Chapter 3
Creating a Community of Learners
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I think working with a group of people helps you get along with people, and you can get alot of ideas out of listening to the other people. When talking to other people in a group, you feel like you CAN say things, and you can talk. When you're with yourself, you can't get new ideas from other people. Being in groups changed my learning, because I can learn from the other people.

Lori, grade 6

In this class, we don't just sit in our desks and try to do our work by ourselves. We sit together and try to help each other. I have grown as a learner because in first and second grade we did skillpack and if we did not know the answer, we would tell the teacher and she would say, "Read that paragraph and you will find the answers." And now we have literature circles and in literature circles, the people push you if you don't talk. And that way you learn more. We support each other like if someone cannot think of anything to say and we think it's hard for that person, we will not push that person. We will just try to help them.

Nicole, grade 3

Lori and Nicole both value being in classrooms where their presence makes a difference. Instead of sitting and listening as their teachers pass on knowledge *to* them, they are actively involved in thinking and learning *with* their teachers and other class members. Their classrooms are communities where learners are committed, not just to working side by side,

but to thinking together to build new ideas that go beyond what could be accomplished individually. Adding a focus on literature to the curriculum will result in only small changes in readers' talk about books unless there is also a fundamental change in social relationships within the classroom.

As educators, we well know that such a learning environment is not easy to establish in a classroom. There are many forces and structures within education that serve as obstacles to anyone wanting to move beyond the hierarchies of control that exist in schools. In our concern for who has control, who's on top, we have many times failed to realize that we have other options. We have made our educational system into an "either-or" world—"either you're in control or I am"—instead of figuring out how we can work together in sharing that control.

The kind of social setting within which learners form relationships and dialogues with others has a major impact on the potentials and constraints those learners perceive for their own learning. Vygotsky (1978) has argued that the way we talk and interact with others becomes internalized and determines the way we think and learn. In classrooms, then, the kinds of social relationships and conversations that are encouraged will greatly impact the thinking processes of learners.

David, a third grader, described how his participation in exploring diverse perspectives in literature circles had affected his own thinking. "Last weekend I finished *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson 1977). I started thinking about the book. I had a literature circle in my head. One side of my brain said one thing about the story, but then the other side said, 'No, wait a minute. What about this?'" David's thinking had been changed because of the conversations encouraged in his classroom.

When we look closely at schools, we realize that in most classrooms two kinds of interactions occur among students. One is the type of competition where students compete to see who is the best and the attitude is "I win only if you lose." The other is individualism where students work on their own and so "What I do has no impact on anyone else." Neither of these interactive structures encourages teachers and students to engage in active dialogue with each other or to learn from and with others. If we believe along with Vygotsky that our social interactions determine how we think and that the most optimal zone for learning is what we can do *with* the support of others, then these interactional patterns are cause for concern.

What I want to explore in this chapter is another option for social interaction, that of establishing a collaborative community of learners who share responsibility for learning. Such a community is structured to encourage continuing conversations among individual voices and to support the learning of everyone in that community. Collaborative communities go beyond cooperating with someone else to learning from and with others.

This type of community provides a rich context to support talk about literature.

Because of the long traditions of hierarchy, competition, and individualism in schools, establishing new social contexts for learning is a difficult task. It is easy to ignore the broader learning context of the classroom and to focus instead on adding new materials and activities such as literature and literature circles into the existing curriculum. I've tried the additive approach myself and found that the result was usually frustration and failure. When educators say to me, "I tried literature groups and the kids didn't like them any better than basal reader groups," I wonder if they have added a new method to their classrooms instead of taking a new perspective on learning. It is not until we, as educators, focus on the broader learning contexts established in our classrooms and consciously think through our own beliefs about learning that we are able to effect change.

This chapter focuses on the ways in which I and other teachers have worked at establishing collaborative social contexts for learning. These learning contexts support both teachers and students as they read, discuss, and respond to literature within a community of readers and learners. We have come to realize that a community of learners is formed as learners (1) come to know each other; (2) value what each has to offer; (3) focus on problem solving and inquiry; (4) share responsibility and control; (5) learn through action, reflection, and demonstration; and (6) establish a learning atmosphere that is predictable and yet full of real choices.

Much of what I want to share grows out of interactions I have had over many years with teachers and students at Millersburg Elementary School in Goshen, Indiana. In particular, many of the classroom examples and quotes from children come from Gloria Kauffman's third-grade classroom and Kaylene Yoder's sixth-grade classroom. Last year, the three of us, along with their student teachers, Nancy Sauder Bontrager and Kim Hawkins, took field notes during the first month of school to look more closely at how they were establishing a social context that highlighted collaboration and dialogue. Our continuing conversations with each other and other educators form the basis for this discussion on learning communities.

PERSONALIZING THE CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

At the end of the year, I interviewed first-, third-, and sixth-grade children. All three groups had been involved in collaborative learning environments and had participated in many exciting reading and writing experiences throughout the year. I asked them to talk about how they had changed as learners during the course of that year, expecting them to reflect on their

changes as readers and writers. To my surprise, the first comments in all three classrooms were about how well they had come to know each other during that year.

The children talked about how this personal knowledge allowed them to feel comfortable talking to each other about what they were reading and writing without fear of ridicule or rejection. Kim, a third grader, commented, "We know each other so good that we feel free to come up to each other and ask questions and to help each other." Christina, a sixth grader, talked about how her opinions of others changed. "You find out that somebody you always thought was a snob, really isn't and you get along well." Even the first-grade children talked about how afraid they were of other children thinking they were stupid at the beginning of the year. Pat, a first grader, said, "I was scared at the beginning. I didn't want to do anything. I was afraid I would do it wrong. I was afraid of the other kids. But now I'm just fine."

Certain experiences seemed significant in supporting children's personal knowledge of others, including their teachers. During the first week of school, they all participated in the curricular activity, "Getting to Know You" (Harste, Short, and Burke 1988), where they interviewed each other in partners and then published those personal interviews either in a newspaper or on a bulletin board. The sixth graders made lists of areas where they were experts and posted these lists so classmates would know whom to talk to about particular topics. They made personal shields that contained pictures of objects, people, and events significant in their lives. They decided to share these by holding them up and having others guess what each picture signified for the individual. Not only did they learn more about each other, but they began to get over their fear of getting up in front of their classmates. A message board was also established so students could exchange personal messages with others.

The third graders wrote in personal journals each morning when they entered the room. Journal time was followed by a whole-group meeting which began with children, who chose to share, reading from their journals. This sharing provided demonstrations to children who were unsure about what to write in their journals and helped them get to know each other better. After the first month of school, the sharing rarely occurred unless requested by a particular child because it had served its function. However, many other forms of sharing continuously occurred in the classroom.

Both Gloria and Kaylene began the year with units of study that allowed the children to draw from past experiences and share personal knowledge. In third grade, the children were involved in a study of their families. They

collected stories about their families by interviewing family members on different topics and then shared these stories with classmates both orally and in writing. They collected data on their families for a variety of surveys. Their first round of literature circles was different text sets of picture books about topics related to families. These experiences allowed them to understand each other within a broader personal context and gave the children the sense that their lives outside of school were significant resources within the classroom. As a continuing experience throughout the year, a bulletin board was established highlighting a "Person of the Week." This bulletin board contained family pictures and objects. Usually, class members were highlighted during the week they had a birthday. As part of this experience, each child was interviewed by the class, which then created a book containing a personal letter from every member of the classroom, including the teacher.

In sixth grade, the children began the year with a short unit on folktales. In addition to reading widely from a variety of folktales, they met in literature circles where each group had a set of different versions of the same tale. These tales were familiar ones such as "The Three Little Pigs" and "Little Red Riding Hood," so the children could pull from their own memories of these stories from either home or school and contrast their memories with the different versions within their sets. Although their major focus was on comparisons of the tales, they also shared stories from when they were younger and discussed some personal issues related to the story events.

Immediately involving children in many kinds of partner and small-group activities was an important goal at the beginning of the year. Not only do these activities help children get to know each other, but they also support them in working at small-group processes such as taking turns, asking questions, and giving ideas. Both Gloria and Kaylene introduced literature circles and authors' circles by the second week of school. Although these first groups were not particularly successful in their conversations as evidenced by uncomfortable silences, they did allow the children to begin exploring how to work with others in a group and signaled to them the importance of literate talk about what they were reading and writing. By working together in these small groups, children gained personal knowledge of each other as they talked about their reading and writing. "You get to know other people better and how that book relates to their lives and how you and them relate" (Jamie, grade 3).

For children who have not worked in small groups, partner activities seem especially helpful because they are less threatening and overwhelming. Gloria and Kaylene constantly looked for opportunities to have chil-

dren work together with partners at the beginning of the year. As partners, children read together; worked on math problems, science experiments, and art activities; did readers' theatre; shared a piece of writing; and played physical education games. They also engaged in activities such as "Written Conversation," where two children shared a pencil and a paper as they conversed through writing, and "Say Something," where two children took turns reading aloud and stopping after each chunk of text to say something to each other about the text (Harste, Short, and Burke 1988).

A frequent request from their teachers during the first two weeks of school was that they work with someone new in partner activities. The goal was to help the children feel comfortable with everyone in the room. Although this request sometimes elicited groans, particularly when it involved working with someone of the opposite sex, children became much more comfortable working with a greater variety of classmates and more appreciative of what others had to offer. Boy–girl distinctions began to break down. Lynn, a third-grade boy, talked about how he did not want to work with girls at the beginning of the year. "Now it doesn't matter. I don't even think about whether I am working with a boy or a girl. I think about the person and what they are saying." Children also found that they did not always want to work with their best friends. Philip, a third grader, commented, "You don't sit with friends when you need to get some hard thinking work done. You will talk too much."

Encouraging children to work in a variety of groupings is facilitated when children are not assigned to particular seats. When the seating remains flexible, children can make differing decisions throughout the day depending on the activity and their needs. Tables with separate cubby or locker storage areas are the most facilitative for flexible grouping. If the classroom has desks, we found it helpful to talk about the desks as storage areas. No one may get into someone else's storage area, but anyone can sit at a particular desk to work. Instead of attaching nametags to a desk or table, the children have movable nametags which they place at whatever table or desk they are currently occupying. The nametag signals to others that a seat is taken and avoids arguments when someone sits down in an area that another child has temporarily vacated.

As children interact with others in many different experiences, they learn to know each other from a variety of perspectives, both academic and personal. Their lives outside and inside of school become connected so they can draw from the whole of their experiences in learning as they talk about literature with others. As they come to know each other, children and adults also come to value the unique contributions that each person offers to the learning community in the classroom.

VALUING DIVERSITY WITHIN A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

One of the paradoxes of a collaborative community is that individuality and "groupness" are both highlighted at the same time. A successful community is not built on each individual's becoming more like others in the group, but on the different contributions that each member brings to that group. Each person contributes diverse talents, experiences, and perspectives. This diversity increases and expands the resources that the group brings to learning far beyond what any one person could do alone (Fleck 1935). Individuals are not subsumed or consumed by the group. Instead, the uniqueness of each person's contributions to the group is valued.

As I interviewed the children, I found they could all name the strengths of the other children in the classroom, including those other adults had labeled "slow learners." They talked about the influence others had on their thinking and on the kinds of ideas they considered. David, a third grader, stated, "Working with others stretches my mind." Another third grader, Josh, explained, "When you work with others, you get more ideas. Like maybe your partner thinks of something you never would've thought and you think of something your partner wouldn't have." Josh's statement points out the reciprocal nature of people's contributions—the give-and-take that makes the community so valuable to the learners. Learners benefit not only from listening to others, but also from having to express their own ideas in words. As Jamie points out, "You don't keep all your ideas in your head. Literature groups take the ideas out of your head." The children had a clear sense that their thinking as individuals was much broader and deeper because of their conversations with others.

Because the unique contributions of each person are essential to the process, they are given equal value. Equal value means that all learners, no matter how apparently limited their experience or knowledge, come to see themselves and are recognized by others as competent contributors. Many of the children talked about how they no longer thought about who was in the high or low group. Josh explained, "We aren't put in groups of who's the smartest in this room." Jamie continued, "Here everybody is the same. They're equal. We can all read books and talk about them with each other. Some people might take longer to read a book but everybody does it and everybody has something to say. We are all equal."

Equality to these children does not mean the same amount or kind of contribution, but instead means an equal valuing of diversity, of what each person can bring to the group process. This process of equal valuing reminds me of a children's story, *The Great Big Enormous Turnip* (Tolstoy 1969), in which an old man cannot pull a turnip out of the ground. He calls

for help from an old woman, who calls the granddaughter, who calls the pig, who calls the dog, who calls the cat, who calls the mouse. Finally, the turnip comes out of the ground. Each person or animal did not contribute the same amount of strength, but all were essential to the common task of getting the turnip out of the ground.

Much of what was described under personalizing the classroom contributes to the valuing of diversity. As children learn to know each other, participate in many partner and small-group activities, and share their ideas both informally and formally, they gradually come to value others around them. Of course, to value diversity in individuals, there must be diversity in the kinds of experiences offered in the classroom so that differences among learners become apparent and can be used. Children need to be involved in experiences where they can create and share meaning in many different ways such as through art, music, mathematics, movement, and oral language as well as through reading and writing. "I found out you can do better things because we were working on a poster and I couldn't draw but my partner could and so our project turned out better" (Wrennie, grade 6).

Activities also need to be open-ended enough so learners can provide a variety of responses based on their own experiences. When students are given choices as to what they read and write and how they respond to their reading and writing, they are able to pull from their own experiences. When teachers control the questions asked in literature discussions, they often close off the questions and issues important to students. Expert projects, where students research and then share about topics on which they have chosen to become experts, is one curricular strategy that allows students to demonstrate knowledge in different areas. Another is Text Sets, where students read from different reading materials on the same topic and then come together to share what they have learned and make comparisons across those materials. Because everyone has read something different, each has something to contribute.

Teachers can support students in valuing each other by directing them to others who have information or strategies they need. This is particularly important with children who have experienced difficulty in school and so have erected barriers around themselves, which makes them difficult to know and like. The child who writes a play, uses dialogue markers, reads a mystery, figures out how to use the index in a reference book, or makes a diorama can become a resource for others. Seeing others as resources occurs informally when teachers say, "Oh, I know just the person who can help you." Particularly at the beginning of the year, we found it was important to take advantage of *every* opportunity to help students see and value the possible contributions of others in the classroom.

Having regular sharing times also facilitates children seeing each other as resources. I've noticed two kinds of sharing times that occur within classrooms. One is a general sharing which tends to occur at the end of the morning or day when children can share anything from what they have been reading, writing, and studying. Another is a sharing time that has a specific focus. For example, after children have tried partner reading for the first time, it is helpful to ask them to share the different ways they went about reading with a partner. We found it helpful to initially ask a few children each day if they would share new strategies or books during sharing time. They were reluctant to talk in front of the group, thinking they had nothing to contribute, and needed to be encouraged.

Many teachers have some form of sharing in their classrooms. We found, however, that sharing became more frequent and was an integral part of the curriculum rather than simply playing a "show-and-tell" function that had no connection to the broader curriculum. It was through continuous sharing that students were able to become more reflective about their learning and to effectively use the demonstrations of other learners around them. Students began to feel the support of others and got over their fear that their ideas were not valuable. The variety of responses shared demonstrated that there really was no one right answer or way to do something. Their teachers had a much better sense of what they were thinking and feeling. Through sharing, their voices were heard in determining the questions and responses that were part of classroom inquiry.

In this setting where many are sharing ideas, teachers can more easily share strategies as one of the participants instead of being the sole resource. Teachers have often made themselves indispensable as the source of information in classrooms and so closed off the process of children coming to value each other.

Another curricular strategy that encourages children to see each other as resources is brainstorming. In brainstorming, a group works together to develop as many different responses as possible without immediately evaluating those responses. During the first two weeks of school, I observed children brainstorming lists or webs on the variety of ways to read, ways to respond to books, topics to write about, information they knew or wanted to know on a particular topic, topics and issues they could discuss or compare in their literature circles, editing strategies, all the ways they could make 25 cents, and questions to ask in their interviews. Participating in these brainstorming experiences demonstrated the power of the group in coming up with more ideas than any one individual alone could and allowed each of them to contribute to the process.

Learners confer with others. It is this two-way process of receiving and sharing with others that allows each person to become a unique individual.

When learners realize that others value them, they come to value themselves in a different way. As Karen says, "Working in literature groups changed me in my eyesight and my brain too." We find our self-identities through the give-and-take of our relationships with others. Collaboration encourages us to see others in terms of their potentials, not their limitations, and so opens up new possibilities for everyone to work together in learning through a shared process of inquiry.

FOCUSING ON INQUIRY AND CONSENSUS IN DECISION MAKING

A focus on inquiry is essential to creating a classroom atmosphere where learners share responsibility for searching out new questions and ways to solve problems that occur within the community. When a community shares vulnerability for mistakes, those mistakes are seen as part of the learning process rather than as "bad" or "wrong." The group cushions the mistakes that are part of all risk taking and values them for the cues they provide about processes of thinking and learning that the group is exploring (Goodman 1984). Learners can end up knowing more as they work through a process of inquiry, even though they do not immediately solve the current problem.

Often when problems arise, our tendency is to look for someone to blame or punish. We found that when the classroom focus changed to talking about possible solutions to problems, students became part of the process and felt shared ownership and responsibility for the classroom learning atmosphere. Instead of assuming that students were unable to handle responsibility when they had difficulty, we assumed they could learn from their mistakes. Moorman (1983) points out that when students are having difficulty working in groups, teachers often say, "We won't do groups again until you can work with each other and be responsible." If the same group of students were having difficulty with a particular math concept, however, we would never say, "We won't do math again until you can do math." As teachers, we learned to encourage students to learn from their mistakes by reflecting on what was and was not working and what might be done next.

Taking this problem-solving perspective is not always easy to carry out in the classroom. As teachers, we want our classrooms to operate smoothly and we often abandon experiences that are not successful. If children have difficulty writing or working in groups, we tend to say, "Well, this just isn't going to work with this class." If, instead, we operate from a well-thought-out theory of curriculum and learning, then we are willing to take an inquiry perspective and work with children to make changes in the classroom that will allow them to experience success. Sometimes this will

involve simply giving children more time to adjust to new expectations; other times, changes will need to be made in the experiences provided in the classroom.

When the focus is on inquiry and not on final solutions and right answers, then consensus becomes a key process for working at new insights into problems. Instead of using authority or compromise to make decisions, consensus involves exploring the diverse perspectives available within the group without creating winning and losing sides. The conversation is brisk, challenging, wide-ranging, and conducted in depth, but it is not coercive. Ideas, not members, are challenged and individuals are not coerced into changing their points of view (Short and Burke 1989).

The third graders talked about this process of consensus in relation to literature circles. Chris, a third grader, said, "Everyone has the chance to give their opinion and even if you don't agree with that person, you keep on talking because you know that you will get more ideas. You aren't trying to just figure out one right answer. In reading groups, when someone gave the right answer, we were done talking. In literature circles, we keep on going. We try to come up with as many different directions as possible."

Through experiences such as brainstorming and explorations of "rough draft" ideas in literature circles and authors' circles, children develop their abilities to use consensus as a key process for developing understanding into new knowledge (Barnes 1976). Individual knowledge, experience, and understanding become pooled resources as the group confers on any question. Through consensus, the group is able to create knowledge and understandings that go beyond the current capabilities of any individual within that group. This process of consensus and inquiry is supported in a classroom where roles remain flexible so that everyone can contribute.

SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR CREATING A LEARNING COMMUNITY

The competence of each learner is enhanced when roles and responsibilities within a classroom remain more fluid instead of being fixed formal roles with boundaries and territories to defend. When roles are flexible, they can be generated by the needs of a particular project and filled as individuals recognize what they can contribute to that project. Because learners, including the teacher, are not "type cast," there is a better chance that none of their talents or knowledge will go unused. Students can move in and out of the role of teacher as they interact with others instead of seeing that role as the sole property of the adult learner in the classroom.

Erin's comments about how she became a better reader during first grade reflect how the role of teacher was more fluid in her classroom. She talked about four experiences that she felt had made a difference for her as a

reader. Two of these involved other children reading a book to her before she read it herself, one involved reading a book with me seven months earlier where I had suggested she might try skipping unknown words and reading on to see if she could make sense of the story, and the fourth was to just keep reading and writing. "The more I read and write, the better I get." Erin saw herself, her classmates, and the adults in her classroom as teachers.

Because most students have not experienced shared roles and responsibilities in classrooms, they see the teacher as their sole resource and decision maker. Particularly at the beginning of the year, teachers can help students accept more responsibility for each other's learning. As mentioned earlier, teachers can direct students to others in the classroom who have information or strategies they need. They can encourage students to ask others around them for help when they do not understand a particular activity. During the first two weeks of school, children who approached Gloria requesting help with an activity were questioned, "Who else have you asked for help? I'm the last person you should ask." Gloria's purpose was to change the teacher-dependent behavior she saw in the students. As they began to more fully use those around them, she knew that when children approached her, they were coming for information or support from her that they could not get from others in the classroom.

As teachers, we have to examine how fully we are participating in classroom experiences as learners. When we write and read with our students and participate in discussions instead of only serving as the "asker of questions," we signal to our students that we are learners as well as teachers. More subtle messages such as sitting at tables with students instead of behind the teacher's desk tell students that we are participants with them in the classroom.

One area that produces great concern among teachers is keeping control of the classroom. The assumption is that either the teacher is in control or the children are. When I shared this concern with third graders, their response to me was, "Tell other teachers that the kids can help out. If it gets too noisy in our room, we just turn out the light and make an announcement. It's part of our job, too." In a collaborative community, control is part of the shared responsibility. Inquiry, *not* control, is the central focus of the group (Dewey 1938).

Early in the year, Gloria encouraged children to share in this responsibility with her. When it was time for recess, she quietly turned to a child and asked that person to turn out the lights and make the announcement. Whoever was at the head of the line led the class down the hallway while Gloria walked at the back. When problems arose, she either talked individually with the child or convened the class in a group meeting to talk through the problem and possible solutions. There was one particular child

in her classroom who had emotional problems that made it difficult for him to engage in many of the classroom activities. Gloria involved the students in talking about how to support this student and created a place that he could choose to go when neither he nor the others could cope with his behavior. Although this child continued to have difficulties throughout the year, he and the other children saw him as a member of that classroom community, something he had never experienced before in school.

In sixth grade, the students created their own rules for how they wanted to be treated. Kaylene asked them to first work as partners to develop five rules. They shared these in small groups to develop a common list of five rules and then negotiated the final list of five as a whole class. Other teachers such as Karen Smith have had their students form their own governments for managing the classroom.

For shared responsibility to work in a classroom, there must be shared commitment and an atmosphere of trust among class members. Collaborative relationships are initiated by the recognition of some type of shared commitment that is more general and long lasting in nature than a simple goal or objective. This shared commitment gives a sense of direction to the group, but it does not assume a specific end that everyone must reach or rule out individual goals. It involves a commitment to working together as co-learners helping each other make sense of the world. A sense of unity is reflected when teachers and students talk about ''our'' classroom rather than ''my'' classroom, and create a class corner that contains pictures and other items that reflect the shared history of that classroom.

An atmosphere of trust lies at the core of this shared commitment to a particular community of learners. Learners build trust as they come to know each other personally and begin to value their own and others' contributions to the group. How successfully trust is built will depend on how fully teachers are willing to trust their students. Kaylene found that she communicated this trust when she treated students with respect and talked to them as adults and as competent individuals able to carry out the tasks and responsibilities of that classroom. Because she talked honestly about the reasons for certain decisions or requests, students had a different feeling for the classroom and her role as a teacher.

Gloria and Kaylene constantly tried to communicate this trust to their students through the ways they talked with them and the kinds of decisions and choices that were offered to students. For example, when beginning a new activity Gloria would often say to students, ''I'm going to give directions all at one time and you are going to have to figure out what to do. If you don't know what to do, ask someone else. Figure out a way to do it.'' At other times she simply immersed them into an activity by beginning to do it herself and gave them few, if any, directions. She consistently communicated to them that she believed they could figure out a way of going about

the tasks set before them. She trusted their judgments to figure out a way that made sense to them rather than being concerned that there was only one way to approach that task.

Sharing responsibilities in the classroom allows learners to feel ownership of that classroom and their own learning potentials. They have a sense of responsibility not present when the teacher is seen as the sole controller of what occurs in that room. The teacher does have greater power and different responsibilities. However, different responsibilities do not mean that the classroom is not opened up to more possibilities for everyone to take on a variety of tasks and perspectives. Collaborative communities build slowly as individuals explore new roles and learn to use others as resources for their learning. Mistakes occur, and the whole process of community building often involves solving many problems. Working through those problems, however, is seen as part of the process of making a classroom into a community rather than a sign of failure (Gilles and Van-Dover 1988). Shared responsibility for inquiry and problem solving depends on learners' feeling that they are engaged in learning that is active and purposeful for them. Otherwise, they have no purpose for wanting to search out and solve the problems that arise.

LEARNING THROUGH ACTION, REFLECTION, AND DEMONSTRATION

All of the previous components of a community of learners assume that learners are actively engaged in learning that is meaningful for them. Motivation to engage in uninterrupted learning experiences is natural to learners unless those experiences are too disconnected from their lives and interests (Dewey 1938). These experiences are valued when students feel that they are learning for today, instead of only for "someday."

In the classroom, active learning involves learners in reading and writing for a range of real purposes. Many students have come to see reading and writing as activities that are done for the teacher rather than as ways to create and share meaning with others. We have found that at the beginning of the year, we need to focus on immersing children into a wide range of uninterrupted experiences with reading and writing. We fill the classroom with all kinds of reading materials and give time to introducing books, reading aloud to the class, putting on readers' theatres, reading alone or with partners, and sharing informally with others. All kinds of paper, writing utensils, and art media are available as children write messages to each other, letters to penpals, notes to remind themselves, journal entries to record their thoughts, and stories and articles that eventually may be published for a broader audience. Getting the publication cycle going in the classroom and involving children in literature discussion groups and other

kinds of responses to literature help them see other purposes for reading and writing than just to please the teacher or to practice reading and writing.

As learners actively engage in learning events in the classroom, their learning becomes a source of demonstrations about language and learning for others. Demonstrations do not occur through telling or showing others what they must know. They occur when students are able to observe others living openly as learners. The learning events that learners engage in must therefore be open enough to allow them to be actively engaged in learning, to observe others around them, and to choose from among the demonstrations the ones that make the most sense for them at that moment (Smith 1981).

Making your learning available as a source of demonstrations for others is part of the responsibilities that everyone shares in the classroom. It is an expected part of the classroom that when students figure out a new way to do readers' threatre or are the first group to do an authors' circle, they are responsible for demonstrating and sharing their insights with others. Gloria and Kaylene have found that if they begin the year with the room filled with the work of students from previous years or invite those students to visit the classroom, many other demonstrations are available.

At the beginning of the year, teachers play a key role in offering demonstrations to students as they try to determine how this particular classroom operates. Instead of telling students what to do, teachers can more effectively demonstrate by doing, by actively engaging in activities along with students. Teachers offer important demonstrations as they talk with students about the books that are read aloud to the class, participate and respond to students in literature circles and authors' circles, and engage in the same kinds of reading and writing experiences as students. For example, when Kaylene wanted to support students in making comparisons among folktales in their small groups, she did so by reading different versions of folktales aloud to the class. As the class discussed these folktales, she introduced strategies such as webbing and charting which could help them organize their comparisons among the versions. Rather than telling them about one strategy they might use for comparisons in their literature circles, she provided several demonstrations from which they could choose. The number of demonstrations available increased when she asked groups to share the different strategies they were using in their discussions with the rest of the class.

Learners not only need the opportunity to engage in learning and to observe the demonstrations of other learners, they also need to be able to stand back and reflect on their learning. Through reflection, learners can distance themselves from an immediate learning event, take new perspectives, see new alternatives, and develop more generalized understandings

and knowledge (Peirce 1966). They can reflect on what they are learning (content), how they are learning (process), and why they are learning (purpose). They become more conscious of their learning strategies and develop a wider repertoire of strategies from which they choose as they engage in future learning experiences. They know their options as learners and so have the tools to be able to stand back and reconsider their current circumstances. Learning becomes more predictable for them because they have control of their own learning. The world still shifts and changes, but they are able to control their responses to those changes (Harste, Woodward, and Burke 1984).

One way Gloria and Kaylene introduced reflection into the classroom was to ask children to share the strategies they used in a particular activity such as partner reading, authors' circles, or writing a letter. Initially, children had difficulty talking about their strategies because they previously had not been asked to take a reflective stance on their learning. Some did not have the language to express what they were thinking and doing, or had not consciously attended to their learning. Gradually, as they came to value reflection as part of learning, they were better able to take this stance and talk with others about their learning. Often, teachers tell students about a particular language concept or strategy and then ask them to engage in a learning experience. Learning is more powerful when students engage in learning experiences and observe the demonstrations of others, and then reflect on their learning with others so they are able to consider a wider range of options.

The quotes from children in this chapter come from classrooms where they are continuously encouraged to think about their learning. Their ability to express the insights I have shared grew out of the many times their teachers asked them to reflect on their learning throughout the year. Not only do these reflections give students greater control of their learning, but they also inform teachers and students as they make evaluative decisions about the classroom learning environment. Through observing children as they actively engage in learning and reflecting with them about the impact of those experiences, teachers can work with students in establishing a learning environment that provides the support and choices they need to continue moving their learning forward.

ESTABLISHING A PREDICTABLE ATMOSPHERE
THAT OFFERS REAL CHOICES

All classrooms have some type of structure that supports learning. In a collaborative community, learners are constantly faced with many decisions. They are able to make these decisions without feeling overwhelmed

because of the existence of routines that establish a predictable structure within which they are free to make real choices about their learning. These structures include routines about how time, space, and materials are organized.

One way we found to increase predictability was by organizing materials and supplies so that they were easily accessible to students. Different kinds of paper, writing utensils, and bookmaking supplies were placed in a center where children could find them rather than in a closet that was only accessible to the teacher. When a variety of art supplies were placed in a center, children were more likely to try different approaches to illustration. Placing books in displays as well as having an organized classroom library increase both accessibility and interest in reading a wider variety of materials.

Students can be involved in creating the organizational system for the classroom. Because Gloria had to remove all the books from her shelves over the summer, the classroom library was stacked inside a closet. Rather than organizing the books herself, she opened the closet and talked with the students about how they might want to organize the books. Once the group made a decision to categorize books alphabetically by author, she asked them to organize themselves to carry out the task. Initially there was some chaos, but the children soon negotiated particular tasks for themselves in carrying, sorting, and putting books on the shelves.

How space is organized makes a difference in supporting the differing kinds of activities important to that classroom. The use of space can encourage or discourage conversations among students. As teachers, we usually think about organizing for our interactions with students, rather than theirs with each other. The use of tables or groups of desks in a large work area facilitates informal conversations among students. Quiet areas can be created in one corner of the classroom while other corners contain conference areas where collaborative groups can meet to talk about their writing or reading. Often these conference areas also serve as the large-group meeting area.

Time is organized as routines are established in the classroom. When children know how time is organized, they are able to proceed with the learning engagements instead of waiting for the teacher to tell them what to do next. By the end of the first week of school, the children in Gloria's classroom came into the room at the beginning of the day and immediately took down all the chairs, found a place to sit, and began writing in their journals. As they finished their journals, they wandered over to the whole-group meeting area with their journals and engaged in quiet conversations or read from a book while waiting for the rest of their classmates. The schedule for the day was written on the board each morning so they could refer to it if they forgot the routines.

In Kaylene's classroom, students were asked to schedule their use of time during the reading and writing work time each morning. Each morning, Kaylene listed their choices on the chalkboard, starring any activities that needed to be completed that day. Students used this list of options as a reference as they each wrote a schedule of what they wanted to accomplish that morning in their schedule logs. At the end of the morning, they recorded in their schedules what they had been able to accomplish and set new goals for themselves. The routine Kaylene established was not a particular order of events but a process for making decisions about their use of time each day.

In both classrooms, students were immediately introduced to the curricular framework of the authoring cycle (Harste, Short, and Burke 1988) which supported their reading and writing in this classroom. "Getting to Know You" was used not only to help children get to know each other, but also to introduce them to the broader authoring cycle as they moved from uninterrupted writing to authors' circles, revision, editing, and celebration of authorship through publishing. This same cycle supported them as they read widely, read and discussed books in literature groups, and gave presentations on these books to other class members. As children participated in the authoring cycle, they were introduced to procedures for activities such as conducting an authors' circle. When those procedures are kept simple, then children can focus on the intent of the activity rather than on going through a set of procedures for the sake of procedures.

The presence of these routines which organized time, space, and materials gave children the predictability they needed to feel secure in the classroom. They were free to be creative and make a wide variety of choices within the support of those routines. Rather than using structures and routines to direct learners toward the same outcomes and convergent responses, the structures in their classroom freed them to go many different directions without confusion and chaos. These structures also supported social relationships that were fundamentally different from those found in most classrooms. Without that change in social relationships, the classroom examples shared in this chapter become isolated activities instead of ways to work at building collaborative learning communities.

CONCLUSION

The learning atmosphere that is established in a classroom will determine both the potentials and the limitations for learning and for talk about books. A learning community that encourages collaborative relationships and conversations among all learners creates new potentials for learning and breaks down obstacles that keep them from learning more fully with

and from others. Rosen (1984) says that it allows all learners, not just the teacher, to be storytellers. All learners are able to construct their own understandings of their world through connections to their past experiences. As they interact and engage in dialogue with others, they are able to grow beyond those experiences to new understandings of literature and life.

On the last day of school in first grade, the children were asked to write a journal entry on what was important to them about their learning in first grade. Some children wrote long entries. Adrienne's was short but captures for me the essence of a collaborative community.

I got to nau avry budy and I got to make stores.

Adrienne's comments remind us that learning is both social and constructive. We author our understandings about the world as we interact with others and create stories to help us understand that world.

The last words in this article come from Chris, a third grader, who gave this advice to teachers who want to create a literate community:

I think teachers should try letting kids work together because it can make their students smarter and it is fun for the kids so they want to do it. It can help the teacher learn too. I think it helps the whole class learn better.

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