Opportunity and access for children with disabilities in the inclusive preschool classroom

Jodi Meyer-Mork

University of Northern Iowa

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OPPORTUNITY AND ACCESS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES
IN THE INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM

A Dissertation
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved:

Linda May Fitzgerald, Chair
Dr. Christopher Kliewer, Committee Member
Dr. Rebecca Edmiaston, Committee Member
Dr. Roberta Davilla, Committee Member
Dr. Katheryn East, Committee Member

Jodi Meyer-Mork
University of Northern Iowa
December 2005
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Dr. Susan Koch
Dean of the Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

In this qualitative case study, I investigated how one teacher provided opportunity and access to full classroom participation for children with disabilities in the inclusive preschool classroom over two academic years. The site was a state-funded preschool program for children considered at risk for school failure. The principle participants included a preschool teacher with more than 22 years of experience and ten preschoolers identified with mild to moderate disabilities. In this naturalistic inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), data were collected through participant observation over two academic years. Primary data sources included descriptive and analytic field notes as well as formal and informal interviews. The data were analyzed using the constant-comparative procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 2003). Triangulation of the data occurred through extended time in the field, multiple data sources, member checking, and peer debriefing. The theoretical basis for this study included the socio-cultural approaches as articulated by Vygotsky (1978), Rogoff (2003), and Lave and Wenger (1991).

Findings of the study indicated the classroom context, the opportunities that children with disabilities had for participation in the classroom, and the ways in which the preschool teacher guided participation were important to provide access to classroom membership. The classroom context was influenced by the teacher’s background experiences, long-range vision for children’s learning, and the roles she fulfilled through her teaching. The classroom context included the purposeful arrangement of the learning environment and attention to the temporal aspects in the classroom to assist children in meeting their learning goals. Children with disabilities had similar opportunities for
participation as their non-disabled peers. The teacher guided children’s actions and understanding in five areas: relationships with peers, sharing of responsibility, choices in participation, teacher framing of children’s actions, and access to an embedded, child-relevant curriculum. The teacher guided children’s participation over time through responsively assisting them to become more independent in their communication and in following classroom routines. Through the teacher’s guidance, children with disabilities achieved greater participation within the classroom community. Implications are provided for personnel who work with children identified with disabilities, and for those who prepare such personnel.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I want to thank the classroom teacher who warmly welcomed me into her classroom for two years. From her I learned much about young children, inclusive teaching, and the importance of relationships in learning. She will influence my own teaching and learning for years to come.

Finally, my family offered me encouragement throughout the twists and turns in this journey. My husband, through his humor and words of wisdom, kept me going through the long hours of writing.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Research Problem

In this study, I investigated the opportunities for children identified with disabilities in one inclusive preschool classroom. In addition, I was interested in how the teacher helped children access these opportunities through the support she provided. In establishing the context for my study, I briefly describe the legislation that has influenced education for children with disabilities and provided them access to the public education system. Then I present background information on the socio-cultural approach, as it addresses the social, historical, and institutional contexts that influence development. I follow that with a description of preschool opportunities for young children with disabilities, and finally, I consider the ideas of inclusion and citizenship for children with disabilities.

In 1975, the original version of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 (IDEA) became law. Through its mandates, and subsequent amendments, the IDEA guaranteed a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for all individuals birth to age 21 who are identified with a disability (services for children birth through 5 are provided at the discretion of the states). The law intends that these identified or entitled individuals (EI) be educated with their non-disabled peers in what is known as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Only when “education in the regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (Assistance to the States for the Education of Children with Disabilities, 2000) are
segregated educational settings allowed. The LRE for any child identified as eligible for special education is based on his or her needs and may result in placement in various early childhood settings, general education rooms, resource (pull-out) programs, segregated classes, or separate facilities. Although not found in the IDEA, different terms illustrate how the concept of LRE has evolved. Rogers (1993) describes these as:

1. **Mainstreaming** involves the “selective placement of special education students in one or more ‘regular’ education classes,” with a student having to “‘earn’ his or her opportunity to be mainstreamed” by performing the same work as the other students in the class. In mainstreaming, the child with disabilities goes where the services are offered and have to “keep up” with the class (p. 4).

2. **Inclusion** refers “to the commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend.” The criteria is that the child would benefit from being with the other students (p. 5).

3. **Full inclusion** primarily refers “to the belief that instructional practices and technological supports are presently available to accommodate all students in the schools and classrooms they would otherwise attend if not disabled.” Special education services are generally “delivered in the form of training and technical assistance to ‘regular’ classroom teachers” (p. 5).

As defined by Rogers, these terms describe the changing ideas about rights for children with disabilities to access the opportunities of their general class peers. Currently, special education is viewed as a service that can take place in multiple settings, ideally with the entitled child being educated with general education peers. Children do not need to earn
the right to participate in the general education classroom. The ideal is that schools accommodate the diverse abilities of children, rather than children having to be ready for the classroom.

However, are schools ready to educate young eligible children? Overall, in the United States, the numbers of young children identified with disabilities continue to rise, and do so at percentage rates that have increased from 1992 to 2000 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In 1998-1999, approximately 36% of children with disabilities, ages 3 to 5, were educated in early childhood settings. The percentage of children who received their education in segregated classes or facilities was approximately 47%, while the remaining percentage received services in home-based programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). If children with disabilities are educated in self-contained early childhood special education settings, then such children experience an education with decreased opportunities to participate with typically developing peers in contexts and curricula assumed to be appropriate and desirable for young children. The cultural experiences one participates in influence development (Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, & Mosier, 1993). By not being educated with typically developing peers, these young children experience further barriers in joining their peers and in participating in future cultural activities. To provide background for the rest of the study, I describe the socio-cultural approach and how participation within activities valued by one's culture is fundamental to the development of the knowledge and skills needed for participation in that culture.
The Socio-cultural Approach to Development

The socio-cultural approach is founded in the work of Vygotsky (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996). According to Wertsch (1992), it “focuses on the institutional, cultural, and historical specificity of mental functioning rather than on universals” (p. 112). An overarching principle of this theory is that learning has its foundation in the human interactions in which the tools and artifacts of one’s culture are present. According to Vygotsky, higher mental functions, such as selective memory and deliberate attention, develop in interactions between the learner and someone more advanced in the skill. Vygotsky (1981) stated,

Any function in the child’s cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First, it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First, it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. (p. 163)

Vygotsky further stated that this internalization is a long developmental process and requires the use of signs and language to occur. Vygotsky highlighted the role of others in effecting one’s learning. Learning results as a learner interacts with others in the environment, and certain conditions must be present for optimal learning to occur.

To be effective, instruction must occur in the learner’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a hypothetical “region of sensitivity to instruction” (Wood & Middleton, 1975, p. 181). It exists between the actual level of development and the level of potential development (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 84-85). The actual level is represented through what the child can perform independently, while the assisted level of performance is what the child can accomplish with help from another. For instruction to be effective, the teacher must be sensitive to the child’s level of understanding so that
teaching is within the ZPD. If instruction is targeted too low, information already mastered is elicited, and the child is not challenged to further his or her learning. If instruction is directed too high, the child may become frustrated, and optimal learning does not occur. When the child learns something new, this results in both the actual and potential levels of development of the ZPD being raised. Learning is not an accumulation of knowledge or skills but results in a qualitative change in thinking (Vygotsky, 1978). This view of learning contrasts with a vision in which students accumulate skills that are then used to make decisions about placement for students with disabilities. Vygotsky believed “good teaching” occurs when it “awakens and rouses to life those functions which are in a stage of maturing, which lie in the zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1956, p. 278, italics in original, as quoted in Rogoff & Wertsch, 1984, p. 3).

Instruction in the ZPD requires successive adjustments in interactions, or the establishment of intersubjectivity, as the teacher “scaffolds” (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) or assists the child to achieve a new level of understanding. Assistance is temporary and external but mediates the student’s activity until he or she can perform independently. Mediation may occur through verbal means such as questions or directives, and non-verbal means such as modeling (Tharpe & Gallimore, 1988). When a teacher instructs within the ZPD, he or she demonstrates a belief that the child can perform at a higher level and anticipates the learner’s competence (Ellis, Larkin, & Worthington, n.d.; Palinscar, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). Teaching within the ZPD is dependent on the teacher and student establishing intersubjectivity, or mutual
understanding of the goal; if the teacher is not responsive to the child’s understanding of
the task, the teacher will not teach at the level for the child’s optimal learning to occur.

Vygotsky describes the basis of learning as being within the social context,
including adult-child interactions, and provides explanation of learning within the ZPD.
His ideas are foundational to other articulations of this approach such as guided
participation (Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, & Mosier, 1993) and
legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which acknowledge the
various ways in which children and adults jointly structure participation for learning in
cultural activities. Each of these articulations further details the role of personal
interactions that result in learning.

Guided Participation

Rogoff (2003), in her concept of guided participation, envisions human
development as transformation of people’s participation in ongoing socio-cultural
activities, which themselves change with the involvement of the individual in successive
generations (p. 42). A change in participation within one’s setting is evidence of learning
and development. “From the perspective that development occurs in participation in
shared socio-cultural activities, it is clear that children play actively central roles, along
with their elders and other companions, in learning and extending the ways of their
communities” (p. 285).

Guided participation, as in Vygotskian theory, involves coordinating efforts
between the learner and his or her social partners, which may be peers or adults in the
community. This joint activity includes interactions that are explicitly instructional, as
well as informal ways in which children learn in their everyday lives. Children, as well as their social partners, are active collaborators in learning and further develop their community practices. "Guided participation provides a perspective to help us focus on the varied ways that children learn as they participate in and are guided by the values and practices of their cultural communities" (Rogoff, 2003, pp. 283-284, italics in original).

These "varied ways" are basic processes of guided participation and fall into two broad categories that appear throughout the world: mutual bridging of meaning, and mutual structuring of participation (Rogoff, 2003). Mutual bridging of meaning involves partners negotiating a common understanding in order to synchronize their efforts toward problem solving. This occurs between partners, not within one person or the other. Each partner adjusts his or her perspective based on prior communication, creating ever greater understanding (Wertsch, 1984). This involves both verbal and nonverbal communication.

Another worldwide form of guided participation is mutual structuring of participation. This occurs as children and their caregivers structure the situations (contexts) in which children engage (Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Rogoff et al., 1993). The selections of opportunities in which children observe and participate are numerous, with examples including conversations, interacting with cultural narratives, practicing school questions, and involvement in routines and roles. For example, in the U.S., parents of young children typically ask questions with known answers; this question type is also predominantly found in U.S. schools, and assists children in preparing for learning in U.S. educational institutions (Rogoff, 2003). These mutual structures and the resulting
guided practice are influenced by caregivers, community practices, and children’s decisions whether to participate. Although these are present throughout the world, they take on specific forms in any given culture.

The basis of guided participation is that opportunities to participate in cultural activity influence children’s development. If adults exclude children from opportunities, such as conversations about finances, or if children choose not to participate, then children have a different understanding than if they had participated in that specific activity. Another articulation of the socio-cultural approach is legitimate peripheral participation.

**Legitimate Peripheral Participation**

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), development is one’s moving from peripheral to full participation in a community of practice. They liken this to an apprenticeship in that the child or learner initially performs part of the task that is organized by the adult, who assists the child as needed to complete the task. As in scaffolding, the child increasingly takes more responsibility for completing the task, until he or she can do it independently. Throughout this process, the child moves from legitimate peripheral participation toward full participation as the child becomes independent in performing the task. Motivation for doing the task occurs through its being relevant in that particular culture.

Lave and Wenger (1991) specifically address issues of power in legitimate peripheral participation. The manner in which power relationships are enacted is critical to whether one moves toward more involved participation, an empowered position, or
whether one is impeded from participating more fully, even if this appears legitimate in the eyes of society (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 36). Inherent in the idea of power is the access to resources. For instance, if the teacher withholds essential resources or cultural tools (knowledge, material instruments, or goods), the apprentice cannot complete the task and is prevented from moving toward full participation. Kliewer (1998a, 1998c) and Kliewer & Landis (1999) illustrate this. The authors found educational practices for young children with disabilities are based on the belief that such children are unlikely candidates for literacy; they are seen as incapable of “climbing the ladder to literacy” (Kliewer & Landis, 1999) and completing the subskills commonly accepted as needed for reading and writing. That children with disabilities are incapable of literacy is an accepted belief in U.S. society and disempowers individuals with disabilities. Based on this belief, some teachers in these studies did not provide opportunities for such children to look at books, listen to stories, or to be exposed to print or the act of writing. Without access to the material and procedural resources of literacy, teachers precluded, or at least greatly reduced the likelihood that children with disabilities would become literate, which sustained the disempowering view of children with disabilities as illiterate and prevented their movement toward fuller participation in the literate community.

In the socio-cultural approach, adults assist children’s learning in literacy or other cultural activities. The processes in which adults assist children to participate in society and the idea of power in interpersonal relationships influence children’s development. An important factor in learning and development is that the social partners must establish intersubjectivity regarding the task. When adults provide the opportunities for children to
learn in the activities in which they are expected to participate, the adults empower children or allow them entry into society.

**Intersubjectivity and Its Role in Learning**

In order to communicate, one presumes intersubjectivity, or “the sharing of purpose and focus among individuals” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 9). According to Rogoff, intersubjectivity is a process that involves cognitive, social, and emotional interchange. The people involved must adjust their views and negotiate a common understanding of the task or situation. The initial difference in views is necessary for learning to occur as this provides the impetus for forming a new view. Rogoff comments,

> As Vygotsky (1987) points out, intersubjectivity provides the grounds for communication and at the same time supports the extension of children’s understanding to new information and activities, as communication of an experience or idea requires relating it to a known class of phenomena, thereby generalizing the phenomenon in order to communicate. (p.72)

Rommetveit (1979) maintains inference and mutual trust are foundational to intersubjectivity. Inference is one’s forming an understanding of the speaker’s intended message. This is influenced by mutual trust, or an affective dynamic of the relationship between the speakers, and involves aspects of authority and power, such as in “power plays” between a parent and child, when the child attempts to demonstrate his or her competencies (Verdonik, Flapan, Schmit, & Weinstock, 1988). The success of scaffolding or the learning interaction is influenced by agreement on who is delineating and leading the activity (Verdonik et al., 1988).

The establishment of intersubjectivity also occurs through non-verbal means, such as eye gazes, gestures, pauses, and teacher manner (Roehler & Cantlon, 1996; Rogoff,
1990, 2003; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). For instance, when collaborating on a puzzle, a parent may note a child’s expression and actions, signaling he is frustrated in finding the correct piece. As a result, the parent offers a child two pieces, one of which is the correct piece, and reduces the child’s frustration. Children may read adult actions also. For example, a child who is fidgeting in his or her chair interprets the adult’s raised eyebrows and pursed lips as a message to pay attention or listen. Throughout the communication process, the teacher and student use both verbal and non-verbal means to come to a shared understanding about what is to be learned. Intersubjectivity about the task is an important concept in learning, whether for non-disabled or disabled children. In the following section, I describe the beginning of federal services for preschool children and briefly illustrate the types of curricular opportunities and possible relationships between teachers and young children.

**Preschool Opportunities for Children with Disabilities**

Prior to the passage of laws mandating educational opportunities for individuals with disabilities, children with disabilities were often excluded from public education or were segregated from the social and/or academic opportunities. If such children were educated in general education settings, peers and adults alike often shunned them, limiting their access to social and curricular opportunities offered to children without disabilities. In the 1950s, preschool children with sensory or physical disabilities had special programs to attend, but if a child experienced a “hidden disability” and exhibited needs that did not match the program, the child likely did not receive preschool education (Johnson & Carr, 1996). In 1965, the establishment of Head Start offered educational opportunities for children with disabilities.
opportunity to economically disadvantaged children. Although a percentage of Head
Start placements were reserved for children with disabilities, it was not until 1975 that
these children received federally assured education. In 1975, P.L. 94-142 (Education for
All Handicapped Children Act) guaranteed a free, appropriate, public education for any
child, aged 6 to 21 (children aged 3 to 5 could be served at each state's discretion),
identified with a disability.

Today, as in the past, different curricular approaches, which vary in philosophy,
interpersonal interactions, and academic focus, are found in early childhood. These fall
along a continuum from **didactic** (Katz, 1999), which emphasizes academic skills and
controlled, if not negative social climates, to **child-centered**, which provide a supportive
emotional and social climate (Stipek et al. 1998). The nature of the curriculum influences
the classroom contexts or culture in which children are educated, resulting in different
social interactions among adults and children and among children themselves.

Each type of curriculum approach can be characterized by different adult-child
relationships. The adult-child relationship in didactic models typically is heteronomous,
in which the adult exerts coercive power over the child, and the child is expected to
follow the rules made by others (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Piaget, 1932/1965). Sometimes
the external control of a heteronomous relationship is necessary such as in issues of child
health and safety. However, when adults manage every detail of children's lives,
children learn to submit to others' rules and beliefs with little opportunity to question
these and develop their own set of rules and beliefs. In contrast is the autonomous
relationship found in child-centered programs. These adult-child relationships are
characterized by mutual respect and cooperation between social partners (DeVries, Zan, Reese-Learned & Morgan, 1991). Curricular approaches such as functional curriculum, direct instruction and developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1993) are described next.

Functional curriculum (Bailey & Wolery, 1984; Cook, Tessier, & Klein, 1992) and direct instruction (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966) are primarily didactic in nature. Functional curriculum was developed to help teachers facilitate the child's acquisition of skills that would help her or him succeed in the present or subsequent environment (Bailey & Wolery, 1984; Cook, Tessier, & Klein, 1992). This functional curriculum has a deficit orientation, in which the child is perceived as missing or not having enough of something, and then actions would be taken to remediate the deficit (Johnson & Carr, 1996). This orientation may result in limited exposure to general curriculum and further limits what a child may learn.

Direct instruction programs, such as Distar (Distar™ Orientation, 1971) are based on strict stimulus-response sequences rooted in the behaviorist tradition. These programs were developed to help disadvantaged (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966) preschool and elementary children and those who “have traditionally had difficulty learning” (Larsen, 1971). Direct instruction curricula consist of predetermined hierarchies of behavioral objectives or subskills focused on developing academic skills, in which the teacher is to “adhere to a rigid repetitive presentation pattern” (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966, p. 111) and limit work with an individual child during group instruction to 30 seconds (p. 113). The Distar (Distar™ Orientation, 1971) manual states that the child’s
“readiness is not taken for granted” (p. 1) and that the teacher’s job is to “make sure [the child] is taught every prerequisite skill in a subject before he is introduced to more complex skills in that subject” (Distar™ Orientation, 1971, p. 1). If children fail to perform at one level of the hierarchy, they are denied opportunities to advance until they master the prerequisite skills, because it is believed that they are unable to do the more advanced skill or to benefit from the instruction. Children with disabilities who do not progress in such curricula have little chance of making their way into the general education classroom (Kliewer & Landis, 1999; Ryndak, Morrison, & Sommerstein, 1999).

Functional and direct instruction curricula are examples of approaches designed to remediate perceived deficits in children. However, DeVries and Zan (1994) suggest that characteristics of such instruction, such as reciting correct information and responding only to teacher cuing, reduces children’s curiosity, resulting in “intellectual dullness” and “knowledge full of misunderstanding” (p. 49). Longitudinal studies of children who were taught using direct instruction during preschool show mixed results. Although these children achieved better in the early years of school, they lost the academic gains by mid-to-late elementary grades (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). These findings are supported through studies on instructional variables in early childhood classrooms. In classrooms where teachers emphasized pre-academics and predominantly used worksheets for teaching skills, children had minimal opportunities for making choices and decisions; these characteristics are consistent with the direct instruction approach, and found to create higher levels of child stress (Burts, 1992).
The curriculum approach generally considered to be at the other end of the continuum from direct instruction is developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (Bredekamp, 1993). This approach is based upon constructivist principles (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). In this approach, children are believed to construct their own knowledge through interaction with other people, adults or peers, and the environment. Children are the focus of learning and are seen as unique beings that actively construct knowledge and develop skills through experimentations in the environment. Development is considered unique to an individual child, reflecting his or her learning style, temperament, and family background (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The teacher needs to understand three areas in order to make decisions about DAP: knowledge of child development, such as physical, intellectual, and emotional domains; understanding of each child’s needs, strengths, and interests; and an understanding of the child’s social and cultural background in order to make practice relevant and respectful (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Unlike direct instruction models, the children in DAP programs have ample time to explore interests (Davis, 1993) in stimulating environments (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). DAP is seen as appropriate for children with disabilities if its interpretation allows for adaptations to meet these children’s needs (Bredekamp, 1993; Edmiaston, Dolezal, Doolittle, Erickson, & Merritt, 2000; Wolery & Bredekamp, 1994). In DAP, the role of community is stressed as relationships are integral to children, parents, and teachers achieving their fullest potential (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Living in a community requires children to learn relationship skills such as conflict negotiation and perspective taking. Conflict is viewed as part of living in a
community and is important to children's growth (DeVries & Zan, 1994). Conflict exists in two forms, *intraindividual* and *interindividual*, in the constructivist approach as explained by Piaget (DeVries & Zan, 1994). Intraindividual conflict occurs within the child. An example of such is a child discovering that some but not all items produce bubbles when submerged in water, which leads the child to explore causal relationships between object properties and water. Interindividual conflict occurs between individuals and can encourage intellectual, as well as moral, development by creating the context for decentering, in which a child looks beyond his or her own perspective and considers that of another. Conflict is seen as a necessary part of development among constructivist teachers.

Consistent with the idea of DAP, but in opposition to direct instruction models, is *emergent curriculum*, which continuously evolves in response to children's and teachers' interests, availability of resources, and developmental tasks desired (Jones & Nimmo, 1994). Emergent curriculum is not viewed as ideas in presented linear succession but as a dynamic process, which is constantly revised (Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1993). This curriculum approach is amenable to collaboration of children, teachers, and parents as they work together to change the environment and devise strategies. This approach to curriculum is advocated as being appropriate for students with special needs (Armstrong, 2000; Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1993; Johnson & Carr, 1996). Early childhood environments that have successfully included young children with disabilities have used emergent curriculum and DAP (Edmiaston & Fitzgerald, 2000; Fu, Stremmel, & Hill, 2002; Kliewer et al., 2004; Palsha, 2002; Phillips, 2001).
Inclusion and Citizenship

The IDEA does not define inclusion, but through the LRE provision, it mandates that children be educated in the general education classroom when appropriate for the learner. Different interpretations of inclusion and citizenship exist. The decision of Oberti v. Board of Education (1992) states, “The goal of the IDEA is realized when a child with a disability can become included, accepted, and respected as a full member of a regular class, and is no longer seen as an outsider” (p. 1329). Inclusion speaks to creating an environment where each individual is valued and feels connected to the community. In Creating an Inclusive School, Falvey, Givner, & Kimm, (1995) give a “Pragmatic Definition of Inclusion,”

[Inclusion] is an attitude -- a value and belief system -- not an action or set of actions...[It involves] embracing all, making a commitment to do whatever it takes to provide each student in the community -- and each citizen in a democracy -- an inalienable right to belong, not be excluded. Inclusion assumes that living and learning together is a better way that benefits everyone, not just children labeled as having a difference....An inclusive school values interdependence and independence...[It] views each child as gifted and focuses on how to support the special gifts and needs of each and every student in the school community to feel welcomed and secure and successful. (pp. 6-11)

Kliwer (1998c) describes various images of the citizenship of children with disabilities based on society’s interpretation of disability and value of such students in the wider school community. The alien image reflects a view of children with disabilities as defective, with educational needs outside the norm for non-disabled students. Considered a burden to the community, they are segregated from the wider school community. A second image, the squatter, is included in the physical space of the classroom, based on the democratic right of all people to participate in the community; however, a defect
orientation still underlies this orientation and creates a squatter who is positioned at the margins of the classroom community. Both the alien and the squatter are denied access to opportunities that are available to their non-disabled peers. A third image, the citizen, is valued as a human being and school participation is viewed as “an ever-shifting web of relationships among all members of a community” (p. 12). Similar to Rogoff’s idea that development results from participation in the community, Kliewer views development not as a condition for acceptance but rather community acceptance as vital to development. Community provides the basis for human possibilities and capacities to be realized. Kliewer defines citizenship as “an ongoing realization of each individual’s value to the larger group” (p. 12). In this paper, I use these ideas of inclusion as a value when I speak of membership and participation: the right of each person to belong in the community and the development of the individual as well as the group.

Relevance of This Study

My aim was to use qualitative methods to study the context of an inclusive preschool class to investigate the practices of the teacher. Young children with disabilities still are often educated in separate classrooms or programs, away from social and curricular opportunities generally accepted for typically developing children. My hope is that this study will add information on how teachers can successfully teach children with varying abilities, including “dis-abilities,” along with their non-disabled peers by creating a context where children with disabilities move toward full participation in the life of the classroom community and where learning is real and purposeful.
Research Questions

I developed the following research questions to guide me in this study:

How does one teacher provide opportunities and access to full classroom participation for children identified with disabilities in the inclusive preschool?

A. What is the classroom context in the inclusive preschool?

B. How are children with disabilities given opportunities to participate?

C. What does the preschool teacher do to guide participation and provide access to class membership?
CHAPTER II
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this qualitative case study, I explored the opportunities and access provided in the inclusive preschool classroom for children with disabilities. Specifically, I was interested in how the teacher’s actions supported or denied the classroom citizenship of children with disabilities. In this chapter, I review the literature in three areas: (a) the types of assistance offered to young children in learning; (b) the varieties of classroom contexts, with an emphasis on young children considered at-risk and adult-child relationships; and (c) literature on children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Types of Assistance

Development in the socio-cultural approach occurs as a child participates in joint activity that is guided by others (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Adults and other social partners assist the child’s development through various forms of guidance. Two forms of guidance are scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), and apprenticeship (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). However, these two forms are encased in the two overarching processes in which children and their social partners collaborate: mutual bridging and mutual structuring of children’s participation in cultural activities (Rogoff, 1990, 2003).

Mutual bridging, as presented in Chapter I, involves the child and the social partner arriving at a shared understanding of the task (Rogoff, 1990, 2003) in which the adult assists the child in using his or her present understanding and skills to move to a more advanced understanding. Mutual structuring of participation occurs as adults make
decisions about experiences in which the child should be involved, and the child makes choices about whether to be involved in those experiences. Social partners support a child’s development through structured instruction but also through the activities in which the child is allowed to participate and observe. The child and the social partner structure each other’s participation. Social resources provide guidance and challenge for children as they assume increasingly skilled roles in their community (Rogoff, 1990). Both mutual bridging and structuring of participation are dependent on the process of intersubjectivity, or “a sharing of focus and purpose between children and their more skilled partners and their challenging and exploring peers” (Rogoff, 1990). These processes of guided participation encompass situations that are explicitly instructional as well as those that are not. In this literature review, I present studies conducted within clinical and educational settings that specifically address scaffolding and teaching dialogues.

Scaffolding is a process in which adults or others assist children. Scaffolding was initially studied in mother-child interactions and then in tutor-tutee interactions. In mother-child rituals of book reading, mothers were found to talk at a level of complexity that children understood but at a level beyond what the children could generate independently (Brown, 1977). These interactions helped children "master new meanings in context" and “better understand what language is about and what it can do" (Bruner, 1986, p. 77). Bruner suggested Vygotsky would have thought “the mother was providing an opportunity for the child to achieve his own consciousness" (p. 77) by borrowing the mother’s speech until he could use his own.
Setting the task of assembling pyramids of wooden blocks, Wood and Middleton (1975) found that mothers facilitated problem solving by keeping the children in a "region of sensitivity to instruction" (p. 181) or Zone of Proximal Development. Mothers who adjusted their prompts to the child's previous response were more successful in assisting the child with making the pyramid. The authors stated the crucial result of the study was "[the mothers'] instructions and suggestions should fit within the child's present interests and abilities; they must be geared to his prevailing needs and not administered without due regard to his reactions" (p. 189). This finding supported the authors' contention that human development is essentially social and interactive.

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) studied tutor-tutee interactions. Ross taught 3- to 5-year old children to assemble a pyramid of blocks, which was outside their actual or independent developmental level but inside their ZPD. Ross' goal was to "allow the child to do as much as possible for himself" by letting the child pace the task as appropriate in a manner that was "gentle and appreciated" the child (p. 92). Ross became the "consciencess for two" and "controlled the focus of attention" (p. 75) through her presentation of the task. With Ross' support, children were able to accomplish what they had been unable to do on their own. As children became more competent and independent in completing the task, Ross reduced her participation in the interactions.

In each of the above studies, the mother or tutor assisted children in doing what they were unable to do on their own. The adult adjusted his or her communication based on the child's response in order to assist the child in understanding the task. Adjusting perspectives of the child and adult is critical to arrive at greater understanding of the task.
(Wertsch, 1984). The interaction with the adults provided the challenge needed to move children to greater understanding and independence in achieving the task.

If this mutual structuring and bridging are not achieved, then optimal learning may not occur. In a replication of the wooden pyramid assembly task, Jamieson (1994) investigated the processes that hearing and deaf mothers used to communicate with their hearing and deaf preschool children during a problem-solving task. Deaf mothers of deaf children demonstrated the same behaviors as hearing mothers of hearing children; they responded to the children's pyramid puzzle-assembly attempts through appropriate semiotic systems, and provided targeted support, which resulted in the children becoming more self-regulating. However, hearing mothers of deaf children were less able to adjust their communication, both verbally and nonverbally, to their children's responses to attain intersubjectivity. Likewise, the children with deafness could not understand their mothers' auditory feedback, which resulted in mothers controlling the interactions more and in children exhibiting less self-regulation and puzzle-construction attempts than in the other two groups.

Each of the above studies was quasi-experimental in nature and was conducted in clinical settings where one adult and one child interacted. Scaffolding also occurs in classrooms, although it differs in terms of the adult-to-child ratio, the types of interactions that may result (call and response or teacher evaluation of comments), the public nature of the interaction, and the time constraints in scaffolding answers for numerous children (Meyer, 1993). Individualizing scaffolding for children is difficult within the classroom. However, the goal of scaffolding remains the same: for the
participants to negotiate meaning through the teacher's guidance of instruction in the learner's ZPD and to shift responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Meyer, 1993). Studies that are more recent have examined scaffolding in the context of classrooms.

Henderson (2001) and Henderson, Many, Wellborn, and Ward (2002) investigated how a preschool teacher’s interactions with her 11 young students, ages 3-, 4-, and 5-years, acted to scaffold their literacy development and to aid their understanding of the preschool classroom experiences. Through analysis of such qualitative data as field notes, interviews, and audio taped dialogue, the teacher was found to scaffold literacy through both the academic (drawing, writing, reading) and contextual (emotional and intellectual) domains. The teacher assisted students to reach new levels of understanding in writing, drawing, or comprehending their environment. She helped students link their current knowledge with new information through her sensitive questioning and verbal prompting of students.

Palinscar (1986) investigated the use of dialogue in teaching comprehension strategies to first-grade students, some of whom had been identified for special education services and as at-risk of school failure. Reciprocal teaching offered a framework for instruction but allowed responsiveness to learners. Analysis of teaching dialogues suggested that teachers who focused instruction, linked student ideas to new knowledge, made the point of instruction explicit to learners, and worded evaluative statements constructively were more likely to prompt higher gains on student post-test measures. Focusing instruction and making the point explicit are examples of structuring
participation, while assisting students in linking known ideas with new knowledge indicates mutual bridging.

**Educational Contexts for Children Considered At-risk, Including With Disabilities**

In the socio-cultural approach, children develop in joint activity with their social partners. Children appropriate the attitudes, values, and knowledge that are practiced in their culture. In the United States, children with disabilities have a history of being educated in environments that differ from those of children without disabilities and that are based on varying philosophies, attitudes, and values regarding education. As a result, children with disabilities learn different knowledge, skills, and dispositions than children in general education classrooms. In this section, I present studies of adult-child relationships in various settings for children considered at risk of school failure and children identified with disabilities as these factors often occur together.

In studies of the socio-moral atmosphere in lower income, kindergarten classrooms, DeVries, Zan, Reese-Learned, and Morgan (1991) and DeVries and Zan (1994) investigated teacher-child and peer relationships in classrooms where teachers used either direct instruction or constructivist approaches. In three different classrooms, the authors observed, video recorded, and then coded instances of teacher-child interactions and of children’s methods of solving problems. In the kindergarten classrooms where teachers used direct instruction approaches, skills were taught in isolation from meaningful context. The children answered questions in unison when cued by the teacher. The teacher was stern and demonstrated authoritarian behaviors such as controlling children’s behavior and demanding certain responses from them. The
children used physical or verbal aggression when trying to negotiate differences with peers, showing lower levels of interpersonal skills. Few child-child conflicts were noted because the teacher control was so great. Continuous regulation by the teacher resulted in few opportunities to demonstrate self-regulation. Interactions in child-child relationships tended to be competitive or negative non-verbal behaviors, such as making faces. Children’s emotional and physical needs such as a child requesting to get a drink were often unmet or denied.

In a second kindergarten classroom, DeVries, Zan, Reese-Learned, and Morgan (1991) observed children taught by a teacher having a constructivist philosophy. In contrast to the direct instruction room, the teacher treated children with respect and invited them to help solve problems in a cooperative manner. Constructivist teachers encouraged children to interact and fostered their problem-solving abilities by asking them their ideas about situations and following through on these when appropriate. Children exercised autonomy through activities such as voting on many decisions affecting the group and working with the teacher to generate rules. Although children experienced more conflicts in this classroom, the children independently used verbal negotiation more often to resolve the conflict than in the direct instruction room. The teacher was characterized as a Mentor and the socio-moral atmosphere as a Community. The results from a third type of kindergarten classroom showed adult-teacher and peer interactions to fall on the continuum between the direct instruction and constructivist classrooms.
The nature of adult-child interactions also affects the frequency with which children with disabilities initiate contact with general education peers and engage in activities. Kliewer (1995) used qualitative methods to explore the language usage of preschool children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Individual children's expressive language encompassed use of speech, typing, gestures, and symbols. Through participant observation in the natural settings, Kliewer studied language usage from the child's view. This was in contrast to adult-determined language for children that resulted in a mixed quality of language intervention for children with disabilities. Children expressed themselves through seven different types of "talks" throughout the day: play, negotiation, excluding, empathic, information, understanding, and rule and challenge talk. Children's language was more complex when teachers were not part of the interaction. When involved in the interaction, teachers tended to guide the child's language toward their own purposes. For those children who needed teacher assistance to communicate, some types of talk such as negotiation and rule and challenge were rarely observed because teachers were unaware of the contexts they needed to foster for such children's participation.

Mahoney and Wheeden (1999) studied engagement of children with disabilities, ages 17 to 71 months, as a function of teacher directiveness. In this clinical study, 49 child-teacher dyads were video taped in each of three interactions: alone, where the child played alone but the adult was present; free play, in which the adult played with the child; and in instruction, in which the teacher worked with the child on a goal selected from the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Each of the interactions rated on two different
measures, the manner in which the teacher interacted with the child, and the child’s engagement with the teacher and specified task. Correlational and regressional analyses were performed, and findings were inconclusive as to teacher directiveness and children’s attention to task. However, more directive behavior by teachers was negatively associated with children’s social initiations. Teacher’s responsiveness to children’s verbal and non-verbal cues was positively associated with children initiating social interactions with the teacher. The authors suggested their findings support the idea that children with disabilities play in developmentally appropriate ways and initiate meaningful interactions with adults who are responsive, or relatively non-directive, to the child. Engagement of the teacher with the child is critical to the child undertaking and engaging in developmental activities.

Wells (1987) contrasted how Rosie, a child with low verbal and developmental abilities in the United Kingdom, was perceived as she interacted with two different teachers in her first year of school. As Rosie worked on making a calendar from a Christmas card of Father Christmas, the first teacher pointed to the skis on Father Christmas’ feet. In asking Rosie about the skis, the teacher posed a series of questions such as: “What are those things?” and “D’you know what they’re called?” (p. 96) to which Rosie responded by shaking her head, looking at the card, and rubbing her eyes. When the teacher prompted Rosie to look at what Father Christmas is skiing down -- “Is it a hill or a mountain?” (p. 97), Rosie answered, “A hill” and said, “Father Christmas” (p.97). The teacher then pursued the naming of the skis and ignored Rosie’s reference to Father Christmas. Rosie appeared to understand little of what the teacher asked during
the exchange while the teacher focused on something that was apparent and meaningful to her but not to Rosie. Later the same day, Rosie read with a second teacher, who responded to an affective comment the child made about a picture of a chimney the book. “I don’t like that one.” “You don’t like it? Why not?” (p. 98) asked the second teacher. Through this exchange, Rosie talked about fire underneath the chimney, the room it kept warm, and whom she liked to cuddle with at home. In this exchange, Rosie was alert, responded to the teacher’s questions, and took the lead in the conversation. Throughout the interaction, the teacher capitalized on a connection Rosie had made with the picture.

Wells made the point,

> When adults are determined at all costs to develop the meaning that they see in the situation, there is little chance of achieving that collaboration in meaning making which is so essential for successful conversation. Also, there is little chance of the child to learn through talking...[Y]oung children need to be helped to participate in conversation, and this means listening in order to discover what meaning they can contribute to the topic and then helping them to sustain and develop it. (p. 100, italics in original)

Rogoff (1990) addressed intersubjectivity as an underlying factor in social-emotional, communicative, and intellectual development; the findings of the above studies substantiate this. Highly directive teachers who are controlling do not allow children to assert their autonomy (DeVries, Zan, Reese-Learned, & Morgan, 1991). Such teachers limit the participation of children with disabilities in some types of interactions because the adult changes the nature of the interaction to fit his or her intent or is unaware of contexts in which children with alternate language (sign, gestures, typing) need assistance (Kliwer, 1995). As Wells (1987) makes clear, teachers who are directive or focus on their own agenda miss opportunities to help their students learn and
develop communicative competence. Teachers who are more responsive to children encourage their autonomy and participation in the classroom community (DeVries, Zan, Reese-Learned, and Morgan, 1991), and foster interaction and engagement in play for children with disabilities (Mahoney & Wheeden, 1999).

**Children in Inclusive Classrooms**

Children who are accepted as members of the classroom community move toward greater participation in that community (Kliwer, 1998a; Kliwer et al., 2004). The following studies present children with disabilities in contexts where the teacher is responsive to the child, expects the child to contribute, and aids the child's understanding to support the child's classroom membership. These studies include those that examine general characteristics of socio-cultural environments as well as those looking at apprenticeship of children with disabilities in academics and changing participation within the community.

Paley (1997) described the development of her kindergarten students as they evolved throughout the year. Paley used observation and tape recorded reflections to develop the portrayal of how one child's interest in the writings of Leo Lionni acted to engage children in sustained projects and dialogue around social issues introduced in the books. Paley also chronicled the changing membership of another child (identified with learning difficulties) whose involvement in the classroom changed as he moved from the periphery of class involvement to greater participation.

Hewett (1999) conducted a study of an early childhood special education teacher and eight 3- and 4-year-old children identified with mild to moderate developmental
delays who received the Extended School Year session in an inclusive early childhood setting. Hewett gathered data through non-participant observation and interviews. The teacher participant retained responsibility for the children even though they interacted with 20 or more children for the major part of the day. Three themes were identified that led to full participation of the children with disabilities: modeling by more advanced peers, teacher intervention to enhance learning or social engagement, and collaboration with the early childhood teachers. Two elements in this study closely resemble that of my study: student population in age and extent of disability, as well as observation of one setting. The teacher in this study had preparation as an early childhood special education teacher; this contrasts with my study in that the teacher is prepared as a preschool and kindergarten teacher.

Blasi and Priestley (1998) described a child’s entrance into their kindergarten classroom and his increasing participation in the classroom community. The child had profound hearing loss and used cued speech for communication. Participant observation was the primary means of data collection. The child’s increasing participation in the classroom was described as he moved from being newcomer to an oldtimer (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Examples of mutual structuring of opportunities were evident in the developing relationships, mediation of communication, and the child’s participation in meaningful activity and routines.

Fu, Stremmel, and Hill (2002) presented observations of two young children: one 3-year-old who was non-verbal and diagnosed with cognitive delays; and a 4-year-old boy diagnosed with autism. Peers interacted with each of the children, respectively, to
scaffold their feeding skills and their participation within the curriculum. The authors noted that the teachers had purposefully planned activities in which the children with disabilities could participate and receive "natural therapy" sessions through interaction with the other students. This study, as well as Hewett's, underscores the fact that inclusion requires planning and the ability of the teachers to recognize and respond to students' needs.

Kliewer (1998a) examined literacy for ten children with Down syndrome, ages 2 through 10, in various inclusive classrooms. Data were gathered over two years through participant observation and interviews. Two conceptions of literacy emerged: first, reading as conformity to a hierarchy of subskills; and second, literacy as constructed within meaningful contexts and through interactions with others. Teachers who viewed literacy as contextual and interactional viewed the children as symbolic beings, and shaped interactions to increase students' communicative participation to create meaningful opportunities for connections with others by using symbols.

Qualitative methods were used in these studies. Two of the studies were longitudinal and depicted children's changing participation in the classroom, suggesting that participation in the community, being supported by sensitive teachers and using symbolic tools, contributed to the children's development. The cited studies depict how different instructional and interpersonal contexts influence the development and participation of children with disabilities in early childhood classrooms. In the following chapter, I present my methodology. As in the majority of studies cited above, qualitative methods will help me illustrate the complexities of the inclusive classroom context.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this qualitative case study, I investigated how one teacher supported the children identified with disabilities to participate in her inclusive preschool classroom. According to Stake (1995), the purpose of a case study is to seek and “understand the complex interrelationships among all that exists” (p.37). By detailing “how things were at a particular place at a particular time” (p. 38), the complexities of the situation and the perceptions of the participants are revealed. The researcher conveys the experience to the reader as if he or she had been present, striving to discern the "uniqueness of individual cases and contexts as important to understanding” (Stake, 1995, p. 39).

This methodology, which focuses on interpretations constructed from the data, seemed appropriate for my questions and allowed me to show the complexities within the inclusive preschool classroom. Other researchers have used this method for investigating socio-cultural development (Henderson, 2001; Henderson et al., 2002; Vasconcelos & Walsh, 2001) and young children with disabilities (Hewett, 1999; Kliwer, 1998a, 1998c; Kliwer & Landis, 1999).

Site Selection

The site is an inclusive preschool program purposefully chosen to illuminate the topic being studied. This naturalistic or “real-life” setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) is located in the public school system of a medium-sized city in the Midwestern region of the United States. I gained entrance to this site through my participation in a larger
federally funded study, *Young Children's Citizenship in the Literate Community: Research Into Low Incidence Disability, Development, and Inclusive Early Childhood Programs* (U.S. Department of Education, No. H324D010031), which focused on literacy and classroom citizenship for children with significant disabilities. As a researcher in this larger study, I observed in four early childhood classrooms. I chose to concentrate on this particular preschool classroom because it typified inclusion: children with and without disabilities participating alongside one another in the classroom community.

The inclusive preschool is a state-funded program for 4-year old children considered at-risk for school failure. Children are eligible for the program based on poverty or other risk factors. The preschool program is located in suburban Woodridge Elementary School (all proper names are pseudonyms). Woodridge houses classes for kindergarten through fifth grade, plus one class each for self-contained early childhood special education (ECSE) and English as a second language, in addition to the inclusive preschool classroom. In the second year of the study, the school district moved an additional class for older ECSE students (grades kindergarten and first) into Woodridge. The half-day preschool program being studied has been located in the school building since 1998.

I visited Woodridge personnel and parents to explain the purpose of the study, answer questions, and secure signatures of those interested in participating. I will introduce those participants next.
The Participants

I included those people who shared experiences in the classroom during the two years of the study. The classroom teacher, the speech-language clinician, and one parent were adult participants. The children of the preschool classroom included those who were typically developing, those identified as English language learners, and those identified for speech only or speech and special education services. I acted as a participant observer. Table 1 lists the adult participants and their roles in the research, and Table 2 lists student participants and IEP information. All names listed are pseudonyms. Next, I will describe the participants.

Table 1

Adult Participants, Roles, and Year in the Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Year of Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kate Emerson</td>
<td>Classroom teacher</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Wilson</td>
<td>Paraprofessional</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandi Altman</td>
<td>Speech-language clinician</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise Koontz</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginny Loenser</td>
<td>Student teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teacher, Kate Emerson, holds State licensure as a preschool and kindergarten teacher. She has taught in her present position for 11 years and in early childhood programs for another 11 years previously. Emerson obtained a BA in psychology but did not professionally practice psychology prior to becoming a teacher. Emerson describes herself as a “late-in-life teacher” since she was not interested in teaching until her own children entered school. She became attracted to teaching as she volunteered and then became a paraprofessional in early childhood classrooms while her own children were growing. She was hired as a preschool teacher while completing additional classes from
Table 2

*Child Participants in Each Year of the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Entitled Individual?</th>
<th>Goal Areas on IEP and Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brent</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Articulation, language; attended ECSE in afternoon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Danai</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denish</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kassie</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kenny</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Articulation, Language, added Cognitive and Behavioral; identified for more restrictive placement for kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malcolm</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Articulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Articulation, Language, added Cognitive and Behavioral. Joined the class midway through year. Identified for more restrictive placement for kindergarten.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Entitled Individual</th>
<th>Goal Areas on IEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Braden</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Articulation, Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daria</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emmy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Articulation. Language; moved midway through study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Halle</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Articulation, Language, Cognitive. Attended ECSE in afternoon; moved midway through study.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jerry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jonathon</td>
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<td>Karen</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lonny</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Marco</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tiane</td>
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<td>Articulation, Language</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timmy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Articulation, Language, added Cognitive midyear; moved midway through study.</td>
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</table>
a state university to obtain her current certification. She collaborated with agencies and special education classroom teachers to provide inclusive experiences for children with disabilities since the beginning of her teaching career, although such children have not been in her classroom each year.

Throughout this study, which spanned two successive academic years, Emerson had 15 to 16 children enrolled in her class. As stated earlier, the children were diverse, and eligible for the program because of economic or other factors. The students represented the local school population, including native and non-native English speakers (five the first year and two the second year), six ethnic groups, and children who qualified for speech and special education services. In each year of the study, 10 students qualified for speech services based on the preschool screening assessment. In response to this, Emerson and the speech-language clinician collaborated to provide whole-class instruction in the classroom instead of providing therapy to all the individuals in small groups. The children who entered preschool with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) that already included speech goals participated in the whole-class instruction, as well as in small group meetings with the speech-language clinician. In the second year of the study, Emerson advocated on behalf of the students who were non-native speakers, resulting in the English as a Second Language teacher joining the classroom for 20 minutes daily to help with instruction during small group time.

Throughout the study, I focused on 10 students identified as Entitled Individuals (EI) who received special education services according to the State guidelines for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. These students either entered the program as
EI or qualified as such during their year with Emerson. The students' verbal abilities ranged from single words and phrases to full sentences, and included mild to moderate speech impediments. According to the speech-language clinician, the targeted children lacked experiences such as being read to, listening to and engaging in conversation, and visiting local attractions that could act as catalysts to develop vocabulary and verbal fluency. Without these as a foundation, the children were at a disadvantage in language and literacy learning.

All of the 10 eligible students whom I followed received small group speech services, but some also had additional behavioral and/or learning needs listed on their IEPs. Three children fell into this category. In the two years of the study, two of the children identified with additional learning needs attended the all-day ECSE program in Woodridge Elementary the year prior to attending Emerson’s program. As 4-year olds, these children were eligible for Emerson’s class. They then attended Emerson’s program in the morning and the ECSE classroom in the afternoon. During the research period, three additional children qualified for additional services; these were offered in ECSE classes, either to start within the current school year or to start in their kindergarten year. More about specific students will follow as in Chapter IV. Table 2 lists all of the students, (identified by pseudonyms) who participated in this study and their IEP status.

The speech-language clinician, Brandi Altmann, worked with the local education agency and had taught at Woodridge Elementary as well as other early childhood programs for 10 years. She worked specifically with the preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade children while another clinician served the older children. Altmann and
Emerson provided the weekly whole group instruction based on themes relevant to the class. Then Altmann provided small group instruction once a week to eligible individuals.

Ellen Wilson, the paraprofessional for the program, worked with Emerson during the two years of the study and for eight years prior to the beginning of the study. She supported the children in their personal interactions and in learning the curriculum of the preschool program.

Denise Koontz participated in the study as a parent. Her son Brent attended the preschool in the first year of the study. Identified with special needs when he was 2 years old, Brent received early intervention services at home until attending the ECSE classroom as a 3-year old. Denise had extensive interactions with the school and area education personnel as they met regularly to review goals and collaborate about how to best assist Brent.

Ginny Loenser, a student teacher, participated in the second year of the study. She interacted with the children for eight weeks after New Year’s Day.

I acted as a participant-observer in Emerson’s classroom. As the inquiry was naturalistic in nature, I took part in the typical events of the classroom, but my role varied from being an observer to participating among class members. My interactions included supporting Emerson’s curriculum delivery by working with individual students and small groups in endeavors such as reading, writing, and conflict negotiations. Sometimes children read books to me; sometimes I read to them. I helped children with writing words and sentences. Children approached me as a friend to say “hi,” to ask questions,
and to ask for assistance. In whole group time, I often sat among the children, participating in the activity and sometimes guiding their behavior. Other times I observed without interacting, watching interactions from afar. I assisted the teacher and paraprofessional in preparing materials and cleaning up, as well as by chaperoning field trips. My intent was to participate in ways similar to other adults in the classroom.

Data Procedures

Data collection for this investigation was informed by qualitative methods that were also used in previous studies of socio-cultural development of young children (Henderson, 2001; Henderson et al., 2002; Rogoff, 2003; Vasconcelos & Walsh, 2001) and young children with disabilities (Hewett, 1999; Kliewer, 1998a, 1998c; Kliewer & Landis, 1999). Data sources, collection, and analysis are presented in this section.

Data Sources and Collection

I used multiple methods such as writing field notes, completing interviews (formal, informal, semi-structured) with adults, audiotaping lessons, and collecting artifacts, each of which I will describe below. The study was longitudinal; I collected data over two academic years. I visited the classroom approximately every other week for one to four hours and observed or participated in the range of activities occurring in the classroom. As a researcher in the larger study that focused on literacy, I initially concentrated on literacy in the classroom. Most of my examples retain a literacy focus, as this is a major area of need for children with disabilities and a focus of the preschool program.
Field notes. While I was in the classroom, I wrote brief notes consisting of key words, phrases, and quotes. If the participant explained anything I had observed, I included that explanation. After leaving the classroom, I added details to my notes or expanded my thoughts on audiotape. Then I typed an account of my visit, usually within 24 hours. As I typed my field notes, I added memos (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 2003) that consisted of an interpretation of events, questions to follow up on, and specific emotional responses I had experienced. Occasionally, I audio taped a group lesson to use in clarifying my notes. I listened to these and condensed the ideas in my field notes. However, I fully transcribed specific student-teacher verbal interchanges when relevant to my topic. Then I inserted these in my field notes and marked them as such. In the headings of my field notes, I listed the date and time of the observation as well as the activity observed. As I present the findings in Chapters IV and V, I code them with the date, data source, page of transcription, and paragraph where the information occurs. For example, 2/26/2004.16.36 denotes the date February 26, 2004; “I6.36” represents an interview (I) with the data found on page six, paragraph 36. An explanation of data code sources is presented in the Appendix A. Although, the bulk of my data was field notes, interviews also comprised an important part of my data.

Interviews. Stake (1995) makes the analogy that the interview “is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64). Over the two years of the study, I attempted to journey to the multiple realities in my research by interviewing key adult participants. I formally interviewed the teacher six times, the speech-language clinician one time, and a parent once. Each interview was semi-structured. Prior to meeting, I suggested a broad topic
that I wanted the participant to address. After asking the first question, I based my
subsequent questions on the participants’ responses. I audio taped each interview and
wrote brief notes during the exchange. Then I transcribed the interviews verbatim and
created a synthesis of each interview to present to the respective participant. Along with
the interviews, I gathered artifacts as part of my data.

**Artifacts.** I collected student assessment data, copies of assessment instruments,
and class newsletters. I also took photographs of specific mediators in the classroom,
class activities, and child-teacher interactions.

I collected data over two consecutive school years. I also had access to
observational data collected in Emerson’s classroom prior to this investigation and
interpreted by other researchers. The Institutional Review Board approval of the
previously mentioned federal research project covered the research permissions for my
portion of this study. All individuals discussed signed permission forms and were
assigned pseudonyms for purposes of safeguarding confidentiality.

**Data Analysis**

I used the constant-comparative procedures described by Bogdan and Biklen
(2003) to analyze my data. In this process, one mines the data (Glesne, 1999) and
reduces the findings to coding categories and subcategories, based partly on variables
identified in the research literature. The researcher then uses inductive reasoning to
discover abstract concepts based in the categories. Next, the researcher uses inductive
reasoning while looking for patterns at the conceptual level and then connects these to an
overarching theme that encompasses the important ideas the researcher has interpreted.
from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 2003). Throughout the collection and synthesis of data, I recorded themes related to this teacher and her assistance of the participation for the children identified with disabilities. The researcher’s roles as “interpreter, and gatherer of interpretations” is essential in qualitative research (Stake, 1995, p. 99).

Reliability and Validation

Validity in qualitative research is known as validation (Stake, 1995). Validation requires that the researcher measure constructs accurately and interprets those measurements logically. This is to ensure that the cases not be falsely represented, which may lead to harmful consequences such as participants being viewed negatively or claims being false. To ensure the measurement and interpretation of qualitative data, triangulation (Goffman, 1989; Stake, 1995) can be used. While the term triangulation was originally used in celestial navigation, Stake (1995) defines it as “working to substantiate an interpretation or to clarify its different meanings” (p. 273). A researcher can use triangulation to “gain the needed confirmation, to increase credence in the interpretation, to demonstrate commonality of an assertion” (p. 112).

Denzin (1984) discusses four types of triangulation: data source, investigator, theory triangulation, and methodological. Data source triangulation involves looking at whether the derived phenomenon has the same meaning when observed in varying circumstances. In investigator triangulation, the researcher presents her data, with or without interpretations, to other researchers who discuss their perspectives on it, thereby supporting or challenging the original researcher’s interpretation. The interpretations of the other researchers are additional data. In my research, I sought the viewpoints of
fellow researchers from the larger study and my doctoral committee. Theoretical triangulation involves having others with alternative theoretical perspectives examine the data. Theoretical triangulation occurs based on the degree of similarity regarding interpretation (meaning) or detail (description) of the phenomenon from researchers representing alternative theoretical viewpoints (Stake, 1995, p. 113). In my study, connections to the research literature and discussions with colleagues provided these alternative views.

Finally, methodological triangulation involves the researcher collecting data in various ways and using them to explore whether the phenomenon is supported or refuted in another mode. For example, I observed Emerson interacting with children and theorized about those interactions. Then I interviewed Emerson to learn her perspective about those interactions. This form of triangulation happens through member checking.

Member checking (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Stake, 1995) involves consulting with the participants to elicit their views of two different types of data: descriptions of the classroom interactions (the raw data), and the researcher’s interpretations of those data. When using this process, I provided participants with printed information prior to meeting. This information consisted of one or more of the following: selected notes of classroom portrayals from my field notes, quotes from previous interviews, and synthesized notes. In furnishing the information before meeting, I gave the participants time to read and ponder the information. When I wondered why Emerson or Altmann chose to act as she did, I used the same procedure and requested that she “think back to
the situation and reconstruct what she was thinking.” As participants reflected, I probed their thinking and used this information to further my analysis.

Another way to establish validation is through extended study in the field (Glesne, 1999). My study was longitudinal, spanning two academic years. Early in each of the two years, I spent time establishing rapport and becoming familiar with the participants and the contexts in which they interacted. In addition, I observed Emerson, the primary participant, as she interacted with a new group of students in each of the two years. Then I regularly visited the classroom as a participant observer. My study was also extended in that starting with my first visit, I attempted to move beyond “bare reporting” and to “describ[ing] and prob[ing] the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of action” (Denzin, 1988, p. 39).

Strauss and Corbin (2003) stress the importance of being aware of one’s biases. While maintaining that all research is biased, the honest researcher must admit his or her particular biases, to self and to others, and work to minimize the effect of these on the interpretations. As a former special education teacher, I had to be cognizant of my role as a researcher. I had to monitor my biases toward certain classroom practices and not assume that I knew what actions or circumstances portrayed. For instance, in my previous role as an elementary segregated classroom teacher, I taught small groups of children identified with disabilities. Typically, I employed teacher-directed lessons of hierarchical curricula, while integrated instruction comprised only a small portion of my teaching time. In the preschool classroom, I tried to understand the nature of the interactions of larger groups of children inclusive of those with disabilities. I also

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puzzled over curricula, which was integral to the running of the classroom and not partitioned to defined times such as reading, math, and science. Throughout the study, member checks, interviews with the participants, and discussions with other researchers functioned to help me recognize my biases.
CHAPTER IV
EMERSON AND HER CLASSROOM

The context is an important part of the socio-cultural approach and of case study research, so here I provide a detailed description of Emerson and her classroom to help the reader better understand the contexts Emerson established for her children. The information provided here was obtained through formal interviews and participant observation. It also supplies the necessary background for the next chapter. In this chapter, I provide information about Emerson as a teacher and the environment she purposefully creates for learning and citizenship opportunities for all students in her inclusive classroom.

Who Is Emerson?

When I entered Emerson’s classroom the first time, she welcomed me and engaged me with her easy laugh as she told me about the possibilities for the coming school year. She was preparing for the parents and children who would be coming the following day. She was excited about the new group of children and the learning she knew would take place. Over the following months, Emerson allowed me to learn about life in her inclusive preschool classroom. During that time, I came to know more about Emerson including her (1) path to becoming a teacher, (2) her long-range goals for children, and (3) the different roles Emerson played in children’s and families’ lives.

Journey to Teaching

Emerson described herself as a “late-in-life-teacher” (2/12/2004.16.35) who had not considered teaching when she was a psychology major in college. Her mental model
of the teacher was as "the bearer of information" and an "all-knowing, all-powerful kind of person" – something that Emerson was not interested in being (2/26/2004.F36, 43). Emerson knew that teaching was not for her at that time; however, as a mother, she volunteered in kindergarten as her own children grew. Eventually, she was offered a long-term associate position, in which she "really got to know the children...and the routines" and "it was so cool!" (2/26/2004.F6.36). In her experiences as a volunteer and associate, she "got a sense of cause," which spurred her to become a preschool teacher (2/26/2004.F6.35). Emerson began teaching in an all-day program for children considered at-risk of school failure and completed her Child Development Associate certificate. When a state university offered a grant-funded opportunity for early childhood personnel to earn their state teaching certificates, Emerson decided being a teacher was something that interested her. In that year, when she was teaching full time, and helping organize the state early childhood convention, Emerson pursued classes to earn her pre-school and kindergarten certification (2/26/2004.17.41).

Throughout her career, Emerson has worked to be a better teacher. In her first year of teaching, Emerson was impressed with her supervisor and with the professional development opportunities. Even so, Emerson confided she spent "a lot of time in tears" because of "this image in my mind of a teacher; a teacher knew everything" (2/12/2004.17.41). When Emerson realized that experienced teachers had questions about teaching and interactions with children, she confided that it "really shook my foundation" (2/12/2004.17.41). Emerson desired to be "the best teacher," by "trying so hard" to "become developmentally appropriate" and to learn other good practices.
(2/12/2004.19.48). She actively sought research regarding young children and teaching through constructivist methods as in the Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1993; Fu, Stremmel, & Hill, 2002) and attended meetings with other teachers to learn how to improve her practice. Emerson felt she did not measure up to others' perceptions of a “good teacher.” She laughingly said she handled that frustration by “having the opportunity to get together with people” who were “going through the same kinds of things” and getting “kind of recharged” (2/12/2004.19.56). She determinedly said, “I can. I can get a handle on a piece of it, and I can tackle one little thing, and maybe do it” (2/12/2004.19.56).

My observations of Emerson confirmed this stated willingness to learn about herself and her children. When she saw a child struggle in interactions with others or in fulfilling behavioral expectations, she intervened to support the child. If that intervention did not produce satisfactory results, then Emerson tried a different approach until she and the child arrived at a more desirable way of interacting. In her statements about becoming a better teacher, and in her daily classroom interactions, Emerson also showed her propensity in facing the challenges presented in teaching. In her continuing journey, Emerson has stayed informed of curriculum and research, reflected on the type of teacher she wanted to be, and frequently assessed her efficacy with the children. She also related how she coped with those challenges – Emerson turned to other people to share experiences. Emerson realized the importance of other people in her own learning – an aspect that she later emphasized for her children.
As I watched Emerson orchestrate her classroom, I realized how her actions and aspirations paralleled the expectations she had for her children. She modeled what an adult learner looks like through her interactions and problem-solving actions; she illustrated the good communication skills she desired children to develop; and she was still striving to “become the best person” she could be (2/12/2004.14.31).

A Long-range Perspective for Guiding Learning

When Emerson spoke about what she wanted for children, she referred to the “total child” (2/26/2004.16.29) and to helping “[the student] become the best person that she [or he] could be in that environment” (2/12/2004.14.31). Although Emerson addressed the academic, physical, and social-emotional in her program, the goals she articulated most explicitly focused on the social and emotional development of children because these were “crucial” to children’s academic development and to the adults they would become (2/12/2004.16.37). Having this long-range perspective helped Emerson focus beyond the academic gains expected for children to be successful as they entered kindergarten. Emerson knew the year she spent with the young children was foundational to their adult development – she would influence how children understood their own abilities, their interactions with others, and learning in general. The children would develop foundational skills and attitudes to carry into adulthood. Emerson viewed these social and emotional aspects as “interwoven” and believed that through attending to them, she was “addressing those other needs in the children…and helping them feel competent” (2/19/2004.16.18). She provided an example of a girl who had been argumentative with peers, but as the child gained competence in communication and
skills, her interactions with peers improved (2/19/2004.I6.18). When Emerson elaborated on these goals, her description included developing children's awareness of themselves and of others.

Many ideas surfaced in my interviews with Emerson about what a child gained from the preschool experience. She wanted children to be aware of all those things they "needed to be learners," which included developing "self-discipline," and monitoring "their emotions and attention" (2/12/2004.I4.31). I observed Emerson's use of icons and non-verbal communication such as pained expressions and covering her ears to communicate when children became noisy and were not doing what was needed to in order to be learners. Emerson emphasized that a child needed to become "a problem-solver. I mean, that's what it's all about!" (2/12/2004.I6.37). Becoming learners and problem solvers required that children "trust themselves," "develop confidence and be able to take a risk" (2/12/2004.I6.41). She wanted children "communicating effectively" and to "express their feelings," as well as to show self-reliance and initiative (2/12/2004.I9.62). Children needed to "build that sense of identity" and "to realize their own strengths and their basic worthiness" (2/19/2004.I1.3). For example, in fostering identity, Emerson explicitly noted that a child with an IEP correctly wrote the alphabet from memory. When other children asked how to write a letter, Emerson referred them to that particular child. In this way, she also reduced children's tendency to seek help from her or the classroom associate Wilson. These experiences were to help children develop into responsible adults.
However, Emerson was clear that children did not accomplish the aforementioned goals in isolation. The environment, especially the social one, was an important context in Emerson’s classroom. Emerson wanted the children to “build trusting relationships with the other children and with the adults” (2/12/2004.16.41) in the classroom. Interactions in these trusting relationships encouraged the children’s communication and helped them develop respect for other people through becoming “more aware of facial expression and those nuances” of body language (2/12/2004.16.41). “Others” created the context in which children came to realize their own and others’ strengths; interaction with others was needed to help children look to another person as a resource, to begin to see other people as valuable, and to foster taking the perspective of another (2/19/2004.12.6). Emerson thoughtfully reflected on her goals, which included those in which children learn to value themselves as well as others. Next, I describe Emerson’s role as she accomplished these goals with children.

One Teacher, Many Roles

Any teacher fulfills many roles in the course of a teaching day. I will focus on the roles that I observed Emerson fulfill as she interacted with the children. These broadly fell into two categories, a resource to parents and a facilitator for children’s learning.

A resource to parents. As I observed in the classroom and interviewed her, two areas became apparent in Emerson’s interactions with parents. She visited parents in their homes prior to the start of the school year in order to understand the children who would be coming to her class. Throughout the year, Emerson provided information about
the preschool program, community resources, children in general, and a parent’s specific child.

The state-funded early childhood program that Emerson worked for required her to involve parents in the children’s education. This included involvement prior to the child entering the program and continued participation during the school year. Before the child entered the program, Emerson visited the parents and children in their homes to gather early developmental information. Emerson interviewed parents during this time and did some basic developmental screening with the children. Throughout the school year, Emerson continued involving parents through monthly home visits. The time that Emerson spent with parents allowed her to build a relationship and gave her a “richer picture of the child” (2/26/2004.13.15), which assisted her in tailoring instruction for individual children. Emerson saw her role “as being someone that [families] can trust” regardless of what was going on in their lives and without being judgmental (2/12/2004.17.49). She related that families were “trying to improve the life of their child...and I’m here to support them in doing that, in whatever way I can at whatever level is comfortable for them” (2/12/2004.17.51).

Throughout the school year, Emerson invited parents into the classroom to help with activities and chaperone field trips. When parents visited the classroom, most appeared comfortable and joined in the activities without prompting from Emerson. The parents frequently sat among the children during group and helped with a task during Work Time, when children selected the activities on which they would work. Parents helped children cut vegetables, work on the computer, make crafts, and write sentences.
Parents also chaperoned the field trips to places such as the fire station, ice cream store, and local park. All parents were encouraged to participate in the family events, which were held monthly. Throughout the two years I observed, parents helped the children make school bags, attended a soup supper prepared by the children, and participated in seasonal parties where child and parent rotated to different stations to create gifts or projects. Parents were a valuable resource in the classroom.

Emerson involved parents in their children’s education outside of the classroom, too. She had a “traveling suitcase,” that each family received once monthly. In the traveling suitcase was a variety of developmentally appropriate activities that required family involvement. Some representative activities were playing games, writing activities, and reading books – all of which were designed to engage family members. Typically, an art project – such as making a puppet, decorating a snow person, creating a scarecrow - was included, and when completed, the children shared these with the class. All materials that a family needed for the activities were included in the suitcase, so no family had to worry about having the resources to complete the projects.

Through the home visits, the traveling suitcase, and parents’ involvement in the classroom, Emerson informed parents of activities that were appropriate for their children. She taught them strategies to guide children’s actions. She assisted individual parents by providing ideas on how to help children modulate their voices or how to create daily routines. She provided general information about child development and events in her monthly newsletter. Emerson created opportunities to involve parents at a “level comfortable for them.” She approached each family as an individual unit, realizing that
no two families were the same. She was flexible and optimistic in her work with them. She played a role in helping families understand their individual children and overall child development. She performed another role in facilitating the learning of the children in her room.

**A facilitator of children’s learning.** Emerson said her perceptions of and expectations for children guided her interactions with them (2/18/2005.15.22). She viewed her job as that of facilitating children’s growth. “They are capable,” she emphatically stated of children. She continued:

My job is not to mold them or things like that. They come in, and they have abilities. They have LOTS (emphasized); and I have to figure out what those are, but I don’t see myself [as] the powerful one. I want to respect what they have. When you really look at conflict negotiation and so forth, yes, I can help give them the skills and things, but hopefully I’m not trying to direct teach that...but model that more for the children and help them with that. I think they have that capability. And my role is to facilitate that. That’s why I set up the environment that I do. That’s why we do the activities that we do to help facilitate that with the children. I don’t see myself as the teacher expounding or having the solutions for them. I want to help them figure that out for themselves and to know that they have the ability to do that. You know they can come up with solutions that maybe from the adult perspective would be not be acceptable, but if it’s acceptable to them, then it’s acceptable to me too. I mean that’s my goal. It’s not to have them conform (laugh); it’s not to have them conform. I want them to be independent, and problem solvers and thinkers to know that they can do that. And hopefully they’re going to be able to take those and build on those and use it in many other ways, not just in the social emotional domain but with math and literacy and all those things. It’s like, you know, I can do it. I can figure things out, I can do it in this situation and I can do it in those situations. I don’t really want to be the rule maker. I mean, sometimes you have to be the enforcer. It just comes with the territory. (2/18/2005.15.22)

For Emerson to be successful in her facilitation of children’s development, she downplayed her power as a teacher and transmitter of knowledge when she said, ‘I don’t
see myself as the powerful one,” the “teacher expounding.” Likewise, she was comfortable with, indeed desired, that children develop their own solutions to problems, even when these were not “acceptable to adults.” For example, when a child approached Emerson, concerned that one boy called another an inappropriate name, Emerson broached the subject with the boys. In talking with the boys, Emerson learned that they had already resolved the issue with the offender offering the second child a place to sit. Emerson listened carefully to the boys’ explanation of what had happened and decided not to intervene further with reasons why name-calling is inappropriate and hurtful.

Emerson did not see herself as the “rule maker.” She did not want children to conform but rather encouraged them to be independent problem solvers and thinkers – traits that Emerson herself demonstrated as she observed children’s abilities and considered ways to help children solve problems for themselves. Emerson facilitated these through her interactions with the children and through the ways that she structured the learning environment – each respected the children’s rights to choose, their need to experience consequences, and their abilities as capable human beings, even at four years old.

Emerson further acted as the facilitator when she modeled and encouraged those dispositions and behaviors that she expected of children. For instance, she modeled respectful interactions, problem solving abilities, and enthusiasm in others’ accomplishments. She said she sometimes had to be “the enforcer,” such as when a child hit other children or threw items, yet she did this in such a way as to preserve the dignity of both the child and herself. When children showed persistence or appropriately
responded in situations that were difficult for them, she further encouraged their participation through talking with them and making them aware of what they were doing (2/12/2004.15.35). For instance, when a boy started becoming aware of the alphabet, she acknowledged his advancement by saying, “Oh, did you hear Jackson? He said that Karen’s name starts with K.” When children showed growth in an area, such as counting to ten, she enthusiastically cheered, “They are becoming such good counters!” Or when a boy hurt his thumb because of other students not being careful, Emerson drew the children into a conversation about what they needed to do in order to be safe. In these ways, she was respectful, modeling and encouraging her children to develop problem-solving abilities, and become independent thinkers.

Emerson was a good “kidwatcher” (Goodman, 1978) and integrator of knowledge in order to respond to the children as she did. She observed children and developed a sense of each child’s abilities. She also empathized with children, understood early childhood development, and related research. These were foundational to knowing what types of interactions and environments maximized opportunities to develop children’s autonomy, self-discipline, and responsibility. She knew to “up the ante” or challenge children within their ZPD to foster their learning in an area, such as communication (2/26/2004.15.27). All of these sources of information fostered Emerson’s ability to understand each child as an individual and to be aware of each one’s unique abilities.

Through her personal interactions with children, Emerson constructed local understanding (Kliwer & Landis, 1999) of each child as a unique individual in the given instructional context. This provided the basis of individualization of instruction. In the
study which focused on literacy for children with disabilities, Kliewer and Landis (1999) found that teachers who based their teaching on local understanding "emphasized practices derived from questioning how the student might best be supported in his or her achievement toward what is always a professionally indeterminable...potential" (p. 90). This contrasted with institutional understanding (Kliewer & Landis, 1999), in which teachers accepted the established "decontextualized, universal assumptions" (p. 89) regarding definitions of disability, resulting in rigid beliefs that all children with a certain disability exhibit the same characteristics which can be addressed through specialized practices to address those characteristics. When children identified with disabilities came to Emerson, she developed local understanding of their strengths in the contexts of peers and the environments she created in the preschool classroom.

Regarding children with disabilities, Emerson related, "It's hard for me to think about kids with labels versus kids who don't have labels, because there's a wide range of abilities in kids" (11/5/2004.14.19). She had not thought of herself as "working with children that have been identified with special needs" because she made "accommodations for each child" (11/5/2004.111.40). Emerson believed that any person was "more than this identifiable little thing" with a disability label (11/5/2004.112.42). A teacher could not look at "discrete bits and pieces" but must look at the "total child" (11/5/2004.112.44). Emerson saw her role as helping each child to be "accepted by other human beings...being part of the classroom and being included" (11/5/2004.112.42). I learned over the course of the two-year study that Emerson's actions in the classroom were indeed similar when educating children with and without special needs. Emerson's
experiences in her teaching journey, the vision she had for children, and the roles she performed led her to plan learning environments to meet the needs of her students.

The Learning Environment

As I reflected on Emerson’s goal of having each child become the “best” that she or he could be in the preschool environment (2/12/2004.14.31), I realized that “best” was situational. The same child may “look” very different – appear with different capabilities or “dis-abilities” – depending on how the teacher views children and manages the classroom environment. I found corroboration of this as I read about the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education in Italy. In this approach, the environment is conceptualized as “the third teacher” (Gandini, 2002; Malaguzzi, 1998). Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia schools stated:

There is a difference between a child who can be reduced or a child who can be amplified depending on the favorable or unfavorable aspects of his or her environment. The broader and more varied the range of offers, features, activities, relationships, the broader the possibility for children. (In Palsha, 2002, p. 111)

In Emerson’s classroom, I observed children whose favorable aspects were maximized through the thoughtful planning of an environment, which created learning opportunities for all children. However, as I observed, I noticed that the learning environment was much more than a tangible space in which learning about academic concepts occurred; the environment encompassed elements of social-emotional and temporal rhythms. In this section, I describe the physical space of furnishings and materials and the temporal rhythms, which influence the social-emotional climate of the classroom. Lastly, I conclude with a description of a typical day in Emerson’s classroom.
The Purposeful Space

Furnishings. When I first entered Emerson’s classroom, the school year had not yet started. As I studied the room and listened to Emerson speak, I started to get a sense of the physical space and of the possibilities that might be provided to children. Some items sat in boxes, waiting to find homes on shelves, while others rested on tabletops. As I looked around the room, I was struck by all the materials and furnishings Emerson had in her classroom. Given the constraints of being located in a public elementary school, the classroom was small by early childhood standards for a group of active preschoolers. With the exception of the sink, where most of the preschoolers would stand on tippy toes early in the year to wash their hands, the furnishings in the room were just the right size for young children. Child-sized tables and chairs, too low for most adults to sit at comfortably, would provide spaces for various activities such as drawing, games, puzzles, and meals. The furniture would provide boundaries for the various work areas in which children would later engage. Open shelves and storage compartments were at a height that small children could access materials independently as well as responsibly return them to the shelf for the next person. Appendix B depicts Emerson’s classroom as arranged in year two of the study. Emerson carefully organized the furnishings of her classroom to assist children in meeting the educational goals of the program.

Materials. The arrangement of furnishings and selection of available materials encouraged the investigation, problem solving, and choices of children as active learners, as well as fostering communication and relationships. Emerson had a variety of the materials such as manipulatives, building blocks, books, writing tools, art supplies and
toys typically found in early childhood classrooms. However, Emerson also had items that were unfamiliar to me, such as the light table, the sensory table, and the mirrored triangle or life-sized kaleidoscope, often indicative of the Reggio Emilia influence. The light table had a white translucent top illuminated from underneath. Emerson provided various colored translucent and opaque objects that children manipulated on the illuminated surface, allowing experimentation with the effects of light, color, and degrees of transparency or opaqueness. Then there was the sensory table. The tub on legs held various materials throughout the year such as pasta, soil, and water. Included with these materials were assorted tools such as shovels, buckets, pans, trowels, and toothbrushes. Children played at the table, experiencing the sensations and constructing physical-knowledge relationships between and among the physical features of items. Finally, the kaleidoscope was three-sided, rather like an A-frame house. Each inside surface was a mirror, and when children lay inside, they experienced the visual effect of repeated mirrors. Emerson invited children into this space by placing large pillows and a basket of books inside.

Emerson optimized the favorable aspects of children through offering interesting, open-ended activities, and through these, she extended children’s thinking and engaged with them in learning. These represented only some of the opportunities available in the physical environment in Emerson’s classroom. These were further enhanced through Emerson’s responsiveness in the temporal element of the classroom.
Rhythm of Time and Children

Another aspect of the environment was that of time or temporal rhythm. Prior to my interactions in Emerson’s room, I did not think of time as tangible. However, my experiences in her classroom made me reconsider this. Time was relative to different aspects in Emerson’s teaching: it was important in scheduling daily activities, in developing children’s autonomy and curiosity, and in Emerson’s responsiveness to individual children.

Time, as a schedule. Emerson posted a classroom schedule each day that she and her children followed in order to be part of the wider school community, but she also allotted time for children to choose their own activities. Because of their ties to a larger elementary school schedule, Emerson had to coordinate resources with other teachers and systems within the school. Recess was scheduled at a time when similar-aged children were on the playground. Times to visit the library, play in the gym, and receive speech-language services were coordinated within the larger school community. Emerson had a classroom schedule, to which she mostly adhered; yet, I rarely felt that it dictated how time was spent. Emerson’s commitment to developing children’s abilities and relationships appeared to be a priority in the play of time.

Time, in developing autonomy. Another aspect of time was the opportunity Emerson allowed in her daily schedule for “Work Time.” During this 30- to 45- minute period, the children explored a variety of engaging materials. Throughout the two years of this study, I observed children engaged in myriad activities. I describe a selection of them here.
I saw children investigate properties of cotton balls, pressing them tightly into a jar and then removing them one at a time. In the dramatic play center, a reclining lawn lounger acted as a dentist chair. A boy and a girl donned surgical gowns and face masks, then negotiated who would wear the protective goggles. A third child, the patient, reclined as she waited for the dental procedure to start. In a different area of the room, a manual juicer sat on the table. Children went to this table to squeeze fresh juice from orange halves. In yet another area, children shaped and reshaped clay. Some children stayed in one work area for the whole period, while others played in a few areas.

Likewise, some children played with the same children for the whole time, while others switched playmates. For the most part, children determined what activities they pursued and how long to pursue them. Occasionally, Emerson imposed on children's Work Time if she needed to assess children or wanted everybody to experience something, such as an art technique, although she did not like to do so. She felt this independent Work Time was crucial to developing children's dispositions (Katz, 1993, 1999) such as learning to be curious, developing persistence, and becoming "deeply involved" and "interested" (2/12/2004.110.68). Time to engage in these activities was important for children to build their identities, learn their strengths, and develop autonomy.

Time, in developing relationships. Time influenced the quality of relationships among the members of the classroom community. Emerson fostered relationships and provided for the emotional security of her children through the way she adjusted time for individual children in both group and personal interactions. During group activities, Emerson usually appeared to have time to pursue a child's line of thought during large
group, to provide the assistance for someone to be successful, or to respond to a child's query. Her manner with the children was relaxed but engaged. For example, when a child with English as a second language did not have a word for "cloud," she calmly employed visuals and verbal explanation to help him develop the concept. When a child had a question about a picture in a story, Emerson encouraged the child to ask, and then she explained or asked other children what their thoughts were.

Emerson also supported the emotional climate through being present for children during Work Time. Although other teachers might use self-selected Work Time as a personal break, Emerson used this time to interact with children, observe them in play, and listen to their discoveries. Occasionally, she engaged in play, attempting to extend children's opportunities in thinking or peer relationships. If children needed assistance understanding each other, she calmly interceded. When I asked Emerson about the time she spent responding to children, she said, "It's given that you have the time to do it. I mean there could have been another situation where somebody [interrupts] and I couldn't have taken that much time to spend with an individual child" (2/18/2005.F7.37).

Overall, Emerson adjusted the temporal aspect in both the timing of an interaction and in the quantity of time to work with individual children. Her responsiveness helped create a calm, secure emotional environment in which children all felt comfortable seeking answers and taking risks in communication. Emerson coordinated the aspects of the physical and temporal-emotional environment to create the school day.
A Day With Emerson’s Class

To this point, I have described the environment, including the physical space and temporal aspects of the classroom. This provides the context for a typical day in this preschool classroom, in which Emerson and her children are purposefully busy. Children arrive at 9:00 and leave at 12:30. The schedule (see Appendix C) is only a surface indicator of what goes on in Emerson’s classroom, while the real teaching and learning happens within the structure of the day. I describe this in present tense to invite the reader to experience being in the classroom.

When I arrive in the morning, Emerson is in the hallway, welcoming children and their parents as they arrive. When children finish hanging up coats and greeting Emerson, they enter the classroom to sign in – or move their nametags from the OUT to the IN side of the magnetic attendance board. At the beginning of the school year, many children need help finding their names, but as the year progresses, most children learn to recognize their names and sign in independently. As children sign in, they also select a small milk icon that indicates their choice of white or chocolate milk for lunch. Each child is responsible for this daily routine. Then the child joins the other children and Ellen Wilson, the classroom associate, for breakfast. All children are encouraged to eat as proper nutrition is a goal of the preschool program. Typically, children call out to greet their friends as each arrives and talk about what they did the previous night or will do that day. In the time that children come to school and eat breakfast, the goodwill of class members and the anticipation of seeing friends is evident.
As the children finish breakfast, they clean their own plates and head to the carpet for Self-selected Reading time. During this time, children sit huddled with a partner or lie on the floor and interact with books through reading, retelling, and talking of pictures or letters they recognize. A variety of books is available, including picture books, cookbooks, non-fiction books, joke books, and teacher-created books about class projects and field trips. When time comes for the group to meet for Opening, Emerson signals the children by singing a transition song, such as “Everybody find a leaf....” Children return their books to the shelves and seek a leaf sticker on which to sit.

Opening begins with Emerson and the children acknowledging one another through song. Sometimes the class dances, sometimes they do hand motions, and other times, they sing with silly voices. After singing, Emerson invites the children to “Wake up, Snoopy,” which they must do with quiet voices since Snoopy is sleeping and the class does not want to scare him. As she lightly touches her baton three times on the cartoon character, the children say, “Wake up, Snoopy.” “Who is the leader today?” Emerson asks as she points to the name printed on the Job Chart. Many of the children call out the name of the leader and the other helpers, such as Weather Person, Table Setter, and Table Host. Children happily exclaim as they read their own name or that of a friend on the chart. Several of the children have already read the chart as they entered the carpet for Self-selected Reading, so they are prepared when Emerson asks them to read the names. Emerson tells the Leader what tasks -- such as leading the line, being the first to wash hands -- he or she will be responsible for that day.
Next, the Weather Person is called forward, and Emerson cradles that child against her leg as she leads the children in the song "Weather person, weather person, what do you say....What kind of weather are we having today?" In the first days of school, Emerson modeled how to observe area outside the classroom window to seek information about the weather. The child now looks out the window, seeking clues such as the blue sky, clouds, and movement of the U.S. flag in the school yard. Then the child indicates the weather by moving two hands on a weather wheel. Emerson might ask the child, "Is this a good day for playing outside?" or "Will we need our coats at recess?" as she helps the children connect the effects of weather to their own lives. As the child finishes, Emerson asks, "How did Jonathon do on the weather report?" Each day the class shows their appreciation for the good job done by the weather person by performing "alligator claps" or "fire crackers." Numeracy is reinforced as the children clap the number of times equal to the children’s age.

After the weather report, Emerson directs the children’s attention to the daily chart. This outlines what special events will occur, such as visiting the school library or having the speech clinician come to the classroom. Perhaps, the children from the early childhood special education class (ECSE) will visit or the class may walk to the fire station.

As Opening draws to a close, Emerson directs the children’s attention to the picture schedule. She points to each picture, and accompanies it with questions such as, "Did we come to school this morning? Did we finish Opening?" Then Emerson sketches the rest of the day by showing icons for remaining activities.
Other activities occurring during Opening include sharing information between Emerson and the children. This sharing is responsive to the children and directly involves them. Emerson invites children to tell about projects they completed at home with help from their families. Sometimes children spontaneously inquire about a sick friend or tell of an experience from the previous night. While Emerson encourages the children further through her questioning and comments to extend their language.

After Opening, Emerson prepares the class for the daily tooth brushing routine. She calls each child to sit at one of the tables. At the beginning of the year, the adults lead this activity, but as children mature, they become the leaders for this activity. The Leader demonstrates the correct procedure and dismisses the children to rinse their toothbrushes to prepare for the next activity, which is Work Time.

Children select the activities they like to pursue during Work Time. At this time, Emerson and the teacher of the ECSE class each exchange two children. This provides an opportunity for children to develop friendships with peers in the wider school community and experience other classroom environments. Emerson has a menu board illustrating a variety of choices, such as Art, Computer, Dramatic Play, Play Dough, Construction Area, Light Table, Painting, and Sensory Table (for a description of what is included at each area, see Appendix D). Emerson reviews the choices with the children and lets them choose the areas at which they work. Children may move from one activity to another but must clean up their area before moving to the new area. Children work at activities together, alongside one another, or may work alone. Emerson monitors the
room at this time, providing other materials as children ask for them, listening to children, and asking questions to sustain play of children.

When Work Time is finished, the Leader alerts the other children that Clean Up will be in five minutes. The Leader takes the Talking Timer, an electronic clock with synthesized speech, to each child or group of children to show them the “5,” which signals the last five minutes of activity time. At the appropriate time, the children return their toys and materials to the appropriate spaces. Emerson and Wilson are active in the classroom during this time, helping put materials away and inviting the participation of those children who need encouragement to quit work or put materials away.

After putting materials away, the children use the bathrooms and then prepare for Outside Play. The children share their outside time with friends from the ECSE class. The children engage with one another on the elementary playground equipment, and play with additional gear such as tricycles, balls, and hula-hoops. The teachers and paraprofessionals from both classrooms supervise the children, supporting them in their physical play and social activity.

Small Group Work occurs after children play outside and wash their hands. During the first year of the study, Emerson and Ellen each worked with eight children during this time; however, the second year of the study, the teacher of English as a Second Language worked in the classroom also, so each adult worked with five or six children. Some of the skills addressed during this time include speaking, reading facial expressions, matching household items, and practicing early literacy.
Story Time involves Emerson reading aloud to the whole group. The children are active in Story Time performing finger plays, repeating the refrain of the story, or trying to predict what will happen next in the story. During this time, the two children who are Table Setters wash the tables and then place, in a one-to-one correspondence, plates, napkins, silverware, milk, and children's nametags designating where each will sit at mealtime.

Lunch is served family style, with the children being divided into two groups and sitting around tables. Finding the space where each of their names is placed, the children sit, serve themselves, and then pass the food to a peer. Emerson and the paraprofessional each sit at a table with the children. In each group, one child acts as a Table Host, whose job is to check that the children have placed each of the foods on their plates. A typical script of the Table Host is: “Does everyone have pizza? Does everyone have green beans? Do you have milk? You may eat.” After the Host asks the questions, the children commence eating and talking with the friends at the table. When children finish eating, they clean their plates, and get ready to go home with parents or caregivers.

As the children prepare to leave school, Emerson talks with parents and tells them about the children’s activities that day. Before leaving, the children take any papers from their mailboxes and then sign out, moving their nametag from IN to OUT.

I described a typical day in Emerson’s classroom. However, other activities are not reflected in this description. Emerson’s children and those from the ECSE class gather once weekly for a visit from the media specialist, who comes to the classroom to read stories. During this time, all the children sit on the carpet with the teachers and
paraprofessionals. Emerson’s class also joins the ECSE class for parties in which families mingle while completing activity stations such as decorating cookies or stringing pasta necklaces. For one 30-minute period weekly, the speech-language clinician presents a lesson to Emerson’s children. These lessons involve stories and kinesthetic activities that reinforce concepts and vocabulary in the curriculum for the many children who qualify for speech services.

In the elements of the physical and temporal environment, Emerson provided for the development of her goals for children. Emerson said, “It’s just that you really have to support what you want for kids” (2/12/2004.111.68). She invited the children’s participation in the joint activity of the classroom to develop children’s abilities and attitudes in learning about themselves, others, and academic concepts. In the next chapter, I provide a more detailed look at how Emerson structures opportunities for children through the physical environment and how she intervenes to maximize those opportunities for children who may otherwise have difficulty benefiting from them.
CHAPTER V

PARTICIPATION THROUGH OPPORTUNITY AND ACCESS

Emerson created curricular and social opportunities for all children in her classroom through her expectations and structuring of the environment. Generally, children with disabilities participated alongside their non-disabled peers. In this section, I describe the activities in which children with disabilities participated, the practices Emerson employed, as well as the ways in which she provided access to these opportunities and to class citizenship for the identified children. The findings are organized as (a) fostering relationships, (b) sharing responsibility, (c) positively framing behavior, (d) accessing the curriculum, and (e) sensitively responding over time.

Fostering Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are crucial to children's learning in the socio-cultural approach. This was reflected in Emerson's espoused goals and classroom practice. Emerson stated, “I want [the children] to build trusting relationships with the other children and with the adults” (2/12/2004.17.43). Emerson builds those trusting relationships through her interactions, which are respectful, empathetic, and adaptable to the situation. Because she repeatedly emphasized the social nature of learning, I concentrate on the ways in which Emerson supported children's interactions with one another and how these fostered the participation of the children with disabilities. Emerson structured many opportunities for children to interact. I present these in two broad categories: children on their own -- when children interact with little direct influence from adults; and teacher-supported interaction -- when just being among peers.
was not enough for children with disabilities to participate successfully, Emerson provided direct support to help them access the peer opportunities.

**Children on Their Own**

Emerson thoughtfully planned time daily when children with and without disabilities had occasion to interact, often without the direct influence of an adult. These opportunities occurred during meals, recess, Work Time, and Self-selected Reading. I will concentrate on the personal interactions that occurred as children interacted with books. Examples of children's reading in this preschool classroom include naming items, finding letters or words, retelling stories, looking at or reading pictures, and reading familiar words. Early literacy is a goal for all children in the preschool program. More specifically, this book time presented rich opportunities to support the communication and literacy goals for children with IEPs. I provide three vignettes followed by a discussion of the opportunities in "children on their own."

A daily activity in Emerson’s classroom was Self-selected Reading time. As they finished breakfast and cleaned their trays, the children selected a book and read individually or with a peer on the carpet. During this time, I often sat among the children; sometimes I read with them, but other times I sat and observed. Early in the first year, I read the *Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1987) with Denish and Danai, who were both English language learners. In the book, a caterpillar ate through an assortment of foods as he prepared to weave a chrysalis and transform to a butterfly. As I read, the children named and counted each of the foods that the caterpillar had eaten. Brent, a child who joined Emerson’s room from the ECSE program, bounded into the book...
reading area, touched his name hanging on the job chart, and then sat beside us, apparently watching the other two children in the activity around the book. As I continued reading, Brent started offering the names of foods and counting along with the other children. Near the book’s end, a butterfly with its outstretched wings was illustrated. Danai touched her finger to each section of the butterfly’s wings and counted; and then Brent repeated the gesture, counting each segment in one-to-one correspondence (10/02/2003.F3.12).

Brent’s interactions with the children supported attainment of such IEP goals as increasing social competence in initiating interactions. Brent initiated this interaction as he joined the group in an unobtrusive manner. He imitated the other two children’s actions, showing an awareness of one way to join in the mutual activity of story reading. The other children welcomed his participation evidenced by their turn taking in providing answers and counting.

In another instance at Self-selected Reading time, a basket of small stuffed animals sat on the carpet. Most children approached and chose an animal. Tiane, a child with speech and language needs, joined Daria, a typically developing peer, and the two girls positioned the animals to engage in pretend conversation. Seated behind the two girls were Jackson and Braden, both boys with IEPs, who each sat with stuffed animals on their laps. However, Jackson had a book resting on one leg and was reading aloud to Braden. “Braden, I’m going to read the cooking one,” Jackson announced. Braden leaned close while Jackson retold the story, “I want a muffin and a cookie and a hamburger. What do you want? I want cheese and ketchup and lettuce on my
hamburger,” Jackson continued reading and answering his own questions while Braden placed his hand on the book and appeared to listen (1/25/2005.F2.5).

Tiane rarely interacted with other children. When children tried to interact with her, Tiane often just looked at them or replied with one short comment and left the group. However, in this relaxed atmosphere and with the stuffed animal as a vehicle for connecting, Tiane engaged in pretend play and expressed herself verbally. Verba (as cited in DeVries & Zan, 1994) suggests this exchange required Tiane and the peer to create shared understanding of the play and to make reciprocal adjustments in their interactions to sustain conversation. This interaction supported Tiane’s specific learning needs in language and self-expression.

Jackson, a child identified with moderate speech and cognitive delays, demonstrated understanding of picture reading, story sense, and the awareness of question/answer forms of language. He had opportunities to be in a leadership role and to apply vocabulary from personal experience to text as he orally retold the story to Braden.

Yet another day Mikey, the newest member of Emerson’s class, sat reading a teacher-made book, *Pumpkin Fest, 2004*. Each page displayed a photograph and one line of text chronicling the class’ recent trip to the pumpkin farm. As Mikey flipped each page, he looked at the photograph of the children, said, “These are my friends,” and then proceeded to name the children. Timmy, a child with speech-language and learning needs, seemingly divided his attention by looking at his own book about trucks and occasionally looking at Mikey. When Mikey turned to the last page, he said, “I don’t
know these friends.” Timmy leaned over, touched the children in the photograph, and said their names (11/9/2004.F6.30).

Jackson and Mikey, whether they were retelling or reading their stories, each verbalized their thoughts about the books they were reading. Then Timmy, a child whose skills were low and whose speech was delayed, listened to Mikey read and then supplied peers’ names. Timmy demonstrated literacy in attending to text, awareness of others, and in taking an opportunity to help a peer.

The Self-selected book time routine provided an opportunity for children to interact with books and to exercise their autonomy -- choices in books, peers, and directing the flow of the activity. During this period, Emerson’s expectation was that all children interact with books and she provided the opportunities to do so. Children viewed themselves as capable readers -- excited to pick up a book, and respond to the print and pictures within it -- because of these repeated positive contacts with books and emotional climate Emerson offered. The children’s confidence in their capabilities as readers and communicators was evident as they read, joined in activity with peers, and provided names of peers in the books. In each instance, the relaxed book time allowed the children to show their knowledge and understanding relevant to their particular books or conversations. For Emerson’s preschoolers, literacy and language were areas of need. This book time allowed all children to practice literacy and provided opportunities for children with disabilities to interact in valued ways with their non-disabled peers. Next, I illustrate how Emerson created the opportunity for peer interaction during more structured times and how she facilitated engagement for the children with disabilities.
Teacher-supported Interactions

When children did not or could not participate with others in the typical class structures which routines provided, Emerson and Wilson became more directly involved in helping children connect with peers. The adults encouraged children's interactions with peers through various strategies, ranging in the extent of teacher mediation. Those requiring the least amount of teacher influence were modeling and invitations, while the most teacher-directed intervention was conflict negotiation.

Teacher modeling and invitations. Timmy and Jason had developed a friendship. One morning, I approached Timmy as he sat eating his orange. He smiled at me and excitedly said, “Jason told me good morning. He gave me a hug!” Jason, sitting directly behind Timmy at another table turned toward me and smiled (1/25/2005.F1.2). Later, during Opening, Emerson played the song The Freeze (Scelsa, 1987, track 4), to which children moved around the space while the melody played. Children froze their movement when the singer said “Freeze!” and the music stopped momentarily. As the music played, Emerson moved among the children, taking their hands and dancing briefly. She moved toward Timmy and Jason, who had been dancing beside each other but not touching. She took one hand of each boy and danced with them, then moved to other children. As Emerson moved away, Jason started to leave also, but Timmy grabbed each of Jason's hand and the boys swung their arms and smiled at each other as the last refrain played. The boys expressed their friendship within the structures of the classroom.
The early morning routine of children arriving and eating among peers created an environment where children could express themselves, and interact without being under the direct influence of an adult. These opportunities resulted in children initiating their own interactions. Even in the more structured Opening exercises, Emerson provided opportunities for children to interact with one another. Some children imitated peer interaction and danced together during the song. Others, such as Timmy and Jason, danced alone until Emerson directly modeled dancing with another child was acceptable and could be fun! Timmy, evidently understanding this, sought his friend Jason as a partner. Through the structure of the class activity, and in the latter case, with Emerson modeling the interaction, Timmy took the initiative to dance with Jason. Although Timmy imitated Emerson’s actions, imitation is important in learning. It is a visible expression of learning with others and necessary for an action to be internalized (Vygotsky, 1978), leading an individual to fuller participation. With Timmy already being one of the class, he participated in the cultural activity of the room and by being part of Emerson’s dance group, he learned he could approach a peer in this activity. Emerson, through modeling and invitation, helped children with disabilities interact with peers.

Other times, she invited children to work and play together. Lonny and Timmy, both children with learning needs, stayed at school after dismissal once a week for speech therapy. On this particular day, the two boys were the only children in the classroom. Lonny sat in the “teacher’s chair” (an adult sized chair in which Emerson sat during large group time) silently studying the cover of *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* (Martin, 1992).
Timmy, who was able to read his name and those of a few classmates, kneeled on the floor near the toy shelves. Emerson said, “Lonny is reading. He can read with you, Timmy.” After situating himself in the chair alongside Lonny, Timmy put his hand on the cover, and Lonny opened the book. He appeared to read each page, although sometimes he paged ahead to see the animal on the next page as Timmy looked on, apparently listening, until the speech clinician came for the children (1/25/05F6.6).

Emmy, a child with special needs, was in the dramatic play area with Daria and Braden, a child with speech needs. Initially, Braden sat in the chair, holding a doll, and speaking into the phone. I heard him say, “...girlfriend. Leave a message.” Braden laid down the phone and walked to the stove, while Emmy and Daria picked up the phones. Emmy held the phone to one ear, while flipping through the phone book. “I need your number. What is your name? What is it?” she demanded. Braden played with the baby doll, and Daria had another phone to her ear. Emerson, watching the scene said, “Emmy, I think Daria is calling you.” Daria replied, “I'm calling YOU [Emerson]!” Emerson conversed with Daria, while Emmy stomped away, apparently frustrated at not being able to find a phone number (10/19/04F2.5).

In this case, Emerson commented,

I was trying to get her engaged in the conversations with Daria and Braden...I wish I knew what Emmy was thinking. Is she frustrated about the situation with the phone book? Did she frustrated about the situation with the phone book? Did she want to be included in that conversation with Braden and Daria? Did she want to be Braden’s girl friend? (2/16/2005.1.7.46)

Emerson said Emmy had “such difficulty interacting with the other children” but observed that Daria and Emmy “had developed a relationship” (2/16/2005.17.51). Emerson’s attempt to invite Emmy into the play was unsuccessful this time.
Emerson knew her children, and she was cognizant of times when she might encourage them to work or play together. Through observation, Emerson knew Emmy rarely interacted with other children but had noticed friendship blooming between Emmy and Daria as they wanted to sit beside each other during group time. In her interactions with Logan, she knew he retold stories and read some words yet needed practice with articulation. Applying this knowledge, Emerson sought opportunities to have children address their needs within natural classroom activities, as opposed to isolated skill times. These times were important in helping children learn their own strengths, building their identities as learners, and bolstering their sense of belonging. For instance, Lonny demonstrated his abilities in retelling stories, while Timmy looked on with interest. Other times when children interacted, expressions of friendship or caring occurred.

When providing the opportunity, modeling, and inviting children to interact were not enough for children to access opportunities with peers, Emerson or Wilson intervened more directly. These interventions guided children’s interactions in conflict negotiation and in attempting to support play.

**Conflict negotiation.** When children became upset with one another, Emerson and Wilson intervened to facilitate communication and the children’s ability to come to an agreement about the matter at hand. As stated in Chapter I, Piaget believed inter-individual conflict was necessary to socio-moral and intellectual development. With appropriate guidance, children learn to take another’s perspective. DeVries and Zan (1994) call this process *conflict resolution*. Three underlying teacher attitudes necessary for conflict resolution are “be calm and control reactions, recognize that the conflict
belongs to the children, and believe in children’s ability to solve their conflicts” (p. 82).

Fourteen principles are outlined to guide teachers in conflict resolution (pp. 82-100).

Emerson demonstrated many of these principles in her interactions throughout the two years of the study. Emerson however prefers the term conflict negotiation as the process involves negotiating perspectives, a difficult task for most 4-year-olds and even more difficult for those with delayed language.

I present three different situations in which Kenny, a boy with moderate speech-language and learning needs, is supported in interactions with peers through conflict negotiation. After the vignettes, I discuss Kenny’s engagement in this process and with peers, and interpret the adult action in guiding the interaction in terms of DeVries and Zan’s (1994) principles of teaching in conflict situations.

Kenny and Brent, another boy with an IEP, chose to play in the construction area, which contained farm toys such as barns, tractors, wagons, animals, and farm workers. Each of the boys played with an item on the floor, while two peers played independently in the same area. Brent kneeled at one end of the play area, hooking a wagon to the tractor, and then he pushed it near Kenny. “No!” Kenny retorted, his face twisted in anger. Brent replied in a soft voice, his words indistinguishable. Kenny lifted the barn he had been playing with and stomped to Wilson, who sat at a nearby table. “Allen taking mine!” Kenny shouted as he noisily placed the barn on the table. Wilson calmly responded, “You need to call him by his name. Brent.” Brent approached the table as if Wilson had called him. “What do you want Brent to do?” she asked of Kenny. His anger seemed to dissipate as he quietly said, “Stop.” “You want Brent to stop?” asked Wilson.
“Yes,” Kenny answered softly. Brent shook his head once and voiced, “Uh, uh.” “Boys, you need to use your words,” reminded Wilson. Then she turned to Kenny and said, “You need to say ‘stop.’” Perhaps as communication of his own feelings about the conflict, or to remind Kenny, Brent showed the manual sign for ‘stop’ -- a quick slicing motion with the edge of his right hand stopping to rest in his left palm. Wilson then spoke to Brent, “If Kenny asked you to stop, would you?” Brent nodded vigorously two times. Kenny then opened the toy barn and removed a farmer that he handed to Brent. “That’s Kenny’s way of saying he’s sorry,” explained Wilson. Brent reached for the farmer and walked back to the construction area with Kenny (10/26/2003.F9.141-160).

Wilson remained calm and allowed children ownership in the conflict. Wilson helped the children verbalize their feelings and desires (Principle 4; DeVries & Zan, 1994, p. 85) as she prompted Kenny with such questions as, “What do you want Brent to do?” and “You want Brent to stop?” Wilson said, “It’s so difficult when neither of them speaks” (10/26/2003.I.F10.161). However, by asking questions that could be answered with short phrases, yes or no, Wilson assisted Kenny and Brent in communicating. Then she prompted Kenny to suggest a solution (Principle 6, p. 89). When Kenny stated that he wanted Brent to stop, Wilson restated this to see if Brent agreed to or wanted to suggest an alternate solution (Principle 8, p. 90). When Kenny spontaneously handed Brent the farmer, Wilson then interpreted this action for Brent as “That’s Kenny’s way of saying he’s sorry.”

Later in the year, Emerson related that Kenny tried repeatedly to engage Kassie in conversation but she rebuffed him by making faces or ignoring him. In early January,
Kassie dropped her mitten in the hallway, and Kenny picked it up. However, before he had a chance to hand it to Kassie, she tried to grab the mitten. Emerson, who watched from several feet away, now approached the children to prevent a physical struggle. Emerson interceded, modeling language for Kenny and explaining her interpretation of Kenny’s behavior to the girl. “I was trying to hand that to you,” Emerson stated for Kenny. Then she said to Kenny, “You were trying to hand that to her, weren’t you?” Kenny nodded, and then Emerson supported Kassie’s understanding by saying, “He was trying to be helpful. That was something helpful he was trying to do.” Kenny handed the mitten to Kassie, who put it in her locker (2/19/2004.12.5-6).

When Kassie grabbed the mitten, Emerson intervened and provided for the children’s physical safety (Principle 1; DeVries & Zan, 1994, p. 82). Although Kenny did not verbalize his feelings (Principle 4, p. 85), Emerson interpreted his actions as “being helpful” because she had observed him helping children on numerous occasions. Kassie put her mitten away, but I do not know if she said anything in reply to Emerson’s interpretation of this situation. DeVries and Zan (1994) urge teachers to help children repair their relationship but discourage teachers from forcing children to be insincere (Principle 13, p.97). The day following the mitten incident, Kassie accidently put her coat in Kenny’s locker. When he brought this to her attention, both children started laughing as Kassie moved her coat. In contrast to earlier interactions when she had rebuffed him, this interaction suggested that Kassie’s perception of Kenny had changed.

In late January, Kenny and Malcolm, both boys with speech and language needs, sat on the carpet as Emerson greeted the children and directed them to look at the job
chart during Opening. Kenny and Malcolm sat closely together, as one tried to push the other off a certain leaf sticker marking where children should sit. The boys pushed their toward one another and angrily looked at each other through narrowed eyes. Malcolm said, “...my leaf.” Emerson paused briefly, looking at the boys and then said, “Kenny, Malcolm said you are on his leaf.” “I was here first,” Kenny retorted. Emerson calmly directed the two boys “to go work it out.” Without further comment, the boys went to the designated area and spoke quietly for several seconds. Then they both rose and walked back to the group, sitting several spaces apart. Emerson paused again and asked, “What did you two work out?” Malcolm responded. Emerson, not hearing him, asked him to repeat what he had said. Then she reiterated, “He was trying to save your spot,” and Kenny nodded in agreement. Then Emerson said to the children, “Let’s give them a round of applause for working it out. They talked it over and came up with a solution.” The children joined Emerson in celebrating and then continued with the activity (1/21/2004.F12.11).

Emerson encouraged the boys to resolve the conflict by themselves (Principle 14; DeVries & Zan, 1994, p. 99). In interactions to this point, Kenny had direct support in his communication during conflict negotiation. Emerson believed the children could resolve this conflict. When the boys returned to group, Emerson helped clarify that Malcolm was saving a spot. The solution, while not verbalized, was the boys agreeing to sit with several children separating them.

Emerson commented on her reasons for using conflict negotiation in the classroom:
My goal for these kids...is to become autonomous. I want them to be able to problem solve and do these things on their own. And I do want them to become assertive and [know] they have rights as a person, and that you can assert those rights. And you know if somebody is doing something that you don’t like, it’s okay to tell them. I just think that it’s really important for these children instead of having an adult or another force come in and solve things for them...They’re very capable. They might need that...initial adult support in helping them tap into the vocabulary, the words that they need so that they can express themselves. I also think that it’s important for the other child to listen to the child who is doing the unwanted activity to listen to what the ‘victim’ has to say. I just think for them to listen to another child is so much more powerful because I think that children want to be accepted by their peers. They want to have a relationship.

Emerson saw conflict negotiation as an “essential” element of her classroom (5/6/2005.P). She saw it as “an investment” and establishing the “groundwork” for children, who, “as they go on in life,” will “be able to resolve their problems” (2/18/2005.14.20). Conflict negotiation also created a powerful context for learning to communicate even though children needed support in the process. Stone (2002) discusses the difficulty in verbal interactions for children who have learning difficulties. Inadequate vocabulary and limited or inflexible syntax provide challenges for both the adult and the child in creating mutual understanding of the task. Emerson and Wilson’s use of questioning and interpretation of children’s actions supported children in their understanding. Through conflict negotiation, Emerson helped children learn facilitated peer interactions and communication. Conflict negotiation acted to increase children’s awareness of themselves and others and was instrumental to help children learn to solve problems independently, a goal for children in the preschool program.
**Sharing Responsibility**

In the previous section, the general classroom structures provided opportunities for children with disabilities to participate with peers in the inclusive classroom. In this section, I describe the general classroom practices in which Emerson and the children share responsibility for learning and in developing autonomy. The practices are (a) guiding classroom roles and routines, (b) decision-making through voting, and (c) supporting children’s choices. I address each in a general way and then provide examples of how Emerson aids the participation of children with disabilities.

**Guiding Classroom Roles and Routines**

In the previous chapter, I outlined a day in Emerson’s classroom. Embedded in this was a description of the roles and routines in which children participated. Emerson assigned specific roles such as Leader, Weather Person, Table Setter, and Table Host. These roles helped to equalize the leadership and participation for children in that they made everyone publicly responsible for something in the classroom every two or three days. These roles illustrated the interdependence of the citizens in the classroom community. Every child acted in these roles; however, sometimes children needed support in order to fulfill their role. I outline some specific examples of how Emerson interacted with children to optimize their participation in these expected roles through questioning the child, verbally prompting the expected script, and interpreting words for other children.

When a child is Weather Person, she comes forward to stand near Emerson, who wraps one arm around the child while looking into the child’s eyes. Tiane, with language
and learning needs, comes forward to rest against Emerson’s leg, while the children begin singing, “Weather person, weather person, what do you say?” When the children finish, Emerson prompted Tiane “to look out the window.” Tiane appeared to look, and then moved the hands on the weather wheel (a circular graph divided to six slices, each illustrating a type of weather) to indicate “windy” and “cloudy.” Emerson directed, “Look at the sky. What do you see?” Tiane glanced and paused before responding “blue.” Then without any further cue from Emerson, Tiane changed the “cloudy” selection to “sunny” (1/12/2005.F2.11).

Another day, Timmy selected “windy” and “partly sunny” for the weather icons. Emerson said, “Look outside. What do you see?” Timmy replied, “Flag is moving.” “Yes, the flag is moving. What do you see that is shining?” Emerson asked. Timmy responded, “Sun,” and then indicated “sunny” instead of partly cloudy on the weather chart (1/27/2005.F1.5). As with every child who completed the weather, Emerson had each of the children choose what cheer should be performed to celebrate “doing a good job” completing the weather report.

These are only two examples of how Emerson responded to children to support their understanding of the task and optimize their experience as a leader. The task was repetitive and children knew what to expect when they went to stand near Emerson, however, the concept of reading the weather cues had not yet been learned. Emerson used questions to help children focus their observations on information to derive a better description of the weather. She used similar strategies with all the children. Emerson’s voice tone and body language did not change as she redirected children’s attention to
more salient points of weather; her manner was supportive and respectful. Likewise, all children’s efforts in risk-taking were rewarded with applause or cheers for a job well done. In the next examples, adults support children in their roles of Table Host.

In the role of Table Host, the designated children checked that each child at the table had each of foods offered for lunch, and signaled children when to start eating. The children were the models of caring about others and polite conversation. The bowls of pizza and peaches, along with individual cups of celery and peanut butter were passed from child to child. Then Emerson signaled Brent, a child with a speech impediment, to start asking the questions, or “reading the plate.” “Do you guys have pizza?” he asked, pointing to the item on his plate. “Do you have milk?” He asked as he touched his own milk. To each question, the children nodded or said, “yeah.” Then he said, “Do you guys have [he said something unintelligible]?” Emerson appeared puzzled as she scanned the table, “What was that? Maybe, that was peanut butter. You can tell them they may eat, Brent.” “You can eat,” Brent told the children (10/2/2003.F7.42).

On the first day of school, Tiane acted as Table Host. Brandi Altmann, the speech-language clinician was helping in the classroom. Tiane, a child with speech-language needs, had not seen the routine modeled before, and Altman prompted her, “Does everybody have milk?” Tiane pointed to her own milk, and Altmann responded, “You’re going to ask. Say, “Does everybody.” She paused mid-sentence as Tiane repeated, “Does everybody.” Altmann stooped to be at eye level with Tiane and said, “Have.” Tiane, watching Altmann closely, repeated, “Have.” Then Altmann supplied, “Milk?” which Tiane then said. Altmann then prompted Tiane by modeling full
questions for each food on the plate (9/7/2004.F3.17). Within several weeks, Tiane confidently and independently asked the questions as she hosted the meal (10/18/2004.F8.33).

Emerson and Altmann supported the children's participation in this classroom routine by interpreting words and modeling the expected script of the Table Host. In each case, the adult was sensitive to the child's level of understanding of the task, providing only the amount of assistance needed to help the child complete the task successfully. Emerson supported peers' understanding when she perceived Brent's speech was not clear enough for children to interpret and he refrained from pointing at the food he named. Altmann initially provided one and two word phrases after determining that Tiane did not know her role or the script for Table Host. After prompting the first question word-by-word, Altman modeled the full question, which Tiane repeated to the group.

As the Weather Person and Table Host, children participate within the classroom community. According to Emerson, these tasks, as well as Leader and Table Setter give children "opportunities to perform tasks and take on responsibilities that there is a real reason for doing, in other words, that are essential to the running of the classroom, not just fabricated tasks" (5/10/2005.P1). Emerson explained that the children developed an understanding of what the task or job involves as an adult shares or guides the activity early in the year. As children's competence develops, the responsibilities expand, allowing children to lead independently and take more responsibility for running the classroom. These tasks provided opportunities for language development and expressing
one's ideas and opinions. Emerson also described children who needed opportunities to have “center stage,” to feel comfortable talking in front of a group and to have some moments of “power” (5/10/2005.P1) -- of being in charge since they experienced few chances to do so outside of school or and would probably have fewer chances as they continued in their school careers. Emerson said, “I want children to develop a sense of classroom community, that they are active participants in the classroom -- decision makers, and that this also entails responsibilities along with their right to participate.”

Emerson explicitly expounded on the value of the tasks and roles of child leaders in her classroom. She saw these as opportunities for children to have “real reasons” to participate in the classroom in terms of developing competence and communication skills, as well as displaying legitimate power (5/10/2005.P1). In curricula focused on functional or isolated skills, children with disabilities may have few real reasons to develop these skills and participate in such opportunities as described by Emerson. However, the repeated participation in the routines, as observers and participants, and with assistance from adults, allowed the children identified with disabilities to be contributing members of the classroom community and to share responsibility of classroom membership with adults and other children. Emerson further encouraged children's participation and shared responsibility when children voted within the classroom.

**Voting as Group Decision-making**

Emerson shared responsibility with children through letting them vote on what materials or activities were provided in the classroom. Voting as shared responsibility
entailed the teacher's willingness to let children determine some outcomes in the classroom. In the following portrayal, the children vote on the theme for the dramatic play center. I illustrate the basic process of voting but also detail Emerson's actions as she allowed one child's participation within this classroom routine.

The children journeyed to the grocery store as part of a thematic unit on foods. The day following the excursion, Emerson had the children vote whether the dramatic play area should remain an "ice cream shop" or whether it should be changed to a "grocery store." With the children gathered on the carpet, Emerson placed pictures at the top of the two-column grid she had laid on the floor. One sheet depicted fruits for the grocery store, while the other represented the ice cream store. As Emerson called each child, he or she laid a nametag on the grid to select the ice cream shop or grocery store. Emerson announced each vote as individual children made their choices or asked the child, "Which did you vote for -- the ice cream shop or grocery store?" Occasionally, she paused in calling the children and led them in counting the cards in each column. Or she asked, "How many people have voted for the grocery store?" When Timmy, identified with speech and cognitive delays, laid his card on the grid, Emerson stated, "Timmy, you're voting for the grocery store." "Let's count," he said; then he pointed, with peers joining in the counting of the six cards under the groceries and the five under the ice cream. Then Timmy announced, "Ice cream needs one more." A few more times during the process, Timmy bounded from his space to hover over the chart and count the votes. At one point, many children had clustered around the chart, eager to see the outcome. Emerson instructed all of the children to "sit back so everyone can see," but Timmy
single-mindedly continued counting while Emerson said his name. He shouted, "There's eleven!" indicating the votes for the grocery store. Emerson, seemingly ignored Timmy this time and said to everybody, "We're going to count." She touched each vote as the class counted to determine whether their ice cream shop would be converted to a grocery store. When the voting finished, Emerson engaged the children in conversation about specific grocery items to include and about notes to parents soliciting items for the store (1/27/2005.F3.16).

In this voting scene, Emerson shared her responsibility as teacher and encouraged, indeed empowered, children through sharing the decision of what props would be available next in the dramatic play area. Voting was a resource in that it illustrated to the children one process of making decisions. The ensuing discussion about the items to include and the actual resulting action to change the play area to a grocery store, demonstrated that the process of making decisions democratically was a resource. It illustrated children's rights as citizens to participate in decisions that affected them.

Emerson made available these opportunities to be autonomous and to be active members of the classroom for all the children through a variety of means. She commented:

I think about how I would like the children to develop autonomy and to be active and responsible members of the classroom community. I want children to have opportunities to be active in the decision-making process of the classroom and to participate in the group life of the class. (5/6/2005.P)

Her use of themes relevant to children's lives helped children make connections beyond the classroom -- children had exposure to foods and grocery stores in school, but children were familiar with these from their personal experiences as well. Another way in which
Emerson helped share power was in the symbolic choices she used when implementing the voting. The hand-drawn pictures were easy for children to understand the choices of the grocery store and the ice cream store. Throughout the voting process, Emerson included children in interpreting the number of votes for each category, thereby making this more visible to children who may not yet independently understand the vote. She also allowed the children’s enthusiasm and movement as they counted and lobbied while deciphering the meaning of the graphing activity.

The children identified with disabilities participated in the voting alongside their more typically developing peers. Emerson helped provide access to the instructional and cognitive resources when she questioned Tiane as to where she had placed her vote, and Tiane correctly answered “grocery store.” Timmy was acutely aware of the votes placed in each category, and his repeated counting and comparison ("Ice cream needs one more") illustrated that he understood the number concepts in the voting process. These children, identified with speech and learning needs, contributed to the activity just as any other child in the class. Through Emerson’s techniques for inclusion in the voting process, these children shared responsibility within the classroom.

Emerson shared responsibility with her children through encouraging their participation in classroom roles and in voting. Another way she shared responsibility for learning and membership was to honor children’s choices to participate.

Supporting Choices in Participation

Emerson believed that “children have so little power in their lives,” and she attempted to counteract that by providing opportunities for choice. Through making
choices and learning about the consequences of their actions, children can learn to make responsible choices. Emerson offered opportunities for making positive choices through (a) allowing choice, (b) explicitly structuring choices, and (c) encouraging children to choose.

Allowing children to choose. In these examples, Emerson allowed children’s actions, such as deciding not to participate in dancing, that many may consider antithetical to the purposes of schooling, such as children following directions and participating in classroom activities. While some teachers may have seen these children’s actions in a different light, Emerson honored these as opportunities for children to choose.

On some mornings, individual children chose not to participate in the dancing and singing which Emerson did as part of Opening. During a song, Jackson sat with his head resting on his hands, sometimes seeming to mouth the words but not displaying the hand motions (2/11/2005.F2.12). Emerson continued leading the group but did not explicitly mention Jackson’s behavior. On another day, Peter, a general education peer, sat while the rest of the class stood to sing its welcoming song. As I invited him to stand, Emerson responded, “It’s alright, he doesn’t need to” (9/30/2004.F1.3).

When Emerson commented on these situations, she laughed and said, “It’s really important that children have choices…in the structured school setting that we have, we limit their choices a great deal…They need to make choices, and they have to [be able] to choose not to do things, too” (2/18/2005.F1.3). She continued that “some children are just not comfortable” singing and dancing in a group; that is something outside their
“comfort zone” (2/18/2005.F2.5). She empathized with the children, saying she did not enjoy doing some things required of her in groups because of the “pressure” and being “ostracized,” and “it’s important to respect that children feel that way too” (2/18/2005.F2.5). However, not all choices counter to Emerson’s expectations for children were allowed, and in these instances, she clearly provided choices for more desirable behavior.

Explicitly structuring choices. Emerson used these when a child was acting in a way that did not respect others’ rights to lead or listen. Emerson offered the “offending” children restricted choices to stay with or move from the group. These choices supported children in respecting others but also allowed them choices within the larger group structures. Throughout the two years in Emerson’s room, I saw instances of “side bar conversations” -- which allowed children who needed to talk about something the opportunity to do so -- and alternatives to staying with the group.

During Opening, Daria shared her art project brought from home. Although most children listened, Jonathon and Tiane, a general education peer and a child with special needs, talked between themselves. Emerson spoke their names while pointing to the listening icon. “If you don’t want to listen, go over to the table, but I want to listen to Daria. That is your choice.” The two children left to sit at the table but sat away from each other and did not speak. Emerson said, “If you want to talk, you can sit closer.” Then, Wilson, the paraprofessional intervened with the children (1/27/05F3.4). Emerson called this type of incident a “Side Bar Conversation,” and said, “It’s not respectful of what I’m doing [but if children] really need to talk with someone, it’s okay”
(2/18/2005.F1.3). She tried “not to present that as a punishment” even though children were removed from the group. Emerson “would love” to have the children join but acknowledged they may not be ready to do so (2/18/2005.F1.3).

In another Side Bar Conversation, Marco and Braden repeatedly spoke to each other during group. Emerson suggested, “If you need to talk, you may go to the table.” The boys sat at the table, and Marco talked animatedly about dinosaurs. He gestured with his hands while Braden quietly listened. When Marco paused, Braden said, “Can we go back to group now?” and the boys returned to the group activity (5/17/2005.F).

Emerson’s actions allowed children to retain their autonomy and avoided power struggles in the classroom. Children were not excluded in a demeaning way, and they were able to enter the group when they were ready to learn and listen.

**Encouraging choices.** Children were encouraged to make choices when they acted as leader in an activity. The group enacted the choices made by the child, and sometimes the leader acted as regulator to other children. A common time when children played this role was in sharing the projects, which they completed with the help of family. When children showed their project, Emerson asked questions to help the child elaborate on its construction. Then the child walked the project around the circle for his or her classmates to see. Tiane talked about her snow pal, which was made from three white circles and decorated. Then Emerson asked her, “Can children touch the snowman or just look?” Tiane said that children may “touch,” and she walked the snow around the circle, pausing for children to see and answering their questions (1/25/05F3.13).
Later that same week, Jackson displayed his snow pal, as Emerson prompted him to tell about it. "Jackson, is it okay for the children to touch your snow pal?" He said the children should "only look." Emerson reiterated this for the group, "Jackson would like you to look at his snow pal, not touch it." He walked it around the circle. When one of the children reached out as if to touch the project, Jackson reminded him, "don't touch." The child withdrew his hand, and Jackson continued around the circle (1/27/05F2.7).

All children shared their projects in this fashion. Each child requested the other children to "touch" or "not touch," and this was, for the most part, respected. Each child, no matter how quiet or how boisterous, had the opportunity to share and request that children respond in a desired way. This sharing period acted as a time for those sharing to experience some power but also presented the other children the responsibility to respect the child’s wishes.

Emerson shared responsibility with children through encouraging their participation in roles and routines, decision making through voting, and supporting children’s choices. Emerson purposefully chose these activities for reasons of meeting children’s needs. She also made choices of how to view children’s actions.

**Positively Framing Children’s Actions**

Throughout the study, I observed children initiating opportunities to contribute by verbally suggesting an idea or conveying some message through their actions. What made these children’s actions and ideas true opportunities was Emerson’s ability to see them as such and capitalize on the moment to allow the child greater participation or to highlight his or her knowledge in some way. Emerson believed that children want to
belong (2/19/2004.F5.15; 2/26/2004.F5.25), and she responded to children in such a way
as to have them fit in and foster their acceptance among peers, never belittling or
embarrassing children. These types of interactions appeared in two forms: maximizing
children’s effort to accentuate the positive and minimizing contributions to downplay
potentially disruptive behavior.

Emphasizing the Positive

Emerson was sensitive to the children’s actions and verbalizations. She often
acknowledged children’s contributions during group time, even if the child’s input did
not seem to me to fit the activity or discussion at hand. For instance, Emerson and the
children had just started the Opening routine when Jackson said, “I saw Timmy at [the
local discount store] last night!” Emerson paused and asked in astonishment, “Is that
right?” “I did too!” said Tiane, who was echoed by Peter. Emerson looked around the
circle of children and asked “Timmy, did you see these people at [the store]?” He
nodded earnestly in response (12/14/2004F1.8).

Jackson was a child who did not initiate conversation easily. When Emerson
suspended the Opening exercises briefly, she affirmed Jackson’s communication,
providing a chance for him to express himself in the conversation. She sensitively
responded to Jackson’s individual needs and seized the opportunities when he intitiated
conversation or expressed himself. In contrast, other teachers may have responded
differently to Jackson’s comment by ignoring it, telling Jackson, “not now” or chastising
him for interrupting. Emerson acknowledged Jackson’s contribution as something
worthwhile, not as bothersome, and affirmed his membership in her class.
On another occasion, the children gathered on the carpet singing along with a recorded song, which engaged the children producing varying qualities of voices – loud, soft, slow. Emerson prepared for another song by reviewing the words and illustrating the hand motions. As soon as she finished demonstrating, Timmy, with language and learning needs, leaped to stand directly in front of Emerson, and placed his hands on either side of her face, demanding her undivided attention. “Let’s use the magic lips,” he said in a slow, enunciated fashion, imitating the voice of the previous singer. She replied, “Let’s use singing lips first.” The group sang one verse of the song, and then Emerson announced the next verse by saying, “Now with your magic lips,” in which the children showed actions for the song but did not sing. When that verse ended, Daria said, “With our quiet lips.” “One more time with our quiet lips,” prompted Emerson as the class repeated the verse but this time in a whisper (2/11/05F3.14). Emerson was responsive to Timmy and Daria’s wishes, supporting their autonomy, and again allowing their contributions to be valid. In this instance, Timmy also acted as a leader in that Daria followed with her own request. She allowed each a voice in the classroom community by honoring their requests.

Emerson also capitalized on children’s spontaneous contributions in large group story time. Emerson and the children finished a finger play about apples. She placed a magnetic board for the children to see and proceeded to lay a red apple shape on it. “One,” Emerson said. As she placed a second apple, Brent, who had a moderate speech impediment excitedly called, “Two, two!” “How many apples?” Emerson inquired. “Two! Kara...” Brent responded, then paused. “Is your little sister Kara two?” Emerson
asked of Brent, who nodded vigorously. Emerson added another apple to the board, and pointed to each apple in succession, as the children counted, “One, two, three.” With the addition of the fourth apple, Brent raised up on his knees, waved his hand, and called, “Me, me, me!” “Brent, are you four?” Emerson offered. “Yeah,” he replied. With the placing of the successive apples, the children counted without offering other comments (10/02/03F7.44). Although Brent’s comments may have seemed out of place in some classrooms, Emerson understood that he was connecting the numerals to relevant aspects of his life, and she acknowledged this when she commented. She made this explicit for the other children. Brent’s comments allowed Emerson to understand more about Brent’s concept of number. Brent practiced articulation and expressed himself in large group; both of these were goals on his IEP. Emerson’s response to Brent reinforced his attempt to communicate.

Rogoff (2003) states that children and adults mutually structure participation in cultural activity. In each of the above events, Emerson and the children made choices about participation. Emerson structured the situations for large group participation and instruction in her classroom, yet she responded to individual children to enhance their experiences within the larger group. The children added their own understandings of the tasks, initiating opportunities for their further participation within those large group settings. In the following examples, Emerson worked with children’s choices to downplay possibly disruptive behaviors or outcomes.
Minimizing the Negative

Although children positively created opportunities for participation in the classroom, sometimes their actions were outside the norm for expected behavior. When this occurred, Emerson responded to individuals in a way that helped them participate within the larger group. These instances usually occurred when children gathered for large group activity. They usually related to children's actions as opposed to their verbalizations.

Sometimes children appeared to have difficulty sitting during large group activities. Lonny often fidgeted with his hands, touching the other children, sitting on his knees or laying on his stomach, although he did not appear intent on engaging others' attention. When Emerson observed this behavior in Lonny, she often provided a sensory toy -- in her classroom, this was one of several balls with flexible, translucent outer membranes encasing smaller items, which children could squish and poke. She offered it to him simply by saying "Lonny." He took the ball and proceeded to poke at it, seemingly trying to push through the membrane. Then he laid the ball on the floor and pressed it, while rocking his body forward and backward. While he was doing this, his eyes appeared oriented toward the lesson. For the duration of the lesson, Lonny directed his movement toward the ball and contributed verbally to the lesson (1/25/2005.F4.20).

Although Lonny continued to fidget, this did not threaten his participation in the group. Emerson quietly accommodated his movement by giving him something to keep his hands busy while she continued leading the group. Other times when he displayed these behaviors, she handed him a cushion to sit on or presented him with a stuffed
animal. These supported his self-regulation in sitting quietly and being part of the group lesson. In the next classroom event, Emerson had to intervene more directly to support a child's participation.

The class had been participating in the weekly speech lesson about autumn. First, the children listened to a story about leaves and performed actions to a poem about falling leaves. The final activity involved small groups of children in matching autumn pictures. Emmy, a child with communication and perceptual needs, participated in the activities. She joined with three peers and Emerson to play the game. Shortly after the game started, Emmy removed one shoe. Then she stretched out her body and lay on her stomach. Halle, a general education peer, lay down also, and Emmy crawled toward her, extending her hand. Emerson moved to sit near Emmy and gently lifted her to her lap. “When is this going to be over?” Emmy asked. “When is this going to be over? After we make some matches. I wonder if Lonny is going to find those marshmallows.” Emerson asked as if attempting to redirect Emmy’s attention. The associate, standing outside of the circle, asked “What would you like me to do, [Kate]?” “Maybe you could take the game,” Emerson replied as she attempted to replace Emmy’s shoe. Emmy arched her body, refusing the shoe. Emerson lifted Emmy from the group, took one step, and set her on the floor, while saying, “I’m going to put you on the floor and put on your shoe. Emmy, are you listening to [Kate]?” “Yes,” replied Emmy who allowed Emerson to replace her shoe, and then they returned to the game (10/18/2004.F7.29).

In this instance, Emerson was the “rule maker” and demonstrated heteronomous control to prevent Emmy from further disrupting the game. Emerson related, “I was
hoping Halle would provide that support for Emmy and tell her to ‘sit right here’” (10/18/2004.F7.31). However, when Halle followed Emmy’s lead instead, Emerson provided physical support for Emmy’s behavior. She initially tried the least intrusive act of sitting with Emmy, answering her questions, and then appeared to try to refocus her attention. When she unsuccessfully tried to replace the shoe, Emerson verbalized what she was doing such as “put you on the floor and put on your shoe.” Throughout the interaction, Emerson used a calm voice and invited response from Emmy, keeping her a part of the interaction instead of dismissing her role in it.

In each of these interactions, Emerson attended to the positive aspects or minimized less desirable aspects of children’s behaviors. As stated earlier, she expected a range of abilities in her class but also believed preschool education should be for everyone, and her responses acted to allow children to participate in her classroom. Emerson had expectations about how children should act, but she recognized that not all children could do that yet and was willing to work with each child according to his or her abilities. Her actions resulted in extending the experiences for children, such as singing with magic lips or otherwise allowing children to express themselves. Emerson viewed these as positive contributions on the part of children. In the instances where Emerson acted to decrease the influence of children’s behavior, her interactions were sensitive to the children and allowed them to remain part of the classroom community.

Previously, I have presented how Emerson fostered peer relationships, shared responsibility, and positively framed actions of children with disabilities. Woven throughout these opportunities, I have commented on curriculum. I have done this
because of the integrated nature of Emerson's classroom – curriculum is inseparable from routines and activities. Next, I describe in more detail the opportunities presented through her curriculum and how she facilitates participation for children with disabilities.

**Accessing the Curriculum**

Emerson was thoughtful about her curriculum. She carefully decided how to meet the academic, social-emotional, and physical goals of her program. The curriculum was structured within her classroom routines and it appeared natural and purposeful to the activity at hand. The curricular concepts had meaning because children needed to use them to perform some task or routine. Children rarely performed any skill outside of a context in which it was useful. Emerson was cognizant of that “teachable moment” or uniquely made opportunity to extend children’s thinking and language. In this section, the curricular-instructional opportunities are presented in the context of Emerson’s classroom routines and include: Opening, Story time, Project Sharing, and Play.

**Opportunities in Opening**

The opportunities embedded in Opening were many, but I will concentrate on those offered in four areas. The first is a routine in which numeracy is practiced as the class celebrated the Weather Person’s completion of his or her job. The second is another routine in which children read peers’ names; and the third is the language opportunity presented when children share projects. The fourth is the unique opportunity on which Emerson capitalized to help children understand their actions and a child’s sore thumb.

**Number fun.** Jerry completed the weather report and requested “alligator claps” - exaggerated claps in which the whole arm is used, suggesting the opening and closing of
an alligator’s mouth. Emerson asked how old he was, and Jerry held up four fingers and answered, “Four.” Emerson selected the numeral five from her cards and showed it to the group. Children respond, “No!” and “That’s not four.” Emerson then showed the group the numeral three. The children laughed and said, “Noooo!” Jerry, noted the numeral and said, “I have too many fingers for three!” “Oh, did you hear Jerry? He said he has too many fingers for three,” Emerson smiled as she showed the numeral four and the children performed the alligator claps, counting a one-to-one correspondence for each clap (11/1/2004.F1.10-16).

On another day, Jonathon completed the weather report, and Emerson asked how old he was. “Five,” Jonathon answered. Emerson handed the number cards to Jonathon, who selected the “five.” Timmy, with a disability, watched from his space on the carpet, walked to Jonathon, looked at the card, and then asked Emerson, “Is that five?” Timmy touched his finger to the card. “Yep, “Emerson replied. Then Timmy traced the numeral while Emerson recited the directions for making a five, “Over, down, and around” (2/11/05.F6.30). When he finished tracing, Timmy returned to his seat.

In Opening, children were exposed to number concepts, number writing, and counting. Occasionally, Emerson or a child modeled writing a number and this was paired with verbal cuing, such as “over, down, and around.” Every child was the Weather Person regularly and repeatedly experienced the routine; children had reason to learn their numbers in a fun and non-threatening way. The numerals were paired with meaningful opportunities to learn number concepts, and peers could learn from other children in this structure.
Recognizing letters and words. Each morning, Emerson posted children’s names on the Job Board. Children routinely checked the names before Opening. As children gathered for Self-selected Reading, they often looked to the board first to see which children had roles for the day. As I sat among children, I often heard, “I’m Leader,” or “Tiane’s the Weather Person.” Children were drawn to the board and spoke among themselves as they read the names. When no name card was placed by a job, children commented, “There’s no Table Setter.” The posting of children’s name for the roles motivated children to recognize letters and names.

Emerson further capitalized on using children’s name in Opening. Early in the year, she posted children’s first names on the chart. As children became more sophisticated in reading their own and peers’ first names, Emerson started posting children’s last names. One day Emerson showed the card “Fuentes” -- the last name of Karen. “That’s me! That’s me!” shouted Karen. Jackson, a child an IEP, stated, “Your name starts with K!” Emerson drew children’s attention to this, “Oh, did you hear what Jackson said? Karen starts with K, but her last name Fuentes.” Emerson covered all the letters but F. Then she made the sound for F and asked the children, “Can you make that sound?” (2/11/2005.F4.18).

Just as learning numerals was made meaningful in celebrating the end of Weather Person’s job, the idea of letters, sounds, and reading was made meaningful through the use of children’s name in the environment and in communicating the daily jobs. Children had other opportunities to see their names and names of peers in print; each day they located their locker and mailbox with their names posted on them. Frequently Emerson
reinforced letter-sound relationships during these times, but she explicitly did this during Opening. These opportunities gave children a reason for learning to read names and allowed the children with disabilities to listen and interact as other children were learning too. Plus, as Emerson introduced the last names, she was providing challenge for some children while still supporting other children at their level of understanding.

**Sharing projects.** One of the home-school connections that Emerson employed was the Traveling Suitcase, which contained activities for children and parents to do together. One activity typically involved constructing some art project related to the season. Then children brought the project back to school to share with peers. This sharing presented a rich source of language opportunities. Each of the following examples involved snow pals, snow people constructed of three cardboard circles and then uniquely decorated by families.

Jackson stood at the front of the group, resting against Emerson’s leg, while she held his snow pal for the class to see. Emerson posed questions to help Jackson tell about the buttons shaped like snowflakes and the black hat with the feather attached. Then she asked “Jackson, who helped you make your Snow Pal?” “My mom,” he answered. Then Timmy asked expectantly, “And your sister?” Emerson gasped in wonderment. “Did you hear what Timmy asked? Did your sister help you? Do you have sisters?” she asked Jackson. “Lacey,” Jackson supplied. “Is Lacey older or younger?” Emerson asked. “She’s a baby,” Jackson explained. “She’s a baby. She doesn’t use markers or scissors yet,” Emerson explained to the children (1/27/2005.F2.7).
At another time, a peer described how he and his mom had made his snow pal, and then started walking around the circle so each child could get a close look. When Jackson, a child with disabilities, saw it up close, he said, “What a dude!” Emerson looked surprised and asked “Jackson, what is a dude?” Jackson did not answer, but Jason, a friend sitting next to Jackson said, “It’s a nice guy.” “It’s someone who’s nice?” queried Emerson, and then nodded. Jackson added, “Not like those bad guys on TV.” The peer continued to show his snow pal and no other child commented (2/11/2005.F6.34).

Sharing of projects allowed each child the spotlight for a short time. Emerson helped children provide details of their projects through questioning and took advantage of children’s spontaneous comments to build further understanding. Although the sharing typically focused on the details of the decoration, conversations sometimes focused on the process of making the project or illuminated the child’s thinking and imagination in the creative process. Children had opportunities to express themselves but also listened as each shared their project.

Emerson purposefully structured her classroom and curriculum to allow children opportunities in language. In the next example, Emerson took advantage of a situation, attempting to extend language and understanding as a little boy returned to school after hurting his thumb.

Trying to learn from experience. The children had gathered for group Opening when Jonathon entered the classroom with a bandage on his thumb, the result of having his thumb pinched in the bathroom door the previous day. Emerson invited him to the
group and expressed that the “children were worried when you left school yesterday. What happened?” Jonathon responded that he “got an x-ray.” With Emerson’s guiding questions, Jonathon explained that an x-ray was a “picture of his hand” and that he had four x-rays taken. Jonathon’s mother, waiting to chaperone the field trip that morning, offered that nothing had been broken but the bandage was on his hand because of a cut.

Emerson then drew the conversation to the prevention of future pinches. “When you are in the bathroom, what can you do so nobody gets hurt? Put your thumb up if you have an idea.” Several children extended their thumbs. She called on Lonny, with a speech-language disability, who said, “It hurt.” “What can you do so that no one gets hurt?” Emerson reiterated. “Be careful,” volunteered Timmy. “How?” Emerson persisted. “Don’t get owies,” Timmy countered. Then Jackson offered, “Keep your hands to ourselves at the fire station” as he thought of the upcoming field trip. “And what about in the bathroom?” Emerson emphasized. Jonathon, the boy with the sore thumb, replied, “Don’t close the door and keep your hands by your sides” (11/9/2004.F2.6).

This conversation was more extensive, but these excerpts illustrate Emerson’s persistence in helping children learn from another’s experiences. In this instance, establishing the idea of prevention with some of the children was difficult but Emerson patiently pursued until Jonathon provided a solution. This spontaneous happening provided a context for learning about vocabulary, safety, and one’s actions.
Story Time

Another good opportunity for embedded instruction occurred during story time. Emerson read to the children in a large group and often encouraged participation in the story.

The story Mouse's Christmas (Baker, 1996) described the preparation for Christmas by one young mouse. Emerson used each of the items as a riddle to involve children. On one page, a large brown cookie with frosting was illustrated. Emerson showed the picture and said, "It's sparkly and sweet." "A sandwich," one child offered. "A sandwich?" questioned Emerson. "Hamburger," said another child. Emerson pointed to the picture and reiterated, "It's sparkly and sweet." "Cookie!" another child answered. The riddle game continued throughout the book with Emerson offering verbal or visual hints when the children to assist children in developing their answers.

Emerson related another time when she read Pumpkin Eye (Fleming, 2001). The children had looked for the letter 'p' in the book, and some children noticed that pumpkin had two 'p's in it. Children started to play with the sound /p/. A particular child became excited as he started connecting the /p/ sound with items he knew. Children spontaneously started providing words: Peter, paintbrush, paper. Then a child started saying, "Emmy, Emmy!" Emerson thought this was odd until she realized the child recognized E – the beginning letter of a peer's name. What surprised Emerson was that she had not worked specifically worked on sound-symbol associations, and the children played off each other to extend their understanding (11/5/2004.11.8-9).
Emerson embedded many skills in story time. Throughout the year, I observed her engage children in creating rhyming words, extended understanding about concepts, such as snow and stars. She broadened children's vocabulary development, encouraged children's questions, as well as promoted prediction, visual discrimination, and listening for learning and enjoyment. Although she planned some of the skills, Emerson also responded to children's interests. Children had opportunity to experience many skills within the context of stories. Children with disabilities participated alongside their typically developing peers, being exposed to the language and ideas in the conversations around books. This may be unusual for children identified with disabilities whose functional curriculum relies on hierarchical approaches to reading or who may not be thought of as candidates for literacy (Kliewer, 1998a; Kliewer & Landis, 1999; Koppenhaver & Erickson, 2003). Other opportunities for learning presented themselves through play.

Play

Within the course of play, Emerson tried to extend thinking and involvement with an activity. Jackson, a child with disabilities, was dressed in a blue surgical scrub shirt, which hung to his knees. He adjusted the surgical mask over his nose and mouth as he approached Emerson. "Jackson, are you a doctor or a dentist?" Emerson inquired. "A dentist," he replied. Emerson realized he had come to get latex gloves because she had told children earlier that morning that they may do so. "How many gloves do you need?" she asked. "Two," Jackson replied. Emerson handed one glove to Jackson, who immediately inserted his hand and tried to align it with the fingers of his hand. Emerson
then asked, “How many more gloves do you need?” “Two,” Jackson repeated. She held out two more gloves to the boy, but he only selected one. “No, I only need just two,” Jackson reiterated as he pulled on the second glove and walked away (2/18/2005.11.2).

In a second play scene, Emerson interceded to extend fire-fighting concepts with Jackson. This time, Jackson was dressed as a firefighter, with yellow slicker, red hat, black boots, and a fire hose of foam piping. Emerson acknowledged, “Jackson, you’re dressed as a fire fighter.” Jerry entered the dramatic play area, with arms flailing, and shouting, “I’m on fire! I’m on fire!” “Jackson, Jerry is on fire!” Emerson stated. Jerry repeated his call, and Jackson approached him, apparently spraying him with the hose. “The fire is out,” Jackson said, as Jerry moved away. Jackson started to leave the area, apparently losing interest, but Emerson interjected, “If there is no fire to fight, maybe you could do some training. Remember fire fighter Dan said he needed to train to be a good fireman.” Jackson walked to the carpet, where he pretended to spray two peers as they played with cars; then he returned to the dramatic play area and removed his fire-fighting gear (12/14/2004.F2.12).

In the play scenarios, Emerson created opportunities for Jackson to engage in mathematical thinking and to extend his language. Instead of handing him two gloves initially, she presented a puzzle for Jackson and questioned him to gain his understanding of the situation. In the firefighting scene, Emerson helped Jackson connect his actions with the class trip to the fire station and prompted his imagination by suggesting he “do some training.” Emerson did not always have the time to do this because she might get “caught up in other things, but “it’s those moments” when she gets excited to watch
children in their thinking (2/18/2005.16.38). These moments also provide children with rich opportunities to have their thinking challenged by Emerson and be provided individual instruction.

Embedded instruction happens throughout the day in Emerson’s classroom. The curricular concepts and skills to be learned are embedded in the roles and routines in which children participate. These proved a context to make knowledge or skill acquisition meaningful to the child. Emerson capitalized on children’s words and actions; she provided individual assistance and supported participation of children within the classroom community. The examples of offering opportunities and access in peer relationships, shared responsibilities, supporting choice and embedded curriculum illustrated Emerson’s actions to support children within the immediate classroom event. Next Emerson’s actions are detailed as she assists children over time.

**Sensitively Responding**

In socio-cultural theory, development is evident in the ways that one’s participation change over time in cultural activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003). Development is possible through social partners’ communication and coordination in shared activity (Rogoff, 2003). The goal of communication is *mutual bridging* of perspectives in which the individuals adjust perspectives to arrive at a shared understanding of the task (Rogoff, 2003). In this section, I describe how Emerson’s actions with two children throughout a period of weeks acted to scaffold the children’s independence and classroom membership. Each vignette illustrates the fluid nature of the interactions through using multiple symbol systems and in the shifting of responsibility.
for participation to the student as well as suggesting that the context provides the motivation for the child’s development. I describe how Brent became better able to express his desires to the class and how Tiane moved toward greater participation through learning the class tooth brushing routine. Each vignette is presented and then followed by an analysis of the interactions. The changing nature of the interaction and the shift of responsibility from teacher to child are depicted in Appendix E.

Expressing One’s Self

During the first year, Brent developed his ability to verbally communicate his desires within the large group. Brent was identified with moderate speech delays and had received speech services since he was 18-months old. In the weeks of the first semester in year 1 of the study, Brent progressed from expressing himself through vocalizations and gestures to communicating with speech. This progression was noted in a 10-week period during large group activities such as singing and story time. The children sat on the carpet while Emerson sat in a chair at the front of the group. Initially, apparently distressed by the noise created when peers were excited about the ending of a story, Brent covered his ears, rocked on his knees, and loudly said, “Lu, lu, lu!” followed by “Kate!” Emerson interpreted Brent’s actions as his communication and pointed to the “listen” icon (see Appendix F) and signaled children to understand Brent by putting her finger to her lips, indicating “quiet” and asking, “Are we too loud, Brent?” When Brent responded by pointing at two talking children sitting close by and then covering his ears again, Emerson directed the children to “look at Brent.” She explained, “He’s covered his ears. That means we’re too loud” (10/0202003.F). The children became quieter.
Three weeks later, the children listened to another story and became very excited while talking about Halloween events portrayed in the book. As the children talked, they became louder. Brent looked around the group of children, and then he rose, walked to the ‘listen’ icon and tapped it with his finger while looking at Emerson. “It’s too noisy, isn’t it, Brent?” Emerson acknowledged. He nodded once and returned to his place on the carpet (10/23/2003).

In December, the children gathered on the carpet. Emerson led the calendar activities, in which Brent was to be the Weather Person. The children sang the weather song that acted as an invitation for the Weather Person to tell the day’s weather report. Some children began boisterously singing the song again. Brent covered his ears and stated loudly, “You’re hurting my ears!” This time, without intervention from Emerson, Brent’s statement resulted in the children becoming quiet (12/19/2003).

This account provides a brief description of Brent’s changing participation in conveying his thoughts to the large group of classmates. Emerson supported Brent’s communication through mutual bridging (Rogoff, 2003) or establishing intersubjectivity with Brent as she assisted him in negotiating his desires and in his participation with his classmates. She accomplished this in two ways: through implementing a variety of symbolic modes that Brent seemingly appropriated and by varying the amount of assistance throughout the semester, thereby shifting the responsibility for communication from herself to the child.

First, Emerson used multiple symbol systems, such as visuals and gestures, at the beginning of the school year to supplement verbal requests. She introduced the “Listen”
sign by pointing to it when the children became noisy. Along with drawing attention to
the picture cues, she sometimes placed her index finger on her lips or covered one of her
own ears and said, "Oh, Kate's ears are hurting." Throughout the semester, she
repeatedly incorporated these gestures and phrases representing "listen," in her
interactions with students and modeled various ways to communicate using diverse sign
systems. Her use of these sign systems made these legitimate ways of communicating in
the classroom, and children other than those identified with disabilities utilized the icons.
Brent came to use these forms of communication throughout the weeks when he pointed
to the icon, and, when at last, he verbally communicated that the children should "Be
quiet." Emerson's and classmates' modeling of alternate symbol systems, appeared to
scaffold Brent's use of verbal communication.

Secondly, Emerson and Brent's responsibilities for the communication changed
throughout the semester. Initially, Emerson assumed the responsibility for Brent's
communication with his classmates. She supported Brent's self-expression over the
weeks through: (a) accepting vocalizations and behavior as suitable expressions for
needs; (b) interpreting his behavior for classmates and thereby increasing peers'
understanding of Brent's behavior and communication mode; (c) communicating his
needs through verbal, visual, and gestural modes; and (d) modeling respect of individual
differences for Brent and his peers. When asked to explain her perceptions of this
vignette, Emerson related:

Brent had something important to say. I want the kids to feel empowered to
express themselves. Part of that is the relationship; if you express yourself, it's the
other person's job to listen or to acknowledge that in some way....With support,
they can out what that is....and they can communicate that to the other person.
And then helping them be aware, and pointing out those things - like the body language that someone might not be able to verbally tell you, but you can tell by their eyebrows or their eyes or things like that. (11/5/2004.16.29)

Emerson provided opportunities for the other children to observe and hear her interpretation of Brent’s actions. She helped Brent communicate his wishes and provided a model of respectful interactions through referencing Brent’s behavior and “reading” or making explicit the reasons for his gestures to the classmates. She was concerned that all the children learn to express themselves, and Emerson assisted each child at the level appropriate for her or him. She reiterated the importance of peers in the learning process.

I’m hoping...that I can step back...and be the observer, maybe the encourager, but I don’t have to be as much the model bringing that to their attention so that they will take that over for themselves and support each other. (11/5/2004.18.31)

In the previous two statements, Emerson illustrated two salient points of scaffolding – establishing intersubjectivity and offering temporary support. First, Emerson helped children understand the classroom expectation of communicating and respecting peers through her use of alternate communication systems. She did not rely solely on verbal channels but used icons and gestures as well to help establish these as goals with her children. She established intersubjectivity with the children and helped children establish intersubjectivity with one another through making Brent’s intention of communication explicit through stating her interpretation of Brent’s behavior, modeling what Brent might have said, and referencing the sign through gesture and facial expression. Secondly, she wanted to “step back” after temporarily supporting children’s understanding to allow them to become self-sufficient. Early in the year, she presented children with multiple communication systems. Brent used these initially with Emerson supporting him.
verbally and through gestures. Eventually Brent communicated independently through
gesture and then verbally. As Brent became more savvy in his ability to communicate,
she eventually removed her involvement in the interactions.

In this sequence of Brent’s increasing sophistication to communicate, the three
essential components of scaffolding were present: context, contingency, and challenge
(Stone, 2002). The context in which the scaffolding occurred was important as it provided
motivation and supported meaning-making (communication) in the goal-directed activity.
The context provided the relevance or the reason for attaining the goal. The challenge for
Brent occurred as he learned to be part of the larger inclusive classroom community and
to communicate in ways similar to peers. The context in which many peers are verbally
fluent, the emotional climate is safe, and the expectation that Brent communicate verbally
appear to be significant factors in his progress.

Ms. Koontz, Brent’s mother, reported that initially her son had difficulty making
the move from the ECSE, where student numbers were low (8 or fewer) to Emerson’s
program where 15 other children were in the class. Koontz continued, “He had a hard
time with...all those kids around that he had to start communicating to” (7/7/2005.12.18).
Koontz commented that the adults prompted Brent in his interactions with the children.

He would look to them [the adults] and be like “what do I say here?” They had
visual prompts in the room. For instance, they had a “listening” sign, or a “stop”
sign, or other things that would communicate their [the children’s] feelings
without them having to use words. He would go up to that board and point at that
to say, “This is what I’m trying to get across, you know.” They also used sign
language for “stop” and “no” - some signs that were real basic that would help
him communicate what he was trying to tell. (7/7/20041.3.20)
Koontz reported that by the second semester, Brent was able to approach children "in a peer-to-peer relation, and communicate what he was feeling and what he wanted and have them do the same back" (7/7/2004.I3.18) and "without so much adult prompting" (7/7/2004.I4.33). As outlined above, Brent's actual participation in the inclusive classroom provided him real reasons to learn to communicate in friendly interactions with classmates and in the structured classroom opportunities, such as a leadership role, which Emerson provided in the classroom.

**Learning a Routine as Participation**

A routine in Emerson's classroom is daily tooth brushing. As mentioned previously, Emerson uses routines in her classroom to help children learn responsibility; in this case, the routine reinforces the child's hygiene and responsibility in caring for one's self. As a routine, tooth brushing was a cultural activity mandated by the state program. The expectation was that all class members brush his or her teeth. Participation in tooth brushing was what members of the classroom did. Tooth brushing was directly taught in small groups with the adults stating directions and modeling the process. Songs about tooth brushing played in the background and peers acted as possible models. Tiane was a child who was easily distracted during this large group routine, but Emerson supported the child's membership in tooth brushing, as demonstrated in the following sequence.

Initially, Tiane was distracted; sometimes her toothbrush was in her mouth, but she may or may not have been brushing. She often clasped her brush in one hand and waved it in the air as she looked at peers. Other times, she apparently stared into space,
while alternately sitting on her knees and then standing instead of sitting in her chair and focusing on the directions provided for good oral hygiene. When Tiane displayed these behaviors, Wilson, the paraprofessional said, “Tiane” and then repeated the most recent direction such “Brush your upper grinders”; this often resulted in Tiane engaging in the activity for only a brief time. While the other children rinsed their toothbrushes and moved on to the next activity, Tiane remained at the table with Wilson who provided individual directions for Tiane to finish her brushing (12/14/2004F2).

In January, Tiane sat among her peers and started brushing, but within seconds, she appeared to watch the other children and stopped brushing. Wilson noted Tiane’s actions and retrieved a small chart with an icon sequence depicting the tooth brushing routine: chair, brush teeth, rinse toothbrush, and carpet. She gave this to Tiane, who laid the chart on the table. Wilson paused in her directions to the rest of the group, said, “We’re right here,” while pointing to the brush teeth icon. As I watched Tiane, she focused alternately on Wilson and the icons, pointing to the brush teeth icon with her index finger. As the group progressed to rinse toothbrush, each child waited to rinse his or her toothbrush. Tiane raised the chart to show a peer and said, “We’re here now.” The boy nodded while Tiane placed the card back on the table and sat in her chair, looking at the icons and occasionally looking back as children rinsed their toothbrushes, until the leader called Tiane to rinse her brush (1/25/05F5.15).

A couple of days later, Tiane sat at the table with the student teacher Ginny. Tiane stood, then sat and stood again while chatting with Ginny and waiting for the tooth brushing music to start. Emerson approached the table with the icons when Ginny said,
“I've been talking to her about sitting in her chair.” Emerson turned to Tiane and said, “Ginny told me she’s been talking to you about sitting in your chair.” Tiane sat on her bottom expectantly, focused on Emerson, who handed the icon chart to Tiane. As the brushing commenced, Tiane brushed, moving her brush as directed, but she also had one finger anchored to the icon which showing “brush teeth.” She seemingly switched her focus between Ginny and the picture. “Tiane, are you getting the bottom ones?” Ginny asked. “Uh-huh,” Tiane said. “What’s the last part we brush?” Ginny asked the children, and several children said, “Our tongue.” With the brushing completed, children waited until they were called to rinse their brushes. During this time, Tiane pointed to each icon and said, apparently to herself, “Sit on our chair, brush our teeth, rinse our toothbrush, sit on the carpet.” Ginny asked, “What are we doing now?” Tiane pointed to the icon of the chair, the first on the card. Ginny then said, “Sit on chair, brush teeth, rinse – that’s what we’re doing now.” Emerson checked back with Tiane, asking “Did you sit while you brushed?” Tiane nodded affirmatively, and Emerson remarked “Good job brushing your teeth.” When the leader dismissed Tiane to rinse her toothbrush, she joined the rest of the children gathered on the carpet (1/27/05F5.23).

As the year progressed, Emerson reported that Tiane was inconsistent in completing the tooth brushing routine when not using the icons (4/29/05.P1). However, the routine changed as children became more independent in this activity; Emerson had the Leader direct tooth brushing in a large group on the carpet. In this setting at this time of the year, Tiane participated in the routine with only one verbal prompt from Wilson (5/26/05.F1.2).
Although Emerson expected all children to complete the tooth brushing routine, she was aware that the scaffolds of multiple symbolic systems already in place — the adult and peer modeling, explicit verbal instruction, and music — were not effective in helping Tiane complete her brushing. To sustain participation in this daily routine and help Tiane participate in a manner more like her peers, Emerson presented her with a sequence of four icons and words illustrating the tooth brushing routine and told her “these pictures will help when you brush your teeth” (2/16/2005.11.3). In reflecting on the decision to provide the icons, Emerson commented:

Tooth brushing was one of those times during the day that was difficult for [Tiane] to stay focused.... And she did seem to respond to other times when we have used visuals with her and that does seem to help give her that little reminder of what to do. (2/16/2005.11.2)

Emerson noted that visuals were effective in assisting Tiane’s journey toward independence in other situations such as the bathroom routine and using safe behavior on the bus. Referring to the latter, Emerson said, “She refers to [the icons] now on her own, and actually, she hasn’t needed that so much now. She’s kind of weaned herself off” (2/16/2005.11.3). With this knowledge about Tiane’s success, Emerson implemented visuals again in an effort to have Tiane brush among her peers.

Emerson applied what she already knew to be an effective mediator for Tiane -- the visuals. Based on this local knowledge (Geertz, 1983; Kliewer & Landis, 1999), Emerson responded sensitively to help Tiane in her journey toward independent brushing but also toward more similar participation with peers in the context of teeth brushing. In effect, she determined Tiane’s ZPD — her independent level of performance in tooth brushing, and then she provided assistance by using the icons to foster a more desirable
performance. Emerson’s knowledge of Tiane’s uniqueness, the manner in which she approached Tiane, and the use of the icons, appeared to allow Emerson to establish intersubjectivity about the goal of the activity -- to be independent, to brush teeth and to be a class member. Emerson adjusted her action as she ‘read’ Tiane’s behaviors and responded by supplying the icons. In reflecting on the icon use and Tiane’s participation during the oral hygiene routine, Emerson reported:

[The icon sequence] just takes that adult course of element out of it, and she can be successful....She can be a part of the group. She can be doing what everybody else is doing and going along to the next activity and doing it with the other children who are so important in learning....I just want her brain to get that pattern in there and feel like she belongs and can do things with the other kids. (2/16/2005.12.8)

The visuals supported Tiane’s completion of the skill but also appeared to mediate the mental process and behavior that allowed her to progress toward independence by remaining among her peers with a minimum amount of adult guidance. Emerson was aware that children sometimes needed additional structures to help them learn the daily routines and expectations within the classroom and help them be part of the classroom community. She also suggested that Tiane would have better relationships with her peers if she was able to participate in a manner similar to her typically developing peers, which supported her citizenship in the class. Emerson also pointed out that the adult is not the only one teaching in classroom; the children are teachers of one another. Late in the year, Emerson had a peer lead the routine, and in the instance, I observed Tiane brushed her teeth with the rest of the children with little adult intervention.

Besides helping her participate in the tooth brushing routine with increased self-regulation, the icons appeared to create two other opportunities for participation for
Tiane. First, she fleetingly showed a boy the icons and spoke to him; apparently the icons provided a topic of comment, an impetus, or, perhaps, a way to communicate with her peer. This could have been significant since Emerson said that Tiane initiated few interactions with her peers. Second, Emerson also commented that because Tiane completed her brushing more easily, or in ways more similar to the other children, that the icons provided a way for Tiane to be in "leadership position" as opposed to disrupting others.

Emerson was sensitive to individual children. She assisted them over time to become more independent and to become part of the classroom community. She provided the environment where skills could be learned and supported development using alternate symbol systems. In the last chapter, I summarize the study and discuss implications for creating inclusive classrooms.
CHAPTER VI
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the preceding pages, I have presented a case study examining full classroom participation for children identified with disabilities. In this chapter, I provide a summary of the study, discuss creating inclusive educational contexts, suggest implications for teaching, and offer ideas for future research.

Summary

In this naturalistic inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), I investigated how one teacher provided opportunity and access to full classroom participation for children with disabilities in her inclusive preschool classroom. The site was a state-funded preschool program for children considered at risk for school failure. The primary participants included a preschool teacher with more than 22 years of experience and ten of her children identified with mild to moderate disabilities. Non-disabled preschool children and other adults who interacted with children in the classroom were additional participants. I was a participant-observer over two academic years and collected data mainly through descriptive and analytic field notes as well as formal and informal interviews. I analyzed the data using the constant-comparative procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 2003) and constructed themes illustrated in the data regarding the participation of children with disabilities in the inclusive classroom. Triangulation of the data occurred through extended time in the field, multiple data sources, other researchers, member checking, and peer debriefing.
I was specifically interested in the ways that this teacher assisted children identified with disabilities in learning within the natural context of her classroom. The socio-cultural approaches as articulated by Vygotsky (1978), Rogoff (2003), and Lave and Wenger (1991) provided me with the theoretical basis for the study. This theory defines development as resulting through human interactions and the use of tools and artifacts of one's culture. In the Vygotskian articulation, the concepts of the zone of proximal development and adult scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) of children's learning initially guided my understanding of what I viewed in the classroom. As I progressed in this study, my knowledge of the teacher and her classroom interactions was informed by Rogoff's (2003) view of development as the transformation of a person's "participation in shared socio-cultural activities" (p. 285). This transformation occurs through guided participation in joint activity with others but in varied ways that are not specifically academic. Mutual bridging and mutual structuring of opportunities are two universal ways in which adults and children cooperate in learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced me to the concept of legitimate peripheral participation, in which development is viewed as one's moving from peripheral to full participation within the community. The ideas of apprenticeship, access to resources, and the power differential between the teacher and apprentice were important to my interpretation of the interactions in this preschool classroom. The concept of intersubjectivity, or establishing a common goal among social partners, is important in one's development. The nature of the teacher-child relationship influences the type and quality of learning, and this was evident in the interactions I observed.
I focused on the participation of children with disabilities in terms of what promoted their membership within the classroom. Inclusion of children with disabilities, at its most basic, speaks to the right to belong to the community, to develop individually, and as a member of the group. Observing in classrooms where all students are effectively included is important to understanding how students with disabilities can become members of a classroom community.

My findings indicate the following as important in providing for participation and membership in the inclusive preschool class: the classroom context, the opportunities for children with disabilities to participate, and the ways in which the preschool teacher guided participation for such children. The classroom context was influenced by the teacher's background experiences, a long-range vision for children's learning, the roles she fulfilled in her classroom, and the temporal and physical aspects of the learning environment. This teacher's background experiences, including college coursework, being a mother, and acting as a classroom volunteer influenced her interactions with children and views of how children learn. She consciously guided children's interactions based on the belief that she was preparing students for their adult lives of being responsible citizens. Children need to have opportunities to make choices and solve problems in the classroom and in childhood if they are to make good decisions as adults. Essentially, children can only learn to make good decisions if they participate in decision-making. The teacher viewed her role as facilitating children's learning; therefore, she did not feel as if she directly taught children but provided an invitation and guided opportunities to learn in a child-centered curriculum.
The teacher purposefully decided the temporal and physical aspects of the classroom. Temporal factors related to time, its use, and its malleability. Examples included the classroom schedule, which provided direction for the day but did not rigidly dictate the day. The pacing in the classroom was relaxed. The teacher was aware of teachable moments and took opportunities to question or respond to children’s comments to extend thinking and language. Building relationships was a priority for this teacher, and she molded time to fit the situation and maximize learning opportunities.

The classroom context, including the deliberate arrangement of the furnishings and materials, reflected the teacher’s belief that children need engaging activities, are responsible partners in their learning, and able to care for classroom belongings. All children had the right to use attractive materials, to initiate interactions with peers, and make choices about learning activities. The teacher artfully used temporal aspects to develop autonomy, to instruct individuals, and to establish trusting relationships. It was obvious that the classroom context was thoughtfully designed to assist all children in their development.

In this classroom, children with disabilities had opportunities similar to those of their non-disabled peers. To assure that this occurred, this teacher deliberately guided children’s actions and understanding in five areas: relationships with peers, sharing of responsibility, choices in participation, teacher framing of children’s actions, and access to an embedded, child-relevant curriculum. To develop relationships with peers, the teacher provided the temporal and physical spaces where children with and without disabilities could play and work without direct supervision by an adult. However, the
teacher monitored opportunities and helped all children appropriately participate in activities and interact with peers. The teacher believed children's peers are powerful teachers, and she created opportunities for children to learn from one another.

The teacher shared responsibility with her children by encouraging choices, fostering their participation through voting on classroom matters, and creating child leadership roles. She supported autonomy through encouraging choices and creating times when students needed to choose – as in stating their Work Time preference or whether peers could touch an art project. The teacher also honored the times when students were unable or unwilling to attend to a lesson. At these times, students were offered choices of staying with the group, using a sensory toy, or prompted to use sidebar conversations in which children left the large group to pursue their own discussions. Although she desired the students to be part of the class activities, this teacher acknowledged that sometimes children might be unable to participate in ways traditionally expected. At these times, she encouraged the children's autonomy in returning to the class activity.

The teacher invited children to help make decisions in the classroom through voting. Children voted on whether to change the dramatic play area, and they further shared responsibility by helping the adults change the play props and discussing what other items would be needed. With suggestions from the children, the teacher drafted a letter to parents informing them of the change in the dramatic play area and of items they might supply.
The teacher established times for leadership. Children became responsible for giving the weather report, setting tables, and being table hosts. Every child performed these jobs regularly, with adult help if needed. The expectation was that all children would be a part of the classroom community, and these leadership roles promoted individual competence and interdependence among classmates. Through sharing responsibility with children, the teacher also modeled how each person is an asset to the community and how each person is responsible to the others in the classroom.

The teacher made conscious decisions regarding children’s responses. She framed behavior in positive ways, capitalized on partial or seemingly incorrect responses and minimized potentially disruptive actions. For instance, when a child fidgeted during a lesson, the teacher provided sensory toys or other items to allow the child to remain with the group and minimized the potential negative effects of the child’s behavior. If a child volunteered information that did not appear to fit the learning situation, the teacher maximized the child’s response by drawing on her personal knowledge of that child, helping verbalize the child’s possible contribution, and linking the child’s response back to the lesson.

Finally, the teacher designed a curriculum that was purposeful for children – real opportunities existed for reading, writing, speaking, and thinking. This was evident in the teacher’s use of children’s printed names for many activities, schedules that were available in print and pictures, and learning conversations that were connected to children’s lives in and out of school. This teacher created these opportunities in her
inclusive preschool classroom for all children and supported children’s independence and growth through sensitively assisting children.

The teacher intentionally guided children’s participation over time and responsively assisted them to become more independent in their communication and following of classroom routines. This involved applying her local knowledge (Kliewer & Landis, 1999) of a particular child in order to support that child. The teacher accomplished this through observing the child in the context of the physical and social environments. She attended to the timing of interactions in order to implement verbal, non-verbal, and iconic cues to scaffold children’s participation. Initially, the teacher took the majority of the responsibility for the learning activity; yet as the child became more independent, the teacher became less directly involved in the interaction.

This teacher responded to the individual child and addressed specific learning goals within the context of naturally occurring classroom situations. As demonstrated by examples in previous chapters, the choices of this teacher regarding children, learning, context and personal interactions assisted children with disabilities to achieve greater participation within the classroom community. Through their actual participation in the activities and interpersonal interactions, the children achieved greater participation in this preschool classroom. In the following sections, I discuss this teacher’s principles guiding her teaching in an inclusive classroom.

Creating Contexts of Participation

The purpose of this study was to investigate how one teacher assisted children identified with disabilities to participate in the inclusive preschool classroom. In creating
a context where children of diverse abilities moved to greater participation, I realized Emerson made choices about classroom practices based on a set of principles. These principles are belonging as a foundation for learning, belief in the competence of students, a long-range vision for children's development, educating the whole child, and sharing power in the classroom.

**Belonging as a Foundation for Learning**

Emerson creates a culture of belonging and respect through her interactions with children, developing their identities, supporting children's emotional growth, and strengthening their membership in the class. According to Emerson, all children want to belong and be treated with respect. Her interactions show respect for the diverse abilities and talents of the children, appreciating the uniqueness of each child. In her teaching, Emerson observes children's strengths, and she capitalizes on opportunities where children can utilize these. She believes that helping children develop their identities is a key aspect of learning. As children realize their talents and worth, children are more likely to engage in desirable activities and interactions. Buoying up children's strengths increases their peers' and their own awareness of talents. Emerson nurtures children yet is firm in her expectations for behavior. When children contribute to class activities in unexpected ways, Emerson responds in ways that are never demeaning but supportive of children's psychological and social growth. Emerson believes that children have to develop relationships with adults and peers in order to do their best in learning academics. She supports this by skillfully teaching conflict negotiation and creating leadership roles in which all children have responsibilities to the group. A social
foundation is the basis for development as peers and adults provide feedback for learning academic and social skills. Supporting membership of children is accomplished through increasing children’s awareness of their abilities and interdependence among the class members. The children are immersed in an environment where caring is emphasized.

A Belief in Children’s Competence

Emerson believes children are competent and that teachers do not know the full potential of students. Emerson’s interactions with a child are guided by her belief in the child's ability to become “a reader,” or “problem solver,” or the other myriad positive things children are expected to become in school. This is a powerful belief regarding children with disabilities, who more often are viewed as incapable, and, therefore, are educated in segregated classes where children have little hope of learning what is needed to return to the general education program. In studies of literacy and disability, teachers who have this orientation provide opportunities to develop literacy to children otherwise deemed incapable of being literate (Kliewer, 1998a, 1998c; Kliewer et al., 2004; Kliewer & Landis, 1999).

Believing that children are competent, Emerson structures the learning environment to support children’s autonomy. Given the opportunities to engage in self-selected book time, make choices in play, initiate interactions, and participate in classroom roles and routines, the children with disabilities gain sophistication in self-regulation. Emerson initially has to support some children in these activities, but with thoughtful guidance, children progress toward independent activity.
A Long-range Vision for Children's Development

Emerson has a long-range outlook for her preschool children and believes she fosters the development of dispositions and abilities that will prepare children to be responsible adults in society. Driven by demands in schools on meeting academic standards, teachers often focus energies on teaching the skills needed to have children perform well on the test or on preparing children for the next year. In programs where progress of the child is based on achieving a hierarchical set of skills, teachers may focus only on what the child can do now or in the immediate future and not consider what is needed as a foundation to becoming a participating member in wider society. Dismal statistics on high school graduation and adult employment for students identified with disabilities underscore the need for schools to do better in preparing such students for life beyond school. When compared to individuals without disabilities, those with disabilities drop out of high school at higher rates (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1993, 1997, 1999), graduate from high school at lower rates (National Council on Disability, 2000), and are employed at lower rates (National Organization on Disability, 2000). In surveys, only one-third of people with disabilities report satisfaction with life commensurate with that of people without disabilities (National Organization on Disability, 2000). Adopting the idea of preparing students with disabilities for life can help a teacher consider abilities and dispositions to develop throughout school careers, such as problem solving and tenacity that are important in wider contexts.
Education Involves the Whole Child

Emerson addresses the needs of the whole child. For all children, including those with disabilities, she provides for physical, intellectual, and social-emotional development. In special education programs rooted in medical models and in a belief that deficiencies originate in the child, the whole child often is lost. Separate parts of the child such as behavior or academic skills become the focus of education at the expense of other parts, such as social competence or emotional well being. Emerson believes that all children need to develop emotionally, intellectually, physically, and socially. Based on this conviction, she makes choices about her practice.

Children’s Needs Can Be Met in the Inclusive Classroom

Emerson supported children’s achievement of their IEP goals through the environment and through activities she considered appropriate for the balanced development of all children. First, she knew a child’s needs because of her interactions with her or him. Second, she was aware of children as individuals and adapted or “tweaked” her interactions with them to make them successful in the classroom context. Third, the curriculum was relevant to the daily management of the classroom and provided opportunities for children to practice skills such as speaking, listening, counting, writing, and recognizing words or letters in meaningful contexts. Language therapy occurred in the classroom for all children and was aligned with the preschool curriculum. Fourth, Emerson believed that other children are a crucial part of learning. Through the help of others, each child forms a self-view. When teachers sensitively guide children,
these interactions can result in positive views being formed. The contexts also provide for
children’s problem solving, development of autonomy, and social interaction.

Each of the above convictions provides a foundation for the practices observed in
Emerson’s classroom. A large part of her practice was that Emerson shared power with
all of her children.

Teacher and Children Share Power

Another important aspect of Emerson’s teaching was her ability to share power
with her children. This sharing of power increased children’s participation because they
became responsible members of the class. As explained in Chapter I, the nature of power
relationships between the teacher and the student significantly influence children’s
participation. I first illustrated this through interpreting how children with disabilities are
disempowered in segregated classrooms (Kliweir & Landis, 1999) because they are
denied access to resources (Lave & Wenger, 1991), both curricular and interpersonal, that
are generally accepted for all other students’ development. I further elaborated on the
role of power when addressing the choices teachers make regarding curricular approaches
such as direct instruction programs or developmentally appropriate practice (DAP).

Adult-child interactions are typically regarded as heteronomous (teacher-controlled) in
direct instruction approaches and autonomous (cooperative) in DAP.

In Chapter V, I specifically described Emerson’s use of power relationships in
conflict negotiation and in supporting children’s behavior. Instead of unilaterally telling
children what to do in a conflict situation or punishing students for not following the
rules, the teacher viewed these as opportunities to help children understand the situation
and further their problem-solving abilities. She worked cooperatively with children to assist their understanding of participants' views, possible intentions, and their own roles in the interaction. Another example of the teacher minimizing her power was in learning interactions. When a student's response indicated attention difficulty or incongruence with the lesson, the teacher did not punish the student but sought ways to integrate the child's response and make it relevant. In relationships where power is shared, children become partners in the running of the classroom. The children also gain the skills and dispositions to negotiate conflict independently to benefit them throughout their school years and into adult life.

When a teacher shares power with her students, all children, including those with disabilities, increase their independence while learning to become important members of their classroom community. Through leadership roles and responsibilities within the classroom, children became an interdependent body, in which all parts were essential to the functioning and good of the classroom. Responsibility and membership along with negotiation, awareness, and rituals illustrate the idea of community (Vasconcelos, 1996; Vasconcelos & Walsh, 2001). Children each supported the classroom community through their participation in the actual life of that community. This meant that children were involved in leading the opening, setting the tables for others in the classroom, and contributing to the class in some manner. Children were active participants in the classroom and in their learning. Adults supported children only if they were unable to complete these classroom tasks independently. Children who initially had difficulty learned the routines and were able to participate in ways similar to peers. The teacher
empowered all the students within her classroom and supported children's greater participation in the classroom community. Emerson also was teaching them to be members of the classroom community, complete with its expectations for responsibility of citizenship. This idea leads to reconsidering the educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

Reconsidering Educational Contexts for Children With Disabilities

Emerson includes each child, regardless of ability, in her class. The children identified with disabilities are afforded the same responsibilities and membership, as are the typically developing children. Within the broader education system, the opportunity to develop responsibility and the expectation of membership is not the norm for children with disabilities. These children, precisely because they have been recognized as being "special," may be perceived as incapable of learning or having inadequate abilities when compared with their age mates. As a result, children with disabilities are taught with a different curriculum, or different daily experiences, in order to gain functional skills necessary for adult life. This may mean that they are educated in special schools or special classes, which focus on instilling these skills and helping children reach a prerequisite level before being permitted to participate with their non-disabled class peers in the general education environment. What is odd about this idea is that the children with special needs are denied opportunities to participate in and observe the activities and cultural values that are generally espoused for the typically developing child. Therefore, without these experiences, how can a child with disabilities be expected to understand what is demanded/presumed of him or her in such "typical" situations as listening to a
story in large group, approaching a peer to play, or knowing the routines involved in eating and caring for one’s self?

Kliewer (1998b) succinctly identifies the “flaw in the logic of segregation”:

One does not learn membership apart from being a member. An individual does not learn to be a citizen apart from being recognized as a citizen. Indeed, one cannot claim a culture without being a part of culture. Further, a person cannot be or do any of these things when he or she is contained apart from the community.” (p. 317)

Such skills cannot be taught outside of their contexts because of the complexities inherent in them, and students will not attain the proficiency on the skills to enter the community (Kliewer, 1998b). Similarly, Ferguson (1994) suggests that if children are to learn to communicate, then they must be in environments where children will need to communicate. In reinforcing the idea that participation is important to learning and development, Rogoff (2003) states, “The ages of accomplishments are highly related to the opportunities children have to observe and participate in the activities and cultural values regarding development of particular skills” (p. 170). For children identified with disabilities, Kliewer (1998b), Ferguson (1994) and Rogoff (2003) posit that the involvement in the activities and ideas that society values is important for all children, including those with disabilities, to become contributing citizens. Educational practices that exclude such children from those valued cultural activities deny the children opportunities to develop in those areas. Emerson understood that children could progress in their social interaction and community membership if they were involved in the actual experiences in which one expected them to grow.
In *The School and Society*, John Dewey (1943/1990) explained that the work of schools is usually viewed by looking at the progress made by an individual child. However, the view of schools' work needs to be broadened to consider the influence of education on society. He stated,

> What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy....only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up, can society by any chance be true to itself. (p. 7)

Dewey advocates that children be involved in purposeful activity to develop habits of work, “the idea of responsibility, of obligation to do something, to produce something, in the world” (p. 11). Only in close proximity and interaction with real things does one learn their nature and acquire first-hand knowledge. Again the idea is that participation is important; but ideals that are valued for some must be valued for all in order for a society or community to be its best. This idea of expanding the view of school and learning through actual participation in community or society is similar to what I viewed in the inclusive preschool classroom. Lessons I learned from this teacher are presented next. These include ideas for personnel working with young children identified with disabilities and teacher educators.

**Lessons Learned – Implications for Personnel Working With Children With Disabilities and Teacher Educators**

A reason for conducting this study was to learn how one teacher creates an environment in which children both with and without disabilities participate as members in the inclusive preschool classroom. Children with disabilities who are educated in
inclusive classrooms tend to have higher levels of social interaction and higher academic achievement (Fryxell & Kennedy, 1995; Kavale & Forness, 1999). In this section, I present ideas for practitioners working with children with disabilities and teacher educators concerning the creation of a context of participation, both socially and academically, for preschool children with disabilities in the inclusive classroom. Each of these suggestions includes children with disabilities as joint participants in their education and allows them opportunities to access the resources of the educational program. The goal is to view disability as a difference, not a deficiency.

**Believing Children Are Competent**

For practitioners, believing that children are competent begins with examining one’s attitudes toward children’s abilities, the nature of learning, and the teacher’s role in education. If a teacher has the belief that children are capable, this sets the stage for creating classroom practices to support competency. For instance, if the teacher believes that children are able to learn, she creates the environment—physically, emotionally, and temporally—that assists the student in becoming capable. A child may initially need support in participating in the ways typically expected, and the teacher provides this to scaffold children’s competence. Assisting children toward independence in social interactions and academic endeavors and knowing when to decrease support suggests the teacher believes the children are capable of learning.

To support pre-service teachers in developing a belief that children are competent, teacher educators need to help their pre-service teachers explore attitudes toward children, learning, and school. This could be accomplished partially by having teachers...
examine these ideas in relation to their own life experiences and classroom observations. Creating connections among experiences, personal learning theories, and formal social learning theories will prompt teachers to understand how one entity informs another. Looking at broader issues such as institutional and societal practices toward the education of children with disabilities and young children can inform one’s practices and beliefs. Creating opportunities where practices can be critically examined within a psychologically secure environment is essential to deeply exploring attitudes. Specifically, beliefs and attitudes toward children identified with disabilities would be examined with an intention of considering the abilities and talents that such children bring to the classroom that benefit all class members.

Some teachers believe that they lack the necessary skills to teach children with disabilities (Schumm & Vaughn, 1995; Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker, 2001). The inability of educators to view children with disabilities as competent may come from their own fear or inability to teach such children. The role of teacher educators then is to prepare pre-service teachers with the skills and tools that will allow teachers to feel confident about their own abilities in meeting the needs of diverse groups of students. These tools include learning about children with disabilities; ways to adapt curriculum, materials, and instruction; and skills to collaborate with a variety of school and community members in order to provide the best education for all students. A system of support where teachers can share ideas and seek assistance should be in place as teachers begin their careers. This system may be part of the post-secondary agency or of school systems and may take the form of formal and informal face-to-face sharing and/or
Internet on-line postings where teachers and other personnel can have on-going interactions about the issues they encounter on a daily basis.

Empowering Children

Empowerment of children is related to viewing children as competent and creating the context to support and increase competency. Establishing a democratic classroom where all children have responsibilities to the whole class and have support in meeting this responsibility fosters competency. The teacher’s use of scaffolding and of prompting, children become independent in their interactions yet develop interdependence among class members. As they develop their own competences and come to value each person’s contributions, children are empowered.

Empowerment also results as children choose activities, act on their choices and develop knowledge. The freedom to exercise choice helps children experience consequences in a safe environment and develop decision-making skills for adult life. This is especially important for children with disabilities who often have decisions made for them by well-meaning adults, but such actions deny development of children’s abilities in this area. Children who participate in decision-making become better at making decisions.

Teacher educators can teach about the psychological and developmental needs of children. Lessons could explore the classroom climate, adult-child interactions, and their effects on children’s autonomy, helping pre-service teachers understand the importance of increasing self-regulation and the types of interactions that promote these. The essence of teaching is communication of ideas, content, and relationships represented
through both verbal and non-verbal expression. Therefore, adult-child interactions
should be examined in terms of the language of the educator and the necessary
communication skills practiced. Teacher educators can provide instruction,
demonstration, and practice of positive guidance strategies. With skills such as these,
teachers are able and more likely to support those children who initially do not
demonstrate self-regulation.

Acknowledging Children’s Expertise

Expertise is reflected in the teacher’s attitudes about who possesses the
knowledge needed to lead activities and provide knowledge in the classroom. Both
children and the teacher possess expertise. When looking to the children, a teacher can
learn and capitalize on the experiences, interests and the special abilities of students.
This also creates the possibility for students to help shape the curricula and experiences
that are relevant, increasing the potential for real learning to occur. The teacher is also a
learner in conjunction with the students. She is aware of opportunities to learn from
students by observing what works for them in the way of support and what talents they
share with others. Encouragement to look to peers for support optimizes the learning
experience for all children. Reconsidering the source of expertise requires the teacher to
decrease her control in the classroom and to take opportunities to follow the children’s
lead.

Supporting pre-service teachers to examine their attitudes about expertise can be
provided through awareness activities and modeling by the teacher educator. Awareness
of curriculum approaches will inform how a teacher can create the environment to foster
the students' experiences and draw on their knowledge to create authentic learning situations. An example of such would be the Project Approach (Helm & Beneke, 2003; Helm & Katz, 2001; Katz & Chard, 2000), in which teachers and children together determine the focus of instruction and then carry out learning through prolonged study and experiences with a variety of learning materials. Such an approach has been effective for involving students with disabilities in cooperative learning, leadership roles, and capitalizing on their personal experiences as expertise to share with the members of the class (Edmiaston & Fitzgerald, 2000; Helm & Beneke, 2003). If teachers are able to give up some of their control over the curriculum, they can be more responsive to children's expertise. In such an approach, teaching is not dissemination of facts from teacher to students but is a two-way opportunity to develop interpersonal relationships, learn from others, and understand content.

**Expecting Differences in Children**

The teacher in this study was well aware of "normal" four-year old development and applied this knowledge in her teaching. However, she did not presume that any one child represented the widely accepted guidelines portrayed in the developmental standards of a "typical four-year-old"; nor did she presume a child exemplified the stereotypical accounts of children with behavioral or mild to moderate disabilities. She recognized, indeed expected, that children would have a varying range of abilities, and she believed that her job was to determine the strengths of each child, and help that child realize what those were in order to help the child develop an identity and be successful in school and in adult life. The teacher developed local knowledge (Kliewer & Landis,
1999) of children, and this helped her successfully teach all of her children. Teachers need to construct knowledge of each child through sensitive interactions and observations.

In personnel preparation programs, prospective educators need to know the typical developmental milestones for young children and understand how these are merely guidelines. These should not be used as a standard by which all children should be measured. Pre-service educators can participate in case studies, ideally with a real child, in which children with disabilities are the focus. In these studies, the goal is for the pre-service teacher to come to understand that a child is a child first, with specific strengths and unique, positive qualities. The area of disability would be portrayed as a difference in development, not a deficiency. Pre-service teachers would gain experience in coming to know a child with a disability and learn how to support that child in social and instructional settings.

**Future Research**

This study investigated participation and citizenship for children with mild to moderate disabilities, in the inclusive preschool classroom, taught by a teacher prepared to teach preschool and kindergarten education. Ideas for future research include:

1. Examine participation of children identified with more significant disabilities in inclusive sites.
2. Examine participation of older children identified with mild to moderate disabilities who are in inclusive classrooms.
3. Study teacher factors and practices in a range of inclusive classrooms.
(4) Investigate what contributes to optimal conditions for participation of children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

(5) For students who have been educated in inclusive classrooms, conduct longitudinal studies regarding socio-emotional development, social adjustment, academic performance, employment outcomes, and life satisfaction.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

EXPLANATION OF DATA SOURCE CODES

In the headings of my field notes, I listed the date and time of the observation as well as the activity observed. I coded the findings in Chapters IV and V with the date, data source, page of transcription, and paragraph where the information occurs. For example, 2/26/2004.I6.36 denotes the following: the date of February 26, 2004; “I6.36” represents an interview with the data found on page six, paragraph 36. The data sources are represented as follows: F, Field notes; I, Interviews; and P, Personal communication (e-mail or phone conversation).
APPENDIX B

DIAGRAM OF EMERSON'S CLASSROOM
APPENDIX C

EMERSON'S CLASSROOM SCHEDULE

9:00 – 9:20 Breakfast
9:20 - 9:35 Self-selected Reading
9:35 - 10:00 Opening
10:00 - 10:10 Brush teeth
10:10 - 10:50 Work time (self-selected activity)
10:50 – 11:00 Clean up
11:00 – 11:10 Bathrooms
11:10 – 11:30 Outside play
11:30 – 11:40 Bathrooms
11:40 – 12:00 Small group work
12:00 – 12:10 Story time
12:10 – 12:30 Lunch
12:30 Dismissal

Other activities, such as visiting the school library, group lesson with the speech clinician, and shared story time with children from the ECSE class, occur on a weekly basis, requiring adjustments to this schedule.
APPENDIX D

DESCRIPTION OF CHOICES OFFERED DURING WORK TIME

(1) Art – Various papers, scissors, tape, and an array of writing tools are provided for children to create.

(2) Computer -- A limited number of software programs are available for one or two children to play. Programs included creating with virtual art media, practicing basic skills (visual discrimination, fine motor development, numeracy, and literacy).

(3) Dramatic play – This incorporates the house keeping area with kitchen supplies, dress up clothes, telephones, and dolls. Usually props (such as shopping baskets, imitation food, firefighter outfits, play fire hose, chef hats, etc.) from the class theme are included too.

(4) Play dough -- This is available along with various tools such as cookie cutters, rolling pins, spatulas, skewers, and blunt knives. Periodically, children help make a new batch to keep the material fresh.

(5) Construction area – The materials which are always available include wooden blocks, assorted vehicles, and various child and adult s (multicultural and spanning careers). Other toys, such as barns and farm animals, are added occasionally.

(6) Light table – See the description in Chapter 4. Among the items supplied for investigation are clear plastic die, translucent two-dimensional geometric shapes, strings of beads, insects encased in resin, and crushed nut hulls.
(7) Easel – Paper and paint are available for children on the two sides of the easel. Sometimes paper is precut into shapes that relate to the class theme. Three or four colors of paint usually are available. Children must wear aprons when painting.

(8) Sensory table – This tub on legs holds an assortment of items throughout the year. Children have investigated soil with its accompanying tools for gardening, plastic teeth and toothbrushes, and colored water with various containers.

(9) Book area – Picture books of many genres are available for children to look at and read. Books include commercial children’s books, big books, class-made books, books on tape, and books in Braille.
CHILDREN’S CHANGING PARTICIPATION OVER TIME

Emerson’s and Brent’s responsibility shift as Brent becomes more independent in communicating with the children in the classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Teacher Influence Over Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brent’s Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brent’s Independent Participation Over Time
Tiane's participation increases as she becomes more independent in the class tooth brushing routine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Tiane's Action</th>
<th>Teacher Action</th>
<th>Children's Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Small group teeth brushing. Adult models and gives verbal directions of how to brush. Music plays. Peers model brushing.</td>
<td>Tiane squirms on her chair, stairs into space, talks to peers instead of brushing her teeth.</td>
<td>Verbal directive to brush teeth.</td>
<td>Tiane sits individually with the adult to finish brushing as other children are dismissed (12.14.04).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. See Context I.</td>
<td>Sqirm in chair, looks at peers, does not brush teeth.</td>
<td>Teacher provides icons of tooth brushing route cuing, “these will help you brush....”</td>
<td>Tiane alternately focuses attention on adult and icons. She brushes her teeth and shows peer the icons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Same as I, but the student teacher leads Tiane’s group and provides the icons before brushing.</td>
<td>Tiane completes the tooth brushing routine with no verbal mediation from the teacher.</td>
<td>Asks Tiane if she finished brushing. Praised.</td>
<td>Tiane leaves the table as “one of the group.” (1.25.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. See Context III. No icons are provided at the outset.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f. Tiane completes brushing. She is dismissed with the other children (1/27/05).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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APPENDIX F

"LISTEN" ICON IN EMERSON'S CLASSROOM