

Tiffany's use of the term "disability" consistently described what other students were already doing—utilizing their own bodies as a point of reference to understand something that was obviously different. Perhaps this information might have alerted Ms. Hilton to the possibilities of new goals for learning about disability. If this was the knowledge that students articulated, to what higher level of development could they be actively stimulated? The power relations implicit in the term "disability"—the meaning of the word can only emerge in the context of the community within which it is used—can offer a rich forum for engaging in dialogue about universal norms, the nature of

difference and their impact on the lives of all members in that community. These political issues are the hidden spaces that Skattebol (2003) laments are left unexplored when students are conceived as best constructing their own knowledge. Implementing a “critical” pedagogy requires the teacher to actively problematize a situation by unearthing its taken-for-granted assumptions. Fostering a critical consciousness requires deliberate scaffolding activity on the part of the teacher, building on what students have already discovered on their own “spontaneous” (Vygotsky, 1987) terms and guiding them to higher levels of reasoning.

The “tools” of a critical pedagogy for Harry: The case of Andrea

A critique that may be directed at the constructivist approach is that individuals are just as likely to construct *erroneous* knowledge. The teaching process then might well become an exercise in “reinventing the wheel.” This argument is not without relevance to the discussion on disability, especially Harry’s disability. Let us revisit briefly the description of the ways in which some students engaged in practice with Harry, offered in detail in the previous section. It was the nature of Andrea’s relations with Harry that was the most deeply puzzling because of the contradictions that emerged within her story. The analysis suggested that at this period in her relations with him, Andrea was baffled about what to do with Harry, and how to think about him. A constructivist approach might suggest that Andrea’s increasing skills and growth were deepening the divide between her and Harry in ways that permitted few connections to be made by her with him. This would concur with the perspective that the lapse in such connections between severely disabled students and their peers was inevitable and determined only by a question of

time. Whatever the ways in which Andrea was constructing her understanding of Harry as her own skills and abilities developed rapidly, it was clearly evident that her old ways of thinking about him were not giving her the tools to make the connections with him now. Andrea, it could be hypothesized, was operating at a different zone of proximal development now than, say, the previous year when she had been more actively engaged with him in ways similar perhaps to Cristo during the study. In other words, Andrea needed to be scaffolded to the next level of development in her understanding of Harry. What tools might benefit Andrea in helping her grow in her relations with Harry? How was growth in relations with Harry to be determined?

Andrea's actions when she stood in front of him, making funny faces, or playing with his hands, seemed to indicate that she was trying to elicit some response from him that might help her *know* him better. As earlier discussions have noted, the project of *knowing* Harry (and Michael) was facilitated through the provision of information about him and the unique needs he presented. This was certainly coupled in Harry's case with frequent and varied opportunities for practical engagement with him, but there was little other guidance that was offered by Ms. Hilton or Ms. Cisneros in achieving direct communication with him. Who was Harry and how did one get to know him? Why did he do the things that he did and what did they mean? Perhaps it was the struggle for answers to these questions that left Andrea in a state of some confusion about how to engage with him, after the initial establishment of a strong bond with him.

(Ms. Cisneros's presence itself, it must be emphasized, was a significant mediator of student interactions with Harry. As much as Ms. Jackson's role as Michael's assistant at Truman High might have had adverse reactions on student relations with him, Ms.

Cisneros's presence as a non-threatening, warm, pleasant, encouraging adult in the first grade classroom worked to Harry's advantage. Students clearly used her supportive presence to experiment with ways of interacting with Harry. Ms. Cisneros's role with other students appeared to address the following objectives: to ensure Harry's safety and comfort; to advocate for appropriate social responses to him; to offer information about Harry that might bring students closer to his experience; to explain the unique activities in which he participated, such as tube-feeding; to offer reassurance and guidance to his peers who sought interaction with him; and, to ensure that Harry's "specialness" did not impede the academic objectives of his classmates. Ms. Cisneros's presence, directly or indirectly, was a significant mediator of others' attempts to know Harry).

It was not clear in the course of this study that Andrea was using Ms. Cisneros in any significant way to further her knowledge of Harry. She might have done so in the previous year when she and Harry attended the same kindergarten class. Ms. Cisneros had been his assistant during that academic year as well. If the instructional practices of this classroom in which Harry was embedded, the opportunities to engage with him, the classroom conversations about his unique needs, the availability of encouraging adults who could answer questions and mediate encounters with him, were together not sufficient for Andrea to act *as though she knew* him, what might be missing in this collective effort to bring Harry closer to his peers? Had the earlier environment offered her some tools that were not available in this classroom? Or if they were available, were they not as effective any more in assisting her in her relations with Harry? Piecing together some discrete bits of information, (i.e.) Harry's mother had been as unhappy with Harry's kindergarten classroom experience as much as she was delighted by the

efforts made by Ms. Hilton this year in first-grade; students spent much less time interacting with Harry given that kindergarten had been a half-day program; it was Ms. Hilton whom the school principal hailed as one of the “stars” of the school, it might be a safe assumption to make that the kindergarten environment had not been especially noted for any unique element that might have shown off Ms. Hilton’s classroom as deficient. It seems more likely then that whatever tools had been made available for Andrea to use in coming to *know* Harry in kindergarten were simply not effective any more in first-grade.

Was it only Andrea who seemed to experience the effect of this inadequacy within the environment in offering ways to *know* Harry? Cristo, Gabby, Dominic and even Stan showed less, if any, evidence of the confusion that Andrea did. If it can be presumed (without much difficulty, given the reputation that Andrea had acquired prior to her entry in first grade) that Andrea had earlier engaged in sustained practical relations with Harry, then Cristo, Dominic and Gabby who were all currently consistently seeking out opportunities of practice with him, were at a level of development in relation to Harry that was different from Andrea’s. It should be added that none of these other students had been in Harry’s class the previous year. Does this imply that they would all experience the same bafflement or disconnect as Andrea did, in the upcoming months? Not necessarily. For instance, Gabby appeared to be motivated by the religious narrative in which she participated at home. That narrative might be strong enough to promote a sustained set of relations with Harry in the future. Cristo seemed to derive persistent satisfaction in engaging with Harry in different ways. There was no difference in the intensity of his relations with Harry, even as his own levels of participation in the classroom increased with his growing proficiency in the English language. He might

continue to experience such fulfillment even as progressed through the educational experiences typical of his peers.

A sociocultural approach to the examination of Andrea's predicament as well as the actions of Cristo and others might suggest that *all students* were collectively functioning within a similar zone of proximal development, where *knowing* through practical engagement with Harry was the level of development that had already been completed. While Andrea might struggle to move ahead on her own from this juncture, offering *all* students the tools that would specifically help *her* now would enable them to progress to the next level in understanding Harry. How can the next level of development in understanding Harry be characterized? One can find some clues in the earlier discussion on narrativizing, which disclosed its potential to extend the meanings available within everyday constructions of actions. Perhaps Andrea might have benefited in her relations with Harry if she had been shown how to interpret his actions in ways that connected with her own experiences. Her spontaneous efforts at this have been already documented. She jokingly described him as "Donald Duck" one day. Ms. Cisneros reported to me early on in the study, that Andrea had made a little pictorial booklet about "Gangster Harry!" Neither characterization had been perceived by either me or Ms. Cisneros as malicious teasing. Instead, they seemed to signal a spontaneous desire on Andrea's part to look for meanings outside the immediate context; to envelop Harry, as it were, within constructions of identity that could draw on other sources beside the immediate actions that he might display. One might make the case that she was engaged in the search for descriptors for Harry that "least restricts the world's possible meanings" (Holquist, 200, p. 85).

Andrea could be indicating her readiness to adopt an approach that, if consistently and systematically pursued, might have enabled her to come to *know* Harry differently. This knowledge of Harry would not be restricted to engaging in practical relations with him, but would draw on that practice to continually invest him with descriptors, labels, characterizations, (i.e.) *interpretations*, that would give her the means to understand him in ways that the physical particularities of his actions could not. It required the engagement in practice to participate in such interpretive activity, even as such interpretations transformed the actions in which the students engaged with Harry. For Andrea and the other students to be scaffolded into this next level of development, Ms. Hilton would have to consistently model such interpretive thinking in her conversations with him and about him in the classroom; emphasize the unique semantic structure of such statements (“*I think* that Harry is ...” or “Harry *might* be” or “*I wonder* if Harry is....”); uphold the legitimacy of sharing such “subjective” information versus authoritative facts; offer opportunities for Harry’s peers to engage in similar behavior, recognizing that such activity required a collective presence of more than one person; and acknowledge and legitimize such behavior when it occurs with peers. Such “narrativizing” practice might bring Andrea closer to the project of “knowing” Harry, even as it transformed the ways Cristo, Dominic and Gabby engaged in practice with him.

The usefulness of “narrativizing” as a tool is further clarified when examining the relations between students from Harry’s perspective. To what extent did they empower him? To the extent that Harry readily responded to Cristo and took the emotional risk of reaching out to him to engage him physically, this relation was empowering for Harry.

Would Gabby's relations be equally empowering? An emergent element in *her* relations with him described earlier was her proud recognition that she offered Harry assistance *even though* others did not. Harry as care-recipient might be an insufficient image to promote his empowerment. Andrea's relations at this juncture were clearly not empowering either for herself or for Harry. The data collected from both West Creek and Truman High clearly indicated that Harry or Michael could not be empowered unless their peers experienced the same within that environment. Yet, the significance of those relations ultimately rested on their capacity to invest Harry with identities that departed from the infantilizing dependence and custodialism traditionally associated with severe disability.

Another equally important question might be to what extent would the understandings of Harry garnered in structured classroom environments be carried over and sustained in unstructured, less supervised settings? The lunchroom and the playground were sites where students carved their own opportunities to interact with him and determined the how, where, when and what of those interactions. Engagement in the classroom still occurred within the parameters of classroom rules of behavior and the nature of the activity designed to a large extent by Ms. Hilton. During the subsequent year, if Harry was no longer in the same classroom as say, Gabby and Dominic, would they continue to grow in their understanding of him? In other words, would the engagement in practice today, offer them the tools to understand him tomorrow when they were no longer consistently engaged in similar practice with him? How would they respond to him if they passed him occasionally in the hallway or if they saw him "parked" on the playground with Ms. Cisneros near the swings?

Offering students the opportunities to interpret his actions (his “talk,” his gestures, his animated responses, his drowsiness, pulling the hair of a peer standing close, etc.) would extend the meanings of the immediate event in ways that newer, more multi-faceted descriptions of Harry could emerge. This might enlarge the potential tool-kit of images from which students could draw to sustain relations with him even when they had little opportunity to be consistently engaged in practice with him. The futuristic images conjured by the principal at West Creek and Ms. Hanson, the special education teacher, entailed peers who had formerly been responsive to a severely disabled student but who had now for the most part abandoned their interest in them. These educators might legitimately believe that such progression of events was inevitable, but it might be equally logical to point out that these students lacked the tools by which they could adapt to changing circumstances and continue to find empowerment within them in their relations with Harry.

Empowerment or Integration of the self-story with the paradigmatic narrative

The discussion on caring communities for *all* students which began this section, has lead us to an appreciation of the ways that specific learning theories can limit or expand the scope of pedagogical practices for Harry and Michael. I have also raised the idea that the project of implementing a caring *and* critical pedagogy might be better served by a sociocultural approach to learning that invested the teacher with an actively interventionist role as she sought to work within the zones of proximal development demonstrated by her students. In this process, I have offered narrativizing as a potential tool whereby students and staff can create the conditions in which both Harry/Michael

and their peers might experience the empowerment that could sustain their relations. In doing all of the above, I have reiterated the urgency to foster relations between severely disabled students and their peers that has already been documented by current research. However, I have sought to describe those relations differently by foregrounding the contextualizing factors of such relations, while simultaneously emphasizing the validity of the task of getting to *know* Harry and Michael. I have thus upheld the account of development postulated by Rogoff (1995) that takes place simultaneously within three different planes: individual, interpersonal and community/institutional.

These events and concepts are subsumed within the theory of narrative induction that was elaborated in the analysis offered in the previous section. The paradigmatic narratives that were evident in these settings implicated specific pedagogical elements that engendered specific ways of participation. These forms of participation, in turn, left students in states of empowerment or disempowerment that subsequently informed their relations with Harry/Michael. While instructional practices, curricular modifications, teacher characteristics and classroom climate were significant elements of the framework within which the different paradigmatic narratives emerged and flourished, this section has also expanded the scope of the teacher's role in fostering that continuing sense of empowerment.

Empowerment itself then, may be understood as arising from the reconciliation of the paradigmatic narrative with one's own self-story. For both Andrea and Mark, whose transformation from an annoying skeptic to an enthusiastic "believer" was as dramatic as it was unexpected, this seeming incompatibility between the classroom "family" narrative and their individual questions/ ruminations/ actions, in short, their self-stories, left them

as disempowered as Harry. As long as Andrea continued to make funny faces at him clearly unable to figure out what to do with him, Harry remained hidden from view. When Mark began to raise Harry's hand to offer his question/comment to the group, he was actively announcing Harry's membership in this classroom. At some juncture during the course of the year Mark, whose initial struggle to accept the validity of Harry as a classroom peer was well documented, had found the means to resolve the tension between the classroom narrative and his own self-story. His resultant empowerment allowed him to use Ms. Cisneros to learn more about Harry's habits and needs; he urged other students to engage with Harry (he was seen to direct students to add their names to the read-a-book-to-Harry sign-up sheet); and he consistently received Harry in the morning when he arrived in school.

While the paradigmatic narrative operating within a classroom can be powerful and far-reaching, it is also continually subject to influences (other narratives) that students encounter outside of their school day. The ways in which students resolve the tension between competing influences, or utilize those that complement the classroom narrative, are many, varied, and admittedly not easily known. But research has also shown that the "community" narrative affords the best possible opportunity for diversity to flourish within a setting, so that however students manage those outside influences, the community focus provides those fundamental tools for students to understand and appreciate the diverse learning experiences brought by their peers. Within this focus, specific instructional practices whether it is differentiated instruction or "narrativizing" can offer those additional resources for students by which they learn to successfully integrate their self-stories with the classroom paradigmatic narrative.

New Directions

I will end this chapter by a brief appraisal of the limitations of this study followed by questions that might be suitable for future research.

Limitations of this study

Firstly, the sample of students that constituted the main participants in this study was small: 17 students in the first grade classroom and 22 students at the High School. It might be legitimate to point out that these numbers prohibit generalization of the findings to other settings, e.g. other first grade classrooms and/or other High schools. One certainly cannot extrapolate from this study that *these* are the only ways of making sense of severe disability that operate in most first grade classrooms or in most High schools. They were particular to these specific contexts in which they emerged. Further, given the size of Truman High school, the narratives of the 22 students who were interviewed might not be representative of the variety and complexity of student perceptions of severe disability. This issue of generalizability (addressed in Chapter 3) reflects the methodological approach of qualitative research in general and is not restricted to this study.

Secondly, given that the focus of the study within the High School was to interview students in Michael's classrooms, less information was generated about student culture(s) within this setting, the educational philosophy of the building administrators and staff members, and the relations between general education and special education staff members. Consequently, while there was clearly a paradigmatic narrative about a standardized student that emerged within this building, it was less clear if there were

other competing/reinforcing narratives that operated within this school. Such information might have deepened the context within which student narratives about severe disability could be understood.

It might also be important to point out that the absence of useful data on Harry's relationships with his siblings and/or other peers from contexts outside school though not strictly a limitation renders the findings of the study incomplete. Were there other patterns of relations that characterized those settings? How did this influence the ways that Harry was able to express himself? What was the dominant narrative that pervaded those contexts? How did his social partners in those settings utilize this narrative to understand Harry? Such information might have deepened the analysis of his participation and that of his peers at school, simultaneously generating additional knowledge for creating supportive contexts of practice for them.

Questions for future research

Leading from the above, some ways that future research can build on this study are suggested in the questions listed below.

1. What kinds of relations exist between Harry (or any other significantly disabled student) and other members of his community (other peers and adults)? How do those relations carve out the nature of his participation within those contexts of practice? In what ways can such information be utilized to influence educational contexts?
2. What does "narrativizing" mean in classroom practice? In what ways does "narrativizing" as a tool for understanding and building relations with students

with significant disabilities alter the participation of peers as well as the disabled student? Can “narrativizing” as a tool for peers work for students with less significant but moderate disabilities without compromising rather than facilitating the emergence of their agency? What are the elements of “narrativizing”? How can it be explicated for both staff and students? How can students be instructed in using this tool? What elements of general education can be utilized to “teach” this skill?

3. What are the ways that students in late elementary and middle school inclusive classrooms make sense of significantly disabled students? What elements contextualize those narratives? What are the areas of development that can be identified in student perceptions of and practice with significantly disabled students within inclusive settings?
4. Can the theory that emerged in this study, be utilized, refined, or modified, to understand the ways other particular identities are formed? For example, what are the institutional narratives that families of students with disabilities encounter when they enter the school system? Who develops and maintains those narratives? How does that influence the engagement of families in the process of delivering education to these students?
5. How do siblings understand their roles in relation to the significantly disabled student? How does this influence the larger narrative surrounding the significantly disabled student within a particular setting? What roles do siblings play in the family’s understanding of disability and disability-related systems?

Implications for practice

The study clearly demonstrated that peers play a critical role in ensuring the successful participation of their significantly disabled classmates within the general education classroom. It is also evident that the successful inclusion of students with significant disabilities requires careful consideration of the learning environment provided to *all* students. Students functioning within a climate of mistrust and control experience limited autonomy that affects the ways in which they explore relations among themselves. *All* students are disadvantaged by this. On the other hand, the metaphor of a “family” can generate a community within the classroom that is premised on care and respect for each other. Membership and belonging are the outcomes of practice in these communities making them hospitable to diversity in the learning backgrounds brought by students. Within such environments, students are more likely to take risks in interacting with each other.

How can teachers benefit from the results of the study?

Teachers can create the caring environments in which such risk-taking can occur. They can ensure that *all* students within a classroom have embedded opportunities to interact freely with the significantly disabled included student. Such opportunities should not be restricted to activities designed to foster “socialization” between these students and their peers, such as unstructured moments of play, activities that are “light” on content-area knowledge, or during “specials” (music, PE, etc.). Rather, these opportunities would emerge within the context of a committed focus on assisting the significantly disabled student to access the general education curriculum. Collaboration between special and

regular educators must serve the dual purpose of embedding IEP skills within the general education curriculum and recognizing the ways in which standards and outcomes for *all* students can be made meaningful and appropriate for disabled students as well. It is not enough to embed (“push-in”) specialized services within the general education classroom, it is equally important that the *goals* for those services should be embedded as well. Otherwise, peers will remain disconnected from these experiences.

Teachers who are committed to creating caring environments produce effective classrooms that generate reduced demands for disciplinary measures and increased opportunities for embracing diversity. Such teachers also perceive themselves as effective and continually seek to develop professionally as they encounter new challenges. They experience “motivational displacement” (Noddings, 1992) when they yearn to meet the needs of students with whom they might be less able to communicate successfully. Caring teachers “narrativize” readily about their students, seeing them holistically rather than in terms of skills. They are concerned about the emotional and social well-being of their students as well as the development of skills. They place their explanations of student classroom behavior within the larger context of family events and concerns. They perceive student success as defined not only in terms of meeting academic goals but also in terms of their abilities to relate and work with each other to accomplish mutual goals.

Caring teachers are concerned that students should enjoy the experience of being in the classroom and therefore implement practices that will instill enjoyment in learning. Social interaction between students during classroom activities is freely encouraged. Whole-group instruction is minimized with a greater focus on collaborative activity. Assessment for the sake of generating scores is not a valued activity. While this was not

always evident in the classrooms that were included in this study, caring instruction also implied meeting the diverse needs of students in different ways. Affording *all* students variety in the modes of accessing information and in demonstrating knowledge might have been a more effective method in meeting the needs of not just Harry (or Michael) but also Melissa, Lisa and Jamie. This would be premised on the recognition that different activities for different students can still be generated by the same outcomes for all students.

The role of paraprofessionals in fostering student relations

Though this study did not emphasize this phenomenon in detail, it was clear that paraprofessionals played a significant role in fostering the relations between the disabled students and their peers. It was also evident that their roles were defined differently depending on the age and grade level of the students. Mary Cisneros provided a reassuring background for elementary students to experiment with ways of getting to know Harry. Ginny Jackson's display of "tough love" was more likely to arouse the indignation of Michael's peers. Her practice, however well-intentioned and driven by a deep faith in inclusion, ironically alienated the students further from Michael. Ms. Jackson's situation indicated that in the absence of a cohesive "community of practice" among the special education staff, individual values and beliefs prevailed that compromised the outcomes of efforts to include Michael. It must be inferred then that paraprofessional practice should be conducted under the auspices of a more informed and systematic commitment to the inclusion of significantly disabled students. While paraprofessionals bring their own unique perspectives, they might benefit from

professional development activity that underscored the significance of their own roles in aiding or hindering the goals of inclusion. Unlike Ms. Jackson, Ms. Cisneros' recognition of the importance of other students in guaranteeing Harry's participation left her ready and willing to assist them in different ways that made both her and Harry accessible to them.

Implications for families

Though the focus of this study was the relations that existed between significantly disabled students and their peers, implications for their families may also be inferred from the results. Families can assist peers in making them aware of aspects of a disabled student's identity that might otherwise have little opportunity to reveal itself within the parameters of classroom life. They can bring information of the student's activities and relations outside school. They can offer support to teachers in designing activities for the disabled student in the classroom by sharing their own experiences in getting to "know" him. Indeed, they might offer valuable clues to teachers and classmates about ways to interpret his actions. It is also clear that schools need to take active steps to maintain meaningful contact with families on a regular basis. This becomes especially relevant in a high school setting when there might be little, if any, sustained contact with one teacher during the school day. Families need to be regarded as important resources in the project of increasing participation for disabled students within in the classroom.

The need for systemic reform

While the importance of the learning environment for *all* students has been underscored as an important implication of the results of this study, it carries an assumption that this can happen more readily if understood in terms of systemic reform within schools. The recommendations suggested in the preceding pages equally imply that schools be designed as communities where learning is not understood as flowing from the teacher to the student and where students are conceived as actively engaged in the process of determining how and what they learn. Creating supports within the system for individual learners to effectively utilize their unique styles and differences involves rethinking the ways in which general education and specialized instruction are offered to them. The process of diagnosing and labeling students might guarantee that students receive certain supports but it simultaneously creates a tiered system of values in school that can interfere with the important goals of membership and the forms of participation that it engenders. Instead, envisioning all participants—families, students, teachers and administrators—as a “community of learners” can offer newer ways to practice relations between them. For example, the role of families may be understood as extending beyond fund-raising ventures and holding celebrations to serving as important resources in furthering the curricula used in schools. As students work with culturally skilled members of their communities—adults in varied roles—they are actively enculturated into a larger sense of community where diversity is a form of practice rather than just the qualities brought by specific individuals.

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Appendix: Interview Guides

Questions for parents:

- Tell me a little about your self, your family, how did you happen to be in this school district?
- Describe your child to me. (A variety of follow-up questions may be used here to seek additional detail. These follow-ups might use some of the following formats:
If you had to choose three words that best describe you child, what would they be? What makes him/her happy? What makes him/her sad? What does he/she find funny or frightening? Can you tell me a story that illustrates what you mean?)
- What are some of the stories (you might think of them as snapshots) about your lives together that stand out in your mind as unforgettable?
- What school activities/situations does he/she seem to engage with/like the most?
What kinds of school activities does he/she particularly dislike?
- How would you describe your relations with the school community (teachers/administrators/other parents/etc.)? Can you share some memorable moments?
- Who are the people outside of school with whom your child has relationships?
What kinds of activities do they share together?
- What is a typical week-day or week-end like for him/her?

Questions for secondary students:

- Talk to me a little about the other students in your class? Who would you say you know best in class? Who do you know least? How would you describe your relationships with your classmates?
- Talk to me a little about (the student with the disability). What kind of interactions have you had with him/her? How and when did you first meet him/her?
- In what situations have you interacted with him? In the classroom? Outside the classroom? Can you give me some examples of these situations?
- What are some of your own favorite activities in school? Does he/she participate in any of them?

Questions for teachers:

- Describe your career as a teacher to me. How long have you been teaching? What sorts of settings have you taught in? What are some important goals for yourself as a teacher that you try to implement in your daily practice?
- Describe your classroom community. What expectations do you hold of yourself and the other students in maintaining this community?
- Describe (the disabled student) to me. Who is he? What do you know about him? What kinds of activities does he seem to enjoy? What does he seem to fear or dislike the most? Who are the children or adults with whom he seems to be most responsive?

- What does “successfully included” mean to you? What kinds of evidence would you look for? How does that apply specifically to (the disabled student)?
- What has been your biggest challenge in making this inclusionary process a successful one? Can you describe some events/share some stories that illustrate what you mean?
- What/who have been your biggest sources of help or support in this process?
- What stories do you hear from your students about (the disabled student)?
- What stories do you hear about (the disabled student) from other staff members in school?
- How would you describe your relations with the family of (the disabled student)? Can you share some anecdotes about any particular event/interaction? What stories do you hear from them about their child?