"I LIKE THE NAME BUT NOT THE SOUP!"

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE METALINGUISTIC SENTIENCE
OF YOUNG GIFTED CHILDREN: ITS REFLECTION OF THEIR
COGNITIVE ABILITY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THEIR
LITERACY ACQUISITION AND LITERACY LEARNING

DISSERTATION

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By

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Metalinguistic sentience refers to the conscious or unconscious apprehension of, sensitivity to, and attention to language as something with form and function that can be manipulated. This includes, but is not restricted to, conscious or unconscious apprehension of, sensitivity to, and attention to the following aspects of language and literacy: pragmatics, syntactics, semantics, phonology, orthography, morphology, figurative, metalanguage, print "carries" meaning, print conventions, book conventions, text conventions, referent/label arbitrariness, purposes of literacy, and abilities. These aspects of language and literacy are part of a morphological model developed by the author for classifying the evidence provided by children of their metalinguistic sentience. The two other faces of the model, displayed as a cube, depict (1) Literacy Acquisition and Literacy Learning and (2) four Prompt States: Self-, Child-, Adult-, Text.
This ethnographic study of nine verbally gifted kindergarten and first grade children was conducted with a three-fold purpose: to explore whether young verbally gifted children's metalinguistic sentience coincided with their cognitive ability, to explore whether young verbally gifted children's metalinguistic sentience influenced their literacy acquisition and literacy learning, and to explore whether young verbally gifted children's literacy acquisition and literacy learning enhanced their metalinguistic sentience. The study took place during a full school year, while the author was a participant observer in the informants' classrooms. The evidence from the research indicated that the nine verbally gifted children who served as the informants for the study had a lower threshold for metalinguistic sentience than did their agemates. This lower threshold allowed them to acquire and learn literacy more easily and more efficiently.
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INTRODUCTION

"ONCE UPON A TIME..."

Figure 1. Example of David's spelling of 'once upon a time.'
For nearly five months, from October until March, David, a highly able kindergartener and one of the children on whom this study focused, began nearly all his stories in a conventional way (i.e., various renditions of "Once upon a time"). Although his spelling was not conventional for several months, none of us would have any problem knowing what he meant and that he intended to signify the beginning of a story through his opening "word" or phrase.\(^1\)

The phrase "Once upon a time..." (or "wonsaponatim") is the customary way to begin a story in western culture and it is the way that I would like to begin this book--because

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\(^1\)Discussion of some aspects of David's invented spelling as it relates to other areas of his literacy acquisition will be presented in a later chapter, in part two of the book. Readers who are interested in the full text of several months' worth of David's stories are referred to Appendix 1.
it is a story of nine gifted children and a researcher. As the story progresses, the reader will learn about the children's parents, teachers, schools, and classmates and will learn about the researcher's beliefs and principles. By the end of the book, the reader will know a great deal about the children and a great deal about the researcher, as well as a great deal about metalinguistic sentience as it reflects cognitive ability and as it relates to literacy acquisition and literacy learning.

This book is an ethnography, that is, a report on a research project, "the product of a research effort." It is, however, more than a report of "facts"; it is an

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2 Paul Ricouer writes about writing and he writes about stories. In "Narrative Time," in On Narrative, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 170, he says, "Let us say that a story describes a series of actions and experiences made by a number of characters, whether real or imaginary. These characters are represented either in situations that change or as they relate to changes to which they then react. These changes, in turn, reveal hidden aspects of the situation and of the characters and engender a new predicament that calls for thinking, action, or both. The answer to this predicament advances the story to its conclusion." This is my plan for this book. I will describe a series of actions and experiences as several real "characters" go through them. These characters (the nine children and me) will be represented in the changing classroom situations and their reactions to these changes will be reported. Readers will learn about hidden aspects of the situations and of the characters as the characters think and/or act in various situations of which they are a part. Their responses will lead to the conclusion of this book—and of the story.

interpretation and a portrayal. It is my intention to make this book, this portrayal, highly readable because I hope that people will read it and then will tell others to read it--and that readers will learn from it and be able to apply what they have learned. Too often, research is written in such a way that only graduate students who are casting about for grounding in theory and research exert the effort necessary to wade through it. I want graduate students, researchers, teachers, and parents to make the effort to read this book.

4 James L. Peacock, in The Anthropological Lens: Harsh Light, Soft Focus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 83-84, states that "Ethnography is unlike literature and like science in that it endeavors to describe real people systematically and accurately, but it resembles literature in that it weaves facts into a form that highlights patterns and principles. As in good literature, so in good ethnography, the message comes not through explicit statement of generalities but as concrete portrayal. The readers must decode the description in order to grasp for themselves the underlying values, then juxtapose these implicitly abstracted patterns to illuminate their own experience, as well as that which they imagine to have been lived by the natives."

5 Pertti J. Pelto & Gretel Pelto, in Anthropological Research: The Structure of Inquiry, 2d ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 249, make it clear that the time has come for social scientists to answer the charge that our research is inaccessible to anyone but other social scientists: "One of the most telling criticisms of social science research calls attention to our modes of reporting the results of our studies. How can we claim that our social science research is relevant to the interested public when so much of it is buried away (in terms of language and place of publication) in materials that are of interest and usefulness only to fellow social scientists? Our reporting styles graphically reveal the nature of our reference groups. Our language of research expression has grown up as an ingroup argot, in terms of which fellow members of our
One of the ways that I intend to make this book accessible to social scientists and to the interested public is to have, in essence, two books in one. That is, there will be running text as one normally expects in a book, but there will also be extensive footnotes that illuminate the running text. Novices are encouraged to read the "top half" of the pages while those more versed and/or more interested in research are encouraged to read both halves. Although the footnote format may be somewhat distracting to some particular subsociety understand and appreciate our contributions to the ingroup-oriented body of knowledge. To be relevant, newly discovered information must be communicated. We need to develop new kinds of research-reporting channels (and language styles) that will maximize the flow of useful knowledge to the people and agencies of social action." [emphasis added]

6This is my way of resolving the conflict of whether I, as an author and a researcher, am crafting my report or simply reporting my craft. "The difficulty for the ethnographer is, of course, to reconcile these two roles. Initially he must decide how much distance to put between himself and his material. Will he choose a narrative design, in which his own growth and development are the organizing principles? Will he present his conclusions topically, suggesting that his material contains its own animus of organization? Will he attempt to do both and telescope his experience into a preface or a first chapter? Or will he write two books, one that credits his profession as a social scientist, and a second that tells how he came to draw the conclusions presented in the first?" Carol Ann Parssinen, "Social Explorers and Social Scientists: The Dark Continent of Victorian Ethnography," in A Crack in the Mirror, ed. Jay Ruby (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 216. Faced with this dilemma and recognizing that there are those who are interested in both aspects of my research and that those interested in only one aspect might be intrigued by the other, I chose to overlay two books into one.
readers, this alternative is preferable to requiring readers to flip to endnotes at the end of each chapter.7

In trying to consider my potential readership, another way that I intend to make this ethnography accessible to a wide audience is to write the "top half" in first person, as a narrative (i.e., informal, for the purpose of telling a story). While this departs from the traditional means of reporting research, many in social science are appealing to ethnographers to explore alternative modes of discourse.8 Some purists may find the more informal style disconcerting, but in fact, a first person narrative is a more appropriate method of reporting

7 "The form and features of any "version" of a narrative will be a function of, among other things, the particular motives that elicited it and the particular interests and functions it was designed to serve." Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories," in On Narrative, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 217. I have chosen this format so that readers, of many backgrounds, will find the book both readable and informative.

8 This notion has only recently gained much attention. Paul Rabinow, in Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 173, calls for ethnographers to experiment with "alternative modes of discourse (which are) more reasonable models of anthropology". Jay Ruby, who edited the book, A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 131, which is partially devoted to the "ethnographer as storyteller" states that conditions in social science are such that, "We seem amenable to the idea that anthropology is at its best when we are telling the stories of our experiences to others." It is also telling that a recent (February 1988) conference, The Ninth Annual Ethnography Conference, introduced a new topic: "Ethnography as Literary Genre."
I will explore the appropriateness of reporting ethnographic research in the narrative mode in Chapter 3.

Just as reading the literature—the folktales, the novels, the poetry—of a culture gives one a feel for that culture, I hope that reading my narrative account of the culture I studied will give readers a feel for it. I do not mean to imply that this book is a novel; it is not. However, I do hope to "dramatize, amplify, and depict,"

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9"Narratives, particularly in the first person, are considered by most anthropologists and social science writers to be too personal and too subjective to be vehicles for scientific communication. It is ironic and also symptomatic of the set of problems fundamentally related to [reflexivity] that first-person narrative is perhaps the most natural way of describing experience. It is difficult to express your self-awareness and reflexiveness to others without employing some first-person narrative. Once the need to be reflexive is more widely recognized, narrative form will become more acceptable as the rhetorical form most logical for the communication of anthropology." Barbara Myerhoff & Jay Ruby, "Introduction," in A Crack in the Mirror, ed. Jay Ruby (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 17.

10I do hope there is some literary value and feel for the work, that is, I hope that readers will enjoy their reading while they are learning, as well as conversely, enjoying their learning while they are reading. "A great ethnographic work is both scientific and literary, attaining a marked degree of objective precision, yet translating patterns discerned in the alien group into a form comprehensible to the reader at home" (Peacock, Anthropological Lens, 90).
rather than simply describe" what happened as these young
gifted children advanced in their literacy development.11

The title of this section of the book is "Using Language to Talk About Language to Talk About Language". Each of the first five chapters will offer partial explanations for the derivation of this title. In Chapter 1, "Using Language to Talk About Language to Talk About Language," I will provide an overview of the study, the focus and purpose of the study, including questions addressed, and the techniques and strategies used for data collection. In the following chapter, "...Language to Talk About..." I will explain what constitutes "metalinguistic sentience" and will make a case for the use of this new term. In Chapter 3, "Using Language to Talk About..." I will attempt to explain the paradoxical, recursive, and reflexive nature of writing an ethnography. Chapter 4, "...Language, Part I" will explore the research base related to the areas of metalinguistics and literacy. Chapter 5, "...Language, Part II" will explore the research base related to the area of giftedness and will address the principles that guided the design of my study and drove my investigation of literacy acquisition and literacy learning.

The story continues in the second section of the book, "Children on the Threshold." Readers will find the second section has far fewer footnotes and much more narrative about the children and about the research. The first chapter in this section, Chapter 6, "Whose Language?" will present the children on whom this study focused and that is when the real story begins. Chapter 7, "Learning School," begins to lay the groundwork for the major assertion of the book, that is, that the young gifted children in this study had a low threshold for language and were able, thereby, to become literate more easily than their agemates. The following chapter, Chapter 8, "Threshold to Literacy: Literacy Acquisition and Literacy Learning," offers definitions and a basis for the use of the terms literacy acquisition and literacy learning in investigating the metalinguistic sentience of the young gifted children in this study. In addition, a model for use in such investigations is proposed. Chapters 9 and 10 deal specifically with "Literacy Acquisition" and "Literacy Learning," respectively. Within these chapters the model for investigating the metalinguistic sentience of young gifted children is demonstrated. The final chapter of the book, "Now What?" answers that question—in terms of future research in the areas of young children, metalinguistic sentience, and literacy acquisition and literacy learning. I hope by the time readers reach the final chapter, they
have developed some of their own ideas regarding the
direction the research should now take.

For those whose interest was piqued by the title of
the book, "I like the name but not the soup!" some
explanation is warranted. Stephanie, one of the nine gifted
children portrayed within these pages, went to a restaurant
with her family and ordered clam chowder. When the waiter
came back to check on how she liked her soup, her reply was,
"I like the name, but not the soup!" Examples like this--of
an appreciation of language as something with form and
function that can be reflected on--are what lured me into
designing this research. I hope readers not only like the
name of this book, but also what is in it.
Date: December 16, 1986
Informant: Kelli
Situation: I am watching and listening as Kelli composes a Christmas story. Although I have not asked her to, she sounds out the words as she writes them, as well as provides "running commentary" throughout the composing process.

Figure 2. Text of Kelli's Christmas tree story.
"A long long time ago. Kelli. One time one time long a long long time ago, the the the uh hold it, the the er- there wu-us was a ch-ch-k-k-r-i-i-s-m-ch-ch-" (to me) "Do you know what makes a ch?"

Mc: "What word are you writing?"
K: "Christmas tree"
Mc: "Christmas tree, christmas tree"
K: "tree, tree"
Mc: "How do you spell tree?"
K: "I don't want to do it tu-ree! a tree."
Mc: "Tree, tree, tree, tree, what sound do you hear?"
K: "ch-ch, I guess h. tree. a tree was was gone gone? for-or-forev-ev-ever. ssss-said the tree. ssumwu- someone walked u-u-up to to to the the tr-tre-tree tree and and and and and she said she said said said she said you you are alive live you are alive! That's all--what she said."

Kelli's composing process, which includes her running commentary, can be analyzed in several ways, any one of which provides information about the nature of her language development. The brief excerpt which opened this chapter can be analyzed:

(1) as a single literacy event involving Kelli;
(2) as one of many literacy events involving Kelli;
(3) as one of many literacy events occurring in her classroom in which some or all of her classmates are also involved;

(4) as one literacy event displayed against a backdrop of all young children who write.¹

For the purpose of demonstrating the richness of information that is available when looking at children's language in context and as a means of introducing the tone of this book, I will analyze one portion of this excerpt that is an exemplar of metalinguistic sentience, that is, the conscious or unconscious awareness of language as something with form and function that can be manipulated.² I will consider this portion as one part of a single literacy event in a whole series of events involving Kelli as a writer (#2 above). As a way of introducing the necessity of studying child language from an ethnographic perspective, I will discuss some of what is apparent about her language that could only be learned by adopting an ethnographic stance (vs. an experimental stance) or, in

¹The term 'literacy event' is defined by Shirley Brice Heath, "Protean Shapes in Literacy Events: Ever-Shifting Oral and Literate Traditions," in Spoken and Written Language, ed. Deborah Tannen (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1982), 35, as "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretive processes."

²The term "metalinguistic sentience" will be fully explained in Chapter 3.
other words, a stance that considers a situation contextually (rather than atomistically).3

Kelli began her story 'A long long time ago, there was a...'/ Figure 3

Figure 3. Partial text from Kelli's Christmas tree story

As I intend to demonstrate, much of my understanding of Kelli's literacy development as reflected in her Christmas tree story, is informed by my observations of her prior to writing this story as she interacted in the classroom environment—a natural setting for kindergarteners in the United States. Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, Ethnography: Principles in Practice (London: Tavistock Publications, 1983), 9, state that "any account of human behaviour requires that we understand the social meanings that inform it....Such understanding requires that we learn the culture of those we are studying. This cannot be done by following standardized procedures; it is a natural process analogous to the experience of any stranger learning the culture of a group....The centrality of meaning also has the consequence that people’s behaviour can only be understood in context. For this reason 'natural' settings must be investigated; we cannot understand the social world by studying artificial simulations of it in experiments and interviews."

' ' indicates conventional spelling/orthography
[ ] indicates Kelli's spelling
/ / indicates "the sound of"
Kelli used what she knew about sounds to spell the words she did not have in her instant spelling repertoire. As she continued with her opening line, Kelli first intended to write '...there was a tree' but before she wrote 'tree', she decided to put 'Christmas' first. After spelling 'Christmas' [cresmes], she again tried to sound out 'tree'. "/ch/, /ch/." The sound was not one that Kelli readily had a symbol for, so being resourceful, she asked me, "Do you know what makes a /ch/?"

I had a pretty good idea that she was planning to spell 'tree' but I tried not to make an assumption lest my doing so might eliminate important data, so I asked, "What word are you writing?" (I also did this because I knew that virtually every sound in the English language can be represented in more than one way). Kelli responded, "Christmas tree." Very slowly, I said, "Christmas tree, Christmas tree" making sure that I enunciated the consonant at the beginning of 'tree' distinctly. Kelli repeated, "Tree, tree" in a rather impatient voice, implying "TREE--TREE--Are you deaf, woman?" So then I asked, "How do you spell tree?" again drawing the word out so that she could hear the /t/ at the beginning. Quite exasperated by this point, Kelli said, "I don't want to do it /tuh-ree/! A tree!"

It is at this juncture that I finally realized that the sound Kelli was asking for, /ch/, was indeed the sound
heard at the beginning of 'tree'. It really was not /tre/, especially in rapid speech or as in the phrase, 'Christmas tree.' I had been using what I knew about traditional orthography and was therefore deaf to the evidence Kelli was providing of her phonological awareness.5

Wanting to verify my hypothesis, I asked Kelli, "What sound do you hear at the beginning?" As expected, her response was, "/ch/, /ch/." She decided that /ch/ was spelled 'h' (no thanks to the nearby adult) and proceeded to spell 'tree' [hre] (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Partial text of Kelli's Christmas tree story.

5According to Linnea Ehri, "How Orthography Alters Spoken Language Competencies in Children Learning to Read and Spell, in Language Awareness and Learning to Read, ed. John Downing and Renee Valtin (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1984), 123, the language knowledge of beginners (in literacy acquisition and literacy learning) "includes a lexicon of words acquired from their experience with speech. The lexicon is comprised of word units having several identities. Each word has a phonological identity, that is, how the word sounds and is articulated. Each word has a syntactic identity, how the word functions in sentences. Each has a semantic identity, what the word might mean in various contexts. In the course of learning to read, another identity is added to the lexicon: an alphabetic image of the word. This image is integrated with the other identities to form a unit in lexical memory." As Linnea Ehri and L.S. Wilce, "The Salience of Silent Letters in Children's Memory for Word Spellings," Memory and Cognition 10 (1982) discovered, it seems that the alphabetic image affects conceptualization of the phonemic structure of a word and may actually override the sounds one hears. Certainly, this was the case here; I could not imagine why Kelli was asking for /ch/ when I knew what she wanted was a 't'.
In her two subsequent uses of 'tree', Kelli, without hesitation, wrote [hre]. Kelli had arrived at a spelling for 'tree' that made sense to her and because Kelli had an awareness that spelling was neither haphazard nor capricious, she was consistent in her orthography.

The awareness Kelli exhibited in December, however, represented growth from October. In October, she was writing a story about four birds. Although she had written [birds] at the beginning of the story, when she got ready to write 'bird nest', she was not sure how to spell it and seemed surprised when I pointed out that she had already spelled it once and that it was going to be spelled the same.

From both the October and December encounters with Kelli, as well as subsequent ones, I knew that she was not cognizant of the fact that, in English, a sound can be represented by more than one letter. For example, on another occasion, Kelli asked, "How do you make a /er/?" I

While looking at this one piece of writing certainly would have been informative, looking at it as part of the process of Kelli's literacy development was much more informative. Bonita Blazer's research, "'I Want to Talk to You About Writing:' 5-Year-Old Children Speak," in The Acquisition of Literacy: Ethnographic Perspectives, ed. Bambi B. Schieffelin and Perry Gilmore, Vol. 21, Advances in Discourse Processes, ed. Roy O. Freedle (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1986), 82, indicated a similar insight: "Only limited information can be gleaned from examining the product of a beginning writer without observing the social context and the sociocognitive interactions that were the history of the product." Growth could not have been detected if I had not observed Kelli before December.
asked her what word she was writing. With an exasperated expression, she said, "/er/, just /er/." When I persisted, she said, "Hurt," implying with her tone and expression, "What difference does it make?"

Much of the rigidity of her belief was attributable to the commercial phonics-based reading program and phonics-based writing program that were part of the curriculum in her classroom. Each letter was taught as "making" one sound and each sound was taught as being "made" by one letter. For example, in this program, children were taught that the letter 'c' makes a /k/, not that 'c' may make a /k/ or a /s/ and not that /k/ may be made by a 'k' or a 'c'. Kelli was not a fluent reader prior to beginning kindergarten so she did not have discrepant cases from her own reading experience to cause her to question these rigid rules about sound/symbol correspondence. As the year progressed, though, she did acquire a different sense of reading and writing, but also of "school reading and writing."

Kelli learned very quickly about the nature of school and that the rules in school were different from rules in other places. It was as if she worked under the following syllogism:

a. All school rules are absurd.

b. All school rules must be followed at school.

c. Spelling rules are school rules.
Therefore: Spelling rules are absurd but must be followed when at school.

As an example of her syllogistic thinking on this issue (which I discuss further in Chapter 6), one day Kelli counted the word 'uniform' as having six letters. I badgered her to recount the letters (several times). Finally, she pointed out that she knew 'or' was two letters, but she said, "At school, we count it as one."

Watching and listening as Kelli wrote her [cresmes hre] story provided information regarding what she knew about the conventions of written language as well as what she did not know. For example, consider the following:

1. Kelli knew that words were written left to right.

   Evidence: essentially all her words were written left to right.

2. Kelli knew that there are spaces between words (i.e., the unit "word" exists--although she was not yet cognizant of all units which constitute a word).

   Evidence: she put a space between the two words in the phrases [1 da] and [go ther] but not between the two words in the phrase [wotup] ('walked up').

3. Kelli knew that lines of writing go from the top of the page to the bottom of the page.
Evidence: She had essentially three columns on her page, and in each column, Kelli had written her words/lines from the top of the page to the bottom.

4. Kelli knew that certain letters represented certain sounds.
   Evidence: she spelled /d/, [d]; /t/, [t]; /w/, [w], and so on.

5. Kelli knew that words were spelled the same each time they were written.
   Evidence: 'tree' was spelled [hre] each of the three times it was written; 'long' was spelled [log] both times it was written.

6. Kelli knew that stories had ritual beginnings.
   Evidence: she began her story, 'One day a long long time ago...' (she wrote, "One day" even though she did not say it).

7. Kelli knew that written language should make sense.
   Evidence: Kelli reread her own text; her completed text did, indeed, make sense.

On the other hand, consider the following regarding what Kelli did not yet know:

1. Kelli did not know that if one was going to write in columns, then the columns go from left to right, sequentially.
Evidence: Kelli's three columns could be numbered, in terms of her story, as 1, 3, 2.

2. Kelli did not know that some words were not spelled like they sound.

   Evidence: she spelled 'time' as [tim], 'gone' as [gon], 'to' as [toow], and so on.

3. Kelli did not know that punctuation conventions exist.

   Evidence: there were no punctuation marks of any kind in Kelli's story.

In addition to knowing what Kelli did and did not know about the conventions of written language based on my observations of her as a reader and writer, I was also privy to how she came to know some of what she did; I had been in her learning environment and had witnessed explanations, questions, lessons, materials, directions, and teacher-child and child-child interactions. Although I pulled out a minute segment of Kelli's school experiences to explicate (i.e., one composing session), I also attended to Kelli's language as it was occurring as part of the larger context of the classroom environment, thereby rendering a cogent picture of her abilities.\(^7\) The depth and breadth of what

\(^7\)The metaphor Judith Lindfors, *Children's Language and Learning*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1987), 158, uses to describe an example of child language is to liken it to stopping a film to look at a particular frame. "In the particular frame that is the example, you cannot see the dynamic child-and-context
can be learned by stopping a film to view a frame—but considering that frame as part of the whole film—is in sharp contrast to what can be learned by simply administering one of the myriad of language testing instruments available or by having Kelli perform certain language "tasks." In order to find out what children know about language, we must observe them using that language in context.

**What Children Know about Language**

By the time children reach kindergarten and first grade, they already possess a great deal of knowledge about language. The first few years of human life are a time of acquiring some knowledge of the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic functions and boundaries of language. The breadth and depth of this linguistic interaction; the ongoing process; but each example reflects that process."

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N. J. Lund and J. F. Duchan, in their book *Assessing Children's Language in Naturalistic Contexts* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 283, point out that "Part of the unnaturalness of tests comes from the removal of contextual clues in order to assure that the child "knows" the answer only from the language forms given....this is an artificial separation since language typically depends on context for interpretation." In order for researchers and teachers to understand the as yet only partially understood world of language and literacy development, "Hypotheses, measurement, samples, and instruments are the wrong guidelines. Instead, you need to learn about a world you don't understand by encountering it firsthand and making some sense out of it." Michael Agar, *Speaking of Ethnography*, Sage University Paper Series on Qualitative Research Methods, vol. 2 (Beverly Hills, California: Sage, 1986, 12.)
knowledge have a significant impact on children's first few years in school as they are learning to read and write.

Reading and writing involve attending to and manipulating language in a way that is distinct from that required for speaking, the mode of discourse that has served the child since birth. As children learn to read and write, they must treat linguistic units (e.g., words and letters) as objects of thought and action. This is different from the tacit use of language in which children normally engage. In other words, knowing how to speak and use language effectively does not necessarily signal the ability to think consciously about language in a way that facilitates reading and writing acquisition. Children's abilities to think consciously about language, that is, to stand back and reflect on language as an object—as something with properties that can be attended to and with form that can be manipulated—are considered their metalinguistic abilities.


Most linguists, psychologists, and literacy researchers would agree that metalinguistic ability is related to reading and writing ability. The disagreement


emerges as those concerned with research on literacy acquisition consider "whether certain aspects of metalinguistic awareness...are a prerequisite, a facilitator, or a result of successful literacy learning."\textsuperscript{12}

There are some researchers who claim that in order for children to read, they must possess a certain degree of metalinguistic awareness. Others believe that learning to read brings about an enhanced metalinguistic consciousness while still a third group sees the relationship between reading and metalinguistic awareness as mutually facilitative. It appears, however, that these language researchers retain a certain open-mindedness such that no one is firmly entrenched in his or her causal belief concerning linguistic awareness and reading, although all of them recognize the correlation between the two and

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\textsuperscript{12}T. S. Sanders, "Three First Graders' Concept of Word and Concepts About the Language of Literacy Instruction," in Directions in Reading: Research and Instruction: Thirtieth Yearbook of the National Reading Conference, ed. M.L. Kamil (Washington, D.C.: The National Reading Conference, 1981), 266, [emphasis added].
acknowledge that reflecting on language as an object is inherent in literacy acquisition and literacy learning.

Metalinguistic awareness—the ability to reflect upon language structure and function, treating language as an object of thought, as opposed to only a tool for comprehending and producing sentences, is considered part of the general cognitive ability to use knowledge consciously and deliberately. Metalinguistic knowledge makes cognitive demands that speaking and listening performance do not. Some researchers suggest that a certain combination of maturity and cognitive development may be necessary for the emergence of metalinguistic awareness that accompanies reading acquisition.


14 See e.g., Courtney B. Cazden, "Play and Metalinguistic Awareness: One Dimension of Language Experience," The Urban Review 7 (1974); Lev S. Vygotsky, Language and Thought (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1965).

Human beings have the very general and maybe species-specific capacity to reflect on their own activities and productions. From the point of view of this capacity, one could suppose that metalinguistic reflection should show close resemblance with general cognitive development, and in particular with the constitution of mental operations.\(^{16}\)

Since, then, it appears that cognitive development and metalinguistic awareness are related, it is appropriate to use subjects with superior cognitive abilities as informants for the research. Using highly articulate children in metalinguistic research is not unprecedented.\(^{17}\)

In addition, verbally gifted children tend to be good readers and examining able readers provides more insight into reading acquisition/reading learning than does looking at problem readers. It simply makes sense that if one wants


\(^{17}\)see e.g., Lila Gleitman, Henry Gleitman, and E. Shipley, "The Emergence of the Child as Grammarian," Cognition 1 (1972).
to see how something is done, a proficient "someone" should be observed.

The world of children's language development is a world not yet understood. In order to understand it a little better, I conducted this study with a three-fold purpose:

(1) to explore whether young verbally gifted children's metalinguistic awareness coincided with their cognitive ability, and if so, how?

(2) to explore whether young verbally gifted children's metalinguistic awareness influenced their literacy acquisition and literacy learning, and if so, how?

(3) to explore whether young verbally gifted children's literacy acquisition and literacy learning enhanced their metalinguistic awareness, and if so, how?

The research questions I used included the following:

(1) What did young verbally gifted children say that indicated their metalinguistic awareness? What did they say spontaneously? What did they say under instructional conditions? What did they say in response to probes from the researcher?

(2) How did what young verbally gifted children say reflect their cognitive ability? Was this a function of developmental stages? Were their comments ordered as opposed to random?
(3) What was the nature of the co-occurrence between metalinguistic awareness and literacy acquisition/literacy learning? Did certain phenomena manifest themselves consistently before young verbally gifted children began to read? Did certain phenomena manifest themselves consistently during the time the young verbally gifted children were beginning to read? Did certain phenomena manifest themselves consistently after young verbally gifted children began to read?18

The body of research I examined indicated that metalinguistic awareness, cognitive ability, and reading acquisition/reading learning all seemed to be linked, but the nature of that relationship had yet to be determined. I felt that by conducting an in-depth investigation of the metalinguistic sentience of a collection of cognitively superior individual children as they acquired reading and

18 Formulating research questions is an important part of designing an ethnographic study. Myrdal 1969, ix-xvi in Jay Ruby, "Ethnography as Trompe L'oeil: Film and Anthropology," Crack in the Mirror (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 127, points out that "Facts do not organize themselves into concepts and theories just by being looked at; indeed, except within the framework of concepts and theories, there are no scientific facts but only chaos. There is an inescapable a priori element in all scientific work. Questions must be asked before answers can be given. The questions are an expression of our interest in the world; they are at bottom valuations. Valuations are thus necessarily already involved at the stage where we observe facts and carry on theoretical analysis, and not only at the stage when we draw political inferences from facts and valuations."
writing abilities could lead to a clearer conception of what the precise relationship was.\textsuperscript{19}

I knew that determining this relationship could be significant for several reasons:

(1) If it was determined that metalinguistic sentience coincides with cognitive development, an instrument (e.g., a checklist) could be designed for use in determining a child's cognitive development based on his or her metalinguistic sentience.

(2) If it was determined that metalinguistic sentience influences a child's readiness for literacy acquisition/literacy learning, this information could be disseminated to teachers so that they have metalinguistic cues to use when determining a child's readiness for formal literacy instruction. Also, if students' metalinguistic sentience can be enhanced, then teachers can be taught methods of developing this awareness in their students.

\textsuperscript{19}I hoped that the research questions I had formulated were the "right ones," that is I hoped that they were engendered by informed thinking. I wanted to avoid a "Type III Error," that is, asking the wrong question. Jerome Kirk and Marc L. Miller, in Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research, Sage University Paper Series on Qualitative Research Methods, Vol. 1 (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1986), 29-30, state that while most researchers worry about Type I errors (i.e., mistakenly 'rejecting the null hypothesis') and Type II errors (i.e., rejecting a principle when in fact it is true), the source of most validity errors is in fact the Type III error (i.e., asking the wrong question). I hoped that my research questions and research paradigm might lead to a formulation of the relationship among metalinguistic sentience, literacy acquisition, and cognitive ability.
(3) If it was determined that metalinguistic sentience is enhanced by literacy acquisition/literacy learning, then it is possible that the essence and structure of this relationship can be determined. If so, teachers can learn to manipulate reading instruction to capitalize on this linguistic activity to further develop metalinguistic knowledge, extending it into writing and other language modes.

(4) Since children's linguistic ability (or lack thereof) has so much impact on their school success, research that explores linguistic ability and that has the potential for revealing more of the nature of language development and learning is worthwhile in and of itself. Because of the duration, depth, and research paradigm of the study, I also expected that new avenues for investigation would be discovered.

A naturalistic mode of inquiry was chosen for this investigation because it had the potential to yield information and insight which had not resulted from the large number of previously conducted experimental studies.

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20 Hammersley and Atkinson, in Ethnography: Principles in Practice, 23, state that "The value of ethnography is perhaps most obvious in relation to the development of theory. (It has the) capacity to depict the activities and perspectives of actors in ways that challenge the dangerously misleading preconceptions that social scientists often bring to research..."

21 Research concerning the relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and reading has burgeoned in the
Ethnographic, or qualitative research, should yield a picture of "what's going on" because, by definition, naturalistic research involves looking at subjects in their natural situations and contexts. This is a sound method for investigating child language because in order to assess a child's language, the child must be observed using language in context.\textsuperscript{22}

Some may argue that the language that occurs in school is not "natural language," that is, it is not the past fifteen years. A recent review of the literature (Yaden, "Findings, Problems, and Classroom Applications," 1984) contains 125 citations, most of which are for articles and/or chapters reporting on experimental research in the area of metalinguistic awareness. A great deal of information has resulted from these studies. It is possible, however, that some of the treatments and/or assessments are inappropriate or are not measuring what the researchers think they are.

\textsuperscript{22}Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, in Naturalistic Inquiry (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1985): 191, cite Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Toward an Experimental Ecology of Human Development," American Psychologist 32 (1977): 513, an authority in developmental psychology, who asserts that those of us who are interested in developmental aspects of children (e.g., language) must avoid, "being caught between a rock and a soft place. The rock is rigor, and the soft place is relevance....The emphasis on rigor has led to experiments that are elegantly designed but often limited in scope. This limitation derives from the fact that many of these experiments involve situations that are unfamiliar, artificial, and short-lived and that call for unusual settings that are difficult to generalize to other settings. From this perspective, it can be said that much of contemporary developmental psychology is the science of the strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time." (emphasis in the original) This study was designed to observe the natural behavior of children in natural situations with natural adults for an extended period of time.
kind of language that would occur except in a school setting. For example, in school, children respond to questions that they know their teacher already knows the answer to, whereas in "real" language, outside the school, it would be absurd for people to seek responses to questions to which they already knew the answers. [Picture the ludicrousness of this family scene: Family is sitting at their favorite restaurant. All family members have a menu and all are reading the menu. Father asks, "Who can tell me how many desserts Denny's serves?" Mother then asks, "Alright, which one of you children can answer this? May I get ice cream on my apple pie? Show me where it tells you that."]

While I will grant that language in school is often unnatural compared to language outside school, the language that occurs is in a context natural to children. School is a place where children spend a large part of their early life and they use language to try to make sense of it.²³

²³When studying children's linguistic and literacy development and ability, one aspect that must be considered is "an understanding of the children's interpretations of what oral and written language does and what it means in their social world. Issues of language competence cannot be understood apart from the social world of which they are an integral part." Perry Gilmore, "Sub-Rosa Literacy: Peers, Play, and Ownership in Literacy Acquisition," in The Acquisition of Literacy: Ethnographic Perspectives, ed. Bambi B. Schieffelin and Perry Gilmore, Vol. 21, Advances in Discourse Processes, ed. Roy O. Freedle (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1986), 155. The social world of which children are an integral part definitely includes school.
Therefore, the natural place to study metalinguistic sentience related to literacy acquisition and literacy learning is in school.

As mentioned above, when planning this research, I also knew that the areas of metalinguistics and literacy were not totally unexplored; scores and scores of experimental, quantitative studies have been conducted in these areas, although researchers have not differentiated between gifted and non-gifted children. While these studies revealed some interesting information regarding children's metalinguistic awareness and reading ability and were certainly not fruitless, a wealth of information was not tapped, due to the nature of the research. In simple terms, those who conduct experimental research on children's language generally: (a) begin with an hypothesis about

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24 Shane Templeton and Elizabeth Sulzby, Beyond the Psycholinguistic Vise of Competence/Performance Theory: Why Study Metalinguistic Awareness? Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, San Diego, Ca., 3-6 December 1980, ERIC ED 199 635, 11, discussed the "plethora of studies" that had investigated the abilities important for learning to read and noted that while there is a significant positive correlation between reading achievement and these abilities, "Diminishing empirical returns have resulted. A shift in research paradigm should correct this orientation. With respect to words, the prospects are exciting: we are now engaging the same child in tasks ranging across both structure and content of words and better yet, following this child over time." Even better yet is a further shift in research paradigm, that is, to study children engaged in tasks ranging across both structure and content of words over time—in context. This is far preferable to studying hordes of children involved in only one experimental task.
isolated, specific skills or traits; (b) test that hypothesis either using an instrument that requires some type of language performance (out of context) or asks children to complete various types of language tasks (out of context); and (c) report what was found, again, out of context.

Studying children's language in this way—that is, experimentally—testing specific, isolated skills or behaviors, without considering who the child is, what is happening as the child completes a particular task, when and where the experimental situation is occurring, why the child might have performed or behaved as he or she did, and how other factors may have influenced the performance/behavior, is very likely going to yield a distorted, partial view of what is actually going on in children's language. Those of us who reject experimental research as the appropriate way to learn about children's language work from the following basic assumption:

...children's language is woven into the fabric of the event that is occurring as the language is used. Just as pulling a single thread from a cloth changes one's perceptions of that thread, separating language from the context in which it occurs distorts its nature and obscures its communicative function. Descriptions of an individual child's language can be meaningful only when framed by the events and purposes that engender the language.25

25 Lund and Duchan, Assessing Children's Language, xi; [emphasis added].
If one envisions the nature of an individual child's language development as a multi-colored, multi-patterned bolt of fabric that is hidden from the view of all but the child, then the only hope teachers and researchers have of constructing an image of that bolt of cloth is to discover various swatches of the cloth to piece together. Looking for and finding separate threads of language through research that ignores the contexts in which language occurs is not useful in the quest for constructing the bolt of fabric.

**Why the Ethnographic Paradigm?**

Because I am interested in constructing an image of a whole bolt of language fabric, I have chosen to employ an ethnographic approach in my study of the metalinguistic sentience of young gifted children. The term "ethnography" was coined by anthropologists to refer to "a monograph-length description of the lifeways of people who were ethnoi, the ancient Greek term for "others"--barbarians who were not Greek."26 The ethnographic approach was originally

26 Frederick Erickson, "Qualitative Methods in Research on Teaching," in *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, 3d ed., ed. Merlin C. Wittrock (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1986), 123. Various terms are applied to this family of research: naturalistic, postpositivistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, subjective, case study, qualitative, hermeneutic, humanistic. Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 7, posit that "It has so many names because the persons who profess to practice it tend to take different views of what it implies, in the same way that persons who profess to be Christians may nevertheless prefer
used by anthropologists who studied intact cultures—either on far away islands, on urban streets, or in rural communities. In the last ten to twenty years, researchers have recognized the opportunities for learning about education through ethnographic investigations.

To understand the distinction between research conducted from an ethnographic perspective and research conducted from an experimental, positivistic perspective, consider the following two scenarios:

Scenario 1: In one room, we find a team of researchers standing in front of a class of children. The teacher is at her desk. The researchers ask students the question, "What is going on here?" and direct students to raise their hands to indicate which of the following five responses they want to answer:

a. We are trying to have class, but researchers are bugging us.

b. Someone is in our classroom, asking a lot of questions.

c. We'd like to learn, but there's someone in here who is keeping us from it.

d. All of the above.

e. None of the above.

...to be known as Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Adventist, Fundamentalist, Baptist, and so on."
The researchers tally the number of responses in each category and go back to their offices to write up the results.

Scenario 2: In the room next door, there is another team of researchers, sitting around the classroom. The teacher is teaching. These researchers mentally ask the question, "What is going on here?" and then "watch, look, and listen" for answers. A child who has just received after school detention for not having his story to turn in "like he knows he's supposed to every Friday," mutters, loud enough for the nearby researcher to hear, "She's full of it if she thinks I'm going to bring in the story I'm sending off to that contest--and have her ruin it!" The researcher records what just happened, and later, after many more days in the classroom (including time to ask this child about the stories that he appears to be writing at home), will try to formulate a possible assertion about what is happening in the classroom.

Needless to say (but I'm saying it anyway), scenario 1 is intended (tongue in cheek) to represent research conducted from a positivist stance and scenario 2 is intended (semi-tongue in cheek) to represent research conducted from an ethnographic stance. While both mock research investigations were conducted to answer the question, "What is going on here?" the positivist research team asked that question from a different perspective than
did the ethnographic research team. Positivists hold that there is an answer, that is, Truth and Reality are out there somewhere. On the other hand, ethnographers hold that truth and reality are individually interpreted and/or constructed—but that each person's truth and reality are as significant as Truth and Reality would be, if they existed.

An ethnographer’s primary means for determining an individual's truth and reality is through fieldwork, that is, encountering the subjects of study in the field—in context. An ethnographic study always involves "fieldwork." That fieldwork may entail going to reside on a remote island in Polynesia, visiting a New York half-way house for former drug-abusers several times a week for a year, or sitting in on a rural school's faculty meetings for

27 In the words of Peacock, Anthropological Lens, 68, : "Put simply, positivism postulates that there exists a body of facts 'out there,' in the 'real world,' independent of our perception and interpretation."

28 "Fieldwork is not, of course, merely encounter. It also entails systematic procedures (for learning about and gathering information about the community.) Ethnographers...will record great masses of notes on whatever they observe, and they may even computerize or otherwise systematize such data. And, of course,...they must ask questions. But the human encounter, and the sense one can make of it, remains the central ethnographic experience." (Peacock, The Anthropological Lens, 68).

Because the fieldworker is in close contact with the field situation and therefore is able to develop a sense of the truth and reality under which people are operating, the researcher is better "able to avoid misleading or meaningless questions" (Dean, Eichorn, and Dean in George J. McCall and J.L. Simmons, Issues in Participant Observation: A Text and Reader (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969) 22.
an academic year. In my case, the fieldwork portion required visiting two elementary schools in a large urban school district throughout the course of an academic year.

It is important when doing fieldwork to observe a society, group, or culture through a natural cycle of events.29

Frederick Erickson, one of the foremost authorities on educational ethnography, states succinctly what fieldwork research involves:

(a) intensive, long-term participation in a field setting;
(b) careful recording of what happens in the setting by writing field notes and collecting other kinds of documentary evidence (e.g., memos, records, examples of student work, audiotapes, videotapes,); and
(c) subsequent analytic reflection on the documentary record obtained in the field, and reporting by means of detailed description, using narrative vignettes and direct quotes from interviews, as well as by more general description in the form of analytic charts, summary tables, and descriptive statistics.

Interpretive fieldwork research involves being unusually thorough and reflective in noticing and describing

29 According to Frank W. Lutz, "The Holistic Approach to Understanding Schooling," in Ethnography and Language in Educational Settings, Vol. 5 in Advances in Discourse Processes, ed. Roy O. Freedle (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1981), 52, "...ethnography centers on the participant observation of a society or culture through a complete cycle of events that regularly occur as that society interacts with its environment....Ethnography is a holistic, thick description of the interactive processes involving the discovery of important and recurring variables in the society as they relate to one another, under specified conditions, and as they affect or produce certain results and outcomes in the society." If a researcher does not become a participant observer for an entire cycle of events, then what is being done is not ethnography, but "blitzkrieg ethnography" that is, charging in, looking around, racing out, making claims that are not adequately supported. I wanted to do much more than charge in, look around, and then race out making claims I could not support.
everyday events in the field setting, and in attempting to identify the significance of actions in the events from the various points of view of the actors themselves.30

The fieldworker interacts with the subjects in varying degrees in the field.31 Figure 5 shows one conceptualization of the roles a researcher may play in the field setting.

![Diagram showing roles of fieldworker](image)

**Figure 5.** Modification of a diagram showing theoretical social roles for fieldwork (Junker 1960: 36 in Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice,* 93).

The four roles that the fieldworker may play are explained below. Even though they appear to be discrete, the division is more superficial than substantive. Many fieldworkers, including me, assume different roles at

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30 Erickson, "Research on Teaching," 121.

31 Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice,* 97, state that "Decisions about the role to adopt in a setting will depend on the purpose of the research and the nature of the setting."
different times, depending upon various interacting forces.32

I. Complete participant: An example of a complete participant in educational ethnography is a teacher who decides to conduct fieldwork research in his or her classroom, but who essentially goes about business as usual, that is, teaching, grading papers, meeting with parents, producing class plays, planning lessons, and so on. The complete participant takes field notes "on the sly," during the precious few moments when no one is demanding help and/or before and after school. The children in the classroom are not even aware that there is any research going on.

32 An analogy that appealed to me was offered by Richard Schechner, in "Collective Reflexivity: Restoration of Behavior," in A Crack in the Mirror, ed. Jay Ruby (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 80: "The fieldworker is very much like the theater director. He is an evoker-observer who participates and keeps a distance at the same time, whose presence and energy make a difference, especially in the mid-phase of making a production, but who is apparently absent at its inception (scriptmaking) and conclusion (performing). The director does not author the script but guarantees its display before an audience. Sometimes, and increasingly so, the director is more than this. He helps make the script and enters into the performance. The fieldworker does not create the society he studies, but his presence gives the society an additional significance to itself and to others: a sense that someone else is interested, is listening, and, consequently, an encouragement for people within the society to be reflexive. The fieldworker is a professional link, a person not at home either in his own or in someone else's culture--an in-between.
II. Participant observer: An example of a participant observer in educational ethnography could be found in a case when two teachers elect to collaborate on a research project. In order to do so, for a year, they share a classroom assignment. Although both are teachers and are responsible for planning and teaching, both will also be researchers. While one is teaching or working with a group, the other might be taking field notes, interviewing children on their perceptions of an event that just occurred, or videotaping a math group. The children in the classroom are aware that their teachers are sharing the class and that they sometimes teach and sometimes "watch."

III. Observing participant: An example of a person assuming this role in educational ethnography could be an outsider who has come into the classroom for the express purpose of doing fieldwork. This person does not just come in and observe, though, but rather, interacts with students: answering questions, reacting to pieces of student work, taking part in a game of historical charades, and so on. The students know the adult is not their teacher, but they do see this adult as someone that they can respond to and who will respond to them.

IV. Complete observer: An example of the complete observer in educational ethnography would be someone observing a classroom from behind a one-way mirror. Just shy of that is the observer who is in the classroom, but who
makes it clear through body language, countenance, and lack of eye or verbal contact with the students, that he or she is unapproachable. In this type of situation, students in the classroom will constantly ask their teacher, "Why is that lady/man in here?"

Using this as a framework, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I ranged between IV and III, but by the end of the year, I was closer to the II, particularly in one class. Part of the tension inherent in fieldwork is finding your "place" or "role" in the field setting—developing rapport with the people who were part of the setting before you arrived (and who will be part of the setting after you leave), but still maintaining enough distance that you can see what is happening. The role that I was seeking was a paradoxical one: close enough to see what was going on yet far enough to see what was going on. It is an undefinable place—close enough to interact comfortably but not so close that you "surrender" your

33 It is not my personality to remain "aloof," particularly when children are involved. Peacock, Anthropological Lens, 67, stated that, "In ethnography, detachment is impossible to sustain. The ethnographer is necessarily involved—to varying degrees—in the human encounter that is fieldwork. Rather than standing aloof, observing and recording in a detached way, the ethnographer distills his ethnography from his own experience in the flow of native life. One may say that the ethnographer and the natives work together to construct the data and interpretation we call ethnography."
ethnographer's perspective.34 Assuming the role required for ethnographic research is rather stressful since you are neither part of the "in group" nor are you completely on the outside. Added to that stress is the suspicion of those in the "in group" related to the question of who or what you are.35 My situation was a little bit different than in some field situations because although the subjects I was interested in were the children, it was not as hard to gain their trust as it was to gain the trust of the teachers. My

34 Hammersley and Atkinson, in Ethnography: Principles in Practice, 102, articulated the tension thus: "There is a sense of schizophrenia that the disengaged/engaged ethnographer may suffer. But this feeling, or equivalent feelings, should be managed for what they are. They are not necessarily something to be avoided, or to be replaced by more congenial sensations of comfort. The comfortable sense of being 'at home' is a danger signal....There must always remain some part held back, some social and intellectual 'distance'. For it is in the 'space' created by this distance that the analytic work of the ethnographer gets done. Without that distance, without such analytic space, the ethnography can be little more than the autobiographical account of a personal conversion. This would be an interesting and valuable document, but not an ethnographic study."

35 Michael Agar, in The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 59, writes about the stress and strangeness involved in trying to gain trust in the field. "In my experience, in the confusion that your presence initially creates, people restructure it (your carefully rehearsed speech about why you are there) with assumptions of your malevolent intent. I think this occurs because I am a complete stranger requesting the status of an intimate, an insider....What reasonable person would not be suspicious of someone like that? The ethnographer is asking for trust without yet having earned it. Little wonder that initial contact by the ethnographer is so often viewed with suspicion by group members."
role as participant-observer/observing-participant will be more clearly revealed in upcoming chapters.

Also in upcoming chapters, particularly in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I will acquaint readers with the "lenses" I used to look into the classrooms where I conducted my fieldwork. It is vital to know the lenses I used (i.e., the perspectives from which I operated) since, just like in a camera, the lens one uses has an effect on what one sees.36 Readers need to know what personal and professional background led me to be sensitive to various aspects of what was going on in the classrooms and I will endeavor to reveal that.

The most important aspect of the ethnographic "approach" and in fact, that which distinguishes it as "ethnography" is not the particular techniques used, but rather the way one looks at and interprets the behavior that is going on. Michael Agar points out that ethnography requires an intensive personal involvement, an abandonment of traditional scientific control, an improvisational style to meet situations not of the

36 Straus et al. (in McCall and Simmons, Issues in Participant Observation, 25) state that one characteristic of fieldwork is that it develops temporally. "The initial phase of fieldwork is a period of general observation: specific problems and foci have not yet been determined. The fieldworker is guided mainly by sensitivities to data derived both from his professional background and from his general notions about the nature of his research problem. As he surveys the field initially, he is continually "testing"—either implicitly, or explicitly--the relevance of a large number of hypotheses, hunches, and guesses."
researcher's making, and an ability to learn from a long series of mistakes.37

Adopting an ethnographic perspective for a research project meshes with my life perspective, that is, in life and in research, giving something the "onceover" yields only the barest of surface information—and that information is rarely anywhere near what is actually happening at the core of the situation. Therefore, if one really cares about discovering the essence of what is occurring, then it takes time, an open mind, an ability to be flexible, and a willingness to immerse oneself in the pursuit of making sense of what is going on. This study exacted all four conditions from me.

Approximate Time Line

As discussed earlier, the idea for this research project evolved over several years. However, during the summer and fall of 1985, the previously nebulous form gradually began to take shape. By the spring of 1985, I had determined that I wanted to investigate the metalinguistic awareness of gifted children as it related to their reading abilities. I had yet to determine where I was going to conduct my study and was somewhat concerned since I had friends with great dissertation proposals—and nowhere to conduct their research.

37 Agar, Speaking of Ethnography, 12.
Fortunately for me, my major professor, Dr. M. Jean Greenlaw, ever watchful for paths for her graduate students to stumble, walk, run, or be pushed down, saw a write-up in *Education Week* about the Gifted Students Institute in Ft. Worth. This triggered the idea of approaching the Institute with my project for backing—not in the financial sense (although that happened, too)—but rather as a means of gaining access to one of the school districts they served through their Pyramid Project.38

My major professor and I met with the executive director of the Gifted Students Institute, June Cox, and several of her staff members on a very hot summer afternoon in July 1985. I presented my idea, asking them to provide

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38 The Pyramid Project is a five-year project undertaken by the Gifted Students Institute and several school districts in the Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex area as well as other districts across the United States. This project is a result of what was learned through the Richardson Study. The Pyramid Project is so-called because of the Pyramid Concept on which it is based. (1) The largest numbers of able learners (represented by the broad base of the pyramid) can be served through enrichment in the regular program and through various programming modifications, such as curriculum compacting, moving students to higher grade levels in their areas of accomplishment, and so on. (2) The next largest group of able learners (those in the mid-section of the pyramid) need more specialized services, such as dual enrollment in elementary and middle school, middle and high school, or high school and college. (3) Those able students at the highest end of exceptionality (the apex of the pyramid) must be served in special schools, such as magnet schools. A full report on the Richardson Study and the Pyramid Project can be found in June Cox, Neil Daniel, and Bruce O. Boston, *Educating Able Learners: Programs and Promising Practices* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).
the entree I needed to gain access to the public schools. They were supportive of the proposed research, and have given personnel, moral, and financial support throughout the project. I left the Gifted Students Institute with a real boost to my research morale.

In January 1986, I attended the American Educational Research Association's Winter Training Institute on the "Ethnography of Schooling." The Institute was designed and led by Dr. Frederick Erickson (then of Michigan State University, currently of the University of Pennsylvania). I submitted a written plan of my research to Erickson and had a personal consultation with him while at the Institute. He made several comments and suggestions which were quite helpful. The one I (unfortunately) did not heed until I was actually well into the field research was a modification of my plan to consider twenty subjects—far too many from Erickson's (and now my) point of view. Next time, I will know better.39

After I returned from the AERA Institute, with a rewritten, more tightly focused research proposal, I again met with June Cox, of the Gifted Students Institute, and with Etta Session, staff liaison between the Gifted Students Institute and the large urban school district I was hoping

39 Anyone considering conducting an ethnographic study is encouraged to read the final appendix of this book: "Other Things I Wish I Had Known and Other People I Wish I Had Listened To."
to use as my field site. At that time, we discussed the specifics of the project and determined possible schools that would be rich sites for my research. Session and I made plans to get together in the spring so that I could meet the principals of the three field site schools that she would choose.

With the Institute's backing and knowing that I needed to seek additional outside financial support, I had to get busy working and reworking the idea into a coherent written plan. As so often happens, as I wrote, I learned. Through the grant- and proposal-writing process, I discovered what I was going to investigate. With my major professor, I applied for, and received, a National Council of Teachers of English grant-in-aid and a North Texas State University faculty research grant. This money, along with a grant from the Gifted Students Institute, enabled me to purchase the equipment and materials I needed in order to conduct my research. (Without the research grants, in

40"It seems...that one does not truly begin to think until one concretely attempts to render thought and analysis into successive sentences....For better or for worse, when one actually writes he begins to get new ideas, to see new connections, to remember material that he had not remembered before....One is never truly inside a topic--or on top of it--until he faces the hard task of explaining it to someone else." J. Lofland, Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1971), 127 in Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis, 91.

41See Appendix 2, for information regarding the equipment purchased.
order to pay for the equipment, I would have been conducting research by day—and sacking groceries by night!)

I was afforded another fairly unique opportunity in February, 1986. Dr. Shirley Brice Heath (Stanford University) conducted an education institute on "Cultural Literacy and Reading" for the North Texas Area Universities. In addition to attending the four day institute, I had a personal consultation with Heath concerning my research proposal. Her insights, questions, and suggestions helped me to further focus and tighten the research plan.

At the end of May 1986, Session and I visited the three schools she had chosen for me. As she introduced me to each of the three principals, she explained that I was working with the Gifted Students Institute to study the language of young gifted children and that I needed access to kindergarten and first grade classrooms. I told the principals that I only wanted to be in classrooms where the teachers had volunteered and that I would like to come back at the beginning of school to talk to the kindergarten and first grade teachers about my research and to make a plea for volunteers. Each principal wanted to know what the time frame for the research was and they were surprised when I told them September through May, two or three times per week. I got the impression that they were accustomed to "quick and dirty" classroom research and expected me to be doing the same.
When I got home that day, I immediately wrote down my reactions. I had very positive feelings about two of the schools—and not such a positive feeling about the third. In my journal, I wrote the following regarding the third school:

Next, we went to Stumpf Elementary School. Met the principal, Mr. Phillips. Got a very different feeling in this school, e.g., Mr. Phillips said, "OK, I know what we're doing for you--what are you going to do for us?" in an accusatory way....Then, the teachers I met were almost suspicious and there was miscommunication about why I was there—that I was going to be doing some workshops for them, or something. Just overall—a bad feeling.

This was in stark contrast to the type of comments I wrote about the other schools. For example:

We went to Shelton Elementary School. The principal is Ms. Carter. She seems wonderful and very welcoming to me....Was shown a book which had been written and published as a joint activity of fourth graders and kindergarteners. It was super! Met two teachers--both very open and welcoming!

I fretted about the third school for several days. Finally, I decided to go with my gut feeling, which was not to use that school. I knew that although I had the entree into the school that I needed, I was going to have a very

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42 I considered these first encounters as part of my data. Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles and Practices*, 56, point out that "Negotiating access and data collection are not, then, distinct phases of the research process. They overlap significantly. Much can be learned from the problems involved in making contact with people as well as from how they respond to the researcher's approaches."

43 The names of the schools, principals, and teachers have been changed.
difficult, if not impossible, time negotiating access to the classrooms and situations where I needed to be. My gut feeling about the other two schools was quite positive. In addition, all spring, the more I had thought about trying to travel to three schools frequently enough to see growth and change in the children I was observing, the more I wished I had only asked for two schools. (I would eventually wish for one school—but more about that later). I contacted Ms. Session at the Gifted Students Institute and asked that she graciously inform the principal of the third school that I would not be coming there after all. I felt greatly relieved!

At the beginning of August, I called Ms. Carter and Mr. Nelms, the principals of the two field site schools, Shelton Elementary and Werner Elementary, respectively. I had met Ms. Carter in May, but had not met Mr. Nelms. He had replaced the retiring principal of Werner to whom I had talked. I made appointments to visit with both of them during the first week in August. I wanted to get on their calendars before too many people realized that the principals were back at school.

I was quite excited on the day I had my appointments with them. It was the first day on this project that I really felt like a researcher because today, I was on my own. I did not have anyone else with me—no major professor and no one from the Gifted Students Institute. So, starting
today, the impressions I made were dependent on me and what I learned was dependent on me. My fieldwork had begun!\(^{44}\)

The day went quite well. After the two meetings, I wrote in my journal:

Met with Ms. Carter from 8:45-10:00. I'm sure that our meeting would have lasted longer except that she had a 10:00 appointment (a couple who arrived). She was extremely warm and enthusiastic. I told her that I was working with the Gifted Students Institute to study young gifted children's language—oral and written (and response to written). I explained that I would be videotaping each time I was in a classroom, as well as audiotaping, and taking notes. I stressed that I was not interested in teacher behaviors and asked that she point that out to her teachers. I told her I was most interested in K and 1st grade children—and she told me about these teachers....

Ms. Carter spent quite a bit of time discussing the teachers and telling me about their strengths and giving me the kind of information that helps me know which teachers I hope will volunteer to let me in their classrooms.

Ms. Carter is very high on her teachers, her students, and the parents of her school. She showed me a brochure that a parent designed, obtained funding for, and had printed—a woman who had been wondering whether to put her child in public or private school....

Another very positive feeling was her excitement about my offer to do an after school workshop to encourage teachers to try to get published (this followed her sharing of one of her teacher's publications with me). We talked about the positive feelings and results of teachers getting published....Extremely positive meeting.

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\(^{44}\)Paul Rabinow, *Fieldwork in Morocco*, 11, wrote an ethnography after doing fieldwork in Morocco. I understood exactly what he meant when he wrote, "How ethnographic. In Morocco only several days and already I was set up in a hotel,... was having coffee in a garden, and had little to do but start 'my' fieldwork. Actually, it was not exactly clear to me what that meant, except that I supposed I would wander around Sefrou a bit. After all, now that I was in the field, everything was fieldwork."
I was soaring as I drove from Shelton Elementary to Werner Elementary! I thought, "WOW, it really is going to happen!" When I got to Werner, some parents were in Mr. Nelms' office, so I just waited in the outer office, mentally going over my appointment with Ms. Carter and thinking about what I wanted to say to Mr. Nelms. Regarding my appointment with Mr. Nelms:

My appointment with Mr. Nelms was quite brief—but we covered what we needed to. I explained what I was doing and what I needed from him. After listening to me, he asked me to write down a one page statement—introducing myself and my project. He will distribute these to teachers on August 25. He will have the assistant principal call a thirty minute meeting of all K and 1st grade teachers....He thought it best for all these teachers to hear about the project so they can decide whether they want to participate—instead of him "volunteering" people since he does not know them yet.

As suggested by Mr. Nelms, I wrote a one-page description/introduction for the teachers at his school (Figure 6). I gave copies to Ms. Carter, also. This is essentially the "pat answer" I had for anyone who wanted to know what I was doing.45 No matter who asked--parents, teachers, or principals--the point that I reiterated time and time again was my interest in children's language, not in teacher behavior. I knew from my years of teaching public school that people coming into the schools are always

45 Erickson, Research on Teaching, 142, says, "It is useful for the researcher to have virtually memorized a brief statement of the study's purposes, the procedures that will take place, and the steps taken to maximize confidentiality and minimize risk."
Welcome back to school! My name is Meggin McIntosh and I will be working at Shelton Elementary School and Werner Elementary School during the 1986-1987 school year. I am working through the Gifted Students Institute and am interested in finding out about young gifted children's language and their awareness of their language. I will primarily be focusing on kindergarten and first grade children as they use language—listening, talking, writing, reading, and thinking.

In order to study these children's language, I will need volunteers who will feel comfortable having me (and my video camera, tape recorder, and notebook) in their classroom. I will try to be as unobtrusive as possible—and because I will be in the school at least once or twice a week for 9 months, feel certain that teachers and children will get used to seeing me and having me around.

I am interested in children's language—not in teacher behaviors. The video tapes, audio tapes, and notes which I will take, are for my use in preparing the information desired by the Gifted Students Institute. The tapes, etc. will not be available for anyone else's viewing nor are they being made for any other reason than to record young gifted children's use of and reflection on language.

I feel that the growth and development of language is a fascinating area in which to explore—and I hope that you will want to participate by allowing me into your classroom. I think that we can discover a lot, together, about children's language.

I will be coming to visit with you on Friday, August 29. Please bring all your questions to our meeting and I will do my best to answer them for you. Thank you very much.

Figure 6. Letter of introduction from McIntosh to the kindergarten and first grade teachers at Shelton Elementary School and Werner Elementary School
"suspect" and that no matter what their actual purpose is, they are always seen in an evaluative role. This concern was particularly acute at this time because Texas was in the throes of implementing sweeping educational reform, which included a new teacher appraisal form and a career ladder, multi-tier reward system. Therefore, I knew my initial written encounter and my initial face-to-face encounter with the teachers had to reassure them that I was not interested in their language or their behavior.

On Friday, August 28, the day before school started, I had arranged to meet with the kindergarten and first grade teachers at Shelton and Werner Elementary Schools. When I arrived at Werner, Mr. Nelms and one of the kindergarten teachers told me that "probably very few kindergarten teachers will come to the meeting because they are all so busy trying to get ready." Mr. Nelms suggested that maybe a meeting in a week or two could be planned and that at that time, he would require all teachers to attend. While I was very understanding of the teachers' burden of work (having been a classroom teacher for seven years), I also felt that

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As Erickson, Research on Teaching, 142, points out, "One source of difficulty with trust is the tendency for informants to assume, whatever the researcher's presentation of the purposes of research was during the initial stages of negotiation of entry, that the researcher's purposes are in some way evaluative. It is often necessary to reinterpret the purposes of research a number of times to the same informant. In addition, it is necessary to explain the purposes of the study to each new informant one meets."
I had to be insistent on a meeting for that day—because I desperately wanted to be in a classroom on the first day of school. Mr. Nelms could tell it was important to me, so we went down to the first grade area and he invited the kindergarten and first grade teachers to meet there, although he did not require their attendance.

About ten teachers came. Mr. Nelms was there as well as two staff members from the Gifted Students Institute (who came to offer support and to strengthen the connection between what I was doing and the Institute. They also took pictures to include with the first report I wrote for the Gifted Students Institute Quarterly). After introducing myself and confirming that they had received the one-page memo I had sent them, I basically reiterated the same notions:

1. I was interested in gifted children's language, not teachers' language or behavior;
2. I would be videotaping, audiotaping, and taking field notes; and
3. Their participation was strictly volunteer and they could "unvolunteer" themselves at any time.

When I finished, several teachers, who were reasonably and understandably skeptical, asked questions. Their principal, Mr. Nelms, sensing an unasked question, assured them that I had nothing to do with their evaluation or assessment and that I would not be reporting to him. He
said, "In fact, I won't even let her." The teachers seemed noticeably relieved. Then, one of the teachers asked if they should just sign up if they wanted to participate. Nine teachers did: five kindergarten teachers and four first grade teachers. I was overwhelmed!

At Shelton, I had a similar response. After my initial presentation to the teachers, Ms. Carter asked if she could give me a little advertisement. She said that the Gifted Students Institute had done so much for Shelton Elementary School, in the way of materials and inservice, and here was a chance to give something back. She said, "I would consider it a personal favor if you volunteered to help Meggin." She also assured them that I had nothing to do with their assessments, but that their volunteering could raise their EQ.47 Eight teachers volunteered: three kindergarten teachers and five first grade teachers. I wrote in my journal after the meeting: "Wonderful feeling between the teachers and the principal and I felt very welcomed. Ms. C. said that she felt like I was going to help them grow--and I can tell she means it!"

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47 EQ stands for Exceptional Quality and teachers can earn the rating of EQ on approximately half of the seventy-two different indicators of the TTAS (Texas Teacher Assessment System). The EQ rating is a judgment call by the evaluator; the evaluator makes a subjective decision about whether or not the teacher's performance on an indicator rates as Exceptional Quality. Receiving EQs is quite important for many teachers.
Wow! I was off to a positive start! As I was soon to find out, I was off to too good a start; I had an embarrassment of riches in terms of volunteers. I had never expected to have too many volunteers and so I had no contingency plan for eliminating some of the teachers down to a reasonable number. The large number of teachers definitely affected how my time was spent during the first month of my research. I will discuss this further in Chapter 6.

At this juncture, I was set up, had access to classrooms and children, had financial support, and was ready for the first day of school. I was ready to begin looking for swatches of children's language fabric.

My plan was to spend the first several weeks observing both the classroom environment of the students and the students in the classroom environment in which the teachers had volunteered to allow me (e.g., I was interested in students' classroom behavior and verbal interaction, students' playground behavior and verbal interaction, students' extracurricular behavior and verbal interaction). At this early stage, I would be involved in

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48 "The fieldworker usually does not enter the field with specific hypotheses and a predetermined research design. To be sure, he does have general problems in mind, as well as a theoretical framework that directs him to certain events in the field....The initial phase of fieldwork is a period of general observation: Specific problems and foci have not yet been determined. The fieldworker is guided mainly by sensitivities to data
"an investigative process, not unlike detective work" in which I would be making gradual sense of the social phenomena--by "contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing, and classifying" the object of the study.49 During this time, I would be determining in which settings and in which contexts children were most likely to manifest metalinguistic awareness as well as which students would serve as the primary foci of my attention (i.e., serve as informants). Once the settings, contexts, and students were identified, observations and interactions would be more specifically concentrated. This is in keeping with the ethnographic paradigm.50

derived both from his professional background and from his general notions about the nature of his research problem. As he surveys the field initially, he is continually 'testing'—either implicitly or explicitly—the relevance of a large number of hypotheses, hunches, and guesses. Many preconceptions fall by the wayside during this initial period, as the observer struggles to ascertain the meaning of events and to place them in some initial order" (Strauss et al in McCall and Simmons, Issues in Participant Observation, 25).

49 Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis, 37)

50 According to Agar, Professional Stranger, 9, the key is "to selectively narrow the focus within a previously explored broad field (using what could be called) the funnel approach." It would be inappropriate to determine too much prior to entering the field because "the emphasis on meaning as defined by participants makes it impossible for an ethnographer to choose all of the necessary collection methods in advance of fieldwork. In other words, data collection and analysis are inextricably linked in ethnography because the ethnographer may not know what questions to ask until initial impressions and perceptions have been analyzed and tentative conclusions have been formulated." (Judith P. Goetz and Margaret Diane LeCompte,
Summary

To return to the vignette which opened the chapter, it is clear that my research with Kelli provided me with numerous swatches of her language fabric. My research with the other able learners involved in this study has yielded information on numerous swatches of their language fabric, as well. The swatches I am able to find will eventually be pieced together with the swatches found by other researchers so that ultimately, we may construct the intricate quilt pattern of child language development. The language researchers who try to look at children's language by pulling children (and their language) out of context, will have only threads to look at--none of which will be identifiable as belonging to the quilt--and none of which will add significantly to the pattern.

Child language development, of which metalinguistic awareness is but a segment, is one of the most complicated and elusive phenomena being investigated. Studying children who are at the stage of language learning that borders on adult competence is extremely fruitful in elucidating this phenomenon.\textsuperscript{51} Not only does child language development

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\textsuperscript{51}Carol Chomsky, in The Acquisition of Syntax in Children from 5 to 10 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1969), 5, commented that "The sorts of things that (children at the border of adult competence) do know at this late stage bear a close relation to the characteristics and complexities of the ultimate linguistic system that they
deserve to be intensely and qualitatively studied, but it will never yield its secrets if it is not so studied (i.e., using whatever time and techniques will allow for an investigation that not only retains the context, but depends on it for information).

Teachers and other child language researchers have a long way to go. Walter Loban stated, "If a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, no one is at present out of danger in the study of language." Adopting an ethnographic approach to the study of child language will lead us to safer territory.

will one day command. An increased understanding of these complexities is currently developing among linguists and psychologists concerned with general questions of the nature of language and human cognitive capacities. Investigation of the child's knowledge as he approaches linguistic maturity contributes to this understanding and provides additional insights into degrees of linguistic complexity that are otherwise difficult or even impossible to detect."

Researchers have coined a plethora of terms over the last twenty years to refer to various aspects of children's knowledge and/or awareness of linguistic features and functions. Some have been more narrowly focused and some have been more broad in scope. For the purpose of this study, I used a wide angle lens when looking at children's sensitivity and attention to language and I needed a term that reflected this perspective. I searched the literature and did not find one that functioned in the way that I needed. So I coined a new term that seems to serve this purpose: "metalinguistic sentience."

Metalinguistic sentience refers to the conscious or unconscious apprehension of, sensitivity to, and attention to language as something with form and function that can be manipulated. This includes, but is not restricted to, conscious or unconscious apprehension of, sensitivity to, and attention to the following aspects of language and literacy: (1) pragmatics, (2) syntactics, (3) semantics, (4) phonology, (5) orthography, (6) morphology, (7) figurative, (8) metalanguage, (9) print "carries" meaning, (10) print conventions, (11) book conventions, (12) text
conventions, (13) referent/label arbitrariness, (14) purposes of literacy, and (15) abilities. Each of these aspects will be delineated.

(1) **Pragmatics** is the newest branch of linguistic study. Before defining "pragmatic" as it relates to the definition of metalinguistic sentience, I think it will be helpful to look at the definition of pragmatics as a subdivision of linguistics.

Pragmatics studies the factors that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effects of our choice on others. In theory, we can say anything we like. In practice, we follow a large number of social rules (most of them unconsciously) that constrain the way we speak. There is no law that says we must not tell jokes during a funeral, but it is generally 'not done.' Less obviously, there are norms of formality and politeness that we have intuitively assimilated, and that we follow when talking to people who are older, of the opposite sex, and so on. Writing and signing behaviour are constrained in similar ways.....In many languages, pragmatic distinctions of formality, politeness, and intimacy are spread throughout the grammatical, lexical, and phonological systems, ultimately reflecting matters of social class, status, and role.1

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1David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 120; A more technical definition is offered by C. Pratt and A.R. Nesdale, "Pragmatic Awareness in Children," in *Metalinguistic Awareness in Children: Theory, Research and Implications*, eds. W.E. Tunmer, C. Pratt, and M.L. Herriman (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1984), 105: "The study of pragmatics is concerned with the meaning of language as it is used to perform the prime function of communicating information and intentions between those participating in any given communication sequence. There are many factors that need to be taken into account when evaluating the meaning that is conveyed in communication....Those which are most frequently mentioned include verbal (i.e., grammatical structure, semantics), intonational (i.e., pitch, stress, junctures), linguistic context (i.e., set of shared..."
For the purposes of the definition of metalinguistic sentience, pragmatic aspects of language and literacy will refer to three areas of language knowledge: (a) children's awareness of message adequacy; (b) children's ability to monitor information for comprehensibility and to detect inconsistencies in information; and (c) children's awareness of the need for speakers to modify speech depending on the audience.2

(2) Syntax, from the Greek word *syntaxis* (arrangement), is one of the basic divisions of linguistic study, focusing on phrase and sentence structure. For the purposes of the definition of metalinguistic sentience, syntactic aspects of language and literacy will refer to "the way in which words are arranged to show relationships of meaning within (and sometimes between) sentences."3

(3) Semantics, another basic subdivision of linguistics, involves the study of meaning. The word

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2 In their chapter on pragmatic awareness in children, these are the three areas of study on which Pratt and Nesdale, "Pragmatic Awareness" focus.

3 Crystal, *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, 1987, 94.
'semantics' comes from the Greek word *semainein*, which means 'to signify'.

Semantics is the study of meaning in language. The study of the properties of definitions is an important part of semantics, but it is only a part. Of greater importance is the study of the way in which words and sentences convey meaning in the everyday situations of speech and writing.  

For the purposes of the definition of metalinguistic sentience being developed, semantic aspects of language and literacy will be considered anything having to do with meanings of individual words, phrases, or expressions, excluding those expressions that are considered figurative.

(4) Phonology, or the study of sound systems, is the third basic area recognized by linguists as comprising linguistic investigation. "Phonological analysis relies on the principle that certain sounds cause changes in the meaning of a word or phrase, whereas other sounds do not."  

For the purpose of the definition of metalinguistic sentience being developed herein, phonologic aspects of

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5 Crystal, *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, 1987, 160. At the level of phonological awareness, "the focus is on the extent to which the young child can both segment the spoken word into its component phonological units and synthesize these units to produce a word" (A.R. Nesdale, M.L. Herriman, and W.E. Tunmer, "Phonological Awareness in Children," in *Metalinguistic Awareness in Children: Theory, Research and Implications*, eds. W.E. Tunmer, C. Pratt, and M.L. Herriman (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1984), 56.
language will refer to the most elementary units of language that can be analyzed (i.e., the sounds of language).

(5) **Orthography** refers to the study of writing systems in standard, everyday use, conventionally accepted and practiced by the members of a culture. Relative to the definition of metalinguistic sentience, orthography will include not only the symbols used to make words, but also the symbols used for logos, punctuation, and so on.

(6) **Morphology**, derived from the Greek *morphē* (form), is basically the study of word formation. Morphologic aspects of language and literacy, for the purposes of the definition of metalinguistic sentience, will denote notions of words and morphemes including notions of "wordness" as typically studied by metalinguistic researchers.

(7) **Figurative aspects of language and literacy** include any use of language that entails invoking representative images (e.g., metaphors). Metaphorical use of language involves "deliberate contraventions of the conventional use of words."\(^6\) English is a highly idiomatic language, so a broad definition of what constitutes a figurative element will be used.

(8) **Metalanguage** is a term for the words that refer to various linguistic units and functions (e.g., word,
letter, sentence, and so on). Another term sometimes used instead of metalanguage is "reading instruction register."7 For the purposes of the definition of metalinguistic sentience being developed in this chapter, metalanguage will denote use of, as well as instantiation of, the terms used to talk about language.

(9) The idea that print "carries" meaning is one that is closely tied to the acquisition of literacy. Before children can learn to read and write, they must recognize that symbols represent some unit of meaning, be it word, sound, name, or whatever, and it is this recognition that symbols (such as letters comprising words) represent meaning.

7Downing, "Reading Instruction Register," is credited with bringing the term "reading instruction register" into current use. Yaden, "Findings, Problems, and Classroom Applications," 8, posits that a close analog exists between the traditional meaning of metalanguage and reading instruction register "in that the latter refers to terms used to talk "about" properties of language systems. Hence, linguistic descriptors and terms in the reading instruction register such as word, syllable, phoneme, sentence, etc. are in the technical sense truly 'metalinguistic'...in order to speak in metalanguage and use metalinguistic vocabulary appropriately, one has to also be able to "think" metalinguistically." W.E. Tunmer and M.L. Herriman, "The Development of Metalinguistic Awareness: A Conceptual Overview," in Metalinguistic Awareness in Children: Theory, Research and Implications, eds. W.E. Tunmer, C. Pratt, and M.L. Herriman (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1984), 12, explain the distinction between metalanguage and metalinguistic thus: "While metalanguage refers to language used to describe language, and includes terms like phoneme, word, phrase, etc., metalinguistic awareness refers to awareness of the instantiations of these terms, but not to knowledge of the terms themselves. Thus, a metalinguistically aware child may perform well on a task involving the manipulation of phonemes without knowing what the term phoneme means."
that will be considered as the aspect of language and
literacy referred to in the definition of metalinguistic
sentence stated above.

(10) **Print conventions** refer to the way our
language is written—not spelled, but written. In other
words, print conventions refer to the ways letters, words,
and so on, are written to somehow imply meaning (e.g.,
italics, bold face, large lettering, and so on), and it is
this reference that will be the concern of the definition of
metalinguistic sentence being developed.

(11) **Book conventions** will be used relative to
metalinguistic sentence to refer to the way books are
designed and made (e.g., title page, illustrator, copyright)
as well as to how books are handled (e.g., read from "front"
to "back").

(12) **Text conventions** will be used in the
definition of metalinguistic sentence to refer to those
elements of text that we consider standard in our society
(e.g., stories often begin "once upon a time," pictures
accompany text and should illuminate understanding of the
text or vice versa, expository text is different from
narrative text, and so on).

(13) The term **referent/label arbitrariness** is
intended to allude to a very basic feature of human
language, that is, that language is arbitrary. In other
words, it is only by convention that we are able to
understand each other. Members of a culture "agree" to label the act of lying down in bed at night with your eyes closed and basically unconscious as 'sleeping'. We "agree" to label a structure with four legs and a flat surface meant for setting out plates from which to eat, and so on, as a 'table'. There is nothing inherent in the object we call a table that requires that it be called a table—it is only through conventional use that members of a culture can communicate about a table, using that term. Young children do not always separate referents and their labels. So, the notion that labels and objects are not inherently tied to each other is the denotation of referent/label arbitrariness to which I am referring in the definition of metalinguistic sentience.

(14) The aspect of language and literacy that I am calling purposes of literacy refers to the "big picture" of literacy as communication, that is, it goes beyond "print carries meaning" to include a sense of what can be expected when taking part in a literacy event and/or a sense of what can be expected from literacy.

(15) Although some may question whether or not this category, abilities with regard to literacy, is actually an aspect of literacy, I have no question but that it is. As researchers have found when investigating skill development of any kind, proficiency will not come unless the person has an awareness or at least some sense of his or her ability.
The phrase "abilities with regard to literacy" is intended to encompass those skills related to literacy, such as printing, composing, oral reading, comprehension, and so on.

In coining the term metalinguistic sentience, I wanted to find a phrase under which the multitude of other phrases could be subsumed. One list, recently compiled, included twenty-six different terms. The term metalinguistic sentience is not among those included, and as far as I know, is not currently in use. I will, however, endeavor to make a case for the adoption of its use.

In making a case for the use of metalinguistic sentience as a new term, it is worthwhile to look at some of the terms that have been used in the past two decades. The terms, and some of their representative definitions will be presented. Little discussion will accompany this list because the purposes are simply (1) to show the variety of denotations and connotations that each of the various terms have; (2) to show the possibilities for miscommunication and misunderstanding that can occur as a result of several definitions being ascribed to the same term and/or several terms being attributed to the same definition; and (3) to demonstrate the need for some standardization of

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I recommend that readers go very quickly through the definitions, attempting only to grasp the gist and the diversity of the myriad definitions.

**Current Definitions**

**Linguistic Awareness**

One of the most frequently used terms is "linguistic awareness." Following are a few of the many ways it has been defined:

The central aspect of linguistic awareness is an attention shift from content to form, the ability to make language forms opaque.10

(linguistic awareness is)...an awareness of certain linguistic features of the language, such as syntax, words, and phonemes.11

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9I am not the first to call for some standardization in terminology, [e.g., see Renate Valtin, "The Development of Metalinguistic Abilities in Children Learning to Read and Write," in Language Awareness and Learning to Read, eds. John Downing and Renate Valtin (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1984)].

10Lundberg, "Aspects of Linguistic Awareness," 87. Lundberg's definition serves his purpose for making a case for the notion that learning to read brings about "a major change in a child's metalinguistic knowledge" (p. 84). It is important with this and all definitions to look at the author's emphasis and the reason(s) behind it.

11Nurss, "Linguistic Awareness," 57, in the article in which this definition appears, reviews evidence that young children's growing consciousness of oral and written language is also a factor in their success in learning to read. She also suggests implications for instruction. Within the article, Nurss discusses syntactical awareness, word consciousness, and phonemic segmentation—those linguistic features mentioned in her definition.
linguistic awareness, a specially cultivated metalinguistic consciousness of certain aspects of primary linguistic activity.\textsuperscript{12}

This last definition was later revised to include the following statement:

linguistic awareness is not a matter of consciousness, but of access. This access is probably largely unconscious, but the degree of consciousness is not very relevant. Moreover, what the linguistically aware person has access to is not his linguistic activity—the processes by which he actually produces and understands sentences—but rather his knowledge of the grammatical structure of sentences.\textsuperscript{13}

Metalinguistic Awareness

The most frequently used term is "metalinguistic awareness." A sampling of some of the many ways this term is defined are as follows:

Metalinguistic awareness is the ability to make language forms opaque and attend to them in and for themselves...\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12}Ignatius G. Mattingly, "Reading, the Linguistic Process, and Linguistic Awareness," in Language by Ear and by Eye: The Relationship Between Speech and Reading, eds. J. Kavanaugh and I.G. Mattingly (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1972). This is a classic, frequently cited definition.

\textsuperscript{13}Ignatius G. Mattingly, "Reading, Linguistic Awareness, and Language Acquisition," in Language Awareness and Learning to Read, eds. John Downing and R. Valtin (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1984), 9. Mattingly's adaptation of his previous definition reflects the attitude of many in this relatively young field, that is, none of us know for sure, but rather we are all learning—together.

\textsuperscript{14}Cazden, "Play and Metalinguistic Awareness," 28. Cazden's definition is another classic one. It is frequently cited and/or paraphrased. In the article from which this definition comes, she makes a case for language play as a means to facilitate growth in literacy.
Metalinguistic awareness is the ability to reflect on syntactic forms, and to treat language as an object in and of itself...16

...metalinguistic awareness is manifested when language temporarily becomes the object of thought rather than functioning, as it does in most ongoing discourse, as a vehicle for the transmission of thought.16

(metalinguistic awareness) ...includes the ability to think about language and comment on it....we might say that a speaker exhibits metalinguistic awareness when that speaker is attending to some part of what he or she knows about the language, and also knows that he or she possesses that knowledge.17

In its broadest sense, metalinguistic awareness refers to the study of or reflection upon language as an object. One is primarily concerned with the form and structure of language rather than with the content--the

15John Neil Bohannon III, Amye Warren-Leubecker, and Nancy Hepler, "Word Order Awareness and Early Reading," Child Development 55 (1984): 1541. The article from which this definition comes is a report on the authors' research with children's awareness of word order, as measured by the ability to discriminate between orally presented normal and scrambled word order sentences. This was ostensibly a syntactic awareness task, thus the reference to syntax in the definition.

16Van Kleeck, "A Cognitive Framework," 239. It is interesting that this definition is from an article entitled, "The Emergence of Linguistic Awareness: A Cognitive Framework." Van Kleeck, as do many other researchers, uses several terms throughout her article, almost interchangeably (e.g., language awareness, metalanguage).

17Read, "Sound Systems," 65. Although Read's primary research interest is phonological awareness (i.e., spelling), his definition is broader than that. He states that "linguistic awareness is not merely a source of data for structural description. The awareness itself is part of the human capacity for language, perhaps an important part, probably a distinctive part. Its form and development are worthy of study" (p. 80). Agreed.
medium rather than the message—and the way in which the form expresses or relates to the message.18

My definition of metalinguistic awareness is narrowed to overt statements that show evidence of the child's analysis of the written language process. This does not mean that the analysis has to be correct by adult standards, but it must show evidence that the child can talk about how language works.19

Metalinguistic awareness—defined as the ability to reflect upon and analyze the structure of both spoken and written language...

Metalinguistic awareness may be defined at the general level as the ability to think about and reflect upon the nature and functions of language.20

18Templeton and Sulzby, Beyond the Psycholinguistic Vise, 11.

19Yetta Goodman, "Children Coming to Know Literacy," in Emergent Literacy: Writing and Reading, eds. William H. Teale and Elizabeth Sulzby (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Co., 1986), 11. Goodman uses the metaphor, "roots of literacy," as a way of providing a conceptual scheme for understanding the nature and process of literacy development in early childhood. Goodman states that "as children explore their literate environment, they develop the roots of literacy....These roots include: print awareness in situational contexts; print awareness in connected discourse; functions and forms of writing; oral language about written language; and metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness about written language" (p. 6). The definition above is from her discussion of the final of the five roots of literacy.

20Yaden, "Findings, Problems, and Classroom Applications," 5. This definition is from David Yaden's literature review of reading research related to metalinguistic awareness. It is the most comprehensive literature review on this topic to date.

...metalinguistic awareness may be defined as the ability to reflect upon and manipulate the structural features of spoken language, treating language itself as an object of thought, as opposed to simply using the language system to comprehend and produce sentences. To be metalinguistically aware is to begin to appreciate that the stream of speech, beginning with the acoustic signal and ending with the speaker's intended meaning, can be looked at with the mind's eye and taken apart.22

Other Terminology

One term considered by many to be quite broad is "language awareness."

...language awareness...seems to include all the capacities and activities concerning language and language judgment which are not themselves a part of (or very closely tied to) production and comprehension processes. Any reflections, ideas, knowledge, or explicit formulation of underlying principles, rules, etc., concerning language structure, functions, or the rules for its use have been classified under the label 'linguistic awareness' or 'metalinguistic activities.'23

Other terms that have had the word "metalinguistic" as part of the phrase have included "metalanguage" (as above), "metalinguistic processes,"22 "metalinguistic processes..."(when one can) detach language from its communicative function, treat it as an object, and study its form..." Ehri, "How Orthography Alters

Spoken Language, 145. This definition is from a chapter in which Ehri posits that just as learning to read clocks and calendars enables children to acquire a visual means of representing the passage of time, so too does orthography allow children to visualize what they are saying and hearing.


26 "metalinguistic acquisitions...include awareness of phonemes, awareness of words, awareness of the structural representations of sentences, and awareness of interrelationships among propositions" A.R. Nesdale and W.E. Tunmer, "The Development of Metalinguistic Awareness: A Methodological Overview," in Metalinguistic Awareness in Children: Theory, Research and Implications, eds. W.E. Tunmer, C. Pratt, and M.L. Herriman (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1984), 40. Nesdale and Tunmer envision metalinguistic awareness as being composed of separate acquisitions, as they have delineated. They state that "An important conceptual (and methodological) issue related to these acquisitions is whether they emerge synchronously or whether they emerge in sequence" (p. 40).

27 "Metalinguistic act' denotes a class of reflexive uses of language such as talking about or describing, imitating, citing, paraphrasing or explaining language" (Franz Januschek, Wolf Paprotte, and Wolfgang Rohde, "The Growth of Metalinguistic Knowledge in Children," in Sprachstruktur, Individuum una Gesellschaft, Vol. 1, eds. Marc Vandeveld and Willy Vandeweghe (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1979), 243-244. These authors talk about the notion that a child "acquires a range of metalinguistic acts and with them develops an awareness and consciousness of its own communicatory activity."

28 "Along with the development of language itself, there emerges a capacity to attend to language and speech as objects of reflection. The development of language awareness is, of course, part of the general development of consciousness and self-consciousness. One can distinguish levels of metalinguistic capacity from the dimly conscious or preconscious speech monitoring which underlies self-correction, to the concentrated, analytic work of the linguist" Slobin, "A Case Study," 45. Slobin's perspective
"metalinguistic activity,"

"metalinguistic skills,"

"metalinguistic development,"

comes from a case study of his daughter, who lived abroad during her second and third year. This definition is from a report on his case study.

Metalinguistic activity involves the ability to treat language objectively and to manipulate language structures deliberately" E.B. Ryan and G.W. Ledger, "Learning to Attend to Sentence Structure: Links Between Metalinguistic Development and Reading," in Language Awareness and Learning to Read, eds. John Downing and Renate Valtin (New York: 1984, 149). This definition opens a chapter in which the authors demonstrate the links between metalinguistic development and reading. In this chapter, Ryan and Ledger advocate various types of training to facilitate metalinguistic awareness.

"metalinguistic skills: the ability to reflect consciously upon the nature and properties of language" VanKleeck, "A Cognitive Framework," 237. VanKleek sees language development in terms of two qualitatively different but related achievements: (1) development of primary linguistic skills (i.e., understanding and producing language) and (2) the emergence of metalinguistic skills. This is similar to Mattingly's notion of linguistic awareness.

"By 'metalinguistic development,' I am referring both to the development of children's awareness of certain properties of language and also to their ability to analyze linguistic input, i.e., to make the language forms themselves the objects of focal attention and to look at language rather than through it to the intended meaning" James Cummins, "Metalinguistic Development of Children in Bilingual Education Programs: Data from Irish and Canadian Ukrainian-English Programs," in The Fourth LACUS Forum, ed. Michel Paradis (Columbia, S.C.: Hornbeam, 1977), 29. Cummins bases his definition, and his research with students in bilingual programs, on the early work of Leopold, Imedadze, and Vygotsky. For example, Vygotsky believes that when children learn more than one language, thereby being able to express the same thought in different languages, their ability to see their language as only one of many will lead to an awareness of their linguistic operations. Cummins uses the term "development" with metalinguistic since his research "provides some support for the notion that bilingualism might promote both development of metalinguistic awareness and an analytic orientation to
linguistic input" (p. 39). "Metalinguistic development...refers to the ability to reflect upon the structure and functions of spoken language, treating language itself as an object of thought, as opposed to only using it to comprehend and produce sentences. Examples of such emerging metalinguistic abilities include detection of structural and lexical ambiguities, appreciation of linguistic jokes, segmentation of words into phonemes and sentences into words, separation of words from their referents, judgment of the semantic and grammatical wellformedness of word strings, detection of inconsistencies and communication failures, and so on" (Tunmer and Bowey, "Role of Language Awareness," 82-83. This definition is quite specific in its listing of the abilities considered part of metalinguistic development. Use of the term development would seem to imply growth along a continuum and from Tunmer and Bowey's writing, this appears to be the stance they take.
knowledge,"\textsuperscript{32} or sometimes "metalinguistic(s)"\textsuperscript{33} as a term, all by itself.

There are also various diagrams which attempt to put "things meta-" into perspective with each other. For example, the following figure shows its authors' conception

\textsuperscript{32}metalinguistic knowledge: "{...}ideas about language..." Anne Sinclair and Ioanna Berthoud-Papandropoulou, "Children's Thinking About Language and Their Acquisition of Literacy," in \textit{Language Awareness and Learning to Read}, eds. John Downing and Renate Valtin (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1984), 90. In contrast to the previously cited definition, this brief definition is lacking in specificity. "Metalinguistic knowledge, or linguistic awareness, involves the ability to focus attention upon the form of language in and of itself, rather than merely as the vehicle by which meaning is conveyed," Ryan, "Metalinguistic Development and Reading," 39. In the chapter from which this definition was taken, Ryan considers whether, as a deliberate language activity, reading requires a degree of linguistic awareness not necessary for everyday verbal/aural communication.

\textsuperscript{33}"...metalinguistics--what the learner knows about his/her own language behavior," John Downing, "Task Awareness in the Development of Reading," in \textit{Language Awareness and Learning to Read}, eds. John Downing and Renate Valtin (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1984), 35. Downing's bent is that reading is a skill (with all the concomitant characteristics) and that readers need to be conscious of the task at hand when they read. "...the term metalinguistic has taken on as its referent varying states of psychological awareness as opposed to merely being a description of types of statements made in a metalanguage about another object--language," Yaden 1984, 8. Yaden points out how broad the term "metalinguistic" has become. "...reading research being tagged as "metalinguistic" generally focuses upon preschoolers', kindergarteners', or first graders', developing notions of the purposes and processes of literacy acts and structural properties of either their own speech or the written language system," Yaden, "Findings, Problems, and Classroom Applications," 7. Since he is reviewing primarily research regarding reading as it relates to metalinguistics, Yaden points out the boundaries of most of the research in this area.
of the hypothesized relationship between emerging metalinguistic abilities and metacognition:

![Figure 7. Hypothesized relationship between emerging metalinguistic abilities and metacognition.]

From the definitions listed above, one can see that not only are numerous terms used, but also definitions that range from narrow demarcations to broad, nearly boundless limits. These definitions could be placed along two different continua: one labeled "most restrictive to least restrictive" and the other labeled "most specific to least specific." If I did that, and then placed the definition for metalinguistic sentience on those same continua, it would be among the least restrictive and the most carefully demarcated and least nebulous. I consider this a strength of the term I am proposing.

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I will explain the proposed definition of metalinguistic sentience part by part, giving examples, where appropriate, from my data. In its entirety, metalinguistic sentience refers to the (1) conscious or unconscious (2) apprehension of, (3) sensitivity to, and (4) attention to (5) language as something with (6) form and function (7) that can be manipulated.

(1) "conscious or unconscious": I think it is important that we have one definition that specifically denotes both a conscious and an unconscious sense of language (as something with form and function that can be manipulated) particularly since nearly all the current metalinguistic terms in use are applied to research conducted with young children and/or other new literates (e.g., in a second language). While I am intrigued by my apperception of language, no one can expect the same heightened fascination with one's consciousness from a five- or six-year old, no matter how cognitively advanced. So, when I use the word "conscious," I am referring to cognizance of language (as something with form and function that can be manipulated).

For example, one day, Megan brought the book, *Amelia Bedelia* to read to the class. (Amelia Bedelia is a maid and she has quite a few problems because she takes everything literally). As Megan was reading the book to the class, she would provide numerous anticipatory "prompts" when one of
Amelia Bedelia's misinterpretations was coming up. In nearly every instance, the only other children who appreciated the humor of Amelia Bedelia's misinterpretations were the other children I had identified as being verbally gifted. The other children, even when the teacher or Megan offered an explanation, were unsure of why Megan and the others were laughing.

The reason unconsciousness is included in the definition is because I see consciousness as a continuum. It is very difficult to know where that critical point is when unconsciousness becomes consciousness. And, for young children in a literate environment, there is a great deal that impinges on moving various aspects of language along the consciousness continuum. Read comments that "some aspects of language use or structure do seem to lie just below the threshold of consciousness."\(^{35}\) And, just like different people have different thresholds for sound, so too do children when it comes to conscious awareness of language (as something with form and function that can be manipulated).

For example, in one first grade class, the children were divided into three reading groups. All three of the groups were reading from the same basal. Often, the teacher would present the exact same lesson to each of the three

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\(^{35}\) Read, "Sound Systems," 70.
groups. She would use the same examples, the same explanation, and so on, and invariably, particular children would immediately latch on to whatever she was presenting, others would take longer, but would eventually understand the idea, and still others would not understand the concept at all.

(2) "apprehension of": The word "apprehension," unlike "perception" and "awareness," does not connote "consciousness," and for this reason, it was chosen as part of the definition of metalinguistic sentience. "Apprehension" may be defined as "the act of taking in mentally; mental grasp; the faculty by which new ideas are conceived." Relative to the context herein, it refers to a person's (conscious or unconscious) mental grasp of, or conception of new ideas about language (as something with form and function that can be manipulated).

For example, in one kindergarten, the children's names were written on labels that were taped to the table where they were to sit. One day, I sat down at the table with Victor, one of the kindergarteners. The following literacy event ensued:

As soon as I sat down, he said, "You can't sit here 'cause this don't have your name on it."

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Glad for the opportunity to play this out, I asked him, "Do I have to sit where my name is?"

"Mmm-hmm." I said, "OK" and moved to where it said 'Megan.' Victor immediately objected. "No! You can't sit over there!"

"This is my name," I told him. We argued back and forth several times. Victor tried to point out to me that the label said, "Megan Sager" as he ran his fingers under M-E-G-A-N. Then he ran over to Megan and asked her three times, "Megan, is this your name?" When Megan confirmed that it was, Victor gleefully said, "See, I told ya'.'"

I told Victor that my name was Meggin—not Megan Sager, but Meggin McIntosh. He argued with me and then told me that I was sitting where it said Megan Sager—and that I should not be sitting there. A couple of other children came over to the table and sat down—at places labeled with other children's names. Victor went around to each of the labels and said the name. "That says Dusty, that says Craig—Hey, you're not Craig" (to a boy sitting in "Craig's seat").

One of the children pointed out to Victor that the label was not tied to the person. "There's not an Amanda here, but there's Amanda right there," as he
indicated where Amanda was sitting—not in front of her name tag.

It seemed that something began to dawn on Victor. Next he read, "Amanda, Dusty Cloud, Craig Conner, Megan Sager. And my name isn’t really yellow square. I’m a yellow square."

I could see from the look on his face that he realized that just because the name of his group was yellow square, that did not make him a yellow square. He had apprehended one aspect of language.

(3) "sensitivity to": The meaning of "sensitivity" within the context of the overall definition of metalinguistic sentience is a (conscious or unconscious) ready response to, or acute susceptibility to, various stimuli, in this case, language (as something with form and function that can be manipulated).

Conscious examples were frequently found in the Spanish immersion classroom. Since half the day was conducted completely in Spanish, the children were often working quite hard at "translating" or figuring out what it was they were supposed to do. During the second week of school, Mrs. Merrone was trying to get the children to clean up the room. She repeated several times what she wanted and she demonstrated what she wanted as she spoke to the students in Spanish. One child said, "Clean up?" and was affirmed in her answer.
In a separate incident that I observed, it only became apparent that a particular child was unconsciously sensitive to the language being used in the lesson when I realized that, part way through the lesson, her sensitivity became conscious. The incident occurred on the second day of school. Mrs. Culture, the teacher, was presenting the book *One Fish Two Fish, Red Fish Blue Fish* to the children. She told them that the book had rhyming words in it and asked the children if they could help her read it.

"Now I'm going to read and if I stop, you tell me the word I need to say. Help me find the rhyming word....Rhyming words are words that sound alike. Like 'hat' sounds like--"

"--fat," said one child.

"--cat," said another.

Mrs. Culture continued, "--and man sounds like--"

"--sun."

"--fat."

Mrs. Culture went on, "--and fish sounds like--"

"--fish."

The teacher and the children proceeded in this manner for a couple of minutes, and then Mrs. Culture began reading the book. Almost without exception, when she paused, Kelli, who eventually became one of my subjects, answered. Frequently, she provided a rhyming word. When Kelli did not give a rhyming word, she
provided a word that made sense in the sentence. After each response by the children (usually only Kelli), Mrs. Culture either repeated the correct word, if it had been given, or provided the correct word and told which word it had rhymed with. For example, "Some have two, some have four, some have six feet, and some have--"

"More!" shouted Kelli.

"More. Four rhymes with more," affirmed Mrs. Culture. After about twenty-five such patterned responses, Kelli responded in the same fashion as Mrs. Culture had been responding. Mrs. Culture read, "Oh dear, oh dear. I cannot hear. Please come over here. Would you please look in my--"

"--ear. Hear-ear," responded Kelli.

Mrs. Culture recognized that Kelli had come up with and provided not only the answer, but the basis for her answer, and for the first time, Mrs. Culture did not tell the children what the word rhymed with. At that point in the lesson, it was apparent that what had been unconscious sensitivity on Kelli's part was now conscious sensitivity on her part.

(4) "attention to": The term "attention" can be defined as "mindfulness," which implies a more deliberate act than "apprehension of" or "sensitivity to." The deliberateness, however, may be self-generated, other-generated, or task-generated.
One example of self-generated attention can be seen in David's story (Figure 8). He deliberately set out to write an alphabet story. He was deliberate in his word choice, as is apparent, for each word does indeed start with the particular letter he has indicated.

![Handwritten alphabet story]

Figure 8. "Alphabet story" written by David.

An "other-generated" example occurred in the first grade classroom where I observed.

The children were looking at the title page for the story, "The Teeny Tiny Woman." Chris P. read, "'The Teeny Tiny Woman,' a folk tale, drawings by Peter Lipton."
Mrs. Benson corrected him, "Lippmann."

Chris P. then said, "Lippman." He continued, "Learning by--"

"Learning?" asked his teacher, causing Chris to focus on the word.

"Lettering by Ray Barber," he correctly continued.

Sometimes, the attention to some aspect of language is required by a particular task undertaken or expected of a student. For example, in one kindergarten, the children were getting ready to listen to a tape about the sound of the letter 'g'. The teacher asked the students to tell her the sound that 'g' makes. The room immediately filled with a cacophonous grunting sound: "guh-guh-guh-guh-guh-guh-guh."

The students had been asked to be deliberate in their attention to language.

(5) "language": Language, more than any other term in this definition, is difficult to define.37 I am choosing to define it in a broad sense, that is, language as a system of sounds and symbols used for communication. For the purpose of the definition of metalinguistic sentience,

37 The Dictionary of Reading and Related Terms, 1981, s.v. "language" opens its entry under "language" thus: "The problem in defining language is that language itself must be the medium of its own description. As a result, defining language is both a difficult and a controversial effort, and a definition of this basic human activity is conditioned by the theoretical or subjective views of the definer." Once again, reflexivity rears its head...
"language" refers to both oral and written forms of communication.

(6) "form and function": Rather than discuss these two terms separately, I think it makes sense to present them together, since the explication of each will help define the other. "Form," on the one hand, has to do with the way language "looks" and or "sounds," that is, the particular arrangement, pattern, or combination of qualities that give language the characteristics attributed to it. "Function," on the other hand, has more to do with the utility and potency of language, that is, the way language is used. Not the message, but rather, the medium, although the medium has an effect on the message. For example, I want a dog. vs. I want a dog. Form and function, together, are the package in which the message is sent.

(7) "that can be manipulated": Language is an open system, that is, there is no end to the number of sentences we can create or the number of ways we can say something. Children unconsciously realize this fact when they ask their parents fifteen different ways if they can go out and play in the snow. It becomes more conscious, when, for example, children are writing a story and make revisions to get closer to the meanings they want.
Summary

The majority of terms discussed in this chapter have been used to label the phenomena associated with the intersection of metacognition and language (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Diagram showing the intersection of metacognition and language, generally described by terms such as metalinguistic awareness, language awareness, and so on.

The distinction between metalinguistic sentience and the terms used to label the phenomena associated with this intersection is that metalinguistic sentience encompasses not only the intersection between metacognition and language, but also a portion of the domains of metacognition and language that are disjunct (Figure 10). The portion encompassed in metacognition (but disjunct from language) includes the aspect of literacy I have labeled "abilities." The portion encompassed in language (but disjunct from metacognition) includes unconscious aspects of literacy such as unconscious pragmatic knowledge.
While part of the purpose behind qualitative research is to discover "what is going on" in a particular setting, there is another purpose, and one that could more aptly be described as a "hope" in my case. The ethnographic paradigm allows for the formulation of theory.\(^{38}\) The whole time I was in the field, I had a fervent hope that I would be able to determine "what was going on" and I considered it more of a pipe dream that I would be able to develop anything new, that is, in the way of conceptual categories, theories, and so on. Although the term and the construct "metalinguistic sentience" are not yet fully conceptualized

\(^{38}\)Goetz and LeCompte, *Qualitative Design*, 8, state, "Ethnographers attempt to describe systematically the characteristics of variables and phenomena, to generate and refine conceptual categories, to discover and validate associations among phenomena, or to compare constructs and postulates generated from phenomena in one setting with phenomena in another setting. Hypotheses developed by induction or causal propositions fitting the data and constructs generated, may then be developed and confirmed."
and/or depicted, I feel that there are possibilities that can be explored using the notion of metalinguistic sentience as an organizing concept.
CHAPTER 3

"USING LANGUAGE TO TALK ABOUT..."

Have you ever questioned five-year olds who were playing a game the wrong way—and had them laugh at your ineptitude for not understanding the game? I had that experience one January afternoon. I was observing the children in the "blue" group, the top group in this particular kindergarten class, as they played a game of sight word Bingo. Each of the three player's Bingo cards had the identical words on it, but arranged in a different order. Megan, the word caller, was calling whichever sight word was on top of her pile of word cards, handing it to one of the three players, then searching through the pile of cards for two more cards showing that same sight word, and handing those to the other two players. After about five minutes of this, I felt compelled to try to determine the children's perceptions of what they were doing.

"I have a question. How are you going to know when somebody wins?" I asked curiously.

"When they say 'Bingo'," Kelli informed me.¹

¹This is a different Kelli, in a different classroom, than the Kelli in Chapter 1.
"But doesn't everybody have the same words on their cards?" I tried to point out.

"Yes," one of the children stated patiently. "But whoever gets finished first wins."

I persisted, "But you're giving Joel a card and Kelli a card and David a card, every time. So everybody is going to win—is that how you want it?"

"No!" they laughed.

"That's what's going to happen," I needlessly reiterated.

"No, see like, the first one wins," Joel again tried to explain.

"But you're...everybody...is getting..." I attempted.

"No, you see, the first one she passes the last card out to is going to win," Joel said, with deliberate emphasis on several of the words, as if explaining something to a very slow learner (which I seemingly was, in his eyes).

"OK," I finally gave up.

"The last word--the first person that she passes out that last card to..." Joel continued, apparently seeing that I still didn't understand.

"Well, it sounds like to me she gets to decide who wins. Is that how it is?" I asked.
"No!" they laughingly said together, even exchanging looks that demonstrated their disbelief that I could even ask such a stupid question.

"Now—we’re looking for another 'he' word for Joel...and then Kelli...and then David," Megan stated as she got back to the game.

"'I','" called Megan.

"We have 'I','" said Kelli, pointing to her card and to Joel's.

"This is an 'l', a lower case 'l','" said Joel, looking sidelong at Megan and then at me, checking our reaction, to see if we would jump to his bait.

I knew he was teasing, but I also knew he wanted someone to make a comment. I obliged by asking, "Is lower case 'l' a word?"

"Nooooo!" Joel stated emphatically. He paused and went on, to show me that he knew we were playing. "Lower case 'i' isn't a word either."

"No, you're right," I confirmed, although he didn't need my confirmation to know he was right.

"'O' isn't a word," said Kelli, joining in, but on a different level.

"And 'a' isn't a word," he giggled.

"'A' is a word," said Kelli with concern, not understanding that Joel was playing.
"'that'... 'THAT'!" said Megan, trying to get the game back on course.

To conduct my research, I had to "endure" kindergarteners who laughed at my misunderstanding--in order to get to the kernels of evidence that they had to offer in natural settings regarding their metalinguistic sentience. In this book, I am attempting to explain what I learned through conducting my research. It is important that I recount how the idea for this research evolved, how it is supported by my predecessors' research, how I went about actually designing and carrying out the research, and of course, what my "results" were. To do this, I will have to use written language--and therein lies a dilemma.2

The essence of the problem is that I am trying to let the reader in on a whole milieu of situations, events, and actors in those situations and events--most of which involved language--but often, not written language.3

2 My dilemma is similar to the one Papandropoulou and Sinclair, "What is a Word?" 242, expressed when they described the difficulty of conducting research on metalinguistic competence. "The study of metalinguistic competence is experimentally difficult--even more so than the study of how language itself is acquired. The object of study coincides with the means of studying it; it is necessary to talk about language and thus use sentences and words to express one's ideas about sentences and words." I can empathize.

3 Trying to describe any complex system is difficult, at best. Language is not only a complex system, but an abstract one. "It is a system of knowledge that individuals
Writing about this milieu is like a gourmet chef who wants restaurant guests to be cognizant of the experience of becoming chefs, but all he can do is give them tastes of specially prepared gourmet cuisine. I am going to be giving the reader specially prepared verbal tastes of what happened in the classrooms and with the children I studied. The sights, sounds, feelings, actions, and yes, the words, will all be described with words—words chosen to give the reader as clear a sense of what went on as possible.

Throughout the year I was doing my fieldwork, friends and colleagues would ask, "Well, how is it going?" My standard answers were "Fine, thanks," or "Really well, thank you." I am sure that some people wondered if I was hiding something or if I was dodging their questions, because, it was, in fact going any way but fine. I was neither hiding anything nor avoiding a straight answer. It is just that to try to sum up in a few sentences what I thought I was learning was impossible. So, every time I have. We can directly observe individual's behavior, but we can't directly observe individual's knowledge. The enormous task facing linguists has been to consider peoples' language behaviors and then answer the question, what would someone have to know in order to behave these ways?" Lindfors, Children's Language and Learning, 35. So, my task is two fold: (1) to consider children's language behaviors and then try and answer question about what they would have to know in order to behave that way and (2) to try to describe what they did and what they know.

According to Agar, in Speaking of Ethnography, 19, "Ethnographies also depend on the nature of the audience. The ethnographer is trying to produce a report for somebody else, to show how the life of some group makes sense."
offered one of my standard answers, I felt inadequate. I kept thinking that maybe I should be able to describe the thrill of hearing children make spontaneous remarks about their language, the joy of seeing pieces begin to fall together, the satisfaction of developing a close relationship with one of the teachers, the panic one day that maybe I had not found anything, the subsequent relief the next day when I knew I had, and the stress involved with being inside, yet outside the social ecosystem that was the classroom. But, as I have finally had time to think my fieldwork experience over, to read other ethnographers' accounts of their fieldwork experience, and to talk to colleagues engaged in similar situations, I know that although I could not describe the myriad emotions nor the

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5 Many ethnographers have referred to the inherent stress that comes with fieldwork. Drea Zigarmi and Patricia Zigarmi, "The Psychological Stresses of Ethnographic Research," *Education and Urban Society* 12 (1980), discuss psychological stresses that stem, at least in part, from conducting research in a culture and an organizational setting that were familiar to them (much as the public schools were familiar to me). They articulated these stresses as relating to: 1) gaining and maintaining access; 2) overload; 3) the issues of participation/intervention; 4) the need for acceptance and identity; 5) the need for reciprocity; 6) data presentation and distribution; 7) autonomy and the problems of doing credible field research. Regarding the specific stress mentioned in the text above, Peacock, *Anthropological Lens*, 58, says, "Fieldwork is hard enough in its practical aspects....Most difficult, in fact, unsolvable, is the dilemma of being at once participant and observer, of being both inside and outside, engaged and yet detached." During part of my fieldwork, I had trouble identifying the stress and so did not recognize it as the "schizophrenic" type feeling that it was.
varied experiences with the children then, I can now at least make a viable, valiant attempt. So, for the people who asked, "How's it going?" during the 1986-87 school year, within the covers of this book lie the answers I wanted to give you then, but could not.\(^6\)

My writing will be very deliberate, with word choices made to represent as closely as possible what I perceived. Although I took field notes and tape- and video-recorded during most of my field experience, the language I used in my field notes, the language I used in my review journal after viewing videotapes, and even the language of the transcriptions of audio-tapes, is either my language or my interpretation of others' language. I am the filter through which this ethnography was conducted and has been

\(^6\)Agar, Professional Stranger, 5, has stated quite succinctly what ethnography and the reporting of it are like: "Imagine a trip to another place for a limited period of time. If you are an adventurous type, you move out into the local scene to learn something about it. You are overwhelmed with new sights and sounds. You find yourself acting and thinking in ways different from your ordinary life. Just to liven things up, let's say you also fall in love and spend more time than normal in various states of intoxication. At the end of your two weeks, you climb on the plane, your mind filled with images of partly understood, partly connected experiences. As you walk into your home airport terminal, a friend who has come to meet you smiles and says, "So, how was the trip? What'd you do?" Good luck with the answer....Only later with much time and a lot of linguistic work, you might try to give your friend a ...description—one that approximates more closely the richness, intensity, and variety of experiences that you had."
written. And, I believe all research, not just ethnography, is filtered through one person's perception. Even if it were possible to describe something exactly as it happened, that is, without the benefit (or distraction) of someone's interpretation, it would be a dry description indeed. The necessity of having someone narrate what happened brings the occurrence to life for the hearers or the readers. Narrative "ceaselessly substitutes meaning for the straightforward copy of the events recounted."  

7It is important for readers who have never thought about truth and reality vs. Truth and Reality to recognize that "There is no neutral observation language in which any scene can be described completely and definitively. Even in the case of recording language 'word for word', interpretation plays its part. Not only is it usually impossible to record everything that is said, and indeed we generally 'tidy up' speech when we write it down, omitting repetitions, hesitations, false starts, and so on, but accompanying non-verbal behaviour cannot usually be recorded unless its significance is of obvious importance. To one degree or another, then, selection, summary, and interpretation are always involved. That this involves dangers is clear, but so is the neglect of the wider context in which the events occurred. Some trade-off between detail and scope in note taking is inevitable and must be determined according to the priorities of the research" Hammersley and Atkinson, Ethnography: Principles in Practice, 155-156. I view the tradeoff between detail and scope as worthwhile.

6Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in On Narrative, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 2, continues his statement by saying, "And it would follow, on this view, that the absence of narrative capacity or a refusal of narrative indicates an absence or refusal of meaning itself." Meaning is of the utmost importance in human life and certainly in human research. So, readers will learn the meaning I have made of this research--through my perceptions.
Perception is as close to reality as I, or anyone can come.\(^9\) I will present my perceptions (or, my constructions of truth and my constructions of reality), along with my perceptions of what led to my perceptions, so that the reader can arrive at his or her own perceptions. All the while, though, both I and the reader will have to keep in mind that I am using written language to report on a diverse set of written, oral, implied, and inferred language events.\(^10\)

If this sounds reflexive, it is. The idea of reflexivity in literature is old.\(^11\) As long as there have been storytellers, there have been stories about storytellers. These stories' readers and listeners learn not only about the characters in the stories, but about the person telling the story. Likewise, viewing Norman Rockwell's painting of himself painting himself painting

\(^9\)While this is an important concept to keep in mind when dealing with life in general, it is a vital concept to keep in mind when reading and evaluating research. Diane Stephens, "Toward a Reconceptualization of Educational Inquiry," FORUM on Reading and Language Education 1 (1985): 34, states that "Truth is not independent of the researcher, but a construction of the researcher." This being the case, readers must know the researcher and what informed the researcher's "constructions."

\(^10\)"...just as there is no available neutral language of description, so there is no neutral mode of report. The reflexive researcher, then, must remain self-conscious as an author, and the chosen modes of writing should not be taken for granted" Hammersley and Atkinson, Ethnography: Principles in Practice, 207.

\(^11\)Myerhoff and Ruby, "Introduction."
himself provides insight into the painter. And, as I hope is the case with this book, discourse on a research project should provide insight into the researcher just as the researcher is providing insight into the research.\textsuperscript{12}

No matter what type of classroom research has been conducted, the report should involve some degree of reflexivity, but with ethnographic classroom research, the reflexivity must be acknowledged, explored, and exploited. This is due to the philosophical undergirding of the ethnographic paradigm.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} Agar, \textit{Professional Stranger}, 42, in a footnote writes that Devereaux (1967) and Sullivan (1937) "argue strongly that the psychodynamics of the ethnographer are critical in understanding the research both as a process and a product. There is a saying that I have heard that 'all social science is autobiographical' (and there is) much truth in that statement." While I do not think that this ethnography is an autobiography, I do think that readers will know more about me by the time they finish reading the book than they did when they started. I think all writing is somewhat revealing of its author; the nature of my research and the nature of my writing are more revealing than other types of research and other types of writing.

\textsuperscript{13} Lincoln and Guba, \textit{Naturalistic Inquiry}, 15, define a paradigm as a systematic set of beliefs along with their accompanying methods. "Paradigms represent a distillation of what we think about the world (but cannot prove)." They present the following quote from Michael Quinn Patton, \textit{Utilization-Focused Evaluation} (Beverly Hills, Ca: Sage, 1978), 203: "A paradigm is a world view, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world. As such, paradigms are deeply embedded in the socialization of adherents and practitioners: paradigms tell them what is important, legitimate, and reasonable. Paradigms are also normative, telling the practitioner what to do without the necessity of long existential or epistemological considerations. But it is this aspect of paradigms that constitutes both their strength and their weakness—their strength in that it makes action possible,
As discussed in Chapter 1, the ethnographic paradigm is based on the idea that there is no one TRUTH—there is no one REALITY. Truth and reality, like beauty, are in the eyes of the beholder.\(^{14}\) One person's truth is no better than another's. Therefore, since I am the one who designed the research (albeit with others' input), conducted the research, and am presenting the research, it is essential that readers know me, because in this case, I am "the beholder." I cannot, nor should I, separate myself from the research. Readers will have to take me into account as they are making sense of the research.\(^{15}\)

\(^{14}\) Michael Agar's representation of "the beholder" is stated thus: "Ethnography is neither subjective nor objective. It is interpretive, mediating two worlds through a third" Agar, Speaking of Ethnography, 19. In this case, I am mediating the world of young verbally gifted children and adult readers, interested in language and cognition. Readers must know who their mediator is.

\(^{15}\) Barbara A. Babcock, "Ritual Undress and the Comedy of Self and Other: Bandelier's 'The Delight Makers,'" in A Crack in the Mirror, ed. Jay Ruby (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 187, wrote an entire chapter about the connection between the ethnographer and ethnography. Babcock states quite strongly, "I do not believe that the process of interpretation really can or should be separated from the product. Neither do I believe that we can or should separate the understanding and interpretation of Others and their texts from an understanding of our Selves."
In order for this book to be as cogent as I hope it will be, I must examine myself so that I can display my "self" for the reader alongside and intertwined with the research. Recently, Dan Rose, an ethnographer, wrote about the tension between a writer and his writing and his work.

A text is the source and the aim of a man's desire to be an author, it is the form of his attempts, it contains the elements of his coherence, and in a whole range of complex and differing ways it incarnates the pressures upon the writer of his psychology, his time, his society.

This text, 'I liked the name but not the soup', is one source and one aim of my desire to be an author. Its form reflects my attempts at coherence of the experience reported herein. And, in a whole range of complex and differing ways, it incarnates the pressures on me--my Type A personality, my coming of age in the 1970s, my attending graduate school in the 1980s, and my middle class upbringing. To try to pretend that this text is not a product of the microcosmic milieu that is my life would be deceiving to myself and to my readers. Therefore, to the best of my self-reflective, introspective, metacognitively aware abilities, I will note what has engendered various principles, connections, and insights.


17 This will not be easy, for as John J. Honigman, "The Personal Approach in Cultural Anthropological Research,"
Being self-reflective and self-revealing is not only desirable for social science researchers, it should be expected, because without that aspect of a research report, the rest is at least partially out of context, and therefore, lacking in validity. Ethnographers pride themselves on looking at events in context and on considering the context during data collection and analysis. So, since the researcher is the primary data-gathering instrument in ethnographic research, to omit, ignore, or deny the influence of the researcher constitutes faulty, flawed research design.18

Current Anthropology 17 (1976): 243, in Myerhoff and Ruby, "Introduction," 23, pointed out, "It is chimerical to expect that a person will be able to report the details of how he learned manifold types of information through various sensory channels and processed it through a brain that can typically bind many more associations far more rapidly than the most advanced, well-stocked computer." I will, however, try. I will try by being as reflexive as I can be. "Reflexive...describes the capacity of any system of signification to turn back upon itself, to make itself its own object by referring to itself: subject and object fuse....Within the self, detachment occurs between self and experience, self and other, witness and actor, hero and hero's story. We become at once both subject and object. Reflexive knowledge, then, contains not only messages, but also information as to how it came into being, the process by which it was obtained" Myerhoff and Ruby, "Introduction," 2.

18 Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis, 230 refer to qualitative researchers as "one-person research machines." They state, "Most qualitative researchers work alone in the field. Each is a one-person research machine: defining the problem, doing the sampling, designing the instruments, collecting the information, reducing the information, analyzing it, interpreting it, writing it up. A vertical monopoly." One can see the folly in pretending that the researcher was without influence on the research.
So, instead of omitting, ignoring, or denying my impact or influence as the primary data-gathering instrument, I acknowledge it--and want the reader to acknowledge it, too. I am an integral part of the research--from its inception to its conduct to its final product, this ethnography. Although the verity of this ethnography is made possible by acknowledging my part in the research, it is paradoxical that for some, this will spawn doubt.19 The absolute necessity for revelation and explicitness, however, far outweighs the questions that will be raised in doubters' minds.20

Another aspect of this research that must be taken into account is the influence that the subjects had on the outcome. The subjects, nine gifted children, were anything but static. They were dynamic creators of the data.21

19 Myerhoff and Ruby, "Introduction," 26, articulate this paradox thus: "The more the ethnographer attempts to fulfill a scientific obligation to report on methods, the more he or she must acknowledge that his or her own behavior and persona in the field are data. Statements on method then begin to appear to be more personal, subjective, biased, involved, and culture bound; in other words, the more scientific anthropologists try to be by revealing their methods, the less scientific they appear to be."

20 "If we must operate with some conceptual notions, the failure to be explicit about them is as self-deceiving and at least as likely to distort the ethnography as is the explicit statement of that conceptual framework" Lutz, "The Holistic Approach," 51.

21 According to Lincoln and Guba, Naturalistic Inquiry, 100, I was definitely not the sole creator of this research. "In a very real sense...investigator and respondent together create the data of the research. Each
very real sense, I was my informants' apprentice; I learned from them.

Investigating children is quite different from investigating mold in a petri dish or mice in a laboratory. Children are thinking, growing, changing, caring, sharing, complex human beings and they are not "data" to be "collected" and "analyzed" like information resulting from manipulations in a chemical experiment.

It influences the other, and the direction that the data gathering will take in the next moment is acutely dependent upon what data have already been collected, and in what manner. There is in the investigator-respondent dyad a transivity, a continuous unfolding, a series of iterations. Each shapes the other and is shaped by the other.

Agar, Professional Stranger, 195, writes about learning how to do ethnography and likened it to an apprenticeship—an apprenticeship with one's informants. Peacock, Anthropological Lens, 49, relates the following story: "A story is told of the Russian general Kutuzov. Before an important battle, his advisors were detailing high-level strategies. Bored, the old general slept. On the eve of the battle, he rode around and interviewed his sentries. In this way, it is said, he learned more about the actual situation than did his strategists." Peacock continues by making the following point: "This tale should appeal to the ethnologist. Like the old general, he distrusts abstract formulations distant from "real people" and "real life." He seeks truth from the natives in their habitat, by looking and listening. We call this fieldwork." Certainly in my fieldwork, I was not bored and I did not sleep, but I did look at, listen to, and interview the children to find out about the actual situation.

Peacock, Anthropological Lens, 100, states that "Human lives are not specimens, to be captured, preserved, and ordered within museum cabinets..."

"Ethnographic research is sometimes termed, too simply, as 'collecting data'...the ethnographer does not simply gather facts, as a botanist might gather plants or an archaeologist potsherds. The ethnographer's mind is not a bucket or a basket, but a searchlight. One seeks and
is precisely the complexity of these human beings that
requires that they be studied by the most complex instrument
available--another human being. In ethnography, the
researcher is the instrument.

Ethnographers have no choice but to employ the human
instrument; only the human instrument has the attributes
necessary to cope with the indeterminacy of the research
setting. Because the direction of ethnographic research
is determined as the project progresses (i.e., the entire
plan cannot be laid out prior to the beginning of the
project), the "instrumentation" cannot be neatly planned and
laid out. Hypotheses are formulated while in the field and
therefore, arrangements must be made to test these
hypotheses and either confirm, disconfirm, or reformulate

highlights, notices this but not that. One abstracts and
constructs 'facts' from the flow of experience" Peacock,
Anthropological Lens, 66. It is very important when judging
research, then, to know who has abstracted and constructed
the "facts" regarding the human "data."

Lincoln and Guba, Naturalistic Inquiry, 107, comment that the adaptability displayed by the human
research instrument is remarkable. They liken it to "the
military's 'smart bomb', a bomb that need not be programmed
exactly to the target but only lofted in its general
direction. Thereafter, the bomb has the ability to wend its
own way to the target, dependent upon its detecting certain
characteristics (such as heat) that it is capable of
recognizing as being linked to the target, however
ineffably. Similarly, the human instrument...can (for
example) sort people on intelligence and determine whether
intelligence is an important characteristic to which to pay
attention in some situation. The human instrument can
duplicate virtually any other instrument people have
devised, perhaps with a little less reliability or
discriminatory power, but probably well enough for most
purposes--and for simultaneous purposes at that!"
them while in the field. A highly adaptable instrument is required because judgment, interpretation, and improvisation are required. Only the human instrument can serve in this capacity. Not only does the human instrument improvise in the research setting, simultaneously sifting and sorting and foraying in new directions, but

Moreover, the human instrument can bring to bear all of the power of its tacit knowledge... The advantage of beginning with a fund not only of propositional knowledge but also of tacit knowledge and the ability to be infinitely adaptable make the human investigator ideal in situations in which the design is emergent; the human can sense out salient factors, think of ways to follow up on them, and make continuous changes, all while actively engaged in the inquiry itself.

Along with many of us, Michael Agar is interested in the "ethnographer as instrument." He reported that he read numerous accounts written by social scientists who were experimenting with acknowledging their presence in the research setting. He recognized the newness and unsureness of this approach. The way I intend to integrate my

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26 Agar, Professional Stranger, 92, talks about the need to improvise: "It's up to you to pick the opportunity and the strategy, or to develop new ones. Sometimes I think ethnography is to social science as jazz is to music."


28 "After reading all this material, I get the dizzy feeling that an ethnographer (or any social science researcher) is like a drunk pretending to walk a straight line in a dark room with a gale force wind blowing through it. It's clear that the ethnographer's culture-personality background, though increasingly acknowledged as critical, is a great unknown in ethnographic research. To make things worse, it's not clear how to integrate it into discussions..."
culture-personality background into my discussion is to give
readers two whole chapters about "where I'm coming from"
(Chapters 4 and 5) but then also to infuse and integrate my
self as naturally as possible into my narrative, as if I am
conversing with my readers, acknowledging, of course, that
writing is not just speech written down.

The notion of the researcher as research instrument
carries with it certain connotations. For example, in any
type of research, it is necessary for the researcher to have
faith in the instrumentation used. In the same manner, I
had to have faith in the instrumentation I was using—me.
My experience indicates that conducting an ethnography,
serving as your own primary research instrument, requires a
strong sense of self and a strong sense of metacognition
(i.e., knowing what you know and knowing what you do not
know). In the following chapter, I will provide readers
with information regarding what I knew before I went into
the field as well as information regarding what I did not
know, but intended to try and find out. It is also possible
that some of my sense of self will be evident, too.29

One of the primary purposes of this chapter is to
explain how and why this book (i.e., the "top half") is

29Peacock, Anthropological Lens, 56, indicated that
"...the anthropologist in his ethnography tells about the
'natives', the others; but reporting the way 'they are'
often reveals much about the way 'I am'.
written in narrative form. I alluded to this in the introduction. First, I commented that I hoped that this research report would be readable to more than just researchers. Secondly, when I explained that I would be trying to give readers a "feel" for the situation and that I believed that I would be able to accomplish this through narrative. In fact, in order to give readers a sense of what went on, I have no choice but to present it in narrative fashion. Narrative is the natural means for one human to portray life to other humans. It is an inherent part of our nature as human beings. Hayden White has written extensively on the value of narrative, and in a chapter he wrote entitled, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," he stated:

To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and,

\[30\] Julie Jensen, "Commentary," in The Dynamics of Language Learning, ed. James R. Squire (Urbana, Ill.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills/National Conference on Research in English, 1987), 58, called for more readable research: "I wish we could encourage a redefinition of the term research report. Research reports with even a slim chance of affecting classroom practice are in the minority. Granted, it is at times appropriate for researchers to address their work to other researchers, but most often it is essential that we speak to teachers. If research has had little effect on practice, it may be because researchers forget that classrooms are practical places where teachers make countless decisions daily. Studies of minute aspects of language clothed in complex prose and undertaken by researchers removed from all the complexities of teaching a particular classroom of students are unlikely to have import for teachers, no matter how much we might wish that instructional decisions were influenced by research findings."
possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself. So natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report of the way things really happened, that narrativity could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent—absent or, as in some domains of contemporary Western intellectual and artistic culture, programmatically refused. As a panglobal fact of culture, narrative and narration are less problems than simply data....Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific. We may not be able fully to comprehend specific thought patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty understanding a story coming from another culture, however exotic that culture may appear to us.31

From the time I was a little girl, I have loved to write and tell stories. As an adult, in a "publish or perish" university track, I have not been able to write any stories, although I do still tell a few. In the last eight years, I have learned to write in a non-story form and have been quite successful at it, co-authoring a book, a chapter in a book, and numerous articles. While I can write using the expository form, and do believe that some topics need to be written in expository rather than narrative form, I have never grown completely comfortable with it and have had to be yanked back to it on more than one occasion.

Therefore, when I began preparing to write this ethnography, I made a concerted effort to use exposition. It would not work. A friend and colleague, Jim King, to

whom I turned more than once for solace and direction, recommended that I read the book, *A Crack in the Mirror*. When I finally got a copy of it and began reading it, I devoured it—the words, the concepts, the struggles—all depicted therein. I then began to search for other ethnographers and authors writing about using narration. The more I read, the more I knew that a sizable portion of this book would be written in narrative form. When I began working on it as a narrative, it began to flow whereas when I had struggled with it as an exposition, it had jolted. The frustration of trying to write in a form that did not fit was removed once I adopted narration.

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The flow/jolt metaphor is not mine. Billy Langley, a gifted student I taught several years ago, when interviewed regarding the difference between narrative and expository form stated: "Stories have a smooth rhythm to it [sic]. It's just like a river going downstream. It's—smooth. But textbooks—seems like—powerful rapids trying to go upstream. It's just jolting and pushing and swaying and swallowing and engulfing and just shooting up. It doesn't go smooth—it's a lot of hacks and cuts....Story form is smooth. It doesn't feel like a mountain. It doesn't feel like you're going over a road that has needed to be repaired for 15,000 years. It feels like a Ferrari driving down a road—it's just smooth and almost effortless." The writing of this ethnography has not been effortless, but it has certainly been smoother as narrative than it was as exposition.

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33 Myerhoff and Ruby, "Introduction," 22, offer that it is "our impression that more anthropologists than any other social scientists write novels, plays, poems, and science fiction. We believe they do so because of the strictures imposed by traditional science on the reporting of experience. They cannot do it in their ethnographies so they seek other outlets."
With ethnographic research, the write-up must be more than a reporting of "facts" because the investigation was more than the collection of "facts." Rather than relegating the stories that bring the research to life, I will elevate them, choosing instead to consign the expository portions of the ethnography to the footnotes or to those sections that require exposition (e.g., Chapter 2 on the definitions of metalinguistic sentience). Mixing the two forms is far more appropriate than forcing all the information into one form or the other.

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34 Rose, "Forms of Anthropological Experience," 272-273, writes about why he chose to place his field experiences as an ethnographer in the "story form, a mode of communication that anthropologists have for the most part studiously avoided and that the journals do not honor. Stories are for talk over coffee or at cocktail parties or at the annual meetings in the halls or at the bar. Stories for social scientists are sublimated in the scholarly report and are displaced as the analysis of social organization where the flow of lived experience has no place. This sublimation and displacement...has, obscured the symbolic forms that we as practicing anthropologists use. As a result, the hidden rhetoric of the article and the monograph has not been much questioned and the tacit formal dimensions of the field have dominated our thought. All this now is changing, and we are presently confronting ourselves and our discipline in new ways as the whole of anthropology evolves."

35 Because ethnographers study human cultures which, by definition, are social structures, an ethnographer preparing to write his or her ethnography must consider whether writing it in the traditional scientific style will distort the information rather than proferring it objectively. "There is an inescapable tension in ethnography between the forms, the rhetorical and literary forms, considered necessary for presentation (and persuasion of colleagues), and the narrative form natural to the experience of the work, and natural to the meaningful report of it in other than monographic contexts. I would even
Peacock states that "Ethnography can never describe with complete objectivity, producing a set of facts that are completely true; but through its portrayals and interpretations it can communicate human truths." I determined that narrative form would allow me to communicate far more effectively than would any other mode of discourse. I hope readers come away from this text with an impression of the significance of the research "reported" herein.

suggest that the scientific styles often imposed on ethnographic writing may produce, not objectivity, but distortion" Dell Hymes, "An Ethnographic Perspective," New Literary History (1973): 199-200. [emphasis added]

36 Peacock, Anthropological Lens, 84.

37 Peacock, Anthropological Lens, 90, writes that ethnography, though based on fieldwork, "is also a way of generalizing about humanity. Like the novel, poem, and parable, but also like the scientific experiment, ethnography must say more than it tells; it must imply and teach general significances through presentation of particular experiences and patterns." [emphasis added] It is my hope that this ethnography says much more than it tells.
CHAPTER 4

"...LANGUAGE"

PART I

Whatever possessed me to undertake this huge study? Believe me, this is a question others have asked me and one I have asked myself more than once! Certainly part of the answer can be found in the words of my major professor, M. Jean Greenlaw. She once wrote in a letter of recommendation while I was still a doctoral student that I "pursue ideas relentlessly and treat every paper as if it is a dissertation." Naturally, then, when it came time for a dissertation, I had to outdo myself.

A second reason comes from my compulsion to design a project of potential significance. I did not just want to do a dissertation that would fulfill the letter of the law about being original research. I really wanted it to be significant, original research.

Thirdly, I wanted my dissertation to be a project that would allow me to explore the three broad areas that I felt comprised my expertise: reading, linguistics, and gifted children. Through a series of papers and projects for various reading and linguistics classes, and a book I
co-authored on gifted children and youth,\textsuperscript{1} I pared my project "down" to focusing on the metalinguistic awareness of young gifted children as they learned to read. A concatenation of reading, participation in seminars, attending conferences, writing, talking, and thinking (not necessarily in that order), enabled me to arrive at a "final" plan: I would conduct an ethnographic study of the metalinguistic awareness of young gifted children to determine if and how it reflected their cognitive abilities and if and how it was related to their reading acquisition and reading learning. As the study got underway, it became quite clear that it was impossible for me to focus on reading acquisition and reading learning separate from other aspects of literacy acquisition and literacy learning; hence, a modification in focus to include development in oral and written language proficiency.

But, just what research led me to consider the fruitfulness of investigating metalinguistics, literacy (reading and writing), and giftedness, altogether? A rich body of research, none of which actually considered the three components I did, indicated to me that this was a potentially fertile direction. In this chapter and the next, I will present a review of the literature in each of

\textsuperscript{1}M. Jean Greenlaw and Margaret E. McIntosh, \textit{Handbook for Educating the Gifted} (Chicago: American Library Association, 1988).
these three areas prior to explaining exactly which principles have guided me in the design, conduct, and analysis of this research.

**Metalinguistic Research**

As I stated in Chapter 2, the term "metalinguistic sentience" is my attempt to coin a phrase that is broad enough to account for both conscious and unconscious awareness of language as something with form and function that can be manipulated, and specific enough clearly to demarcate what distinguishes metalinguistic sentience from other aspects of metacognition. The term is a new one and is derived from a body of research conducted during the last two decades.

Metalinguistic awareness (metalinguistic sentience) has been defined in a plethora of ways, as delineated in Chapter 2. It has been the focus of experimental research for approximately fifteen years.² There are scores and scores of studies that have been conducted since the 60s—to review all of them within this chapter would be unwieldy and

²Yaden, "Findings, Problems, and Classroom Applications," 5, states that "During the past decade and a half, there has been increasing interest among language and reading researchers in the ability of young children to consciously and deliberately reflect upon and analyze the structure of both oral and written language as opposed to merely reacting to its content. This capacity...is...most commonly known as 'metalinguistic awareness'...or sometimes just 'linguistic awareness' (and) is believed to encompass a variety of language behaviors."
unnecessary for readers. I have chosen a few representative studies, to indicate the methods that have been used to investigate the metalinguistic awareness of children and youth. For a compilation of the various tasks children have been asked to do to determine their metalinguistic awareness, see Appendix 3. Some of the behaviors that have been explored by language and reading researchers are: 1) young children's concepts of the metalanguage that accompanies literacy development and instruction; 2) young children's notions of the purposes of reading and writing; and 3) young children's recognition of figurative language.

Young Children's Concepts of the Metalanguage that Accompanies Literacy Development and Instruction

The term "metalanguage" refers to language used to talk about language—both form and function. For example, a "metalanguage lexicon" would include words such as: word, sentence, phrase, letter, story, phoneme, grapheme, diacrital mark, and so on. As with any other specialized vocabulary, some terms are shared by both novices and experts, and some terms are reserved for only the experts. In other words, linguists and youngsters both talk about "words" but only linguists refer to "alveolar flaps." Young children need the language that will enable them to become literate, not linguists.³

³Janet Black, "Beginning Teachers and Beginning Readers," in Reading Instruction and the Beginning Teacher:
One of the terms and concepts that teachers assume is part of their young students' repertoire is the notion of "word." Numerous researchers have explored young children's concept of "word" and have found that it is either non-existent or does not match the adult concept of "word." In order to determine what children's concept of word entails, researchers have employed numerous techniques. Papandropoulou and Sinclair interviewed a total of 102


French-speaking children between the ages of 4 years, 5 months and 10 years, 10 months. Each child heard a researcher pronounce a word (e.g., dormir, prendre, le, parce que) and then was asked, "Is that a word?" Children were asked to explain their judgments and were then asked to define "word." Other tasks were given to the subjects (e.g., "Say a long word"; "Say a short word"; "Say a word you invented yourself.") Based on the results of this study, the researchers delineated four metalinguistic or epilinguistic levels demonstrated by the children: 1) no differentiation between words and things; 2) words represent reality (i.e., only content words are considered words); 3) words are detached from the reality they represent and are placed in the context of meaning; and 4) words acquire autonomy and become constituents in the grammatical sense. These levels corresponded to particular age ranges.5

Johns presented auditory stimuli (words, isolated phonemes, isolated syllables) to sixty-five primary grade children. Subjects were asked to identify the stimuli as one word or not one word. He found that the youngest children failed to recognize words as words and that the children who were ages 6 years, 6 months to 8 years, 0 months, recognized short words as words, but experienced confusion concerning long words. Even the oldest children

5Papandroupoulou and Sinclair, "What is a Word?"
(ages 8 years, 1 month to 9 years, 5 months) showed some confusion about long words. Few children in any of the three groups consistently recognized that isolated phonemes and syllables were not words. Johns suggests that metalinguistic awareness increases with age and that a significant relationship exists between this awareness and reading achievement.  

Huttenlocher investigated sixty-six young children's awareness of words by giving them word pairs (e.g., black-white, man-runs, table goes) and having them repeat the pairs and then reverse the order of the two words. She found that the four- and five-year-olds in her study were largely unable to complete the second part of the task, indicating an inability to segment the stream of language into two separate components which could be reversed.

Preschool prereaders, kindergarten prereaders, and first grade readers were given several tasks by Ehri in order to determine the salience of "word." For example, the researcher pronounced a word and the subjects were asked to put the word into a "story." A second task involved having the subjects listen to two sentences that were

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7 Huttenlocher, "Word-Phrase Relationship."
identical except for the placement of one word and then having them tell what was different. Readers were more successful than were non-readers although some first graders were also unable to complete the tasks successfully.  

DeGoes and Martlew showed children (ages 4 years, 10 months to 6 years, 0 months) cards that contained different symbols (e.g., words, single letters, vowel strings, punctuation marks). The subjects were asked to put the cards containing "words" into one pile and all others into another pile. The authors found that young children used symbol shape and length of symbol string to differentiate "words" from "nonwords."  

Bowey, Tunmer, and Pratt conducted three experiments to measure preschool, first grade, and second grade children's concept of "word." The subjects heard stimuli which they were asked to identify as a word, a sound, or an animal. Half of the subjects were given a brief training phase to establish the meaning of "word" and "sound." In the second experiment, children listened to a stimulus which they were then asked to identify as one word or two words. In the third experiment, the children were given words which belonged to various word classes (nouns, prepositions,  

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8Ehri, "Word Consciousness."

9Cecilia de Goes and Margaret Martlew, "Beginning to Read and Write: An Exploratory Study of Young Children's Understanding of Metalinguistic Terms and Graphic Conventions," First Language 2 (June 1983).
conjunctions) and asked to identify whether each was a word or not. The results of all three studies indicate that training enhances children's understanding of the concept "word," that school-age children have a better understanding of "word" than do preschool children, and that content words are more salient than are function words.  

Several researchers have questioned children directly concerning their definitions of "word." Children's answers have ranged from meaning-based definitions to confusion between words/letters/numbers. There has been significant hypothesizing concerning children's perceptions of "word" and its relationship to their notions of reading and writing.

Young Children's Notions of the Purposes of Reading and Writing

The researchers mentioned in the previous section and others have directly interviewed children to determine not only their concept of word, but also their perception of reading and what it entails. The data from their research


12. E.g., Jerry L. Johns and A.L. Johns, "How Do Children in the Elementary School View the Reading Process?"
indicates that young children rarely have any idea about what reading is and what the demands of the task are.

Johns and Johns elicited responses to the question "What is reading?" from 168 students (kindergarten through sixth grade, twelve boys and twelve girls from each grade). Their results showed that over 70% of those responding gave "vague, irrelevant, or no response" to the question. Only 4% of the respondents indicated that reading included decoding and understanding.13

Other researchers have found similar results. Rather than present a reiteration of the studies that have investigated children's perceptions of the tasks of literacy, I chose to include the conclusions listed below, which were drawn by Jerry L. Johns. In a synthesis of the research concerning students' perceptions of reading, Jerry Johns said, "The following conclusions appear to be supported by a careful interpretation of the available data":

1. Beginning readers in various countries throughout the world are frequently confused about the process of reading. Their responses tend to be vague or concerned with only fragments of the reading process.
2. Efforts to teach beginning readers knowledge and understanding about reading have been successful. Unfortunately, the impact of this knowledge on reading


13 Johns and Johns, "View the Reading Process."
achievement has not been supported by research.
3. As students progress through the various grades, their perceptions of reading demonstrate greater emphasis on the meaning-reconstructing aspect of reading. In addition, better readers and girls tend to give more meaning-focused responses.
4. An interview format can be used to acquire information about reading that is not readily available from a standardized or informal reading test.14

I agree with Johns' fourth conclusion, and I did indeed interview the nine children on whom this study was based. I would add, though, that observing children as they acquire and learn literacy provides even more information.

Young Children's Recognition of Figurative Language

A third area of research in metalinguistics involves testing children's awareness and exploitation of ambiguity, anomaly, and figurative language. One of the most fruitful areas of this research has been the exploration of children's joke telling and joke explicating. Hirsch-Pasek, Gleitman, and Gleitman conducted an experiment in which they had two young actors record thirty jokes which were to be presented to 48 subjects (grades 1 to 6, four girls and four boys from each grade, including the best two male and female readers in the grade level and the poorest two male and female readers in the grade level). The jokes could be

14Jerry L. Johns', "Students' Perceptions of Reading: Thirty Years of Inquiry," in Metalinguistic Awareness and Beginning Literacy: Conceptualizing What It Means to Read and Write, ed. David B. Yaden, Jr. and Shane Templeton (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1986), 39, remarks are based on a review of thirty years of research in this area.
classified by the type of ambiguity they exploited (e.g., phonological, lexical, surface structure, underlying structure, morpheme boundary, or morpheme boundary with phonological distortion). Subjects listened to each joke, rated it on a "funniness" continuum, and then explained the joke. Their responses were rated on a five-point scale dependent upon their abilities to recognize the ambiguity and explain it. The results indicate that good readers are more successful than poor readers, that older children are more successful than younger, and that "superficial syntactic and phonological ambiguities were harder to explain than ambiguities closer to the level of meaning" as were ambiguities which "required breaking up what is evidently an indivisible language unit, the polysyllabic morpheme."\textsuperscript{15}

Horgan recorded the spontaneous jokes produced by her daughter from age 1 year, 4 months to 4 years, 0 months. The jokes were classified using McGhee's cognitive stages categories: violations of semantic categories; phonetic pattern games; changing established patterns; and riddle-

like questions. Horgan analyzed her daughter's metalinguistic awareness based on the jokes she produced.\footnote{Dianne Horgan, "Learning to Tell Jokes: A Case Study of Metalinguistic Abilities," \textit{Journal of Child Language} 8 (February 1981).}

Using fourteen children, ages six to nine as subjects, Fowles and Glanz explored their metalinguistic awareness as reflected by their abilities to retell and explain riddles. Each child was told a riddle and was asked to retell it to the investigator and then to explain it. Recall and explanation were both rated on a three-point scale. Children who were better readers scored higher, indicating that reading achievement is related to facility with riddles/exploitation of language ambiguity.\footnote{Barbara Fowles and Marcia E. Glanz, "Competence and Talent in Verbal Riddle Comprehension," \textit{Journal of Child Language} 4 (October 1977).}

Figurative language is only one type of metalinguistic awareness that has been found to be related to reading acquisition.

\section*{Metalinguistic Awareness as Related to Reading Acquisition}

Researchers interested in metalinguistics agree that reading acquisition and achievement are related to children's metalinguistic awareness. The controversy is over how it is related (i.e., Does reading acquisition/reading learning facilitate metalinguistic awareness? Is
metalinguistic awareness required for reading acquisition/reading learning to occur? Are reading acquisition/reading learning and metalinguistic awareness related in a mutually facilitative way?)

Lundberg agrees that metalinguistic awareness and reading achievement are related, with metalinguistic awareness being facilitated by learning to read. He says that "learning to read should bring about a major change in the child's metalinguistic knowledge." 18 The research conducted by Nurss led her to conclude that

it appears that word consciousness is not an aspect of linguistic awareness which precedes learning to read; rather it is a by-product of learning to read, perhaps because it is not an aspect of language critical to both spoken and written language. 19

Ehri states that as a consequence of reading instruction, "children's implicit lexical knowledge very likely becomes conscious." 20

20 Ehri, "Word Consciousness," 205. Ehri has written extensively on whether reading enhances metalinguistic awareness and lately, her position has shifted somewhat. Linnea C. Ehri, "Linguistic Insight: Threshold of Reading Acquisition," in Reading Research: Advances in Theory and Practice, Vol. 1, eds. T.G. Waller and G.E. MacKinnon (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 84, stated that the evidence for her position "that learning to read enhances lexical awareness comes from several correlational studies....and so falls short of revealing whether readers acquired their word consciousness as a result of learning to read. Furthermore, there is evidence that not all children attain word awareness in this way...there exist some children who are fairly sophisticated about words before they learn to
Other researchers take the stance that reading and metalinguistic awareness are mutually facilitative. Proponents of this position have found a correlation between reading ability and metalinguistic awareness—but are not sure of the causal direction.²¹ Although no conclusions can be drawn concerning the causal direction of the relationship between reading achievement and word awareness...findings that prereaders' word awareness predicts subsequent reading achievement...suggests that a well-developed word concept and an adequate comprehension of the term word may well facilitate the task of learning to read...On the other hand, the marked difference in performance between prereaders and readers on the word discrimination task suggests that the process of learning to read may in turn foster word awareness.²² Hirshberg sums it up by saying, "The form of the relationship between metalinguistic skill and reading is probably not as simple as cause and effect. Learning to read may require a certain degree of metalinguistic skill while at the same time reading itself may encourage such language awareness."²³

read...this means that experience with written language is not a necessary condition for acquiring lexical awareness but only a sufficient condition. Although it may enhance word consciousness, there are other sources of word awareness as well."

²¹ e.g., Johns, "First Graders' Concepts."


²³ Hirshberg, "Linguistic Judgments," 2; Read, "Sound Systems," 73, makes a call for extensive research in this area: "One final observation about the segmentation problem is that the appearance of segmentation ability near age six or seven is decidedly suspicious; one wonders whether it is reading instruction and reading experience which brings
A third, and seemingly the largest group of
researchers, supports the view that a certain level of
metalinguistic awareness is necessary for children to learn
to read.\(^{24}\) Meltzer and Hearse state that

> learning to read requires an orientation toward
> language which is new to many six year olds. They
> are accustomed to react to language and to respond
> in their own speech in terms of meaning. In first
> grade, often for the first time, they are required
to regard their language analytically, in terms of
> its structure. They must learn to segment the
> stream of speech, to which previously they have
> only reacted automatically, into its syntactic and
> phonological features.\(^ {25}\)

Mattingly concludes that in order for children to learn to
read, they must have developed sufficient linguistic
awareness to be able to use the structures which they have
already acquired in their oral language.\(^ {26}\) Although various
these units to awareness....Clearly the problem of whether
this awareness depends on instruction, or successful
instruction depends on this awareness is amenable to cross-
linguistic and cross-cultural study."

\(^ {24}\) Day and Day, "Development of Kindergarten," 19,
state, "There seems to be little doubt that a child's
linguistic abilities are directly related to a child's
ability to profit from reading instruction."

\(^ {25}\) Meltzer and Herse, "Boundaries of Written Words,"
12.

\(^ {26}\) Mattingly, "Reading, the Linguistic Process"; I.G.
Mattingly, "The Psycholinguistic Basis of Linguistic
Awareness," in Reading Research: Studies and Applications:
Twenty-Eighth Yearbook of the National Reading Conference,
Reading Conference, 1979). Based on their research,
Bohannon, Warren-Leubecker, and Hepler, "Word Order
Awareness," 1546, state that, "One is, therefore, left with
the conclusion that the word order awareness test assesses
something unique to the way that children process spoken
language, and that this element may play an important role
researchers have made statements regarding the direction of facilitativeness between metalinguistic awareness and reading, these statements are often couched in tentative terms.\textsuperscript{27} Many researchers feel that, at this point, no one can say for certain what the relationship is between reading and metalinguistic awareness—one can only conjecture.\textsuperscript{28}

Metalinguistic Awareness as Related to Cognitive Ability

Berthoud-Papandropoulou has conducted extensive research in the area of metalinguistic awareness. She expresses her notion of the relationship between this awareness and cognition in the following way:

First of all, language by its very nature is a product of human cognition as well as a representational system which the child has to reconstruct and learn to use. And secondly, the fact that language becomes an object of human thinking is one manifestation of the general in learning to read." Levelt, Sinclair, and Jarvella, "Causes and Functions," 11-12 posit that "linguistic awareness can facilitate communication (and) may play a functional role in the acquisition of communicative skills."

\textsuperscript{27}"The metalinguistic understanding will be, in practical terms, facilitative in the learning-to-read process" Allan, "The Development of Children's Metalinguistic Understanding," 92.

\textsuperscript{28}"Just how much difference it might make to a child's learning in this area (of reading acquisition) to be helped consciously and carefully, to develop the kinds of awareness and the terminology to express them...is at present a matter of conjecture. But it might well be that it would make a difference not only to his learning of reading but to his general logical thinking and the more sophisticated thinking about language he will later be required to do" Reid, "Learning to Think," 62.
structuring of knowledge that takes place during cognitive development.\textsuperscript{29}

Other researchers have also pointed out the likelihood that a certain level of cognitive development must be reached in order for children to focus on language.\textsuperscript{30} Templeton and Spivey speculate that the increased cognitive development of children determines the development of an analytical perspective \textit{vis-a-vis} words.\textsuperscript{31} Gleitman and Gleitman posit that giving a language judgment involves taking a "prior cognitive process (linguistic performance) as the object of a yet higher-order cognitive process (reflection about language performance...metalinguistic performance)."\textsuperscript{32}

As children mature, their abilities to decenter increase and they are more able to reflect on words and other forms of language as entities distinct from their meanings.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{29}Berthoud-Papandropoulou, "Children's Ideas about Language," 55.


\textsuperscript{31}Templeton and Spivey, "Concept of Word."

\textsuperscript{32}Gleitman and Gleitman, "Language Use," 105.

\textsuperscript{33}Zutell's work with spelling has led him to "conclude that there is a commonality among general
Changes in thinking around six or seven lead to new forms of verbal behavior. A general capacity for detachment paves the way for metalinguistic reflection. The important point, however, is that linguistic awareness be studied in relation to cognitive development in general. \[34\] [my emphasis added]

Bever supports this view. He states that "the influence of language and cognition are mutual; one cannot consider one without the other." \[35\] One of the strongest theories put forth is Downing's cognitive theory of reading:

The task of mastering the skill of reading poses a very complex problem to be solved by the child. Thus the learning-to-read process consists in a series of discoveries of solutions to the sub-problems which constitute the total complex problem of finding out how to read. In other words, progress in literacy acquisition is made by a series of cognitive restructurings which result from the learner's probes made in the course of his search for solutions. Sometimes the new cognitive structure will be a correct solution, but at other times, it will be in error. As the child's attempted solutions approximate more and

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more closely to the reality of each aspect of the reading process, so he will achieve more and more cognitive clarity. Therefore, the best measure of a child's progress in solving the learning-to-read problem should be his degree of understanding the nature of the task. Thus, cognitive clarity will be correlated most highly with reading success, while failure in reading will have as its chief symptom cognitive confusion.36

To even attempt to capture definitions of, theories of, or the workings of, cognition is ambitious. Johnson-Laird, one of the great minds of research on cognition asks:

Is psychology possible?...One plausible conjecture is that the mind must be more complicated than any theory proposed to explain it: the more complex the theory, the still more complex the mind that thought of it in the first place.37

What is most difficult to explain about cognition is the aspect on which this ethnography focused—consciousness.38 Consciousness is mysterious—an enigma; but it is this enigma that must be looked at in connection with literacy acquisition and literacy learning.

36 Downing, "Children's Developing Concepts," 18-19; this is a classic theory, just as much of Downing's work is considered classic research.


38 "As the software of the computer stands to its hardware, so the mind stands to the brain. Only one major problem remains for this doctrine, but it is unfortunately the most central and the most puzzling of all the phenomena of mental life—consciousness. No one really knows what consciousness is, what it does, or what function it serves" Johnson-Laird, Mental Models, 448.
Summary

As can be seen from the brief review of some of the experimental studies and some of the conclusions drawn from these experimental studies that have investigated children's metalinguistic awareness and this awareness as it relates to reading and cognitive ability, no conclusive answers can yet be drawn. It is possible that the experimental research has yielded as much information as it can, given what is known about child language—and it is possible that more information needs to be gathered using a different research paradigm.

Sanders posits that "the use to which both teachers and learners put aspects of metalinguistic awareness...emerges as a topic for further investigation by both descriptive and more traditional methodologies."\textsuperscript{39} In order to discover further information about child language, Hill recommends "observing children...over an extended period of time and under different contextual constraints."\textsuperscript{40} Twenty years ago, Reid noted that "little has so far been done in the way of special observation of that part of children's linguistic equipment which might be called their 'technical

\textsuperscript{39} Sanders, "Three First Graders' Concepts," 271.

vocabulary'—the language available to them for talking and thinking about the activity of reading itself."^{41} One could say that little has yet been done in the way of "special observation" and I hope that this study will begin a trend of such "special observation."

Before further quantitative studies can be designed to investigate the relationship between metalinguistic awareness, reading, and cognition, more information needs to be gathered to provide a baseline from which to work. Clark points out:

> The study of what children are aware of provides one way of finding out what their conception of language is. But this requires that we first establish what reflective abilities they have, when and how these develop, and what role they play in acquisition itself.^{42}

This study was designed to allow for and facilitate the discovery of connections which had heretofore been unnoticed. These connections would therefore provide a baseline for developing new theories and directions for research and ultimately, new practices to enhance children's acquisition of literacy.

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^{41} Reid, "Learning to Think," 56.

Literacy Research

A great deal of research has been conducted in the past several years that has indicated the strong connection between reading and writing. This research has indicated that not only should the two be related in instruction, but that the two are inextricably tied processes. The recent surge in publications touting the connection between reading and writing is indicative of the tremendous interest in and attention to reading and writing as interrelated processes. Just because many now recognize the relationship between reading and writing, however, does not mean that the relationship is conceptualized in the same manner. Judith Langer delineates the two current primary

43 James Squire, in the introduction to The Dynamics of Language Learning: Research in Reading and English, ed. James R. Squire (Urbana, Ill.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills/National Conference on Research in English, 1987), 7, stated, "At no time in our recent history have researchers been so concerned and practitioners so interested in the connections between reading and writing."

44 Judith Langer, in the introduction to her book, Children Reading and Writing: Structures and Strategies (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1986), 1, stated, "The 1980s have been a particularly comforting era for those who view reading and writing as deeply connected activities of language and thought. The interrelatedness of reading and writing has received major focus as a topic of both research and instruction....Because reading and writing are language-based, the interrelationships between them are assumed. Because they are both activities that require thought and evoke thought, they are considered to share common cognitive behaviors. Because they both involve knowledge use and knowledge development, they are both considered to be composing activities. In short, reading and writing relationships are taken for granted; they are assumed to exist."
conceptualizations as: (1) reading and writing are both composing processes and (2) reading and writing are both meaning making processes.\textsuperscript{45} James Flood and Diane Lapp list the varying conceptions of the relationship between reading and writing thus: (1) as two sides of the same process; (2) as dual governors of inner speech that change how we talk to ourselves, how we feel, and how we think; (3) as similar dynamic processes of meaning construction; (4) as cyclical, mutually facilitative entities that support one another; (5) as generative cognitive processes that enable us to create meaning by building relationships between texts and what we know, believe, and experience; (6) as similar language processes that produce and structure print; and (7) as reciprocal acts of comprehending and composing.\textsuperscript{46}

The reason that I ultimately decided to restructure my study to include reading and writing was because the processes are both language-based, composing and meaning-making processes. In this section, I will explain the basis for my statement.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} Langer, Children Reading and Writing, 2.

\textsuperscript{46} James Flood and Diane Lapp, "Reading and Writing Relationships: Assumptions and Directions," in The Dynamics of Language Learning: Research in Reading and English, ed. James R. Squire (Urbana, Ill.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills/National Conference on Research in English, 1987), 9-10.

\textsuperscript{47} As Diane E. DeFord, "Children Write to Read and Read to Write," in Roles in Literacy Learning, ed. Duane R. Tovey and James E. Kerber (Newark, DE.: International
Walter Loban's longitudinal study of students as they passed from kindergarten through twelfth grade offered compelling evidence that all language processes are related and that they share common origins. Marcia Baghban's case study of her daughter from birth to three also offered strong evidence for the "interdependence" of the language arts: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Sandra Stotsky opens her synthesis of eighty research articles by saying, "Inasmuch as reading and writing are both language processes, one can assume relationships between them." She goes on to explicate what research has shown to be the more specific relationships to be as well as to make recommendations regarding directions for future research.

Reading Association, 1986), 79, stated, "Reading and writing are undeniably linked." As she goes on to say, amidst a chorus of other researchers, "the nature of the reading/writing connection in literacy learning is more complex than this simple statement might indicate." In other words--no one yet KNOWS the relationship--just that one exists, as indicated by countless studies conducted during the past two decades. I do not know the relationship either, but my conviction that a relationship exists is based on the work of many, only a few of whom will actually be mentioned herein.


49 Marcia Baghban, Our Daughter Learns to Read and Write: A Case Study from Birth to Three (Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1984).

There appears to be a strong theoretical undergirding for reading and writing sharing a cognitive base. Kucer articulates the following four universals that he developed to represent a synthesis of the reading/writing literature.

(1) Readers and writers construct text-world meanings through utilizing the prior knowledge which they bring to the literacy event.
(2) The written language system operates by feeding into a common data pool from which the language user draws when constructing the text world.
(3) Readers and writers utilize common procedures for transforming prior knowledge into a text world.
(4) Readers and writers display common processing patterns or abilities when constructing text worlds.51

One of the operating principles I adhere to regarding reading and writing is that both are meaning processes. I do not want to be so simplistic and say that they are mirror images, that is, that reading is making meaning from print and writing is making meaning into print, but rather, that the two processes share the ultimate goal of sense-making. "To try to make sense, to construct stories, and to share them with others in speech and in

writing is an essential part of being human." 52 Tierney and Pearson state their belief that

at the heart of understanding reading and writing connections, one must begin to view reading and writing as essentially similar processes of meaning construction. Both are acts of composing. From a reader's perspective, meaning is created as a reader uses his background of experience together with the author's cues to come to grips both with what the writer is getting him to do or think and what the reader decides and creates for himself. As a writer writes, she uses her own background of experience to generate ideas and, in order to produce a text which is considerate to her idealized reader, filters these drafts through her judgments about what her reader's background of experience will be, what she wants to say, and what she wants to get the reader to think or do. In a sense, both reader and writer must adapt to their perceptions about their partner in negotiating what a text means. 53

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52 Gordon Wells, The Meaning Makers: Children Learning Language and Using Language to Learn (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1986), 222. Although he believes that reading and writing differ sharply from each other in terms of the thought processes and human behavior they represent, Merlin C. Wittrock, "Writing and The Teaching of Reading," Language Arts 60 (May 1983): 600-601, says that, "Good reading, like effective writing, involves generative cognitive processes that create meaning by building relations between the text and what we know, believe, and experience. The meaning is not only on the page, nor only in our memories. When we read, we generate meaning by relating parts of the text to one another and to our memories and our knowledge. When we write with clarity we generate meaning by relating our knowledge and experience to the text. Writing also involves building relations among the words and sentences, the sentences in paragraphs, and the paragraphs in texts. In these important ways reading comprehension and effective writing relate closely to each other."

The parallel processes shared by reading and writing, iterated by Tierney and Pearson, include planning, drafting, aligning, revising, and monitoring. Implied in the concept of reading and writing as meaning-making processes is the notion that meaning is being "constructed" from all that is available on the page, in the brain, and in the environment.54

Despite the fact that research into the relationship(s) between reading and writing has burgeoned in the past two decades, it is still in its infancy.55 There was more than enough in the literature, however, to convince me that trying to separate reading from writing was going to be impossible. I essentially was not happy with my decision at the beginning to try to look at metalinguistic awareness

54Humans construct meaning in every situation in which they find themselves—including literacy events. Anne M. Bussis, Edward A. Chittenden, Marianne Amarel, and Edith Klausner, Inquiry into Meaning: An Investigation of Learning to Read (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1985), 12, state that, "Based on research in the areas of memory, perception, thought, language development, and language comprehension, this view of the human brain is so well documented that it is accepted as a 'given' by most social scientists: (1) the brain constructs perceptions and thought (as opposed to behaving like a sponge); (2) the brain's central function is to create meaning; (3) meaning arises through the perception and interpretation of patterns, or relationships, in events; (4) anticipation and intention exert a directing influence on the brain's activity." This, of course, brings us full circle again to reading and writing sharing a cognitive basis.

only as it related to **reading acquisition and reading learning**, but I thought I would try it.

Just a few weeks into the study, though, I knew it would not work. Even in the classroom where the children never really did what I would call writing (composing), the children on whom I was focusing did write on their own. In the other three classrooms I visited, writing of one kind or another was a definite part of nearly every class day.

As I watched and saw something from a reading lesson one day, appear in a written piece the next day—I knew I could not separate reading and writing. As I watched and saw children reading each other's stories and then incorporating an idea they had seen into their own writing—I knew I could not separate reading and writing. As I watched and saw children making natural connections between reading and writing—I knew I could not separate the two in this research.

So, very happily, I changed the wording of the name of my study to meet the focus that was in my mind all along. Reading acquisition and reading learning became literacy acquisition and literacy learning. After conducting the research for a year and then working with the results of that research for another year, now, in writing this ethnography, I have trouble imagining how I ever thought I could focus on reading separate from writing. Readers will see the two naturally combined into literacy throughout the
second half of the book—representing, I hope, the natural combination that was occurring in the minds of the children I studied.
CHAPTER 5

"...LANGUAGE"

PART II

In the previous chapter, I presented some of the body of research relating to metalinguistics and literacy that led me to consider the fruitfulness of investigating metalinguistics, literacy, and giftedness, altogether. The purpose of this chapter is two fold: (1) to present some of the body of research relating to giftedness in general and reading and the gifted, specifically and (2) to present the principles that guided me in the design, conduct, and analysis of this ethnography.

Giftedness Research

The following discussion of research into giftedness is not intended to be exhaustive. I will focus on two aspects of the research and writing regarding the gifted. First, I will discuss the characteristics of gifted students so that readers will know what my background knowledge included as I determined who the gifted subjects of my study were (see Chapter 6 for the specifics regarding the

1A large portion of this section is drawn directly from the book, *Handbook for Educating the Gifted*, which I co-authored with M. Jean Greenlaw.
selection of the nine children). Secondly, I will discuss the research and writing regarding reading and the gifted student.

Characteristics of the Gifted

Trying to describe the characteristics of the gifted is a rather difficult task. A large body of research exists that is related to various aspects of giftedness, including those areas specifically designated by the U.S. Commissioner of Education, Sydney Marland. In Commissioner Marland's report to Congress in 1972, he established the following definition of giftedness:

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.

Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:

2As Kyle R. Carter and S. Kontos, "An Application of Cognitive Developmental Theory to the Identification of the Gifted," Roeper Review 5 (1982): 17, point out, while "many in the field of gifted education treat the concept of giftedness as something tangible, a trait that is easily observed, on the contrary, giftedness is a highly abstract concept, or construct, created by scholars to summarize the common characteristics of a select group of people. Unfortunately, there is wide disagreement over the set of characteristics that define the construct of giftedness. Yet individuals use the same term to refer to a different set of characteristics. This practice has led to much confusion about the nature and identification of giftedness."
The children identified as gifted for my study possessed demonstrated ability and/or potential in one or more of the first four areas listed above. I will, therefore, concentrate my literature review on those areas.

(1) general intellectual ability

The intellectual characteristics of the gifted are those traits that highly able students exhibit as they use their intellect—that is, their power for knowing and their capacity for rational or intelligent thought. The acquisition and application of knowledge is an ability that is markedly superior in gifted children.

Gifted children are distinguished in acquiring and applying knowledge because of their intellectual advancement and their supernormal capacity for knowledge. Their ability to learn is enhanced by an extraordinary memory and quickness to see relationships. The combination of these traits along with varied intellectual interests, an almost insatiable curiosity, and a penchant for independent learning presents a marvelous challenge for all who come in contact with gifted children.

It seems that various intellectual levels have specific intellectual patterns and the most familiar
property of the pattern for the gifted is intellectual advancement. Referring to intellectually gifted children as intellectually advanced is reasonable. The gifted appear to have a "surplus" of mental age beyond their chronological age; for example, by age six, gifted children have a mental age of at least one year beyond their chronological age.

One of the most conspicuous indicators of intellectual advancement, and one that was clearly evident in the students chosen for this study, is gifted students' early and accurate use of a large vocabulary. It appears that gifted children and youth play with language in the same way that other children play with toys. Many gifted children are intrigued by word games and by books that deal with words. They enjoy reference books such as atlases, encyclopedias, and dictionaries at a very young age and maintain this interest usually throughout their lives.

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3 James J. Gallagher and L.J. Lucito, "Intellectual Patterns of Gifted Compared with Average and Retarded," Exceptional Children 27 (1961) used various Wechsler subtests to study and compare the patterns of intellectual strengths and weaknesses in seven samples (three gifted, three retarded, and one average). It was their conclusion that a prevalent characteristic of gifted children is their intellectual advancement.


Their penchant for informational books as young children exceeds the interest average students ever have.

Another early indication of exceptional intelligence is the proficient use of linguistic structures. Young gifted children often speak in phrases and whole sentences earlier than average children. They are also able to reproduce sentences and stories at an early age. Gifted subjects in a study of children's language "demonstrated advanced receptive language operations of auditory memory and memory for linguistic information." Gifted children are not endowed with a totally different intellect, but they seem able to use it in a different way. For example, able and average children pass through the same sequence of Piagetian stages, but it appears that gifted students may enter the stages earlier and progress through them more rapidly than do average children. Gifted children's intelligence could be compared to skilled craftpersons' use of tools. Neither the gifted child nor the skilled craftperson necessarily has anything


different from an average child or an average craftsperson, but each is able to use what he or she has more skillfully.\footnote{Regarding this idea, Roger A. Webb, "Concrete and Formal Operations in Very Bright 6-11 Year Olds," \textit{Human Development} 17 (1974): 294, states, "The development of the tools themselves (operations) may be a human species-specific trait relatively stable across a range of environments, constrained by maturational factors. How well the tools will be used, on the other hand, is a function of a number of things, including experience and intelligence. Bright children use the tools characteristic of their developmental stage very well compared to their peers. If bright children develop new tools any sooner, however, the precocity is not striking."}

This analogy certainly extends to bright children's use of language. Gifted students do not seem to have a better selection of linguistic rules than their average agemates, but rather, they appear to be able to use them more effectively in comprehending and reproducing verbal syntax.\footnote{Guilford, Scheuerle, and Shonburn, "Aspects of Language Development."}

To extend the analogy a little further, while the gifted may not possess different "tools," they may (figuratively) have a larger toolshed (i.e., a superior intellectual capacity). Because able children have an extraordinary ability to assimilate (i.e., to take into their mind and thoroughly comprehend), they are able to absorb large amounts of material in a fraction of the time required by average students. Then, by making use of their accurate memories, the gifted develop a broad knowledge in
many different areas. The range of learning for an able child is wider and deeper than an average child's, and it is often apparent that the gifted know about things of which other children are unaware. The extraordinary depth and breadth of intellectually distinguished children's knowledge are the result of, and are fed by, their superior assimilative abilities, their extended capacities for information and concepts, their keen observational skills, their marked retention, and their varied intellectual interests.

Able learners' wide range of interests stems from their great desire for learning and, in their quest for knowledge, continuous discoveries of new areas to explore. Their curiosity sometimes seems insatiable, but the questions it spawns are asked neither ostentatiously nor to annoy (as it appears to some) but rather as a means of finding out. When gifted children ask questions, their primary purpose is to obtain answers—about the reasons behind an occurrence, the motivation behind an action, or the purposes for completing a task. Their questions may at times seem like defiance because of a perceived challenge to the status quo or the authority figure present but in fact, the queries represent independent thinking and a need for explanations. Sometimes the gifted seem to have striving for knowledge (learning) that is almost subconscious. In a book by gifted teenagers that describes their emotions and
needs, one teenager exclaims, "'Gifted and talented' is not something you can take up lightly on free weekends. It's something that's going to affect everything about your life, twenty-four hours a day, 365-1/4 days a year."11

Besides satisfying their intellectual curiosity by asking questions, gifted children read and observe a great deal. Many, but by no means all, gifted children read early. They read more history, biography, science, informational books, poetry, drama, and folktales than their average agemates. This wide reading allows them to begin to satisfy their craving for information.

Often, bright children will choose to study some subject that is difficult for them, both for the knowledge it will afford and for the challenge. Academically motivated, able children find the challenge and accomplishment of a difficult task rewarding in and of itself—much more than many little tasks. Gifted children do well and often like to pursue topics independently. Such initiative is indicative of the distinctive thinking they will do later within their chosen vocations. They will feel compelled to say or do things distinctively. Since they may have interests that go beyond what any available person (teacher, parent, neighbor) can directly help them with, they often work alone. Some sort of guidance at the

beginning stages of learning is preferable but not always possible. Providing a "framework for thinking" for the intellectually gifted is recommended, "not as a restraint, but as a secure mooring from which they can venture forth on their own."12

The gifted can work alone for long periods of time without frequent checks by others. Their sustained attention span is a by-product of their mental endurance, and during these working periods, they are able to accomplish greater units of work than would an average person within the same constraints. The gifted child has a superior ability to focus on a task and a tenacity of purpose rarely seen in the average child.13 Fifty years

12 Philip D. Baker and David R. Bender, Library Media Programs and the Special Learner (Hamden, Conn.: Library Professional Publications, 1981), 274.

13 Joseph Renzulli, developer of the Enrichment Triad Model for Gifted Programming and the Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness would refer to a gifted child's superior ability to focus on a task as "task commitment." Task commitment, along with above average general ability and creativity, compose Renzulli's three rings, or clusters, of traits that research has indicated are essential ingredients for creative/productive accomplishment. Joseph Renzulli, Sally M. Reis, and Linda H. Smith, "The Revolving Door Model: A New Way of Identifying the Gifted," Phi Delta Kappan 62 (May 1981): 24, explain task commitment as "a refined or focused form of motivation...Whereas motivation is usually defined in terms of a general energizing process that triggers responses in organisms, task commitment represents energy brought to bear on a particular problem (task) or specific performance area. One might metaphorically define the role played by this cluster of traits as the psychological 'yeast' that activates the manifestation of creative productivity."
ago, Gertrude Hildreth, a leader in research on the gifted, in reference to the young gifted child said, "His mental energy is comparable with an electric filament that glows continuously without exhausting itself. He hungers for problems, asks for more or invents, new problems when the supply gives out."\textsuperscript{14} This hunger does not come in spurts but is rather a continuous, gnawing hunger than cannot really have the edge taken off it. There is a flow, a relatedness in the efforts and attention of the superior mind, that distinguishes it from others'.

"Relatedness" and "relationship" are key words in characterizing the mind of the gifted child. Many of the characteristics of the gifted "stem directly from their powers to organize and relate their experiences."\textsuperscript{15} Gifted children are less likely to see things as discrete and isolated, but rather are quick to see relationships and to observe and associate similarities. This ability helps able children to readily absorb abstract concepts and then organize them and apply them efficiently.


Such rapid absorption and efficient organization of concepts allow gifted students to generalize readily. They look for and easily grasp the principles that underlie their learning and are quick to see the applications of these principles, thus preferring to delve into the why behind a concept rather than the what.

Because of the way gifted children learn, they do better in some subjects than in others. They tend to do very well in reading, mathematics, language, science, and the arts. Their written and oral communication skills are quite effective. Their abilities to utilize rather complex associative methods often gives them a flair for science and math. They do less well in history and spelling, because, as usually taught, the latter two depend more on rote memory than on understanding principles and concepts. Often, a gifted student's poorest grade will come in handwriting because of the repetition involved, which the gifted child finds less than stimulating. Overall, though, gifted students have above-average grades and perform significantly better than their average agemates in the various subject areas.

To summarize the intellectual characteristics of the gifted child, the following definition makes a good baseline:

The psychological concept of intelligence defines a network of strongly related abilities concerning the retention, transformation, and utilization of
verbal and numerical symbols; at issue are a person's memory capacities, his skill in solving problems, his dexterity in manipulating and dealing with concepts. The person high in one of these skills will tend to be high in all; the individual who is low in one will tend to be low in all.16

The key word in this definition is tend. Most likely, the student with a 138 IQ will have a superior memory, show facility with verbal expression, employ strong associative capabilities when dealing with new material, and be able to spend long periods of time deeply absorbed in one project. But another student with a similar IQ may possess an extraordinary ability to see relationships and have fluent verbal skills but make poor grades because of a short attention span. There is no one mold into which the highly intelligent youngster fits, especially if that youngster is also highly creative. "Gifted children as a group have specific characteristics that show about as much variation around the mean as the variation shown by any other group around its mean."17 The gifted child must be seen as an individual with concomitant strengths and weaknesses.


(2) specific academic aptitude

Some gifted children and young adults seem to be adept in almost every area of study. Others have extraordinary aptitudes and abilities in one or two areas. Science and mathematics are two areas in which some students display their giftedness. In science and in mathematics, those children who are gifted typically exhibit rather distinctive behaviors quite early. "Science gifted" children display their giftedness in some or all of the following ways:

1. Interest in science during the preschool years.
2. Curiosity as to what makes things work.
3. Ability to understand abstract ideas at an early age.
4. Strong imagination in things scientific.
5. A love of collecting.
6. Abundance of drive—willingness to work on a science project for long periods of time in the face of difficult obstacles.
7. Better than average ability in reading and mathematics.
8. Unusual ability to verbalize ideas about science.
9. High intelligence; IQ of 120 or more.
10. Tendency to think quantitatively—to use numbers to express ideas.
11. Willingness to master the names of scientific objects.
12. Tendency to write stories about science, including the writing of science fiction.
13. Creativity in science projects and delight in studying science for its own sake.
14. Evident discontent with reasons for things scientific that other children readily accept.
15. Exceptional memory for details.
16. Willingness to spend long periods of time working alone.
17. Ability to generalize from seemingly unrelated details.
18. Ability to perceive relationships among various elements in a situation.18

Children who are considered mathematically gifted exhibit numerous distinctive behaviors that set them apart from other children. In fact, it is probably easier to identify those children who are gifted in mathematics than it is to identify children gifted in other subject areas.19 From a very young age, even before going to school, mathematically gifted children are more interested in numbers and abstract numerical concepts than other children are. They ask questions about numbers and become frustrated when a nonmathematical adult dismisses a question as "silly." These young children enjoy working mathematical puzzles and reading and hearing about mathematical concepts. Such children learn mathematics very quickly and can apply the knowledge beyond the expected realm for their age group.


19 John Kemeny, "The Mathematically Talented Student," National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin 47 (April 1963): 31, in speaking to the forty-seventh annual convention of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, stated "There is no other field of knowledge where there is as great a difference between the most talented and least talented students as in mathematics. There is something in the very nature of the subject matter that brings out extreme ability or lack of ability in the human mind."
From early on, they perform well on standardized achievement and aptitude tests.20

Another specific area in which some children exhibit remarkable ability is in language—reading (which will be dealt with in a separate section below), speaking, writing—in either one's native tongue or in a foreign language. Brown and Rogan cite several experts who point out that language is our primary symbol system and that "the ability to manipulate internally learned symbol systems is perhaps the sine qua non of giftedness."21 Because of the primacy of language, fluency in manipulation of this symbol system is almost required for school and career success. Gifted students tend to have a proclivity for achievement in this area, as will be discussed below.

(3) creative or productive thinking

For many, creativity suggests the ability to produce a great painting, an intricate piece of pottery, or a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. While all of these products are the result of creativity, the term also has a broader connotation. It involves production versus reproduction; divergent versus convergent thinking. The creative person is able to produce original ideas with fluency, flexibility,


association, and elaboration. Such ideas are not limited to any particular field. Creativity may be manifested in science, the dance, urban planning, song writing, leadership, photography, architecture, world hunger relief, and so on. No apparent limit exists for the places where creativity is needed or the ways in which it may be revealed.

It is difficult to be specific in a definition of creativity. One researcher who has studied scientists and what constitutes a significant scientific contribution makes an attempt to be specific about the construct of creativity.

Creativity Quality...is an uncommon, uncustomary, unconventional quality due to its breaking away from established patterns and standards and from currently accepted ideas. In a broad sense, it does not emphasize uncommonness by merely being different, per se, but it is a creative or original or imaginative type of quality. We have sometimes described this creative quality in a contribution as being not sterile, but full of excitement which causes a tickling of the imagination and a tingling up the spine of the recipient. If the contribution were sterile, it would be something with nothing new in it. Instead, any contribution possessing the creative quality contains the potential seeds of new blossomings, of new things unforeseen, of new visions of exciting, surprising things yet to come.

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22 According to Donald J. Treffinger, "Research on Creativity," Gifted Child Quarterly 30 (Winter 1986): 15, "given the complexity of the construct of creativity and the variety of its manifestations in daily life, it seems unlikely that there will be a...general theory."

Although creativity is not restricted to the gifted, they are the ones in whom it is most likely to be developed and the ones in whom it is most expedient that it be cultivated. "Creativity can and should continue to be involved in giftedness in any area."24 Both creativity and intelligence are necessary ingredients for productive problem solving. Simply producing massive quantities of ideas is not sufficient. An intelligent "sorting" must also occur; the problem solver must possess the judgment necessary to reject those ideas that are banal, irrelevant, or faulty, and to accept and express those that are fresh, germane, and potentially beneficial.

Numerous researchers have conducted studies regarding creativity. Two of the most well known studies revealed data to separate students into four groups: (1) High Intelligence-High Creativity; (2) High Intelligence-Low Creativity; (3) Low Intelligence-High Creativity; (4) Low Intelligence-Low Creativity. The authors of the studies posit that a distinction does seem to exist between creativity and intelligence.25 But, even though creativity and intelligence are not synonymous, creativity "is a function, and one of a very high order indeed, of the

24Treffinger, "Research on Creativity," 18.

25Jacob W. Getzels and Philip W. Jackson, Creativity and Intelligence (New York: Wiley, 1962); Wallach and Kogan, "Creativity and Intelligence."
One of the foremost experts on creativity, Paul Torrance, says that people who try to make a clear distinction between creativity and intelligence are involved in a futile task. He believes that the two are interacting variables and that trying to force clear distinctions between them creates false distinctions which do not exist in real life.

Since the early 1960s, a great deal of attention has been paid to creativity as it relates to giftedness. The days of considering only a high IQ score when determining giftedness are almost over—especially as the citizenry looks to the gifted to contribute to, and solve the problems of, society.

Creativity, as a vital aspect of genius,


28 Obviously a forward thinking educator, Carroll realized that a high IQ alone would not suffice. He said that, although the intelligence test measured a child's ability to learn (and this is now certainly under some dispute), it did not give a complete picture of all the mental qualities of a gifted child. Furthermore, he believed that, "A child may rate high on an intelligence test and yet fall short of being a genius because though he possesses a large body of information, he has relatively little ability to make that information function creatively. It may never be possible to measure creative imagination objectively, yet certainly this is an aspect of genius that must not be overlooked" Herbert A. Carroll, "Intellectually
must not be overlooked because it is the creative aspect that solves problems, makes inroads, creates beauty, challenges inertia, sees possibilities, and constructs bridges—across races, across time, across space, across disciplines. When one comes to understand the necessity of creativity, one also comes to understand why some societies are opposed to its development.

(4) leadership ability

One of the many myths held by people who do not know much about giftedness is that gifted children are social isolates—only being included in other children's play when they are the brunt of the jokes, being teased and taunted for being strange. The myth of the gifted social misfit has been propounded for so long that many accept it as fact. Almost without exception, however, for moderately gifted children (IQ 130-160), it is simply not the case that because one is gifted, one is unable to interact positively with agemates. An extra endowment of intelligence does not

Gifted Children--Their Characteristics and Problems," Teachers College Record 42 (December 1940): 214.

29 "Creation is a disturbing force in society because it is a constructive one. It upsets the old order in the act of building a new one. This activity is salutary for society. It is, indeed, essential for the maintenance of society's health, for one thing that is certain about human affairs is that they are perpetually on the move, and the work of creative spirits is what gives society a chance of directing its inevitable movement along constructive instead of destructive lines" Taylor, "Developing Creative Excellence," 107.
mean a lack in all other areas. Sociability is no exception to that rule.

Intellectually gifted children tend to possess particular social characteristics just as they possess particular intellectual characteristics. On the whole, the gifted tend to be very social and socially adept, often becoming class leaders—even at a young age.\textsuperscript{30}

Gifted children seem to develop early an understanding of the social setting in which they live and the way in which they fit in. In other words, their social cognition is precocious. Gifted children seem able intuitively to recognize the dynamics of group behavior, often quite early. They identify the social status of

\textsuperscript{30} In a study of 294 elementary school children, the gifted children were not the social isolates. They generally ranged from moderately to most popular in their classrooms; very few were rated as least popular, H.A. Grace and Nancy L. Booth, "Is the Gifted Child a Social Isolate?" \textit{Peabody Journal of Education} 35 (1958). In a study of children with IQs of 150 or more, 52 percent were in the top quarter of the class in terms of social choice. Only 11 percent were in the lowest quarter, James J. Gallagher, "Social Status of Children Related to Intelligence, Propinquity, and Social Perception," \textit{Elementary School Journal} 58 (1958). James J. Gallagher, \textit{Teaching the Gifted Child}, 2d ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1975), later speculated that even though average children see a difference between themselves and the gifted, they choose them as friends because they serve as "ego ideals." Researchers have found that bright children are popular with all intellectual groups, not just other gifted children. A study of 350 fifth graders showed that bright students (IQ 130 or more) are no more cliquish or snobbish than their less-bright classmates, Samuel Silverstein, "How Snobbish Are the Gifted in Regular Classes?" \textit{Exceptional Child} 28 (February 1962).
others and themselves better than average students do. Their abilities to pick up and interpret nonverbal cues are superior.\textsuperscript{31} They quickly discern when something is wrong. They are capable of great empathy and insight into a situation. Superior children as a group, tend to develop and "cultivate comparatively unselfish and social points of view," usually at a very early age.\textsuperscript{32} For this reason, and others, persons who are concerned about able individuals cloistering themselves and developing a master plan for ridding the world of all but themselves are mistaken. The gifted not only enjoy others and are enjoyed in return, but their perceptive sensitivity moves them to do the kinds of things necessary to improve society.

Much of the fear of elitism is based on the assumption that if individuals discover that they are more able than others, they will develop aristocratic values, caring little for the plight of others. Research indicates that exactly the opposite is true; giftedness is often accompanied by a strong sense of obligation, responsibility and empathy.\textsuperscript{33}

Gifted individuals' senses of obligation, responsibility, and empathy, teamed with a heightened ability to reason out


\textsuperscript{32}Baker, "Characteristics of Superior Learners."

moral questions, offer fertile ground for sowing the seeds of, and cultivating, ethical leadership qualities.

One argument often used to convince others that the gifted need differentiated education is that these bright youngsters are the future leaders and problem solvers of the world. In the late 50s, the recognized deficit in the United States was technological. Today, people probably worry more about the way the United States deals with social problems. If the gifted are to help solve these problems, it is valid to assess their moral and ethical reasoning characteristics. Unethical, immoral, or amoral persons do not meet the requirements for the job of solving social problems and providing social leadership at the end of this century and the beginning of the next. Can the gifted be considered any more adept at handling these problems than anyone else?

On the whole, gifted children tend to be advanced for their ages in ethical and moral sensitivity. In fact, a gifted child of nine may have the moral development of a fourteen-year-old. More than average persons, they tend to be keenly aware of the sad state of the world and feel compelled to do something about it. They are also

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35 Elizabeth Monroe Drews, Learning Together: How to Foster Creativity, Self-Fulfillment, and Social Awareness in
concerned with religion and issues of right and wrong, good and evil, justice and injustice much earlier than other youth.36

Very bright young children may ask parents or teachers to answer questions that have been puzzling philosophers for thousands of years. When unable to get an acceptable answer, these gifted children may ponder the issue deeply and continue to seek an answer from various sources (books, religious figures, grandparents). Frequently, the answers that these children eventually find are original and unconventional. They are, however, the result of systematic logic that is reflective of high moral reasoning.

Why are the gifted capable of precocious and sophisticated moral and ethical reasoning? Perhaps because "intellectual functioning which allows them to have superior memories, capacities for learning, and powers of assimilation...also allows them a superior moral reasoning capability."37 It is true that a child whose moral

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reasoning is high is likely to score well on an IQ test as well. High IQ does not guarantee a high level of moral reasoning, but both developmentalists and social learning theorists agree that certain levels of intelligence are necessary for high moral reasoning.

Reading and the Gifted

Quite often, when thinking of reading as related to gifted students, it is assumed that they all read well. It is true that most gifted students do read well. In fact, "there is probably no single characteristic more consistent among gifted children than enhanced reading proficiency." It cannot be assumed, however, that all gifted children read well, nor can it be assumed that because the majority of gifted children do read well, they do not, therefore, need reading instruction. Although the myth that the gifted can teach themselves is prevalent in all curriculum areas, nowhere is it more pervasive than in the area of reading.


39 Diessner, "Cognitive Abilities."


41 "All too often, little attention in our classrooms goes into 'getting the most out of' our superior students. This is particularly true in the field of reading. As long as their reading performance is consistently above average, superior students are often considered to be doing 'well' in
This is particularly alarming if one considers that gifted readers not reaching their potential may, in fact, be considered in need of "remedial" instruction. In any subject area, including reading, a child's need for remediation is determined based on the discrepancy between potential and performance. Using this as a guideline, one can readily see that there is a discrepancy between potential and performance for many gifted students in reading and they should, therefore, be receiving "remedial" help. Just because a student is "on grade level" does not mean that the student is "doing fine"; for the gifted student, being on grade level may very well be two, three, four, or more grade levels below where his or her potential lies. The discrepancy between potential and performance usually becomes even more pronounced as the gifted student progresses from elementary school to middle school.42

In order to prevent wide discrepancies from occurring in able students, they must receive instruction reading. However, this overlooks the fact that such readers may still be performing far below potential." Kathleen Stevens, "The Effect of Interest on the Reading Comprehension of Gifted Readers," Reading Horizons 21 (Fall 1980): 12.

42 A.V. Olson and W.S. Ames, Teaching Reading Skills in Secondary Schools (Scranton, Pennsylvania: International Textbook Co., 1972), 221, have found this to be true. They state that most able readers, by the time they reach middle school or high school "are more retarded in reading than any other one group. In most cases, they are retarded not because they are reading below grade level, but because they are reading so far below their capacity level."
and that instruction must be differentiated from "traditional" reading instruction. This instruction must be specialized and related to the gifted students' characteristics and needs. Unfortunately, at this time, differentiated reading instruction for the gifted is virtually nonexistent.

Which characteristics of the gifted should affect their reading instruction—and what impact should they have? One obvious characteristic of the gifted is that many of them—from 20 to 50 percent, by various estimates—learn to read before entering school. Those who do not come to school already reading are likely to learn quite rapidly once they are provided the opportunity. Knowing this, kindergarten and first grade teachers must avoid the preprimers and primers that accompany basal programs.

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44 Betty Jo Dawkins, "Do Gifted Junior High School Students Need Reading Instruction?" *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* 2 (September 1978); John N. Mangieri and Faye Madigan, "Reading for Gifted Students: What Schools Are Doing," *Roeper Review* 7 (November 1984); Switzer and Nourse, "Reading Instruction."
Children who have learned to read before coming to school and who have been exposed to good children's literature cannot be expected to enjoy a story about a boy and a girl whose conversation consists of such passionate discourse as, "Oh!" "Look!" "See!"45

While it is true that basal "stories" have improved since the 1960s, using primers with gifted children is ludicrous. Beginning in first grade, these children must have a literature-based program instead of the basal program.46 Teachers should have multiple copies of trade books for the children to read and discuss. Activities should be developed around real reading--trade books, magazines, newspapers, letters--rather than contrived reading--basal readers and their accompanying workbooks and worksheets.

Another reason gifted readers should not plod through a basal program is that most such series include seemingly endless skill drills. Gifted students do not like--nor do they need--such repetitive routine drills, and

the worksheets are likely to be completed very carelessly or not at all. Rather than force students to repeat this work until they "do it right," teachers need to recognize that gifted learners do not benefit from repeated drill on such isolated skills as phonics or word analysis. Their abilities to generalize allow them to learn these discrete skills through inductive processes—without extensive drill and practice.

Gifted students have extraordinary abilities to see relationships and to make connections, and to further enhance these valuable abilities, the most appropriate instruction involves critical and creative reading. Although such reading should be a part of all reading programs, it must be the backbone of a program for the gifted. Gifted readers must be guided and taught. They do not teach themselves the higher levels of reading and thinking. Direct teaching, both of critical and creative reading, is necessary.47

47 Bonds and Bonds, "Teacher, Is There..."; Paula Boothby, "Tips for Teaching Creative and Critical Reading," Roeper Review 1 (May 1979); Bonnie Cramond and Charles Martin, "A Parents' Guide to Creating a Creative Reader," G/C/T Number 18 (May/June 1981); John J. DeBoer, "Creative Reading and the Gifted Student," Reading Teacher 16 (May 1963); Sharon Dunn, "The Gifted Student in the Intermediate Grades: Developing Creativity through Reading," Reading Horizons 19 (Summer 1979); Charles Martin and Bonnie Cramond, "A Checklist for Assessing and Developing Creative Reading," G/C/T Number 32 (March/April 1984); Margery Staman Miller, "Using the Newspaper with the Gifted: An Everyday Opportunity to Enhance Critical Thinking/Reading Skills," G/C/T Number 23 (May/June 1982); William H. Rupley, "Reading
Critical reading requires the reader to evaluate the material—for truth, authority, and value.\textsuperscript{48} All readers need this skill, but for the gifted, it is particularly important: they tend to be voracious readers and so have a particular need to critically sort through the volumes of material they encounter.

Creative reading involves an even higher level of reading and thinking than critical reading does.\textsuperscript{49}

We may consider creative reading to be a thinking process in which new ideas are originated, evaluated, and applied. Divergent and varied responses, not right answers, are goals as thinking transpires and conclusions are reached. Finally the pupil evaluates his conclusions and seeks to extend and use them.\textsuperscript{50}

Creative reading involves using the printed page as a springboard to thinking and action.


\textsuperscript{50}Paul A. Witty, "Rationale for Fostering Creative Reading in the Gifted and the Creative," in \textit{Creative Reading for Gifted Learners: A Design for Excellence}, ed. Michael Labuda (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1974), 15.
Reading curriculum for gifted readers must also take into account their extensive vocabularies, enjoyment of reference materials, curiosity, and affinity for independent learning. Teachers must bring in a wide variety of resources for such students. Reference books (encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs, atlases, readers' guides, record books), periodicals, and media should all be integral components of the program developed for gifted students.

The program should allow gifted readers a great deal of freedom, including choice of reading materials. Two research studies indicate that superior students' comprehension is positively affected by their interest in the material, whereas average and below-average students' comprehension is not so affected.51

The freedom to pursue independent interests in reading also prevents gifted students from feeling that they are in a lockstep program.52 Gifted students do not need to

51 Kathleen Stevens, "The Effect of Topic Interest on the Reading Comprehension of Higher Ability Students," *Journal of Educational Research* 74 (July/August 1980); Stevens, "Effect of Interest."

52 Sabaroff, "Challenges in Reading," 393, observed, "Bright students resent stereotyped work. They react to it in several ways. They do the required work so easily, using only a small part of their minds and energy, that they become lazy and come to expect that all learning should come with great ease. Or, if they already know what is being taught, they become bored, and refuse to put in any effort—eventually falling behind in needed skill development. Later when they are confronted with a problem that requires
be doing the same thing as everyone else. They must be challenged if they are to continue to use their extraordinary capabilities.

Although most gifted students are good readers and have the potential to become outstanding, there are some exceptions. Some gifted pupils cannot read—and crisis is imminent unless immediate steps are taken. As soon as a reading problem appears in a gifted student, determination of the student's strengths and weaknesses must be made so that an appropriate instructional program can be implemented.

The goals of a reading program for the gifted do not differ from those of other reading programs as much in kind as in degree. Two such long term goals are:

1. To create readers in the full, meaningful sense of the word.
2. To expand the child's reading, writing, speaking, and thinking vocabulary.

full attention and sustained effort, they are unable to cope with it and are easily discouraged."

53 Munson, "Adjusting the Reading Program," 46, believes that, for gifted students with reading problems, "Early treatment is urgent since frustration from reading disability rises in direct proportion to the deviation between mental power and reading progress. Thus, the gifted child with reading disability suffers in proportion to his degree of intelligence."


There are other goals for reading considered desirable for gifted students.56

1. The gifted should achieve reading fluency through mastery of decoding skills.
2. The gifted need highly developed comprehension skills, which provide for deep insight, awareness of subtleties and nuances of meaning, and depth and breadth of knowledge in various areas.
3. The gifted require the skill to evaluate reading matter for authenticity, validity, and objectivity so as to form an opinion or determine its usability.
4. Teachers of the gifted should nurture the ability to differentiate between good and mediocre literature and a preference for better literature.
5. The gifted should have the skill to efficiently and effectively compile and organize information from a variety of sources and the ability to locate materials on topics of particular interest.
6. Through creative reading, gifted education should foster increased ability in creative thinking.
7. Gifted students should come to use reading as a source of enjoyment.

Reading can provide a lifetime of enjoyment—as a release, as an escape, as exploration, as learning, as vicarious experience. Gifted students need to experience reading for all it is worth—by seeing it as a channel for the world, not as drudgery meant only to fulfill assignments.

The goals mentioned above are not really different from those set for every child. The distinction comes from the "depth of understanding sought, the experiences and activities used, the materials and teaching methods

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56 Cushenbery and Howell, Reading and the Gifted Child.
employed, and the rate for which learning is planned and achieved."57

The first and last words of this statement are the most significant regarding goals for gifted readers. Academically talented and gifted readers should be expected to go far beyond average readers and so their program must be developed to ensure that. And, they can be expected to achieve. In many reading programs, ultimate goals are set but very few students can or do attain them. But with gifted readers, students can and should attain the goals, and some will exceed them.

**Guiding Principles: Research Design, Conduct, and Analysis**

As the primary data-gathering instrument, it is important for readers to know what theories guided my data collection and what questions were being asked because these certainly impelled what data were collected.58 Although I often felt like a human vacuum cleaner--trying to pick up everything that was going on in the classroom--I not only

57 Cushenbery and Howell, Reading and the Gifted Child, 55.

58 "Because the anthropologist is a thinking being...he interprets; and interpretation entails introspection, albeit implicit. When the anthropologist does fieldwork, when he classifies and analyzes world cultures, he works not only with data but also with himself. No matter how objectively he attempts to record and analyze, he does so in terms of his own categories, attitudes, and orientations" Peacock, Anthropological Lens, 86.
had to be, but was, selective in what I listened to, took
notes on, recorded, and filmed.  

Although I went into the research project with an
open mind—certainly I had some idea that the project would
yield fruitful data—or I would never have spent the time,
money, or emotional energy to conduct it.  

It is not only
pragmatic to have some ideas regarding the research setting,
the subjects and the possible outcomes, but it is also
desirable.  

59 "The participant observer does not record every
event observed; encyclopedic recording is neither possible
nor particularly useful. What was included or left out
depended upon the particular focus I was pursuing, and upon
the particular relevance to the questions or major concern
of the time" Maurice J. Sevigny, "Triangulated Inquiry--A
Methodology for the Analysis of Classroom Interaction," in
Ethnography and Language in Educational Settings, Vol. 5 in
Advances in Discourse Processes, ed. Roy O. Freedle

60 Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis,
134, point out that, "In effect, no researcher can really
begin with a tabula rasa mind. The question is: How soon
and how systematically do I bring my assumptions and framing
ideas to awareness? And how do I permit data to elaborate,
correct, and extend them?"

61 "Some have argued for purely descriptive
ethnography, without the use of theory to guide data
collection or to provide meaning or understanding of the
data collected. I acknowledge the fear of allowing
preconceived 'theoretical' notions to bias and distort the
ethnography (the data), but I am at least as concerned about
the random collection of data (unguided by any concept), the
covert or unspoken bias that a social scientist must bring
to his/her observations, and the dangerous discovery of
something left unexplained. It seems to me to be a terrible
waste of time merely to wander around collecting things
without any concepts to guide what one collects and, of
necessity, avoids collecting. Imagine someone, totally
without concepts, wandering about empirically attempting to
researcher is just wandering around, hoping to happen upon something—although what that something is cannot be articulated. This stance is as likely to yield fruitful results as a person wandering around the country, not looking for gold, is likely to happen upon gold.

I was, however, prepared to find gold. I was looking for gold ore (metalinguistic sentience); I knew where I thought I might find it (in young gifted children's language); and I hoped that once I found it, it could be refined and there would be enough there to prove valuable. The purpose of this chapter is to disclose that which gave rise to this study and to disclose the overt theoretical positions and the less conscious cultural and educational assumptions that compelled me to collect the data and to analyze it the way I did.62

The ethnographer is not only the primary data-gathering instrument, but is also the primary data-analyzing understand the world by collecting, in some fashion, everything he comes upon and not knowing any system to classify those specimens. The notion boggles the mind. Everyone—layman and social scientist alike—must have, or must invent, some system to categorize the data observed” Lutz, “The Holistic Approach,” 60-61.

62 Ruby, “Film and Anthropology,” 128, states, “When it is recognized that anthropologists ask research questions based on their overt theoretical positions and their less conscious cultural assumptions, and that when the questions are asked in a particular way, there is a logical way to generate data and an equally logical way to present the analytic descriptions called ethnographies, then the necessity of publicly disclosing the entire process becomes inescapable, and the phrase 'reflexive anthropology' becomes redundant.”
instrument. My background in elementary education, reading education, and linguistics, my teaching experience at the elementary and secondary levels (involving both gifted and non-gifted students), my research, reading, and writing on many aspects of gifted individuals—all came together to impel the data gathering and analysis. If I did not have the background and personality that I do, the analysis would never have gotten done—and would never have yielded anything fruitful. But, it was done and it has yielded promising information.

What readers of this ethnography must be concerned with is from what perspective I operated throughout data collection and analysis. What did I look at—and why? Who did I focus on—and why? What inferences did I make—and why? Although the first two questions have been answered in a general sense within the first five chapters of this book, I will be much more specific throughout the rest of the book. The final question, 'What inferences did I make—and why?' will serve as the framing of Chapters 7 through 10. My hope is to frame an answer to this question that will demonstrate to readers the validity of my assertions.

63 "An untrained person looking into a microscope or telescope learns practically nothing from the use of the powerful instrument" Pelto and Pelto, Anthropological Research, 2. My training and background enabled me to learn a great deal!

64 As Hammersley and Atkinson, Ethnography: Principles in Practice, 191, point out, "Data in themselves
It is important to know how a researcher arrives at particular conclusions, because otherwise the reader cannot make judgments about the value of the research. Just as a person judging a photograph would use different criteria of the same photograph, depending on the photographer's perspective, so too should a person judging research.

The question of focus is always arbitrary—for the photographer, the biologist, or the social scientist. What brings one thing into clearly observable focus distorts another. To focus the camera lens on the butterfly on one's nose distorts the face; to focus on the face distorts the horizon in the background; to focus on the horizon distorts both the face and the butterfly. The same is as true in the social sciences as it is in photography. The social scientist has a right to be arbitrary. But one should not call the picture of a perfectly good butterfly a picture of a horizon.  

In my study, what I have done is focus on the metalinguistic sentience of nine "perfectly good" gifted children. I have not focused on their giftedness per se. I have not focused on gifted children across grade levels or across ethnic groups. I have not focused on the metalinguistic sentience of children considered average or below average. My focus was very deliberate and my subject choice was calculated. I made my decisions based on what I knew about metalinguistic 

cannot be valid or invalid; what is at issue are the inferences drawn from them."

awareness, what I knew about young children, and what I knew about gifted children.66

Even though I have racked my brain and searched my soul for those principles and assumptions that drive me and that drive my research (presented below), there are others that are hidden from exposure—tacit knowledge that comprises a large portion of my Self—tacit knowledge that refuses to be explicitly probed.67 The theoretical principles and educational assumptions that drive me and drive my research are as follows:

(1) Although I am a researcher, I am first a teacher—a practitioner. In my view, educational research that cannot be translated for teachers or parents is of limited usefulness. Therefore, throughout the conduct and analysis of my study, I wore three hats: that of

66"...all research, however exploratory, involves selection and interpretation. Even in a very small-scale setting we could not begin to describe everything, and any description we do produce is inevitably based on inferences" Hammersley and Atkinson, Ethnography: Principles in Practice, 12-13.

67"Tacit knowledge is all that is remembered somehow, minus that which is remembered in the form of words, symbols, or other rhetorical forms. It is that which permits us to recognize faces, to comprehend metaphors, and to 'know ourselves.' Tacit knowledge includes a multitude of inexpressible associations which give rise to new meanings, new ideas, and new applications of the old" Robert Stake, "The Case Study Method in Social Inquiry," Educational Researcher 7 (1978): 6, in Lincoln and Guba, Naturalistic Inquiry, 195-196.
researcher, that of teacher, and that of translator of research.

(2) I wanted to really find something—something that would stand up to qualitative and quantitative scrutiny from my peers. I did not want to force "results" that were not there. Therefore, even though I knew I had to have something to report for a dissertation (or I would never graduate), I also consider myself ethical enough in my profession and true enough to myself not to conjure something up as "results."

(3) I trust myself and my mind. I believe that as humans we are meaning makers and I believed that if I would allow it, my mind would make meaning. If I have learned nothing else in graduate school, I have learned that I am a learner—a meaning maker. And, since the purpose of this research was to make sense of what was going on in the classrooms I visited, regarding metalinguistic sentience, giftedness, and literacy acquisition and literacy learning, I felt comfortable that if there was anything there to be found, I could find it.

(4) Children are meaning makers and if allowed, they will make sense of life. I believe in children as human beings—not as little adults—but as human beings in the process of growing and becoming.

(5) Children possess a substantial amount of knowledge when they come to school and the best teaching
builds on that foundation. This principle undoubtably affected, to an extent, my choice of classrooms, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

(6) Gifted children are different than non-gifted children—somehow. While I do believe that all children are special and all children are unique, I do not believe that all children are gifted. I have had too much personal experience to believe that aphorism.

(7) The cognitive structure of gifted children is different from the cognitive structure of non-gifted children—somehow. I believe that part of the reason gifted children are different from non-gifted children is because their cognitive structure is different. I do not claim to know how—nor do I think I will be the one to discover it, but somehow, gifted children (and adults) learn differently and process information differently than do non-gifted persons.

(8) The cognitive structure of one gifted child differs from that of another gifted child—somehow. In other words, there is not one cognitive structure for all.

68 Charles Read, "What Children Know About Language: Three Examples," Language Arts 57 (1980): 148, said, "We are not writing messages on a blank slate, and we cannot—and do not want to—wipe the slate clean, even though it is incomplete and partially accurate. Rather, we must strive to build upon the knowledge that the child brings to school....The best we can do now is to respect the children's linguistic knowledge, try to learn from those occasions when it shows through in children's performance, and try to build upon it."
gifted children. The human mind is too complex to expect that there is one structure—and only one structure—which describes the mind of all gifted persons. Giftedness comes in many packages and the accompanying cognitive structures are bound to be different, too.

(9) There is no Truth and no Reality; truth and reality are relative; truth and reality are constructions of the perceiver's mind. Herein, I will present my versions of what I think was occurring as these children acquired and learned literacy.

In the second section of this book, I hope to cast both a bright light and a soft focus on these nine "perfectly good young gifted children" and the contexts in which they operated. They taught me a great deal and I hope that I can share some of it with the readers of this book. The writing in the second section will use less exposition and more narrative as the story begins to unfold.

69Peacock, Anthropological Lens, xi-xii, uses the analogy of "harsh light/soft focus": In the physics of photography, the brighter the light, the smaller the aperture of the lens; with more light, a smaller hole is sufficient to transmit the image to the film. And the smaller the aperture, the larger is the depth of field. That is, the photographer can include in focus the background and foreground of the object as well as the object itself. If this field could be extended infinitely, it could even include the camera.... Rather than focus narrowly on the object, anthropology blurs the boundary between objects and milieu so as to include not only the object but also its background, sideground, and foreground; this perception of the total milieu we call holism."
Some readers may be surprised at my use of the word "story." But I have chosen it quite deliberately. Stories are a way of making sense—of giving meaning to observable events by making connections between them. However, for any set of events there is almost always more than one possible interpretation—as a day in any courtroom would amply demonstrate. Carrying out research is, in this respect, like any other form of inquiry based on evidence. Only a certain number of events can be observed and although, like good detectives, researchers have hunches to guide them in choosing what events to observe and what clues to look for, in the last resort they have to go beyond the evidence in order to present a coherent account. The available evidence is given meaning by being embedded in a story in which it makes sense.

Stories, like other language forms, are created in the telling. But, most important, a story is the expression of the present attempt by the teller to find meaning in those experiences. My purpose in writing this book, therefore, is to make sense of the evidence that was collected during the research project and of the ideas that I have obtained through reading and discussion, and to tell the meaning that I have made to others who share my concerns.70

As Gordon Wells so eloquently opened his book, The Meaning Makers, so I would like to close this chapter.

70 Wells, The Meaning Makers, xii-xiii.
CHAPTER 6

"WHOLE LANGUAGE?"

One day, David and his group were at the back table writing problems that had "8" in them. Even though there was a great deal of conversation at the table (partly because I was sitting there), David got his ten problems done quickly. The substitute teacher came back once to check on the children's progress. Megan was also finished. She and David were instructed by the substitute to turn over on the back and write some more problems.

David began writing his problems backwards. When he pointed this out to me, I said, "Uh-oh, that's not a very good one."

"Yeah, because I'm doing it backwards." Another child heard him and pointed out where he was supposed to be putting his problems. David informed him, "She said to do it on the back, so I can do 'em backwards." He continued to "play" with different ways of writing his "8"s, making them every which way, and pointing out to the other children who were watching that a backwards 8 looked the same as a forwards 8.
Another child walked up just as I noticed that David had made some "8"s sideways on his math paper. Kirsten, the other child, looked intently at David's paper. I asked, "Do you know what a sideways "8" means?" Kirsten looked at me as if I were speaking another language, so I repeated my question: "Do you know what a sideways "8" means—when you have an "8" like this...sideways? Do you know what that means?" Kirsten puzzledly shook her head. I directed my question to David. "David, do you know what a sideways "8" means?"

David's face indicated he not only understood my question, but that there was an answer somewhere in his head. "Uh, let me think about it for a second...I've heard it before. Uh, it means...I've heard of it before...I can't remember."

"It means the word 'infinity.' Do you know what that means?"

"It's a number," David said with assuredness.

"It is a number. It's a number that goes on..."

"Nobody can count it," he interrupted, knowing that he was correct.

"That's exactly right! How did you know that?" I said in amazement.

"My brother studied it in Mrs. Cobb's class. When he was in first grade and second grade. He did two grades in one year."
This is obviously not average conversational fare with a just-turned-six-year-old. But then, the nine children I eventually focused on were certainly not average. And, conversations such as this one did not take place the first day I walked into those classrooms. It took me some time to develop a relationship with the children so that I was a fairly natural part of their environment and so that questions I asked were viewed as deserving of answers.

It is important for readers to know how I pinpointed the nine children who were my informants, as well as how I developed a relationship with them such that they would accept me.\(^1\) I will attempt in this chapter to explain how both these events occurred, beginning first with how the

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\(^1\)The term "informant" is one used by ethnographers to identify anyone in the field who lets the ethnographer "in on" what is going on, through conversation, explanation of events, and so on. The term 'key informant' is reserved for those "individuals who possess special knowledge, status, or communicative skills and who are willing to share that knowledge and skill with the researcher" Goetz and LeCompte, Ethnography and Qualitative Design, 119. Using these definitions, all of the teachers and all of the children in the classrooms where I did my fieldwork were informants, but the nine gifted children who were the primary subjects of my investigation were 'key informants.' Pelto and Pelto, Anthropological Research, 75, offer support for choosing key informants who are "unusually eloquent and sensitive in their presentation of personal and cultural data." The children I focused on were both unusually eloquent and sensitive.
particular classrooms were selected and then how the individual gifted children were selected.2

The Classrooms

As explained in Chapter 1, a total of seventeen teachers volunteered to allow me into their classrooms. Since I had no contingency plan for eliminating the excess, I just started visiting as many classrooms as I could. I essentially spent all of September determining in which four classrooms I was going to spend the rest of the year. Although I did not have any written criteria set up for determining the classrooms, as soon as I began visiting, subjective, internal criteria began formulating in my mind and in my reflective journal. As soon as possible after each day of observing in a classroom, I would write down my reflections of the day, including my impression of certain events that were occurring, the type of language interaction that was allowed or encouraged, the degree of acceptance of

2In later chapters, I will be more specific regarding what exactly I looked at and how I interpreted it. In this way, I will "operationalize," to an extent. I find the notion of fully operationalizing incongruent with the ethnographic paradigm; that is, I can be specific from my point of view, based on my background. Pelto and Pelto, Anthropological Research, 41, agree: "The attitude of strict operationalism may be useful in some areas of science, but it is far too restrictive to be useful in anthropology. Insistence on fully operationalized research methods appears to arise in part from a misunderstanding of the structure of research operations in the so-called hard sciences."
student risk-taking, and thoughts concerning "interesting" children. As I look back over my reflective journal, there were four implicit criteria by which I judged classrooms in terms of their acceptability for the project.

(1) The classroom had to be a place where children were allowed to talk. I could not very well study child language if there was not any.

(2) The classroom not only had to be a place where children were allowed to talk, but where their talk was valued. In fact, not only their talk had to be valued by the teacher, but they had to be valued, as children and as human beings.

(3) The classroom teacher's management style had to be such that I could tolerate it.

(4) The classroom teacher had to value or at least accept gifted children's abilities.

In order to further explain the four criteria, I will use some examples from my field notes and reflective journal. In each of the four cases, I will provide an "acceptable" and an "unacceptable" classroom. I hope that readers do not infer that I was making judgments about whether a particular teacher was a "good" teacher or whether a particular classroom was a "good" place to learn. What I had to do, however, was make judgments about whether the classroom was an environment where I could get "good" data.
(1) The classroom had to be a place where children were allowed to talk. For some readers, this might seem like a superfluous criterion, because certainly the expectation is that in the primary grades, particularly in kindergarten, the children must be talking all the time—because does not all the research indicate that young children need to be talking in order to learn and that as young children's oral language skills develop, so too will their other language skills (reading, writing, listening)? The answer to this compound question is "YES!"
Unfortunately, every classroom I visited was not a place that said, "Language valued here."

During the first week of school, I arrived at one kindergarten class just as the children were arriving. As the children came into the room, the teacher had them sit down on the floor. She collected various articles from the children (folders, kleenex, lunch kits, and so on)—one item at a time, one child at a time. Needless to say, it took a long time. After the children had been sitting on the floor for nearly thirty minutes, several of them began thrashing about and talking to one another. The teacher said sternly, "This is a quiet time. I know that's hard to get used to, but that's school." Although I had already gotten some other indicators in the previous thirty minutes, with that one statement, she essentially staked her position regarding the value of oral language in the classroom and I knew that
I would not be able to obtain the kind of language data I needed.

On the acceptable side of the coin, there were several classrooms, not all of which I was eventually able to visit throughout the year. One class that I did spend a great deal of time in was Mrs. Perrone's Spanish immersion classroom. On the first morning that I visited, Mrs. Perrone had on her Spanish apron which meant that she was only speaking Spanish. There was a "buzz" about the room as the children worked at their learning centers--no loud talking, just children talking as they worked. When the children gathered on the rug for their morning exercises, several children shared spontaneously. It was not a planned "show and tell" time. As Mrs. Perrone asked them about the date and the weather in Spanish, children interpreted what she was asking and/or took risks and responded to her questions. Later, when it was time for the children to go to recess and she was telling them (in Spanish) that they were going to be playing "Squirrels in the Trees" when they got outside, there was a lot of "meaning negotiation" going on--various children were working at making meaning from what she was saying and she was working at helping them make meaning. Even before the end of the morning, I knew this was a classroom where I could get "good" data.

(2) The classroom not only had to be a place where children were allowed to talk, but where their talk was
valued. This criterion really was extended beyond "valuing talk." I was looking for teachers who obviously valued children, that is, teachers who appreciated children as children and children as human beings, recognizing that because they were children, they had to have more time or more understanding or more patience than adults, and recognizing that because they were humans, they deserved to be treated with respect.

Happily, none of the teachers who volunteered were terribly lacking in this area. One teacher, however, treated the children like they were little creatures with different feelings than people have. Her tone of voice was always one of mistrust, implying that she would catch them when they did not do right. For example, when she was collecting the children's folders, she was telling them that they were to let her know if there was anything in them that their mother had sent. "I'm going to take your word for this about whether there is anything in the folder. You've got to be responsible." The tone, though, indicated resignation at having to "take their word for it" and that she just knew they would forget to tell her and she would have to point out that they had not been responsible.

Another show of disregard for a child's feelings occurred when the teacher was showing the children how to put their lunch kits in their lockers. When she called B.J., a child who was dressed less well than the other children, she saw
that he did not have a lunch kit. She asked him if he had any money. When he shook his head, no, she trilled with mock concern, "How are you going to eat lunch?" He held up his lunch ticket (for government subsidized free lunch). Mrs. Anderson showed him where the ticket was to go. Then she said, with some satisfaction, "I don't have a B and a J on here (the locker) because your first name is Barry and that's what you're going to learn how to write. You probably don't recognize it because you're not used to seeing it." This was on the second day of school. My journal entry that evening was, "Anderson's room--don't think I can stand to be in there for long--except that she has several very interesting children." I never went back because I found other interesting children in classrooms where I enjoyed being!

One classroom where I found *very* interesting children and enjoyed being was Ms. Benson's room. From the first day to the last day I was in there, it was evident that she cared for children and valued their company, their ideas, their joys, and their troubles. Children were free to try out their ideas, without fear of being ridiculed by the teacher. Several examples from the first day I observed in Ms. Benson's class will demonstrate her attitude.

The children were playing a rhyming game during reading time. They were told that they would be given a clue and that the answer would rhyme with "-et." The first
clue was "this means to be soaked with water." Holly answered, "bath." Christopher answered, "wet." Ms. Benson's response: "'Wet' is correct. 'Bath' was a good word but it didn't rhyme with -et." Later the same day, when the children were being called back to their reading groups, Chris C. asked if he could bring Wrinkle back to the table (Wrinkle was his Sharpei puppy puppet). Ms. Benson asked, "Can Wrinkle read?" When Chris C. emphatically replied, "Yes!" Ms. Benson said, "Well, then Wrinkle can come back!" Her manner with the children was patient, friendly, caring, and empathetic. It was a pleasure watching children learn in her room.

(3) The classroom teacher's management style had to be such that I could tolerate it. In one kindergarten classroom, the teacher had several little "songs" that she used to remind children to be quiet or to sit still (as if this is either easy or possible for five-year-olds!). The day I was in there, the teacher was checking to see if students knew their phone numbers by calling on children to say theirs. Some knew part of it but not all of it, and after several children had recited all or part of their phone numbers, I could hear other children practicing their phone numbers to themselves or to someone else at their table. The teacher began reciting (with actions), "I fold my hands and sit up tall so I can see and hear it all." By the time she got to "hands," the children had joined in. I
knew this was not the first time they had heard this homily. By the time I left ninety minutes later, I had heard "I fold my hands..." three more times, the stirring "Open, shut them, open, shut them, put them in your lap" twice, and the strummed xylophone (which signals "Be quiet") once. By the end of the ninety minutes, it was apparent to me that not only was children's language not valued, or allowed, but the way the teacher went about ensuring quiet was both silly and insulting.

One classroom that I did not think would be acceptable, at first, due to a seemingly limited amount of talking, ended up being one of the ones I chose. Mrs. Yager was a delightful woman who had taught kindergarten for many years. She had very definite ideas about when children should and should not be talking. She made it quite clear to the children what was and was not acceptable. She was a very experienced and knowledgeable teacher and could almost sense when a child was about to act up. Instead of letting the child misbehave, Mrs. Yager would calmly walk over to the child and pat him or her very lovingly, would call on the child to answer the next question, or would make a general statement regarding conduct. Children were treated as responsible—and as the year progressed, they became very responsible.

(4) The classroom teacher had to value or at least accept gifted children's abilities. As a teacher, I
delighted in the children in my classes, but took particular
pleasure in interacting with the gifted members of the
class, eventually teaching at a school for the gifted. It
was therefore very difficult for me to imagine anyone not
wanting gifted students in a class, not liking gifted
students (because of their giftedness), or not doing
everything in one's power to teach and challenge the gifted
students just as one did for the average and less able
students. Unfortunately, however, there were teachers who
did not share my views. I knew, therefore, that since my
focus children were going to be gifted, I would not be able
to sit and watch them tormented or brushed aside by their
teachers.

One classroom where I would not have been able to
sit and observe (quietly) was Mrs. Bever's kindergarten. On
the day when I went there for the first time, one little
girl immediately caught my attention. She knew every answer
to every question the teacher asked. It was apparent that
her mind was going a mile a minute because in several
instances, she even got ahead of her teacher, correctly
anticipating the next question or the next direction. She
came up to me and began asking me questions: Why are you in
here? Why are you tape recording us? What is the orange
rectangle on the tape recorder for? and so on... I was
very intrigued. Unfortunately, her teacher was not so
intrigued. When Sarah answered for another child, she was
asked, "Is your name _____?" in a cold voice. Later, several children were getting into their supply boxes and moving around when they were not supposed to be. Sarah was the one singled out and sent to sit alone at a table. Thirty minutes later, Sarah was allowed to rejoin the group as they talked about a birthday graph they were constructing. A number of children were getting quite restless, dropping their money, making noises, moving tables, and so on. Sarah was enthusiastically taking part in the question and answer session. She had her hand up for every question. Once, in her eagerness, she accidently knocked a box of plastic markers off the table where she was sitting. Mrs. Bever gave her a look that would intimidate an adult. Sarah started to tell her what had happened. She was cut off with, "I know what you're doing!" She was sent to sit by the door, obviously feeling very frustrated at having been unjustly punished. It was all I could do not to speak up in her behalf. I knew that my remarks would not be welcomed that day—or any other day.

On the other side of the coin, many teachers made it very clear that they found high ability children both challenging and rewarding to teach. I knew it was not just a "show" for me. In informal conversations with various teachers, they talked about individual children and how clever they were, how able they were—and specifically the kinds of things that they could do. It was apparent from
their voices and the animation with which they talked about these children that they found them as fascinating as I did. Later, after I identified the particular children I was focusing on, it was fun to share something I had noticed with the teacher and have them share with me. One teacher, in particular, wrote down various things that the children said so that she would not forget to tell me when I came to the class.

It is important that I make it clear that I did not look for classrooms where teachers taught just like I did. At one time in my career (right out of college), I thought my way was the only way to teach. But through the years I have "mellowed" (matured) and have learned that there are many ways to be effective with students. In fact, sometimes, there were methods and materials that teachers used that were almost the complete opposite of what I would have used in the same situation. But, their differences were not important; teaching methods and materials were not my focus. Gifted children were.

As I stated earlier in this chapter, the first month of the fieldwork was spent winnowing the classrooms down to a manageable number, four. Although, as I indicated, there were certain classrooms that I was hesitant to use due to a concern for the amount of "good" data I could collect, eliminating those still left me with more than four
classrooms. So, then, I used other criteria to narrow it down to the "final four."

First, I wanted to use two classrooms in both of the two schools. Secondly, my first month of fieldwork indicated that the gifted children in first grade were already reading so well, that in order to study gifted children as they acquired reading ability, kindergarten would be much more fruitful. I did however want to have one first grade. Thirdly, I preferred to be in a classroom where the teacher had not just made a show of volunteering; she was really willing to allow me in to her "domain" when I needed to come—not just on certain days or at certain times, and so on. I preferred to be welcomed and not feel like an intruder. These three criteria still left at least twice as many classrooms as I needed. So I was able to use the children as my final winnowing touchstone, which was as it should have been.

The Children

Prior to conducting my study, there were many people who asked what kind of a test I was going to use to determine who was gifted in the classrooms I was visiting. When I told them that I was not going to use a test, many were skeptical that I would be able to identify the gifted children without the means of some kind of test. I am confident, however, that anyone who had a background in
giftedness such that they were familiar with the characteristics of young gifted children would have identified the same children I did as being gifted.

There are numerous characteristics that young gifted children may exhibit. They tend to have extensive vocabularies that they know how to use, they tend to be very inquisitive, they tend to have a great deal of knowledge about at least one area and/or some knowledge across a wide range of areas, they tend to grasp concepts faster than their agemates, they tend to grasp concepts that are beyond the abilities of their agemates, they tend to read early or learn how to read very quickly once they begin reading, they tend to be self-assured about their abilities, and they tend to have well-developed senses of humor.

An additional characteristic that is somewhat more difficult to describe is a "more of" factor; gifted children often have intense responses to other people, to situations, to ideas, and to themselves. The term used by David Wechsler to describe this aspect of the gifted is "more of." When one observes a group of gifted youngsters, their "more of" intelligence is easily recognized, but so is their "more of" personality; the gifted are not dull! Their heightened awareness, sensitivity, forcefulness, humor, responsiveness, and self-respect all interact to form a

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"more of" group of students. It is not surprising that
gifted children are often social leaders, or that they
possess dormant leadership ability that, once awakened, can
be both powerful and charismatic.

Terman, the grandfather of research on the gifted,
referred to this "more of" aspect of the gifted as their
"ZQ" or "zip quotient." When very young, the gifted child
with a high ZQ may appear hyperactive—a result of the lack
of meaningful tasks and challenges. Such children tend to
have a less-than-average need for sleep and may exhibit an
intense physical and psychological drive. This drive can
become almost an obsession when they are particularly
involved in a task; they may work until physical exhaustion
prevails.

It is important to notice that I used "they tend" in
reference to each characteristic. Some gifted children will
have all these characteristics, others will have one or two,
and still others will not exhibit any of these
characteristics. The children that I eventually chose,
however, exhibited all, or nearly all, of the
characteristics listed above—albeit in varying degrees.
Let me explain how each one of the children, although not

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4Lewis M. Terman, "The Physical and Mental Traits of
Gifted Children," in The Education of Gifted Children, Part
1, Twenty-Third Yearbook of the National Society for the
Study of Education, ed. Guy M. Whipple (Bloomington,
superhuman, certainly was a young human being with extraordinary gifts in particular areas.

The Kindergartners

Kelli

Kelli was small, but strong and like a burst of energy. She was very self-assured, sometimes to the point of being cheeky. Although there were times she was quite patient, for example when she seemed to realize that the person she was working with did not have her same capabilities, her tolerance for others (adults) who "should know better," was low. For example, several times when she asked me a question about how to spell a sound, and I asked her what word the sound was in, she made it clear through body language and her voice that she found that to be a ridiculous question. Another time, when I persisted in asking her why a certain two-letter group was considered one letter, she got quite put out with me.

Kelli asked, "Do you copy what we write?" When I nodded, she said, "We have to write a lot. Six pages. Uniform. That's a long word. Six letters. One-two-three-four-five-six."

I said, "Count them again."

She did. "One-" (pointing to 'u') "two-" (pointing to 'n') "three-" (pointing to 'i') "four-" (pointing to 'f')
"five-" (pointing to 'or', which was grouped together)
"six-" (pointing to 'm')."

"Tell me what each of the letters are."

"'u' 'n' 'i' 'f' 'o' 'r' 'm'." When I asked her to count them again, she arrived at six, as before. When I looked questioningly at her, and held out my fingers as if to count, she inferred correctly that I was about to ask her to count the letters again. So, without my prompt, she said, with emphasis, "'u' 'n' 'i' 'f' 'o' and 'r' 'o' and 'r' are one s— letter. That's what we're sounding them for, one letter. If we didn't, it would be seven (letters) in uniform." When she said "'o' and 'r'" she said it very quickly and gave me the impression that she knew very well they were not one letter, and that I should be aware of why she was counting them as one. In other words, I "should know better" than to grill her over whether something had six or seven letters. She was probably right.

Naturally, I could not leave well enough alone. I just had to ask, "Are 'o' 'r' one letter?" (using her words).

Simultaneously, as Brooke, Kelli's partner, answered "YES!" Kelli answered, "NO! 'o''r' is two letters but it's just in a word so we call it one letter."

When Brooke repeated, "It's just one whole letter," and used her hands seeming to indicate that it was smushed together, Kelly very loudly contradicted her.
"It's not one whole letter, Brooke!"

Brooke tried, "One whole sound?"

I nodded. "Yeah, that would be a good way to say it, one whole sound."

The first day I observed in Mrs. Culture's room, as I took field notes, I wrote down the names of several children who struck me as ones to watch. I underlined Kelli's name twice, to emphasize my interest in her. The same day I observed in Kelli's room for the first time, I listened to my audiotapes in the car, noting a particularly interesting lesson on rhyming words. When I listened to that same tape nearly a year and a half later, I noticed how Kelli's voice was the one that was loud and clear on every answer—indicating her knowledge and her assuredness with her knowledge.

Although I tried not to narrow my focus too soon, without giving myself ample time and opportunity to watch numerous children, Kelli just stood out every time. Her progress through the year bore out my initial intuition. She was more advanced in her thinking than were other children; she understood number "families" faster than other children in her class, she understood that "wishing" would not make something happen before other children caught on to a particular question/answer sequence led by the teacher, she noticed patterns and produced patterns in mathematics, art, and language arts without being asked to do so.
The third month of my study, I wrote the following in my reflective journal regarding Kelli:

Kelli continues to fascinate me. She's another one who really makes me want to follow one child around for days on end. One reason she's so fascinating is because since she talks all the time, she lets me know more of what is going on than some children do. I'm privy to more of her thoughts than I am to some of the others'. Kelli's writing process is part of what is so interesting and with her, it is more of a process than it is with some children. She makes changes, etc. Her words are not set in stone.

Kelli's natural tendency to provide "running commentary" made her an ideal "key informant" for this research.

Stephanie

From the first to the last time I observed Stephanie, I was struck with her absolute joie de vivre. I had to find words and phrases that would describe her so that I could try to capture on paper how she looked. One day, I wrote, "Stephanie's face is alight!" Whenever I was observing Stephanie, her face, her body language, and her voice manifested the fact that she was thrilled to be living and experiencing life—and that she expected life to continue being as wonderful as it was at that very moment. After every visit to Stephanie's classroom, I commented on her utter joy and excitement with life. I did not find it at all surprising when I read the following entry in the journal kept by her mother: "2/18/87 Note: I realize I use alot of exclamation points when quoting Stephanie. The reason, of course, is that Stephanie rarely talks in
anything but exclamations." When I look back at my field notes—I too have nearly everything that is a quote from Stephanie punctuated by exclamation points! Of course!

Although Stephanie leaped out at me from the first day as someone who might turn out to be an interesting subject for my study, I tried not to lock on to her too quickly. But, just like with Kelli, there was no way to ignore her giftedness. Her giftedness shone—not like a light under a basket—but rather like a beacon under a sieve.

Besides her ZQ, I also noticed Stephanie's sensitivity to others and her facility with language on the first day I observed in her room. Several children were meeting with the teacher, doing a sequencing activity. One of the children in the group did not appear ready for school. He was completely unsure of what was expected of him, in terms of school-related tasks. He essentially seemed "out of it." When the teacher was trying to get him to tell which picture should go next in the sequence, Stephanie could hardly contain herself, because she knew the answer. She did not blurt it out, but rather tried to give Jerry hints. The picture was of a chicken. Stephanie first tried giving him phonetic hints: "/ch/ /ch/ /ch/." When this didn't work, she said, "It lives on a farm." Next she tried making the sound of a chicken, "Cluck, cluck, cluck." My impression was that she was not trying to show her
knowledge as much as she was trying to help Jerry show his. There were numerous incidents that I witnessed throughout the year like this.

Stephanie's ability to master certain concepts that other kindergarteners were not grasping was quite apparent during the first month I visited, as I was trying to narrow my focus to a few, key children. Every morning in her kindergarten, as in most kindergartens across the United States, there were "morning exercises." These morning exercises included doing the calendar, determining the weather, saying the pledge, singing a patriotic song, and counting. Time after time, I could hear Stephanie above the other children as they were to be reciting, for example, numbers—either counting by ones, counting by twos, counting by fives, or counting by tens.

Stephanie was quite adept at picking up on new ideas presented by her teacher. Mrs. Yager had introduced the concept of analogies to her class on a day when I was not there. The next time I was there, she thought I would be interested to see what they knew. She showed them a rebus analogy (a drawing of a mitten, a hand, a shoe, and a foot). She said, "I want to talk about our analogy." She held up the rebus and asked, "Who can tell me why this is an analogy?" Stephanie immediately flung her hand in the air and was called on.
"The mitten is the home for the hand and the shoe is a home for the foot!" she stated with conviction.

Mrs. Yager looked at me and I could tell she was also impressed with Stephanie's response. She showed a few other analogies to the children and tried to get them to tell the implied relationships. Although there were other children who eventually came up with some rendition of the relationship, no one else appeared to have a grasp on it like Stephanie did. Several weeks later, Mrs. Yager shared with me that Stephanie had taken the word cards, 'hot', 'fire', 'cold', and 'ice' and had arranged them thus: hot:cold::fire:ice. She then announced that these were opposites!

Throughout the course of the study, she delighted me with her metalinguistic sentience and her giftedness just as I seemed to delight her with my personality, my clothes, my jewelry, my equipment, and my attention to her.

Ben

Ben was in the same class as Stephanie was. Early in the semester, Ben informed me that he was going to marry Stephanie. The way he talked about her, it reminded me of Charlie Brown being in love with the little red-haired girl.

Ben did not come to my attention as quickly as did Stephanie. Through a series of visits and discussions, though, I began to recognize his affinity for language, his
creativity, and his sense of humor. One of the stories that his teacher, Mrs. Yager told me, also seems to attest to his self-awareness. Apparently, before school started, Ben was having quite a few apprehensions about what was going to be expected of him and whether or not he was supposed to know everything as soon as he got there. His parents tried to help him understand that school was a place to learn things and that he did not have to know everything once he got there—in other words, he did not have to be perfect—a standard he had apparently already set for himself.

A few days into the school year, Mrs. Yager called on Ben, and he was unable to give the answer. He immediately informed her that, it did not matter that he did not know the answer because he did not have to know everything in kindergarten. According to Mrs. Yager, she eventually had to have a talk with Ben’s parents because she felt that he was taking it a little too easy on himself and was not pushing himself to excel as he could have.

From my experience as an elementary school teacher, there were almost always one or two children in a class who seemed to always be harboring a pun or a joke or a humorous thought. Ben was such a child. His humor often came out in a way that some perceived as "smart alec" but he was not intentionally mean and was in fact quite sensitive. For example, when doing analogies one day, Mrs. Yager asked Ben to tell why "mitten goes with hand and shoe goes with foot."
He said, "You wouldn't think a foot would fit in a mitten or a hand in a shoe, would you?"

Another playful trait of Ben's was his love for exaggeration. He would often launch into one of his tall tales and as long as no one questioned him, he continued. But when he knew he had been "found out," he would laugh at his cleverness in telling the story. I always had a sense with Ben that he was observing what was going on around him: taking mental notes of the people and situations and what each meant.

David

As I got ready to write about David, I realized that I had already used several examples from my observations of him to introduce various topics and/or make certain points in this book. That alone serves as an introduction to this very bright little boy.

David was another "more of" child and was probably one of the most well-rounded of all the gifted children I observed. He was extremely intelligent, was facile with language, possessed mathematical reasoning ability, knew a great deal of information about many different topics, demonstrated leadership qualities among his classmates, was well-liked by the other children, and had excellent motor skills, thereby excelling on the playground as well as the classroom.
Recently, I talked to David's mother and asked how he was doing in the compacted curriculum first/second grade. She shared that the teacher, Mrs. Cobb, had commented that whereas she had considered his older brother the brightest child she had ever taught, now that she had David, she considered him even more gifted—and more well-rounded. If you consider that his older brother, when seven, told his mother he was having trouble going to sleep because he was trying to figure out what the world would be like if the temperature suddenly went to absolute zero, you can appreciate the comparison between the two boys.

The very first day I was in Mrs. Perrone's room, one of the children was calling the roll. When he got to David's last name, David reassured him: "That's a hard last name of mine." This was the first of many references I would hear from David regarding names, words, sounds, books, foreign language—just various aspects of language in general.

It was impossible to be around David for any length of time and not be aware of his giftedness. When talking with him, although I knew he was in kindergarten, I had a sense that he was much more mature—in his thinking, in his perception, and in his cognitive abilities. I often found myself having conversations with him—not like conversations I would have with another adult—but certainly not like conversations I would have with a kindergartener, either.
There were also numerous times when his classroom demeanor was more mature than the other children's. He was not a "goody two shoes" by any means. It was as if he not only knew that certain behavior was not appropriate for the class but also that he knew it was beneath him. There was a quality of intelligence and sensitivity about him that makes him both incredibly endearing and fascinating.

I opened this chapter with an excerpt that demonstrated David's grasp of infinity. Other concepts that he seemed to grasp included figurative language and foreign language. Both of these will be presented in upcoming chapters.

Joel

If any of "my" children looked like the stereotypic gifted child, it was Joel. He was smaller in stature than many of the other children, did not have good gross motor skills, and wore glasses. And, he, like David, was impossible to spend time around without being bombarded with his intellectual ability. Joel's use of language was far beyond his average agemates. He was extremely inquisitive and had a great deal of knowledge across a wide variety of subjects as well as incredible knowledge in one subject—dinosaurs. His sense of humor was advanced for his age and he was very creative. He displayed a large amount of self-confidence when he was working in an area that he knew a
great deal about. For example, he did not hesitate to
correct others if they were wrong about dinosaurs, or some
other area he knew a substantial amount about. On the other
hand, he had very high standards for himself; it seemed that
he compared himself to his concept of perfect.

For example, on the first day I observed in Joel's
classroom, he called the roll. He did very well on
everyone's name (except for David's last name). Later,
during center time, I walked up to Joel and complimented him
on his reading of the names earlier that morning. Then I
asked, "Where did you learn how to read so well?"

Joel replied, "Well, I'm just learning."

"You're just learning?! You sounded very good to
me. What else can you read?" I asked.

"Well, I can't read. Well, I can read some books.
Some books I can't. Some books I can. Some books I can't."

This was all said rather matter-of-factly. So I
persisted. "What can you read?"

"I can read 'Fun to Read' books, but I can't read
all the 'Easy Readers'. You see, 'Fun to Read' books, I can
read, but I can't read all the 'Easy Readers' and the books
on the next shelf..."

"When do you think you'll be able to read those?"

"Well, I'll probably read them when I'm six or
seven. I'm five right now."

"You're five now?" I echoed, brilliantly.
He quickly corrected himself (and me). "I'm five and a half now. I just remembered, Aaron just had his birthday on the fourteenth." (Aaron is his younger brother).

Several months later, when I was interviewing Joel about his perceptions of reading and learning, I asked him if he knew how to read: "This is an easy question for you. Do you know how to read?"

"A little bit," he replied quickly.

"A little bit?!" I countered.

"Yeah, I can only read a few words, but I can't just read all words. I can just read a few words that I know how to read and that's all."

"I would say more than a few--you can read, Joel," I commented.

"Yeah..." he agreed, tentatively.

"Do you think I can read all words?" I asked.

"Well, maybe so, maybe not," he answered, sounding quite matter of fact.

"Well, not all," I replied. "I don't think anybody can read all the words."

As I will discuss in upcoming chapters, Joel was an excellent reader for his age. He devoured books about dinosaurs and enjoyed stories about Amelia Bedelia as well as other informational and fictional books. He was plowing headlong into literacy, acquiring it at a rapid rate,
without undue concern for the little things that might have slowed him down (Figure 11).

Megan

Megan was a kindergartener in Mrs. Perrone's Spanish immersion class, as were David and Joel. The three of them comprised the "Blue" reading group, the top reading group in the class. Mrs. Perrone added two other children to the group in order to enlarge the size of the group and to challenge the two added members. The group worked well together, but there was never any question among the members of the group or any of the other children who the top readers in the class were.
Megan learned how to read on her own. As will be discussed further in an upcoming chapter, she apparently just decided that she was going to learn to read and she badgered members of her family to teach her. Even though they provided assistance, I still consider this to be "learning how to read on her own," because of the self-motivation and the "earliness" of it (prior to beginning kindergarten). Her insistence on learning to read as well as her insistence (and persistence) in other areas of her young life, characterize Megan quite well.

As I have said about some of the other children, one could not spend time around Megan without being struck by her extraordinary intelligence. Often, when I was around her, I felt like she had all her "sensors" on, that is, she was absorbing absolutely everything there was to absorb in her environment. I also felt strongly that, while still a child, Megan had certain perceptions and sensitivities that were far beyond her years. Sometimes I perceived a "distance" between Megan and whatever situation she was in. It was not that she was an isolate, she was not. It was more that she removed herself a little bit in order to be able to observe what was going on better—to get a more objective perspective.

Megan's personality is very strong and one gets a sense of that strength from being around her. Other children seemed also to recognize her strength as well as
her abilities. She has the potential to be a leader, although my impression is that I am not sure she will choose that role—it will just come to her by the sheer force of her personality and ability.

The First Graders

Bryan F.

Like Ben in Mrs. Yager's kindergarten, Bryan F. did not come as immediately to my attention as did the other two children I focused on in his first grade class. But over a period of weeks, Bryan F.'s giftedness became more apparent until there was no question but that I wanted him to be one of my "key informants."

I found Bryan F. to be a highly introspective child. All of the children I focused on were introspective to some extent although it was not always evident until probed. Bryan F., on the other hand not only looked like he was thinking hard, but talked about thinking, and talked about thinking about thinking. He was a very intense child, intense beyond the majority of his agemates.

Bryan F. was not in the top reading group but rather in the middle reading group. For a time, I did not understand why he was not in the top reading group but later, I decided it must have something to do with his "performance" during reading group. He gave the impression of not reading as well as some other children did. My
feeling, though, was that he made decisions about how and where to expend his energy, and reading group was not one of the places he chose to do so. Consequently, he was not in the top reading group. His "reading group placement" belied his ability to grasp language and literacy efficiently.

As will be presented in an upcoming chapter, many of my perceptions about Bryan F. were borne out by his mother's journal about Bryan F.'s early language experiences. She recalls how he wanted to learn words, wanted to learn to read, used language that was apparently advanced for his age, and corrected others' incorrect use of language, from the time he was very young. His facility with language and literacy continued during the year I observed him.

Christopher P.

It is impossible to describe Christopher P. without using superlatives. He was among the best and the brightest first graders—in terms of intelligence, personality, and physical ability—that most teachers will ever have the opportunity to teach. Whenever I told anyone at Shelton Elementary that I was going to be in Mrs. Benson's classroom, the comment was made, "Oh--Christopher P.!!" Even before going to Mrs. Benson's classroom, several kindergarten teachers told me that if I was interested in observing a gifted child, I should go to Mrs. Benson's room because Christopher P. was in there.
Well, sure enough, when I got to Mrs. Benson's classroom, I figured out who Christopher P. was right away. He just stood out from the class. And, I feel strongly, he will continue to stand out in any group of which he is a part. There was a strength of personality that made him a natural leader; he had self-confidence, empathy, a feel for others, sensitivity to problems, and he was thoughtful and polite. This is an unusual description for a first grader, but all of these traits were already apparent at six, and many, I would guess, were already apparent long before I knew him.

Like Stephanie, whom I described earlier, Christopher P. was excited about life and excited about learning. He was an active participant in all the events surrounding him. He gauged the level of participation that enabled him to interact fully with others in the situation, but that enabled others to fully interact as they chose. In other words, although he had the capacity to dominate nearly every child and every situation with which he came in contact, he did not. His sensitivity to others and to situations was nothing less than astonishing.

Christopher C.

The only child in Mrs. Benson's class that Christopher P. would have been unable to dominate, had he chosen to exert his personality thus, was Christopher C.
Not surprisingly, Christopher P. and Christopher C. were best friends. They were able to communicate with each other in a way that they realized they could not communicate with others.

Christopher C. was another child who, just by being, demonstrated his giftedness. He exuded so much energy that one had to notice him. The energy was all positive energy, not "look at me, I need attention" energy. His personality and ability simply overflowed his mind and body such that one had to notice. He read well, he played well, he wrote well, he "computed" well—he did everything I ever observed him doing—well.

Christopher C. had a very sensitive nature, not uncommon in highly gifted children. During the year of my fieldwork, his beloved grandfather died. From my observations of him, from his mother's and my conversations, and from his mother's journal on Christopher C., this death was extremely painful to him and was the cause of a great deal of questioning about life and death. The following are brief excerpts from his mother's journal:

2/8/87

Chris: If Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, where's Papaw?
Mother: I talked with him a long time; this question really threw me.

2/13/87

Chris: Mom, why were you at school today?
Mother: Chris, I'm always at school on Tuesdays.
Chris: Did you see Ms. McIntosh?
Mother: Yes.
Chris: Did she tell you me and Chris P. were special kids? Mrs. Benson says we are.
Mother: Yes, you're special and so is Chris P.
Chris: If I'm so special, why did Papaw die? And I think Chris P.'s dog died and I know Ryan's did.
Mother: Part of life is dying and it's hard for us all to understand.

2/14/87

Chris: Ryan cried at school today.
Mother: Why?
Chris: Because his dog died.
Mother: Are you sad?
Chris: Yes, can we buy him a new dog? Mom, I've got a new 'teshment'. I want things to die awhile, rest, and come back to life. They could rest on Jupiter 'cause that's the biggest planet.
Mother: That would be nice, but that's not how life is.

As with so many aspects of life and learning that Christopher C. came into contact with, he worked through the life/death concept in his extraordinary mind, using all the powers of thought and reasoning that he had available.

Summary

I could not have asked for better key informants for my research. Their willingness to have me follow them around, ask them questions, hook up microphones to them, videotape them, and so on, was commendable. They took the

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5 Their acceptance of me was more rapid than I could have expected, probably due to their youth and accommodation. Agar, Professional Stranger, 60-61, found that in his experience, "People eventually come to accept you for what you are--a strange person who asks many dumb questions. Starting from scratch, it seems to take me about three months until some quantum leap occurs, and I am a functioning, accepted member of the community. While you are becoming adjusted, people watch you and find out
accompanying hubbub of my presence in stride—as they took virtually everything else about school in stride.

I tried to explain to the children what I was doing, that is, that I was interested in children's language as they were learning to read and write and that I needed to make tapes and videotapes so that I could listen to them and/or watch them at home. The children accepted me as one more oddity in a string of oddities associated with school.

Although I have used the term 'subjects' to refer to the nine children described herein, that term is just as inappropriate as saying that they were 'data'. I also cannot say that they provided me with 'data'. To say that (hopefully) that nothing harmful happens as a result of your presence. They notice you do indeed ask questions about language and customs, write things down in notebooks, and tape record interviews. When you are accepted, sometimes you are told what to do. Several of the children who served as my key informants did begin to 'tell me what to do' or at least to tell me what they were going to do, since they knew I would eventually ask, and they thought, in this way, to save me the trouble. For example, both Joel and Ben, when wearing the remote microphone, would inform me when they were getting ready to move to another activity or another part of the room or whatever.

6 Peacock, Anthropological Lens, 62, asserted that, "Anthropologists must declare their objectives openly to those with whom they are engaged in participant observation, must explain as best they can who they are and what they are about, and should not trick or force informants to divulge what they do not wish to divulge....Spying is a manipulative activity, ethnography a sharing one, at least in principle."

7 E.D. Hirsch, Jr., The Aims of Interpretation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) in Kirk and Miller, Reliability and Validity, 50, suggested that, "There is no such thing as 'raw data' in the purest sense. Human beings do not simply perceive, then intercept, but rather go through a process called cognition."
these children were my teachers is much more apt. What they taught me allowed me to construct a version of the structure within which they were acquiring and learning literacy. 8

That structure is the focus of the upcoming chapters.

8"Fieldwork, then, is a process of intersubjective construction of liminal modes of communication. Intersubjective means literally more than one subject, but being situated neither quite here nor quite there, the subjects involved do not share a common set of assumptions, experiences, or traditions. Their construction is a public process" (Rabinow, "Masked I Go Forward," 155).
CHAPTER 7

"LEARNING SCHOOL"

When Ramona Quimby arrived at kindergarten on her first day of school, some big first graders ran past her yelling, "Kindergarten babies! Kindergarten babies!"

"We are not babies!" Ramona yelled back as she led her mother into the kindergarten. Once inside she stayed close to her. Everything was so strange, and there was so much to see: the little tables and chairs, the row of cupboards, each with a different picture on the door, the play stove, and the wooden blocks big enough to stand on.

The teacher, who was new to Glenwood School, turned out to be so young and pretty she could not have been a grownup very long. It was rumored she had never taught school before. "Hello, Ramona. My name is Miss Binney," she said, speaking each syllable distinctly as she pinned Ramona's name to her dress. "I am so glad you have come to kindergarten." Then she took Ramona by the hand and led her to one of the little tables and chairs. "Sit here for the present," she said with a smile.

A present! thought Ramona, and knew at once she was going to like Miss Binney.1

So began Ramona's first day of kindergarten—new surroundings, new people, new ways of saying things, new ways of behaving—some of which made sense and some of which did not. The first year of school for a kindergartener is both similar and dissimilar to anything the child has experienced before. The similarity involves adults who are in charge and children who are not. Child-to-child

1Beverly Cleary, Ramona the Pest (New York: Morrow, 1968), 7.
interactions (exclusive of any other intrusion) carry on in a fashion fairly typical for children. But it is at this point that the similarity ends and the dissimilarity begins. A non-exhaustive list of the dissimilarities include the following:

(1) In a kindergarten classroom, there is generally one adult and anywhere from twenty to thirty children at all times. This differs from the child's previous play experiences of two or three children at a time in one room.

(2) Time is generally highly structured in a kindergarten classroom; bells are rung, chords are played on instruments, songs are sung, voices are raised above the childish din—all meant to signal that it is time to move to the next activity. This differs from the time the child has spent at home in activities involving little structure and relatively little in the way of ritualized beginnings and endings.

(3) Not only is the time highly structured in a kindergarten classroom, but the activities within the scheduled time slots are also highly structured; certain children are to work on certain puzzles in certain areas, particular children are to play with particular blocks in particular places, individual children are to look at individual books, specific children are to copy specific letters or numbers in a specific manner onto their paper. This differs from the relative freedom of choice involving
activities and locations for those activities that children have had prior to coming to kindergarten.

(4) Various areas of the kindergarten classroom and its materials are off limits during various parts of the day or week—but not during others. This differs from the children's previous experience in that although they may have been banned from various areas and items in the house (e.g., getting things out of the china closet), that ban was not arbitrary, it was in force at all times.

(5) In kindergarten, long periods of time are spent sitting, either in chairs or on the floor, with little or no opportunity to get up and move around. Anyone who has ever observed young children knows that rarely do they sit still in one place for extended periods of time, either by choice or by force.

(6) Bodily functions are treated as if all twenty-five children in a kindergarten class need to go to the bathroom and/or get a drink at certain five-minute periods during the school day. This is different from the freedom that children have had at home to go to the bathroom, get drinks, and/or eat as they deemed necessary.

(7) Lunch time at school (for full-day kindergartens) is a highly regimented fifteen to twenty-five minute period each day, where talking is rarely allowed. This differs from lunch at home (or at the babysitter's)
when lunch may have been relatively leisurely, even fun, involving talk and sharing.

(8) The majority of the kindergarten day is spent inside the school building, with many areas of that inside space designated as quiet places—or places where no talking is allowed (by children, that is). This is different from the virtually restriction-free atmosphere (regarding talking) at home.

(9) Talking, something that the five-year-old has been encouraged to do since birth, is suddenly relegated to designated times, types, and places, with severe restrictions as to content and loudness. In addition, some of the designated times, types, and places hold little meaning for the kindergartener (e.g., 9:00-9:30 reading group "discussion" of the sound of 'c'). This situation differs from the child's prior experience where essentially the only restriction was use of "bad language."

None of the discussion above is meant as an indictment of the way kindergarten is set up. It is meant only to cause readers to rethink their perceptions of the task of a five-year-old coming to school for the first time and to consider the dichotomy of "Life B.K." (Before Kindergarten) and "Life I.K." (In Kindergarten) and "A.K." (After Kindergarten). Life B.K. is not easy, but it is infinitely simpler and more sensible than Life I.K. And,
For those children for whom Life I.K. never makes sense, Life A.K. is often a long, tough row to hoe.

For the nine children in this study, however, coping with Life I.K. was no more difficult than Life B.K., or at least, they handled it with the same panache as they had Life B.K. In this chapter, I want to begin laying the groundwork for the major assertion of this book, that is that verbally gifted children have a lower metalinguistic sentience threshold than do other children and that this lower threshold enables them to learn to read and write more easily. For the children I studied, their "meta-school" sentience thresholds were also lower, thereby enabling them to learn school more easily than other children. It is this latter assertion that is the focus of this chapter.

Before I begin making the assertions revealed by the data collected and analyzed for this investigation, I want readers to know that some of the "language stories and literacy lessons" contained in the upcoming chapters are presented not only to support and verify the assertions I will be making, but also to bring readers into some of the

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2 'Language stories' and 'literacy lessons' are two terms taken from a book by the same name (Jerome C. Harste, Virginia A. Woodward, and Carolyn L. Burke, Language Stories and Literacy Lessons (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1984). Harste et al define the term "language story" as an experience, or a life vignette that "accents some important aspects of language and language learning, and therefore helps us understand how language works" (p. xv). Literacy lessons are what we learn if we look actively for what the language story has to tell us.
events I observed. If, for example, in this chapter about "learning school" you think, "Gosh, I know what it is like to start school," please read on, because I hope to make what many think is a familiar setting, school, into a somewhat unfamiliar setting, so that you can see through eyes devoid of school experience and thereby actually "see" what is happening. As the ethnographer in the school setting, this was what I had to do.

Making the Familiar Strange

One of the more difficult tasks of the ethnographer is "to make the familiar strange," that is, to look through naive eyes at a situation that previously has been well known to the observer. In order to determine what is really happening in a field site, the ethnographer must observe through childlike, ingenuous eyes. Otherwise, all the ethnographer sees is what he or she "knows" is there. In my case, in order to find out what was really going on in verbally gifted children's metalinguistic sentience as they acquired literacy, I had to guard against allowing my

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3I hope that I have been able to follow the advice of Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Research Methods, 121: "In writing text outlining your conclusions, document them with the data excerpts that led you to them. A point of emphasis: This direct documentation is very different from what has been called the 'sprinkling' function of anecdotes in text, where the researcher hunts for items that will entertain or convince the reader, then 'sprinkles' them here and there as needed."
expectations to determine my findings. For example, if I was observing a lesson on the sound of the letter 'c' being /k/, I could not sit back and observe the lesson as a whole, allowing my conceptual schema to tell me what I saw, but rather I had to observe each individual part of the lesson as if I did not know what the whole was to be. In other words, I had to make the familiar strange by looking at individual parts as wholes.

Looking at each part of a lesson being conducted by a teacher, trying to grasp its broader contexts and ramifications, is almost an eerie experience because the discoveries one makes are so startling. The looking affects the looker in such a way that looking is never the same again. In my case, the looking made it such that I can no longer look at any classroom interaction in the same way I did prior to conducting this study.

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4 This was particularly difficult because school settings are so familiar to me. Hammersley and Atkinson, Ethnography: Principles in Practice, 92, warned of this problem: "In researching settings that are more familiar, it is, of course, much more difficult to suspend one's preconceptions, whether these derive from social science or from everyday knowledge. One reason for this is that what one finds is so obvious."

5 Ethnographers must always be thinking holistically as they attempt to construct an understanding of "what's going on." "To think holistically is to see parts as wholes, to try to grasp the broader contexts and frameworks within which people behave and experience" (Peacock 1986, 17).
To consciously ignore one's organizing schema for any familiar event is very foreign because as humans, we are accustomed to relying on our schemata to enable us to move successfully through a day. Therefore, as a teacher, it was not easy to consciously ignore my organizing schemata for various familiar events that were occurring in the classrooms where I observed.\footnote{People are meaning makers and meaning finders. It is impossible for human beings not to try to make sense of a situation and our natural inclination is to impose our prior experience on a situation in order to make sense of it. Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis, 215, also believe that, "People are meaning-finders; they can make sense of the most chaotic events very quickly. Our equilibrium depends on such skills. We keep the world consistent and predictable by cognitively organizing and interpreting. The critical question is whether the meanings found in the qualitative data...are valid, repeatable, right." Certainly, I wanted the meanings I found and/or made to be valid, so I had to work at preventing "old" knowledge from depriving me of making new meanings.}

Part of the reason it was not easy to ignore my organizing schemata for classrooms was because prior to doing my field work, I had been in schools of one level or another, for the past twenty-six years, either as a student or as a teacher. Nearly thirty years of previous experience with schools carried with it a bank of knowledge about schools and the people in them. For example, I knew the general arrangement of classrooms (desks or tables, blackboards, bulletin boards, activity centers, and so on), what items were typically available in classrooms (trade books, textbooks, writing implements, paper, art supplies,
games, and so on), the type of personnel and the degree of help that could be expected from them (teachers giving instruction and encouragement, aides lending a hand in small groups or on the playground, auxiliary personnel available for speech or physical therapy, and so on), and the typical purposes and the appropriate behaviors of the people in classrooms (children reading, writing, playing, talking, answering questions, asking for help, and so on).

This familiarity was helpful in one sense. It enabled me to know, on one level, what was going on in the classroom situations I was observing (children being exposed to various aspects of print through workbooks, opportunities to write, labels attached to classroom objects, and so on). It also helped that I was already conversant regarding the terminology used in classrooms (short vowels, long vowels, lower case letters, sounding out words, and so on). Since I was cognizant of the spoken and unspoken demands of teaching and learning which impinge upon teachers and students in a classroom, I could empathize and thereby more readily develop a relationship with the inhabitants of the classrooms where I was observing. Lastly, my familiarity with schools and classrooms prevented me from making any major gaffes or social blunders during my fieldwork.

On the other side of the coin, I had to recognize that my familiarity with the setting and with the typical
events in that setting would also be a hindrance. It was essential for me to recognize and acknowledge that my familiarity with the setting could blind me to much of what was important in that setting. In ethnographic research, it is imperative that the researchers never allow themselves to take anything for granted or to become familiar with the setting such that observation becomes lackadaisical. I was careful not to let my prior knowledge and prior experience with classrooms "drive" my observation. I attempted to establish a mindset of "learner" instead of "knower."

Therefore, I set about, from the first day of fieldwork, to be a naive, ingenuous participant observer of the classroom events and interactions occurring around me and/or involving me. I rather consciously watched and listened as an uninitiated member of the classroom

Because the teachers knew I had been a classroom teacher, as well as a university teacher, they sometimes asked me questions based on my experience. Also, since I was an adult, the children figured that I knew how to do what they were doing, so they often asked me questions. I was not allowed to take on a 'novice role' in the research setting as I would sometimes have liked to do, but I recognized that this was a function of conducting research in a familiar setting. This, however, was not the hindrance that posed the primary threat.

Peacock, Anthropological Lens, 11, relates a story that illustrates this point well. "A Russian factory worker, it is told, was in the habit of pushing the wheelbarrow through the factory gate at quitting time. Every evening the guards would inspect the wheelbarrow and, finding it empty, let the worker pass. After some months, it was discovered that the worker was stealing wheelbarrows."
I intentionally suspended thoughts of what I "knew" was going on to try to enter the children's knowledge of what was going on.

I carefully avoided using superordinate terminology when taking field notes. For example, I did not write "Mrs. D. is conducting a phonics lesson on the sounds of the aspirated 'wh-' with the Eagles reading group." Instead, I attended to, and recorded, exactly what was said and done by the teacher and by the children, including oral and written explanations, questions, examples, acknowledgements, and directions. In the fieldwork situation, I did not even think in broad superordinate terms or rubrics, but rather in discrete, describable instances.

In the next section, I will share some of the discrete, describable instances I observed. Each is

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9 Part of what I tried to do was to think like a child. William A. Corsaro, "Entering the Child's World—Research Strategies for Field Entry and Data Collection in a Preschool Setting," in Ethnography and Language in Educational Settings, ed. Judith Green and Cynthia Wallat, Vol. 5, Advances in Discourse Processes, ed. Roy O. Freedle (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1981), 119, points out that one of the problems in ethnographic research involving children "has to do with adult conceptions of children's activities and abilities. As adults, we often explain away what we do not understand about children's behaviors as unimportant (i.e., silly), or we restructure what is problematic to bring it in line with an adult view of the world....One of the central aims of the ethnographies of childhood culture is the suspension of such interpretations. The researcher must attempt to free himself from adult conceptions of children's activities and enter the child's world as both observer and participant."
intended to provide insight into Life I.K., specifically Life I.K.—the first month.

Life I.K.—The First Month

"Good morning teachers and boys and girls," said a female voice from the ceiling. By the end of this sentence, the kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Anderson, had one finger raised, seemingly pointing into the air. Nearly all the children did the same. In one day of kindergarten, the children had learned that when the voice from the silver box started, they were to raise one finger into the air.

Mrs. Anderson noticed that the children did what they were supposed to. "Remember to put your finger up. When Mrs. Carter came on—that was what I told you yesterday. See that little box up there—with the round silver circle. Mrs. Carter was talking from the office. She talks to everyone in the whole entire building and that means that everyone can hear her. However if she just wants someone in our room, she can always just turn on the intercom and call to our room. In the mornings she will give announcements, that's what that word means, announcements, she tells everybody what they need to know. First thing in the morning. Everybody has to have the same announcements in the morning, first of all, and that's when you put your hand, your finger up.
And you did a great job. Give yourselves a pat on the back. Good job! Very good job!"10

There were other parts of school that the children did not "learn" so well on the first day. For example, they had not learned what "rows" were.

After gathering up the children's folders (one child at a time), Mrs. Anderson said, "Now, now let's look and see what we have, you're doing great. Doing great. OK, now I would like for you to just take your school supplies--the back row--and put them up against that wall back there. Amy and Lauren and Sarah and Brian, Kevin--you've got supplies with you?" (These children were all in the back row and none of them had moved a muscle since she called the back row). "Alright, Maureen, put yours back there. Just put it back there. Alright, the middle row do the same. Just go put it back there." (Several children got up--some from the middle row and some from the front row). "No, you're the front row. Middle row, right here. Middle row! Go put yours back there. Middle row go put yours back there. Now, somebody's not listening--Stephanie, the middle row, put your things, supplies back there. Maureen. Everything. So Mrs. Anderson can look at them in a minute. No! Back there. Look where I'm pointing. See where

10 For a transcription of one hour of this classroom on the second day of school, see Appendix 4.
Stephanie is putting hers, that's where I want it put....Alright, front row, right here. Michelle. Is that yours? OK, front row, right now. We're getting there, people....Alright, Ryan. Front row may put their supplies in the back. Front row! Greg, that's you, too. Front row?! Aaron. Front row, dear. Now we've worked our way around (thank goodness) to the morning activities. I thank you for being so patient and so quiet. Brenda, yours is supposed to be back there."

While Mrs. Anderson was calling different rows to take their supplies back to the back of the room, I remember thinking that the "rows" of children were rather haphazard—as if the children had gotten out of their alignment. What I realized later after observing in another kindergarten that had masking tape stretched across the rug to indicate where the children were to sit was that in Mrs. Anderson's room, there was nothing to indicate rows—or where children should sit. Mrs. Anderson had apparently "seen" rows because that was her schema for how children should sit on the rug.

The only piece of tape on the rug in Mrs. Anderson's room was toward the front of the rug, near her rocking chair. I noticed it and did not know what purpose it served. Some of the children, however, had learned its purpose the day before. After an activity with the calendar, the children were directed to sit on the rug.
Mrs. Anderson said, "Alright, now I'm going to tell you, Zachary, you and Marie and Christin, I'm going to tell you, sshhh. You may be seated....Who remembers the name of the line? What was the name of that line?" (As she said this, she pointed to the masking tape line on the rug).

One of the children called it something, but his response was inaudible.

Mrs. Anderson heard him, though, and said, "No, not quite. Uhhh--somebody I haven't--T.J. what's the name of the line?"

T.J. doesn't answer.

"Unchee--the unchee line. Right there is my unchee line. Who can remember why I call it the unchee line?"

Several children began to answer and Mrs. Anderson called on one of the children who was raising his hand. "Chris, why?"

"Because kids unchee up to you."

"Right, because you unchee up towards me, don't you? And that's fine, and I love to have you but there's only one of me and there's twenty-three of you and you can't all be together. So, that's your unchee line and you have to stay behind the unchee line. Remember I told you I put some tape on it. Please don't bother the tape. They really don't like me to do that, to tell you the truth."
"Who?" inquired one of the children.
"The school. And--"
"Why?" he persisted.
"They don't like me to do that because it gets the floor dirty but I say I've got to have that unchee line. Otherwise everybody just loves me so much they all want to come up here and there's only one of me and twenty-three of you and you just can't do that."

Besides putting away supplies on the second day of school, the children were assigned to certain tables. Mrs. Anderson explained the arrangement to the children as she indicated particular tables.

"Now, I want to tell you that this is going to be called the red table. This is going to be called the blue table. This is going to be called the yellow table. This is going to be called the green table. OK, yellow table. Red, blue, yellow, and green and then I tell you certain things that I want you--I'll say the red table can may do this, this, this. The yellow table may do this. The blue table. And I'm going to tell you now where to sit. Everybody listen. Stay put. I'm going to tell you where you're supposed to sit. OK. Uh--at the red table." At this time, she began calling individual children and seating them where she wanted them at each table. After everyone was arranged, she
said, "Alright now, let's have a run through here about who's sitting where. Alright, if you're sitting at the red table will you raise your hand, please. Very good. Very good. Very good. You may put your hands down. If you're sitting at the blue table, would you raise your hand please? Very good. Put your hands down. If you're sitting at the yellow table, will you raise your hands, please. Brenda, that's you. Kevin. And Doug. If you're sitting at the green table, would you raise your hands please. Alright, now. That means that when I call those tables, you will get in line or whatever I refer to the yellow table doing something or the green table doing something or the red table doing something, that's what we're going to do."

In this kindergarten classroom, although each table was designated a certain color, not one of the four tables had one speck of that color on it. Similar situations existed in other classrooms I visited. For example, one teacher assigned all her students to one of four groups, indicated by the table at which they were to sit: the square table, the circle table, the rectangle table, the triangle table. The shape name designation was neither represented by the shapes of the tables (which were oval or hexagonal) nor had any piece of paper or object been attached to the table symbolizing the shape name.
Many classes used symbols to indicate one message or another. For example, in one class, smiley faces on the cupboards meant that children could open it. In numerous classes, a certain animal shape represented the class: bears appeared on lockers in Mrs. Anderson's room, t-shirts appeared on lockers in Mrs. Victor's room, frogs were in Mrs. Terrell's room. In addition, in nearly every class, colors symbolized male/female (e.g., pink t-shirts for girls, blue t-shirts for boys).

One of the very difficult tasks that children learned in kindergarten was what it was like to be wrong. Although children in Life B.K. attempted feats that were too hard for them, were rejected by older children who said they were too little to play with them, and were scolded by their parents for doing something they were not supposed to, little, if any, of Life B.K. involved being "tested" the way Life I.K. and Life A.K. did. Life I.K. was many children's introduction to failure. On the second day of school in Mrs. Culture's room, the children were directed to look at a row of four objects and indicate which of the four was different.

Ms. Culture said, "Raise your thumb. Which is the different object? Raise your thumb. Scott, tell me which one is different."

Scott replied, "The elephant."
"The elephant is different. Why is the elephant different?"

Donnie shouted out, "I know why it's different."

"OK, tell me."

Donnie continued, "It has the wrong kind of nose."

"It has the wrong kind of nose. This animal is a what?" asked Mrs. Culture.

Several children responded, with Kelli being the loudest, "Chicken!"

Ms. Culture pointed to each of the three chickens and the children said in unison, "Chicken, chicken, chicken." She continued, "So I have three what?"

"Chickens!"

"And I have one what?"

"Elephant!"

"So the elephant is the one that's different. Put your thumbs up so you can show me which one is different. Don't tell 'til I call your name. Thumbs up as soon as you know which one is different."

Several children said, "I do."

Ms. Culture said, "Thumbs up. Michael, which one is different?"

Michael indicated no response.

Mrs. Culture encouraged him, "Come touch the one that's different. Come touch the one that is different."
Michael came up and touched the one that was different in the wrong row.

"No, this row. James, come up and touch the one that is different."

James did. Michael did not look happy. He did not do well on the "test" today.

As Mrs. Culture indicated each item of the first row with her upturned palm, a few children raised their thumb for each one. Some children kept their thumbs up the whole time (i.e., for each of the four items on the row). A couple of children looked around to see what others were doing. I was amazed at all the strategies for "getting the right answer" these children had amassed in two days!

In kindergarten, children have to begin to remember to take pieces of paper home for homework, to do those pieces of paper for homework (based on instructions heard at school), and then to bring those pieces of paper back the next day. In one class, when the teacher was explaining how they were to do their homework sheet, one boy announced, with assurance, "I don't do homework!" He found out that day that he would be doing homework—that day, and nearly everyday after that, throughout Life I.K. and A.K.

Rewards are given in kindergarten and while it is safe to assume that all children would like to earn these various rewards (candy, stickers, stamps, marbles, and so on) it is not always clear how they should go about doing
this. For example, at the end of the first week of school, I arrived in one class just as the children were returning from lunch. Some of the children were told to sit on the floor, others were told to stand by the lockers. When the children were all in place, Mrs. Tantou told the children on the floor that they had done a good job of walking in the hall. To the children who were standing by the lockers, she said, "Your behavior was not acceptable. Do you know what acceptable means?" Several children shook their heads from side to side. Mrs. Tantou continued, "It means you did not do what you were supposed to. I have some special stickers for special students." (She began handing out stickers to the children on the floor). "Sometimes I will just surprise you with stickers. I hope those of you who did not get a sticker will start trying to earn a sticker." Later, I asked one of the children whose behavior had been unacceptable how he thought he could earn a sticker. He said, "Start trying to be better the same day or any day."

Children in kindergarten are exposed to many new words. Some of these words they learn from context and/or from repeated encounters with them. Others are defined by their teachers—sometimes clearly—other times, not so clearly. An example of the latter was given above (i.e., when I asked a child in Mrs. Tantou's class what "acceptable" meant, she was unable to respond). This topic will be explored in more depth in the next chapter,
particularly as it relates to the reading register (i.e.,
those words that relate to reading learning), but was
mentioned here as one more "new" that is experienced in
kindergarten.

From the viewpoint of a language researcher as well
as from the perspective of a teacher who values children's
language as their primary means for learning, the message I
found most distressing in kindergarten was the message about
talking—or the lack thereof—communicated by some teachers
of young children. One example was provided in an earlier
chapter, that is, where the teacher told the children, "I
know it's hard to be quiet for so long, but that's school."
In another class, the teacher told the students on the fifth
day, "We do not talk. That is a classroom rule. We do not
talk at all." While both of these examples were rather
direct statements about the value of student talk at school,
there were many, many less direct indications. For example,
in the vast majority of the classrooms I visited, children
were expected to be "working quietly," "working without
talking," "working without talking to their neighbors,"
"playing the game without talking," "drawing so quietly that
I don't hear anything but crayons on paper," and so on. In
the situations where children were allowed to talk, it was
almost completely teacher directed. For example, in reading
groups, children were expected to respond—one at a time and
only after raising their hands to indicate that they had
something to say. Statements such as the following were common: "This is a quiet time. You cannot think if you're talking. Don't say anything until I have called on you so that you don't bother anyone else who is thinking."

It was apparent as I continued visiting classrooms throughout the school year, that some children "caught on" to how to behave at school, while other children did not. The children who caught on to the proper modes of behavior (including appropriate response modes, ambulation modes, body language modes, and so on), did so at different points during the year and apparently for different reasons. The children I studied were different, however, in the speed with which they caught on and the understanding of their assimilation and accommodation to the school situation. In other words, their "meta-school" sentience threshold was lower than other children's in the classes where I observed.

As stated above, the primary focus of this chapter is to discuss the young gifted children I studied and how they "figured out school." Prior to the discussion of the focus-children's meta-school sentience threshold, readers need to know about the primary metaphor for what I learned in this study (i.e., the connotations that are coming with my use of the word "threshold").

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11 The only other use of the term "threshold" in the literature related to metalinguistics is by Ehri, in a chapter she wrote entitled "Linguistic Insight: Threshold of Reading Acquisition." In this chapter, Ehri uses the
The purpose of a metaphor is to enhance understanding of, or reveal certain aspects of one object, situation, person, or action by comparing it to another object, situation, person, or action. Some metaphors work quite well, that is, extended metaphors involving objects, situations, persons, or actions that compare along a number of attributes. Other metaphors involve objects, situations, persons, or actions that only compare on one attribute.

Even the extended metaphors, though, eventually break down. This should not be seen as a weakness in the metaphor but as a consequence of comparing two different things. Comparing the term "threshold" to refer to an entryway, like a door: "Several linguistic capabilities which stand at the threshold of learning to read have received attention from researchers: word consciousness; syllable and phoneme consciousness; metalinguistic strategies; terminology, concepts, and structural features of written language" (p. 63). (emphasis added)

12 Pelto and Pelto, Anthropological Research, 11, cite Abraham Kaplan, The Conduct of Inquiry (San Francisco: Chandler, 1964), 265, regarding scientific metaphors: "A metaphor, like an aphorism, condenses in a phrase a significant similarity. When the poet writes 'the morn, in russet mantle clad, walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill', he evokes awareness of a real resemblance, and such awareness may be made to serve the purpose of science. When they do serve in this way, we are likely to conceptualize the situation as involving the use of analogy. The scientist recognizes similarities that have previously escaped us and systematizes them....Analogies, it has been held, do more than merely lead to the formulation of theories, so that afterward they may be removed and forgotten; they are 'an utterly essential part of theories, without which theories would be completely valueless and unworthy of the name' (N. Cambell)."
two different objects, situations, persons, or actions inevitably entails contrasts between the two things being compared. In fact, weaknesses in extended metaphors arise when they are extended too far. Recognizing this, I encourage readers to look at my metaphor for the understanding and revelations it offers for nine young gifted children's metalinguistic sentience—not as a metaphor intended to clarify everything there is to know about language acquisition or as a metaphor that fits perfectly along all attributes of the two different things being compared.

Auditory perception researchers investigate how we detect, discriminate, interpret, and react to sound stimuli. To say that a human has "heard" a sound provides incomplete information because "hearing" can refer to several different states, depending on the definition of hearing that is being used; for example, is one referring to an involuntary reflex to sound, a perception of sound, a recognition of specific sounds, an ability to distinguish between different sounds, an appreciation of certain qualities of sound (e.g., in music), or what? For the purposes of this metaphor, "hearing" will be defined along the following continuum:

13 Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis, 222, offer this advice to metaphor-makers: "Know when to stop pressing the metaphor for its juice. When the oasis starts to have camels, camel drivers, a bazaar, and a howling sandstorm, you know you're forcing things. Use it as long as it's fruitful, and don't overmetaphorize."
threshold of feeling > threshold of pain

Figure 12. Continuum depicting 'hearing'.

Although initially I will discuss this continuum along one dimension, I will eventually present it along two dimensions.

The threshold of feeling "is the minimum sound pressure level...that will stimulate the ear to a point at which there is a sensation of feeling that is different from the non-sensation of feeling."\(^{14}\) At the other end of the continuum is the threshold of pain that is defined as the point at which the sound pressure level stimulates the ear to a point that a sensation of pain occurs.

Between these two extremes lie the areas more fruitful to the metaphor: the threshold of audibility and the difference threshold. The threshold of audibility (also known as the absolute sensitivity, absolute threshold, and the threshold of hearing) is defined as "the minimum

\(^{14}\) The full text of William A. Yost and Donald W. Nielsen's, *Fundamentals of Hearing: An Introduction* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1977), 239, definition is as follows: "The threshold of feeling (or tickle) for a specified signal is the minimum sound pressure level of that signal at the entrance of the external acoustic meatus which in a specified fraction of the trials, will stimulate the ear to a point at which there is a sensation of feeling that is different from the non-sensation of feeling." More will be said later about some of the components of this full definition.
effective sound pressure level...that is capable of evoking an auditory sensation..."\textsuperscript{15} The difference threshold (also known as the differential threshold or differential limen) is the minimum effective sound pressure level at which a sound "may be recognized as being the same (recognition) or different (discrimination)."\textsuperscript{16}

The definitions just provided are only a starting point for readers and, actually, I have omitted a lot of information, which I would now like to begin to fill in. Readers who read the footnotes for the last two paragraphs, and thereby read the full text of the definitions, noticed that there were various references to characteristics of the signals, the manner in which signals were presented to the subjects, and the point at which the sound pressure levels

\textsuperscript{15} The full text of Yost and Nielsen's, \textit{Fundamentals of Hearing}, 239, definition is as follows: "The threshold of audibility for a specified signal is the minimum effective sound pressure level of the signal that is capable of evoking an auditory sensation in a specified fraction of the trials. The characteristics of the signal, the manner in which it is presented to the subject, and the point at which the sound pressure level is measured must be specified."

\textsuperscript{16} The full text of Crystal's, \textit{Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language}, 145, definition is as follows: "Sounds may be recognized as being the same (recognition) or different (discrimination). An important question is how different two sounds have to be in order for the brain to perceive that they are different. This minimum difference in magnitude (the 'just noticeable difference') is known as the difference threshold. Our ability to detect and discriminate sound is known as auditory acuity."
were presented. An example of a full definition that includes references to these aspects is provided below:

The absolute sensitivity of the ear is measured as the least sound pressure which leads to a sensation of hearing. We have already seen...that the ear is differentially sensitive to pure tones of different frequencies. Accordingly, one cannot speak of a single intensive threshold because each frequency has its own. Although several psychophysical methods have been employed in the study of intensive thresholds, a much more important influence on sensitivity measures has been the manner in which the tones are delivered to the ear. The transducer may be placed tightly against the pinna (closed-ear method), or it may be located at a distance (open-ear method).

Researchers who conduct investigations into auditory perception recognize that they cannot make unequivocal statements about a person's absolute threshold without reference to what conditions (e.g., frequencies, binaural or monaural, and so on), under which the individual was tested. And, even when the conditions are specified, it is difficult to designate an irrelative point as "the threshold." To


18 According to John D. Durant and Jean H. Lovrinic, Bases of Hearing Science (Baltimore: Williams and Williams, 1977), 138-139, "Traditionally, the threshold has been viewed as a discrete point along the physical continuum of a particular stimulus [i.e. a certain intensity, above which there is an appropriate response (by the organism being stimulated) and below which there is none]. Nevertheless, it generally has been recognized that, experimentally, this discrete point is difficult to demonstrate by virtue of the influence of various internal and external events not under the control of the experimenter. External events might include small but finite fluctuations in the stimulus magnitude due to instrumentation or procedural limitations. Internal events could include variations in the experimental
show one example of this now two-dimensional continuum, a table displaying the threshold of hearing range of people with normal hearing is presented below (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Threshold of hearing.  

The authors note that, "as the curve indicates, this threshold varies with the frequency of sound."

As mentioned above, another condition that affects an individual's "performance" on a test of auditory perception is whether or not the sound is directed at one subject's state of attention over time. Consequently, threshold has come to be considered more of a statistic which depends on the magnitude of the stimulus. The criterion for judging the threshold value is the elicitation of the desired response a certain percentage of the time the stimulus is presented."

Stanley Smith Stevens and Fred Warshofsky, Sound and Hearing (New York: Time, 1965), 147, provide this caption next to their graph entitled, "The Threshold of Hearing": "The lowest level of intensity at which a sound can be heard--falls, in people of normal hearing, somewhere in the range indicated by the purple region of the graph below. As the curve indicates, this threshold varies with the frequency of the sound: in the middle frequencies far less intensity is required to make a tone audible to human ears than in low- or high-frequency tones."
ear or two (i.e., whether the test is monaural or binaural). Depending on the individual, the binaural threshold is generally three to six decibels lower than the monaural threshold. This is due to a process called "binaural summation," which allows two ears to do more than one.

If we examine a diagram of the human ear in any standard textbook, we will notice that a single ear is depicted. Of course, it is unnecessary to point out that an identical structure exists on the other side of the head. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that, as a perceptual system, the auditory pathway is binaural. The existence of two ears insures a process more complex than that which occurs when a monaural system exists. A binaural system provides the basis for comparison of two sets of data pertaining to the same stimulus. Furthermore, this binaural system, part of the human head, is mounted on the neck, making the whole system a mobile one. This mobility is important because it contributes greatly to the role of the auditory system as an active one, which seeks out information from the enormous array of stimuli generated by the changing environment.

20 Gulick, Hearing, 110; Durant and Lovrinic, Bases of Hearing, 163.

21 "Nature", said the ancient Greek philosopher Zeno, 'has given man one tongue, but two ears, that we might hear twice as much as we speak.' There may be an element of wishful thinking in the statement, but there is an element of truth in it, too. Because of a process called 'binaural summation', two ears do hear more than one. When a sound strikes two ears at once, the auditory system adds the two sensations together; for moderate intensities, a sound heard in two ears seems about twice as loud as the same sound heard in only one. The summation process is not characteristic of all sensory systems; opening and closing one eye, for example, does not change the apparent brightness of a scene. As an electronics engineer might put it, the hearing system is 'wired' differently from the eyes.

Sanders' last statement, that the role of the auditory system is an active one, seeking out information from the enormous array of stimuli generated by the changing environment, could also apply to that system that allows humans to receive, not language per se, but information about language (i.e., metalinguistic elements of language). Just as all persons of normal hearing possess an auditory system capable of seeking out information from the enormous array of stimuli generated by the environment, so too do persons of potentially normal language abilities possess acquisition systems capable of seeking out information from the enormous arrays of stimuli generated by the environment. What is eventually acquired is dependent upon the environment (e.g., is it a literate environment, and if so, what type?), and dependent upon the acquirer (e.g., how attuned to various aspects of the environment is the particular individual?).

The data from this study seem to suggest that the nine verbally gifted children studied are unusually attuned to the literacy/language aspects of their environment and it is because of this unusually acute sense of language that they are able to learn to read and write quickly and easily. Or, in other words, their metalinguistic sentience thresholds are lower than those of other children.

Using the term threshold fits well with the metaphor likening metalinguistic sentience to auditory perception
because "threshold provides one measure of the capabilities of a sensory system." Both metalinguistic sentience and auditory perception are sensory systems. Language researchers, particularly those interested in metalinguistic awareness, investigate how we detect, discriminate, interpret, and react to language stimuli. To say that someone has "noticed" language provides incomplete information because "noticing" can refer to several different states, depending on the definition of "noticing" being used; for example, is one referring to a focus on language being read aloud or language being read silently, a mindfulness of word choice as a poem is being composed, an observance of sounds made by individual letters, or what? For the purposes of this metaphor, "noticing" will be defined along a one dimensional continuum ranging from involuntary reflex to threshold of distress (Figure 14).

\[
\text{involuntary reflex} \rightarrow \text{threshold of distress}
\]

Figure 14. Continuum depicting 'noticing' of language.

At one end of the continuum is the level of involuntary reflex for metalinguistic sentience, that is, a person may react to the presence of a certain metalinguistic stimulus, but not be aware, on any level, of his or her

\[23\] Durant and Lovrinic, Bases of Hearing, 139.
response. An example of this phenomenon is children who have memorized "the ABCs." These children can recite (to the very same tune) "a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, lmnop (said as one unit), q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, and z." Many children also consider the final stanza of "Now I've said my ABCs, tell me what you think of me" as part of the "ABCs." Very young children who are able to recite their ABCs on command, in the way described above, possess neither a conscious nor unconscious awareness of what they are doing.

Next, the threshold of feeling is defined as the point at which enough stimulation has been provided that the individual's metalinguistic sentience is "tickled." An example of this is a child who recognizes \( \mathcal{M} \) (the golden arches) as being McDonald's or a child who hears her name in a conversation and is stumped as to the reference to her. I saw the latter one day when Michelle, a kindergartener, was talking to another child near where Stephanie was playing with a puzzle. Michelle said, "He plays with stuff and he always messes it up." As soon as Michelle said, "...stuff and he...," Stephanie jerked her head up and said, "Stephanie?" and looked questioningly at me.

Parents were good at noticing when their children had been "tickled" by metalinguistic sentience (although they did not label it thus). For example, Bryan F.'s mother noted in her journal that Bryan was very attuned to the 'full names' of various objects. She wrote:
When Bryan was in preschool at age 3, his teacher said she really had to be careful because she said the picture was a boat and Bryan said it was a sailboat. He always seems to be very specific about the names of cars, going by the way it looks and the symbol—instead of saying, 'There's a car,' it's, 'There's a yellow Oldsmobile.'

Bryan F.'s concern with specificity earned a mention in the local newspaper. His mother wrote about the following incident:

We were going to have Swimmy (Bryan's fish) blessed by the priest. A man came up to us and asked Bryan if he was going to get his fish blessed. He said, 'I'm going to get my Japanese Fighting Fish, Swimmy, blessed.' The man was a reporter for the Star Telegram and it was in the paper.

At the next level is the "absolute threshold" of metalinguistic sentience, that is, the point at which various metalinguistic elements of language begin to be consciously or unconsciously detected by an individual. As with the absolute threshold for sound, there are many variables affecting this threshold. For some individuals, growing up in a bilingual home provides the magnitude necessary for a child to be metalinguistically sentient. For other children, large doses of literacy instruction in kindergarten and first grade may provide the stimulation necessary for individual children to begin to consciously or unconsciously detect metalinguistic elements. For still other children, older brothers' or sisters' drills and explanations when playing school provide the impetus necessary. Instances of children approaching, or at their
absolute thresholds can often be seen as children "read" a big book (i.e., a very large version of a simple, usually predictable book).

For example, one day, Kristin, Staci, and Kelli were "reading" *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* by Bill Martin. Each one, in turn, used the pointer (as they had seen their teacher do) to run along under the words on the page as they "said" the words. Although there was a reasonable match between what was on the page and what they were saying, it was obvious that they did not know which words actually mapped onto their oral reading--they had memorized the book.

Moving along the continuum, the differential threshold is defined as the point at which an individual recognizes similarities and differences among various aspects of language and so realizes that choices are available and that he or she can make choices within the realm of literacy. Prime examples of children whose differential thresholds have been reached can be seen in children's writing and revision processes. For example, in David's story, shown below (Figure 15), he wrote "Eelngglish" and then decided that he wanted "Eelngglind" instead. On the next line, he revised his spelling of "vre" to "vry."
Figure 15. David's story written on November 11, 1986.
[11-19-86 David Once upon a time in the place of England the king was making very bad rules. The end.]

At the high end of the continuum, comparable to the threshold of pain for sound, is the threshold of distress. Thankfully, very few people reach either the threshold of pain for sound or the threshold of distress for metalinguistic sentience, but it does happen. When a person reaches the threshold of pain for sound, hearing can be damaged either temporarily or permanently. Similarly, when a person (child) reaches the threshold of distress for metalinguistic sentience, literacy may be damaged temporarily or permanently. For example, if a teacher drills incessantly on sounds (i.e., sound/symbol or symbol/sound correspondence), and/or "correction" the surface features of writing, both to the point of the exclusion of
meaning, children's literacy development may be retarded, frozen, or damaged.

Now, just as sound thresholds cannot really be plotted on a one-dimensional continuum, neither can metalinguistic sentience thresholds. Auditory systems are differentially sensitive to the various modes of signal presentation, and so on, and likewise, language information systems are differentially sensitive. It is this differential sensitivity that will be the focus of Chapters 9 and 10. For the remainder of this chapter, though, I want to return to the discussion of meta-school sentience—to further develop the notion that the nine verbally able children I studied were unusually adept at "noticing" school and all its concomitant requirements.

In auditory perception research, there is some question as to whether there is a "true" threshold for sound, that is, one invariant point along the stimulus continuum below which the individual never responds and above which the individual always responds. Similarly, I cannot make unequivocal, unrestricted statements regarding a true threshold for metalinguistic stimuli, that is, one

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24 Durant and Lovrinic, Bases of Hearing, 139, point out that variables such as the internal noise of the nervous system and changes in the subject's emotional state "may produce fluctuations in the subject's response which in turn, make it very unlikely that one and only one value of the stimulus can be found above which the subject always responds and below which there is never a response."
invariant point along the stimulus continuum below which the individual never responds and above which the individual always responds. Regarding metalinguistic sentience, just like regarding auditory perception, researchers can give ranges and can make some generalizations, but one must constantly be conscious of individuals within the population and variations within each individual.25

"Meta-School" Sentience Threshold

Although in Chapter 2 I tried to make a case for a new term, "metalinguistic sentience," this is the only new term I am trying to introduce into the literature. "Meta-school" is simply my way of referring to the spoken and unspoken demands of appropriate performance in school; that is, the requirements or expectations beyond what is visibly required in school, (completing work, and so on). As I will point out in this section, the nine children I studied were

25 The inability to make generalizations is not a drawback of this research, but rather it fits with the ethnographic paradigm. Generalizability is not a goal of ethnographic research; comparability and translatability are. Ethnographers "aim for comparability and translatability of generated findings rather than for outright transference to groups not investigated. Comparability and translatability are factors that may contribute to effective generalization in any study; however, they are crucial to the legitimacy of ethnographic research....Assuring comparability and translatability provides the foundation on which comparisons are made. Comparability and translatability both function for ethnographers as analogs to the goals of more closely controlled research: generalizability of research findings and production of causal statements" (Goetz and LeCompte, Qualitative Design, 8-9).
not only unusually adept at tuning in on and assimilating this meta-school behavior, but were aware that it was meta-school behavior.

What is there to tune in on, assimilate, and accommodate to in Life I.K.? A great deal! To provide a sense of what there is, I present the following examples taken from my field notes:

1. Children were asked to show their teachers "what good listeners" they were--by sitting on their names on the floor.

2. On the second day of school, the teacher rang a bell several times within a thirty minute period. The bell was intended to draw attention to the fact that the children were getting too noisy. A little later, as the noise level again rose, one of the kindergarteners went to the table and rang the bell and was very quickly told, "Only Mrs. Culture rings the bell!"

3. A ditto sheet was passed out to all the children in a group clustered around the teacher. The teacher had an identical ditto sheet in front of her, although hers was encased in plastic. As she was going over the directions for their homework (which they were not to do right then!), she asked the children to "touch the one that is different in the first row." Several children reached over and touched the one on her sheet.
4. During the third week of school, five children were at the listening center with headphones on, listening to a tape of the book that they each had in front of them. As the tape finished, the children announced chorally, "It's over!" After shushing them, the student teacher came over and restarted the tape. The children asked, "Do we go back to the beginning?"

5. In first grade, the children had hardback reading books for the first time. During the third week of school, when the children were directed to one of the skills pages in the book, several of them began writing their answers in the blanks--and then had to erase.

6. In the same first grade, the children had to learn to number down the side of the page and then to put a period after these numbers to separate them from the sentences that they were to write. The children also had to learn not to number down the pages of everything they wrote, such as stories (Figure 16).

7. During the second month of school, the children in one kindergarten reading group were given four pictures and were told to "put them in order." One child put his pictures out on the floor and asked, "Which one starts it--this one or this one?" (He said this as he indicated the picture that was on the far left and the picture on the far right of the four picture set).
Yesterday we drola cast
2we had a contest I wan
3One of them She gave
4us all a todsyrole,
5Part of the time she
6is nise and part of
7the time shese meen.

Figure 16. Example of a first grader who numbered the lines of her story after a lesson on numbering down the page when writing sentences from the basal lesson.

There were scores of examples I could have provided from my data, all of which demonstrated that children not only had much to learn in the way of content but also in the way of how school worked. Children who did not learn how school worked often did not learn the content presented, or even if they did learn the content, it may not have been recognized or rewarded (e.g., children who presented their knowledge at inappropriate times or in unusual ways; children who were considered behavior problems because of their tendency to "speak out" without raising their hands;
children who knew the answer but were penalized for not displaying it in the "correct" fashion).

The children who were the key informants for my study, however, learned to present their knowledge at appropriate times and in appropriate ways. They were not considered behavior problems although several were considered 'talkative'. These nine children not only knew the answers in nearly all the school situations in which they found themselves, but they knew how to present the answers in ways that were recognized and rewarded.

So, is there any explanation for the assertion that the nine gifted children I studied appeared to learn school quickly, due to a lower meta-school threshold? I think so. I will use a series of syllogisms to make a case for my assertion.

Syllogism 1

Premise 1: Most of the talking in kindergarten classrooms is "teacher talk."

Premise 2: Most of the new information in kindergarten classrooms is presented orally.

Conclusion: Most of the new information in kindergarten classrooms is presented through teacher talk.

Premise 1: Most of the talking in kindergarten classrooms is "teacher talk." If one noticed in Appendix 4, the transcription of one hour in a kindergarten classroom,
the majority of time was filled with teacher talk. This one
hour excerpt was reasonably representative of what went on
in the classes where I visited. I knew, from the research,
that teacher talk consumed a larger portion of the school
day than did child talk, but it was not until I began
transcribing the audio- and video-tapes of my visits to the
classrooms and until I began coding my data that I was
really struck with the sheer quantity of time teachers talk
in the classroom.

Premise 2: Most of the new information in
kindergarten classrooms is presented orally. Very few
kindergarteners read or can learn through the print mode, a
mode through which older students are frequently expected to
learn new information. Kindergarten teachers recognize that
their students do not learn through print yet, but that they
can learn through their auditory mode—and so
kindergarteners are presented with information all day,
everyday, through their auditory channel. They hear
directions, reprimands, commands, explanations of new
concepts, as well as talk that can only be classified as
banter, serving no instructional purpose other than as the
teacher's placeholder (again, Appendix 4).

Conclusion: Most of the new information in
kindergarten classrooms is presented through teacher talk.
Classrooms from kindergarten through graduate school are
structured with the teacher as the source and dispenser of
knowledge and information. The classrooms I studied were structured similarly. Teachers tell students how to behave, how to earn rewards, how to complete assignments, where to put assignments, where to sit, how to color, what the next activity is, when it is time to clean up, and so on. Teachers explain to students new concepts, how to play games, why only so many are allowed in a certain area at a certain time, how to make certain letters, and so on. Teachers show children, with an accompanying oral commentary, how to make their letters, how to make art projects, how to dance in the parent night program, how to walk down the hall to the lunchroom, and so on. All in all, teachers are front and center, both figuratively and literally, and are verbally presenting new information continuously.

Syllogism 2

Premise 1: Foreign languages are spoken by the natives of a foreign country.

Premise 2: Kindergarten classrooms are like foreign countries.

Conclusion: A foreign language is spoken by the natives of kindergarten classrooms.

Premise 1: Foreign languages are spoken by the natives of a foreign country. This premise does not need much justification; it is fairly common knowledge to adults that one of the characteristics that marks a foreign country
is the fact that the people who live in that country speak a
different language—even at least a different dialect.

Premise 2: Kindergarten classrooms are like foreign
countries. Anyone visiting a foreign country for the first
time is struck by certain differences: different ways of
doing things (so that some of the familiar ways are
unacceptable), different perspectives on time, new and
different people, unfamiliar places, and certainly, an
unfamiliar language. Likewise, children entering
kindergarten for the first time are struck by the different
ways of doing things, different perspectives on time, new
and different people, unfamiliar places—and, the most
difficult aspect—the unfamiliar language that is spoken.

Conclusion: A foreign language is spoken by the
natives of kindergarten classrooms. A foreign language is
characterized by strange words, peregrine phrases, alien
response patterns, and exotic sounds. In kindergarten,
although some of the language spoken is familiar, much of it
fits the description of a foreign language: strange words,
peregrine phrases, alien response patterns, and exotic
sounds.

Syllogism 3

Premise 1: A foreign language is spoken by the natives
of the kindergarten classroom.

Premise 2: The kindergarten teacher is the native of
the kindergarten classroom.
Conclusion: The kindergarten teacher speaks a foreign language.

Premise 1: A foreign language is spoken by the natives of the kindergarten classroom. This premise is the conclusion drawn in Syllogism 2.

Premise 2: The kindergarten teacher is the native of the kindergarten classroom. Although not literally indigenous to the kindergarten classroom, kindergarten teachers are more or less "permanent residents" of the classroom, while the children in their classrooms are visitors for nine months. And, like a native in a foreign country of the world, the teacher is looked to by the visitors as the source of information.

Conclusion: The kindergarten teacher speaks a foreign language. Just like a person who has spoken French all his/her life does not expect that speaking French to another Frenchman will cause communication problems, neither does a teacher who has spoken English all his/her life expect that speaking English to another English-speaking person, albeit a five-year-old one, will cause communication problems. Unfortunately, though, teachers of very young children must expect just that unless they recognize that the language they speak is indeed foreign in many of its idiomatic phrases, terminology, cadence, and response patterns.
Syllogism 4

Premise 1: Most of the new information in the kindergarten classroom is presented through teacher talk.

Premise 2: Kindergarten teachers speak a foreign language.

Conclusion: Most of the new information in the kindergarten classroom is presented in a foreign language.

Premise 1: Most of the new information in the kindergarten classroom is presented through teacher talk. This premise is the conclusion drawn in Syllogism 1.

Premise 2: Kindergarten teachers speak a foreign language. This premise is the conclusion drawn in Syllogism 3.

Conclusion: Most of the new information in the kindergarten classroom is presented in a foreign language. Just as I would have trouble learning anything if I were to take a class taught in any other language except English, so too do kindergarten children have trouble learning, that is, unless they learn to comprehend the foreign language in which their class is taught. Herein lies the crux of the learning situation in kindergarten classrooms: some children do and some children do not learn the language of instruction. Those children who do are able to be
successful in Life I.K. and hence Life A.K. Those children who do not are less likely to be successful.

Summary

The nine verbally gifted children who served as key informants for this study were successful—and will, in all likelihood—continue to be successful. Why? Because Life I.K. is so dependent on interpretation and comprehension of language—a sometimes foreign language. The sensor that allows them to have a lower metalinguistic sentience threshold is somehow attuned to language interpretation and comprehension. It is, therefore, not surprising that they "learn school" readily since learning school seems to require an acute ability for language interpretation and comprehension—an ability that these nine children successfully demonstrated time after time.
On the first day of kindergarten, Miss Binney taught the class the words of a puzzling song about "the dawnzer lee light," which Ramona did not understand because she did not know what a dawnzer was. "Oh, say, can you see by the dawnzer lee light," sang Miss Binney, and Ramona decided that a dawnzer was another walking about?" she asked Ramona. "What's a dawnzer?"

Ramona was scornful. "Silly. Everybody knows what a dawnzer is."

"I don't," said Mr. Quimby, who had been reading the evening paper. "What is a dawnzer?"

"A lamp," said Ramona. "It gives lee light. We sing about it every morning in kindergarten."

A puzzled silence fell over the room until Beezus suddenly shouted with laughter. "She-she means--" she gasped, "The Star Spangled Banner!" Her laughter dwindled to giggles. "She means the daalking about?" she asked Ramona. "What's a dawnzer?"

Ramona was scornful. "Silly. Everybody knows what a dawnzer is."

"I don't," said Mr. Quimby, who had been reading the evening paper. "What is a dawnzer?"

"A lamp," said Ramona. "It gives lee light. We sing about it every morning in kindergarten."

A puzzled silence fell over the room until Beezus suddenly shouted with laughter. "She-she means--" she gasped, "The Star Spangled Banner!" Her laughter dwindled to giggles. "She means the dawn's early light." She pronounced each word with exaggerated distinctness, and then she began to laugh again.1

This wonderful excerpt from Ramona the Pest provides an example of "literacy acquisition," that is, natural use of and recipience of language. Literacy acquisition is distinct from "literacy learning," that is, deliberate.

1Cleary, Ramona the Pest, 9, 109.
artificial attention to language. The latter is demonstrated in the following excerpt from the same book:

Miss Binney was standing in front of the class holding a brown paper sack with a big T printed on it. "Now who can guess what I have in this bag with the letter T printed on it? Remember, it is something that begins with T. Who can tell me how T sounds?"

"T-t-t-t-t," ticked the kindergarten.
"Good," said Miss Binney. "Davy, what do you think is in the bag?" Miss Binney was inclined to bear down on the first letters of words now that the class was working on the sounds letters make.
"Taterpillars?" said Davy hopefully. He rarely got anything right, but he kept trying.
"No, Davy. Caterpillars begins with C. C-c-c-c-c. What I have in the bag begins with T. T-t-t-t-t."
T-t-t-t-t. The class ticked quietly while it thought. "T.V.?" "Tadpoles?" "Teeter-totter?"
T-t-t-t-t, Ramona ticked to herself as she wiggled her tooth with her fingers. "Tooth," she suggested.
"Tooth is a good T word, Ramona," said Miss Binney, "but it is not what I have in the bag."2

The terms "literacy acquisition" and "literacy learning" are derived from the Krashen and Terrell model for second language learning.3 In their model, the authors make a distinction between "language acquisition" and "language learning." In their terminology, language acquisition involves "picking up the language" by using it in natural, communicative situations. Language learning involves "knowing the rules" of the language and "knowing about" the language (i.e., being consciously aware of the grammar and other aspects of the language).

2 Cleary, Ramona the Pest, 97-98.

The authors have constructed a table that displays the distinctions between language learning and language acquisition (Figure 17):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Acquisition-Learning Distinction</th>
<th>Acquisition</th>
<th>Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>similar to child first language acquisition</td>
<td>formal knowledge of language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;picking up&quot; a language</td>
<td>&quot;knowing about&quot; a language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subconscious</td>
<td>conscious</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implicit knowledge</td>
<td>explicit knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formal teaching does not help</td>
<td>formal teaching helps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17. Distinctions between the language acquisition model of foreign language instruction and the language learning model of foreign language instruction.4

The notion of the distinction between "learning" and "acquisition" appealed to me as I began to plan my study. Although I was familiar with the concepts from my linguistics background (which had a heavy English-as-a-second language emphasis), I was a little vague, at the time, on an articulation and a description of exactly what I meant by the terms "reading acquisition" and "reading learning." I had a tacit understanding of what I meant, but was unable to express it at the time. Although I did not

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use these categories during my data collection, I did use them as I began to sift and sort through the data to see what I had found. By that time, I had also decided to use "literacy acquisition" and "literacy learning" in order to encompass reading and writing together. The purpose of this chapter is to define and differentiate between literacy acquisition and literacy learning, articulating how I distinguished between the two and explaining how I categorized the data under these two rubrics. I am hopeful that my definitions and explanations will enable others who are interested to be able to use the same rubrics in categorizing classroom data. A secondary purpose for this chapter is to enlighten readers as to how I analyzed the data. Although I will not delve into this in great detail, it will be revealed as I attempt to address the above-mentioned, primary purpose of this chapter.

**Literacy Acquisition**

Literacy acquisition is defined as "natural" procurement of literacy, that is, developing literacy by using it in natural, communicative, literate situations. Acquiring literacy is not necessarily a conscious process. Children may learn to read and write without ever really thinking about the fact that they are learning to read and write.
When I began classifying the data, I first thought that I needed to separate the teachers' evidence of literacy acquisition from the students' evidence of literacy acquisition. Literacy acquisition-Teacher (T) was defined as teacher use of language/literacy in a "natural" way. The setting may have been instructional, but the language/literacy use was "naturally" occurring.

For example, one day in the Spanish immersion classroom, Mrs. Perrone was teaching the students to differentiate between fruits (frutas) and vegetables (legumbres). She was teaching them the names of various fruits and vegetables. When she got to "el platino," she and Victor's mother (a native speaker of Spanish) had a discussion about whether the banana should be called "el platino" or "banana grande." For a few moments, they were two women talking about word choice—based on different situations and different experiences—with no thought to the children or to the lesson. It was a naturally occurring literacy event.

Another day, in Mrs. Benson's room, Bryan F. was showing a huge shell for show and tell. One of the children commented that the shell looked like an ice cream cone. Bryan F. disagreed. Mrs. Benson said, "We could make up a name for the shell—like the 'ice cream shell'." She was taking part in the conversation and sharing in a natural way, not in an instructional, focus-on-the-word way.
Evidence of literacy acquisition by the students was defined similarly to evidence by the teacher, but with more specifics. Data was classified as literacy acquisition-Student (S) when students displayed their knowledge about language/literacy in a natural way. The setting might have been instructional, but the language/literacy was naturally occurring. Sometimes, what started out as a literacy learning event became a literacy acquisition event because a student offered more evidence of his or her knowledge about language/literacy than had been prompted by the teacher.

For example, one day, when the Superkids workbooks were handed out in Stephanie's kindergarten classroom, and the teacher had told the students to turn to the second and third page, Stephanie piped up and said, "That's two and three." Another time, in the same classroom, the teacher was having the children spell certain words on their papers. After pronouncing the word 'glad', Mrs. Yager asked the children how many letters were in the word. Stephanie said, "Four." Then she continued, "That's a long word for someone who is just learning to spell."

**Literacy Learning**

Literacy learning is defined as conscious attention toward the procurement of literacy, that is, developing literacy through conscious attention to various manifestations of literacy. Literacy learning is a
conscious process—particularly from the teacher's point of view. Literacy learning involves learning to read and write by focusing on the outward indications of reading and writing.

As with literacy acquisition, I thought it would be more fruitful to separate children's literacy learning statements from teachers' literacy learning statements. I defined literacy learning (T) as direct, deliberate comments about language made in an instructional mode. I included instances where the teacher stopped a student mid-stream and had the child go back to re-read or re-state what he or she had been saying, since this forced a student to focus on the language event. I also included questions asked by the teacher to which she already knew the answer.

A few examples of literacy learning (T) were: "Bump those sounds together," a suggestion made to a lower reading group trying to decode a word on the board; "How do we know when a sentence is finished?" (hoping for the response, "a period"); when Drew read, "There was birds that sang—" and was interrupted by the teacher who had him go back and re-read. She said, "The action word is 'were' and action words must agree with the subject." (Later, Drew again substituted 'was' for 'were'.)

Student comments were classified as literacy learning (S) if the students were in some way "prompted" to display their knowledge about language/literacy. I also
considered reading aloud in a reading group to be literacy learning. Only if the child spontaneously began reading aloud did I consider it to be literacy acquisition.

For example, after Halloween, Benny told the class during show and tell that he had gone to a haunted house. After he finished telling about it, the teacher prodded the children to ask Benny some questions. In a very "school-like" voice, the following questions were asked: "What did you do in the haunted house?" "Does it have mazes?" "Did you get scared?" On the same day, the children in this class were quite noisy. Mrs. Benson told them that they needed to review the class rules. She asked someone to read Rule #2. "I'll be curious to my friends," read one of the children. Mrs. Benson said, "No, not curious, courteous," and had the child re-read the sentence.

**Decision-Making and Analysis**

I hope there are some readers who are curious about how I arrived at these categories and how I sorted the data into categories. Some might think that I had the categories ahead of time and that each literacy event from the data fit nicely into one category or another. The former is not true—and the latter, unfortunately, is also not true. At this point, I would like to begin explaining how I arrived at the categories and how the decisions were made as to the category(ies) into which to put the data.
As I have mentioned several times in previous chapters, the ethnographic paradigm is different from the positivistic, experimental paradigm in that one does not formulate hypotheses prior to the research, then test hypotheses through various experimental means, and then, based on the results of the experiments, either accept or reject the hypotheses. Rather, a researcher operating under the ethnographic paradigm works at keeping an open mind about what might be found once the research begins, formulates hypotheses while in the field, tests these hypotheses while in the field, and either confirms or rejects them based on the data collected. Data collection procedures cannot be laid out ahead of time since the ethnographer cannot be sure what it is he or she will need to collect. Means of testing hypotheses and analyzing data also cannot be specified ahead of time. Many decisions are made throughout the research project. This is the beauty of ethnographic research—but also the bugaboo of the ethnographer.

So, since I did not have hypotheses going into the research—what did I have? I had research questions—questions that I wanted to know the answer to, not questions that I already had the answers to.5 The questions that I

wanted answers to were: What did young verbally gifted children say that indicated their metalinguistic awareness? What did they say spontaneously? What did they say under instructional conditions? What did they say in response to probes from the researcher? How did young verbally gifted children's language reflect their cognitive ability? Was this a function of developmental stages? Were their comments ordered as opposed to random? What was the nature of the co-occurrence between metalinguistic awareness and reading acquisition/reading learning? Did certain phenomena manifest themselves consistently before young verbally gifted children began to read? Did certain phenomena manifest themselves consistently during the time that young verbally gifted children were beginning to read? Did certain phenomena manifest themselves consistently after young verbally gifted children began to read?

With these questions in mind, I entered a classroom for the purpose of conducting research, for the first time, on the first day of school. The class I chose to go to on that first day was a "compacted curriculum" first grade class for able learners, that is, the children who were specially chosen for this class would go through first and

at the outset, (in ethnography), it can be seen as 'observing without any preconceptions,' but that is a misleading characterization. Preconceptions and guiding questions are present from the outset, but the researcher does not presume at the outset to know where, specifically, the initial questions might lead next."
second grade in one year, and would enter the third grade, never having attended second grade, per se. On that first day, I took thirty-five pages of field notes—in one sense, the first field notes I had ever taken. I was excited but frightened. That afternoon, I wrote the following in my reflective journal:

Tues. Sept. 3, 1986--Day 1

Pouring down rain—first day of school! I left Coppell just before 7:00 so I could be sure to be at school by 8:00 and have plenty of time to get set up. I knew I wanted to go to Carrie Cobb's room—and I planned to just stay there all morning.

I lugged all my stuff to her room (which is in a portable building). I walked in and a parent was in there. I knew she knew I was going to be in her room today.

I told her that she was the lucky one—and asked her where she wanted me to be. She showed me where—and it turned out to be a terrible place because it was right next to the air conditioner and so I doubt if much of the sound came through. But once I realized that it was going to be a problem—I felt like it was too late to ask for a different place—I tried to console myself that this was a "learning day."

I ran the videotape continuously throughout the morning. I tried to run the tape recorder—but the batteries were low—or something—and that didn't really work out.

Taking field notes is tough—but, if you get going on it pretty well, it isn't as bad as I thought—since I'm looking at language, I think it's more difficult than taking field notes on other aspects of a classroom—because it is hard to get all the conversations down.

I learned children's names very rapidly—particular children really stood out—immediately—and when Ms. Cobb and I talked later, it seems I had spotted some of the brightest children. Several of these children's self-assurance was noticeable.

As I drove home and thought about all I had seen—and felt frustrated that I did not yet have an instrument developed, I realized that although I had thought about spending a lot of time in this Able Learners' first grade—probably it would not serve me for what I was looking for in terms of reading acquisition—because it
seems that all of the children in this classroom can read—some 5th, 6th grade level. I feel a little bit scared about that—as I realize that fact that I did not do a pilot, etc.—and it worries me—but that is all fear based on a fear that I won't find anything—and I realize that it is an unfounded fear—but probably typical of doctoral students beginning dissertations. (This is one of the few times I will include such a long excerpt, but it is so representative of how it all started).

On that first day, I wrote down as much as I possibly could in my field notes—listening specifically for evidence of giftedness as well as evidence of metalinguistic awareness, but also knowing that I needed to get as much of the "other stuff" down as I could, since I did not yet know what would yield the important information. A few examples of what seemed important to me on that first day included:

(1) a discussion about a young Indian boy who "has a brand new name." When he was asked to tell why he had a new name, he said, "My mom went to Chicago and a lot of people said to change my name—it was the wrong name."

(2) One of the children told Mrs. Cobb that his mother did not want him to bring his supplies on the first day. Mrs. Cobb said, "That's OK. I have spares. Do you know what spares are?" James, another child in the class replied, "Extras."

(3) When Mrs. Cobb shared a book with the children, she had them identify certain pictures. When she showed them a picture of a "MOLASSES TRUCK" (with writing on the
truck), one child said, "Medicine truck." Mrs. Cobb said, "Right, it starts like medicine. Molasses. Molasses."

(4) When some of the children went into the main building to take a restroom break, one of the boys who stayed in the room got the book, Animals People Hate. He opened it and read the table of contents. "Gorilla monster," he said. I told him it was Gila monster, that the 'g' sounded like an 'h'.

(5) During a game of letter bingo, Mrs. Cobb held up Rr and said, "You have big and little R." Roy immediately said, "You mean capital and lower case."

Beginning that first day, and most every day I took field notes, I went back over them and wrote a review journal, that is, I looked over my field notes and wrote down notes about particular sections, illuminating where necessary, and musing about reasons or questions or possibilities. Sometimes before doing the review journal, I watched the videotape and/or listened to all, or portions of, the audiotape for that particular day. On the first day, there were numerous musings and questions I wrote down in my review journal. For example:

p. 4—Monseur has a new name. Children can see that name and person are not tied for life. Possibly explore other ideas with children re change of names.
p. 20—Roy: "You mean capital and lower case."

Must have a concept for the two types. How many other children do in first grade?

p. 35—Tchr. says, "If your chairs are straight, you may line up." Darcy says, "None of our chairs are straight," and indicates with her hand where the curves, etc., are. What about presenting vignettes like this to children--see if they can explain.

During the next several weeks, I made a valiant attempt to go to each classroom where the teacher had volunteered--and I made it to all but one. Also during this time, I tried to get back for a second or third visit to the classrooms where the teachers met my criteria (i.e., (1) their classroom had to be a place where children were allowed to talk; (2) they had to value talk; (3) their management style had to be tolerable, from my perspective; (4) they had to value gifted children's abilities, (see Chapter 6 for further explanation). I tried to get back to these classrooms so I could begin determining which children I would focus on. During this first month or so, I also attempted to figure out whether there were any specific times of day that would be most profitable, in terms of being able to obtain "good" data. Therefore, September was definitely a "casting about" month--learning about taking field notes, trying to keep up with reflective and review journals, figuring out the equipment I was using, developing
a rapport with various teachers, determining where I needed to be, dealing with the omnipresent fear that I was not finding anything—in other words, just generally learning ethnography, first hand.

I obtained schedules from the teachers so that I would have some idea of what time they planned to have various subjects and could, therefore, attempt to plan my schedule in such a way that I got to see children at various times doing various things—thereby beginning to determine when it would be most efficacious for me to visit. I had naively assumed that I could just "hang around" during most any part of a kindergarten day and observe children using language and (I hoped) commenting on their language, or in other ways, indicating what they were and were not aware of concerning their language. After just a few days observing in different classrooms, it was apparent that I had been mistaken. I was going to have to pick my times with care, in order to avoid (I hate to say it) wasting time.

As I already mentioned, I began videotaping and audiotaping on the first day of school at Werner Elementary School and intended to continue doing just that. However, on the following day, when I arrived at Shelton Elementary School—with video camera, tripod, tape recorder and notebook in hand, Mrs. Carter, the principal, mentioned that there was a parent who had asked about what it was that I was going to be doing. Mrs. Carter said that she felt like
I ought to get permission forms signed by the parents in the classrooms where I wanted to be. So, I wrote up a letter, nearly identical to the one I had given to the teachers when I asked them to volunteer, had the secretary type it, and sent it home with a permission form that afternoon. I asked all the teachers who had volunteered to let me into their classrooms to send the letters and permission forms home with their students since I did not yet know in which classrooms I would eventually be.

In all but an isolated case, the response was positive. Only in one class was a parent adamant that I not videotape. The teacher of this particular class was one of the best teachers I have ever seen, particularly in terms of how she built the children's self-concept and enabled them to learn. I ended up spending time in the class just "visiting"—bringing books and stuffed animals to the students, telling them stories, and marveling at their teacher. Because the parent had warned her daughter that if a Ms. McIntosh came into the classroom, she was to report it to her mother, my name for the year was Miss A-Secret. The name came from the first time I visited when a child asked me what my name was and I said, "It's a secret." Mrs. Walker said, "Ms. A-Secret! What an interesting name!" And from that day on, the children in that class greeted me as Ms. A-Secret—never questioning what a funny name that was.
Mrs. Carter, the principal, felt like it was alright for me to audiotape even though I did not have permission to videotape. I was relieved—and for the next week or so (the time it took to get the permission slips back)—I visited the classrooms in this school "sans" videorecorder.

It was during this first month that I really got my "researcher hat" firmly in place. I tend to be a fairly judgmental person but I was able to put that part of my personality into a compartment away from the part of me that was observing and trying to make sense in these classrooms. One of my friends, who is also quite judgmental about what is good and bad in classrooms, went with me to one of my schools one day because she was toying with the idea of doing a classroom ethnography. At the end of the day, we talked quite a bit about what had gone on and she asked me how I could stand being in a class where so much of what went on went against my beliefs about good teaching and learning. I tried to explain to her that somehow, I was able to lock such thoughts away because that was not what I was in these classrooms for; I was in them to see what was going on with children's literacy acquisition and literacy learning. So, therefore, I adopted a "neutral" or "impartial" stance while in the classrooms and while analyzing the data. Frankly, in one sense, it has surprised me that I have been able to do this, but I feel that during September, I honed this ability to lock away my
"judgmentalness" so that I did so automatically when I entered the schools or interacted with the data from the schools.

During my twenty visits to classrooms during the month of September, several ideas began to form and several ideas began to dissipate. Gone was the idea that children's language was encouraged, or even present, all day long in the majority of these kindergarten and first grade classrooms. Gone was the idea that kindergarten was anything like I remembered it to be. Gone was the idea that I was magically going to happen upon the clue that we had all been waiting for regarding the link between reading and metalinguistic awareness. (This last idea was not so much an idea as a hopeful fantasy). Also gone was the idea that I would be looking at reading acquisition and reading learning separate from writing acquisition and writing learning—thus the terminology change to literacy acquisition and literacy learning.

But, on the other hand, certain ideas were beginning to take shape, albeit a rather amorphous shape at this point. First of all, by the end of September, I had decided which classes I would spend time in for the rest of the year. Secondly, I was rapidly deciding which children in those classes would be my key informants for the research. Thirdly, a few areas kept popping into my consciousness as I worked in the classrooms and worked on my data. For
example, (a) the reading register was frequently used by teachers with little or no thought as to whether children were aware of the concepts being labeled; (b) teachers provided all kinds of clues to children--some of which were helpful, but many of which were confusing; (c) precious little time was spent in reading and writing, while a great deal was spend "reading" and "writing" (that is, on inauthentic reading and writing); (d) children really did make spontaneous comments about language (what a relief)--and in particular, the children I was focusing on definitely did; (e) there was frequent mismatch occurring between questions and answers, both teacher/child and child/teacher; (f) school was a "foreign" place, with all the trappings of a foreign place.

One other notion, and one I wish I had heeded, was the sense that there was one class where I could have conducted my entire study. Mrs. Perrone's Spanish immersion class was a metalinguistic awareness researcher's dream come true. Number one, Mrs. Perrone not only volunteered to let me in her room, but she actually liked me coming in.

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6Carole Edelsky and Karen Smith, "Is That Writing--Or Are Those Marks Just a Figment of Your Curriculum?" Language Arts 61 (January 1984): 24, discuss "reading" vs. reading and "writing" vs. writing and liken "reading" and "writing" to a "'creative' mother (who) instead of simply putting last night's leftovers on today's lunch table, prints prices by each container, gives her children pennies and lets them 'buy' their lunch from her 'cafeteria.' It might look like it--money and goods being exchanged--but are her children making genuine purchases?"
Secondly, she was growing and learning and we enjoyed bouncing ideas off of each other. Thirdly, because half the class day was conducted in Spanish, which was not the native language of any of the children in the class, all kinds of natural language/literacy acquisition was encouraged. Fourthly, no matter what time of day I went into this class, I knew children's language was going to be evident—and emphasized. Fifthly, the three children I eventually focused on in this class were magnificent informants and any one of them could have provided more than enough data all by himself or herself.

I first got the idea about kindergarten being a foreign country after spending the day in the Spanish immersion classroom. I was struck by how well the children in this class understood what it was they were to do—even though half the time, they were instructed in a language foreign to them. The more I observed in and thought about this classroom, the more I realized why this was true. Mrs. Perrone knew she was teaching children in a language that was foreign to them and she took great pains to demonstrate exactly what she wanted. Her voice, her facial expressions, her body language, and her willingness to repeat—all emphasized the message she was trying to get across. The children in this class often had a much better idea of what it was they were supposed to do than did children doing the
same activity in one of the other kindergarten classrooms, where all the instruction was in their "native" tongue.

After noticing this phenomenon in September, I began to watch for it during the coming months. I noted words and phrases that were foreign, expectations that were foreign, and other general aspects of school that were foreign. I listened and watched with the ear and eye of a child and realized that the words, phrases, and so on, were not foreign to the teacher, but that they were foreign to the children. The hypothesis, formulated during the research, that school is a foreign country, with its own foreign language, was able to stand up through further analysis of the data and is one of the primary assertions of this ethnography (see Chapter 7).

Throughout the course of the study, besides writing my field notes, my review journal, and my reflective journal, I made little notes to myself—memos regarding ideas, questions, possible connections, musings, categories that seemed to be emerging from the data, notions that piqued my curiosity—just anything that came to mind that I thought I ought to check into or that I thought might become
important at some point. Many of the memos I wrote did eventually become important.

In an extended form of the memo, I wrote several articles about small pieces of my research while I was still doing field work. For example, the piece about Kelli's Christmas story in Chapter 1 grew out of an article I wrote for the Gifted Students Institute Quarterly. Writing out extended explanations was helpful in beginning to force myself to conceptualize where I was going with the research. As always, writing forced my thinking which then drove my writing which then forced my thinking...

Each week that I visited the classrooms and videotaped, I viewed the videotapes as soon as possible--sometimes the same day, sometimes the following Saturday, sometimes up to two weeks later. I jotted down notes regarding things that I noticed, particularly things that

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7Miles and Huberman, in their book, Qualitative Data Analysis, 69, cite B. Glaser's definition of memos as the best, that is, "[A memo is] the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding....it can be a sentence, a paragraph or a few pages...it exhausts the analyst's momentary ideation based on data with perhaps a little conceptual elaboration." Theoretical Sensitivity (Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1978) 83. Miles and Huberman add the comment that, "Memos are always conceptual in intent. They do not just report data, but they tie different pieces of data together in a cluster, or they show that a particular piece of data is an instance of a general concept."

8Margaret E. McIntosh, "Investigating Language in Young Children," Gifted Students Institute Quarterly 12 (Fourth Quarter 1987): 4-5.
had not struck me when I was in the classroom, but that now seemed to stand out because of a different 'figure'/ 'ground' perspective. For example: What was the ratio of the number of references to "sound" to the number of references to "meaning" by teachers? Non-sequiturs--gifted kids, less? Teachers' awareness of when there has been cognitive confusion? What kinds of questions did my kids ask (e.g., for clarification, do they get to the "heart" better?). Use Halliday's functions of language to classify students' responses--any difference in variety or levels? How often do teachers use a word and then a student uses that same word--correctly? How can I explain that when I'm talking to some of these kids, that it is not like talking to a five- or six-year-old? Evidence that children do not understand school [e.g., Steven asking, "Why do we keep getting these fish?" (fish that have their "sight" words written on them)].

During the summer following my field work, within a two month period, I viewed all of the videotapes, one right after the other, to try to recapture a feel for the whole experience, and to see what else might be evident now that I

9 In my opinion, the most workable definitions for M.A.K. Halliday's seven categories for the functions of language comes from a chapter written by Gay Su Pinnell, "Ways to Look at the Functions of Children's Language," in Observing the Language Learner, ed. Angela Jaggar and M. Trika Smith-Burke (Newark, Del: International Reading Association and Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English, 1985), 57-72.
had nine months of fieldwork under my belt. I took notes while I watched, finding examples for some of the categories I had already established and determining some new categories that seemed promising, in terms of being able to explain some data.

Then, in the fall of 1987, it was time to really get down to data analysis and writing the "final" report. I took all of the memos, the articles, the notes from viewing the videotapes, the field notes, the review journal, the reflective journal, as well as the scraps of paper on which I had jotted down ideas—in the car, in restaurants, sitting in class, and so on,--and began to go through and decide which ideas were worth further exploration and which ideas just had not held up throughout the data collection and early analysis. I made list after list of various hypotheses and possible categories for the data. I wrote questions to myself. I began to draw schematics to try to visually represent some of the connections I was beginning to see.

[In order to demonstrate how I wrestled with

10 The word "final" has to be placed in quotes because I do not really think that this is a final report. There is much work that can still be done with the data I collected. But calling this a preliminary report does not seem right either.

11 Rather than using the term "schematic," Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis, 28-29, talk about "conceptual frameworks" as either graphic or narrative explanations of the key factors or variables and the presumed relationships among them. They posit that these "Frameworks can be rudimentary or elaborate, theory-driven
trying to conceptualize the relationships between the three primary variables I was studying, I have included several of these first schematics in the appendix (see Appendix 5)].

And finally, because I was trying to stick with some kind of a time schedule, I knew it was time to begin to define my categories, determine whether they "fit" the data, and if they did, to begin coding the data. The categories that I eventually came up with are as follows:

**Literacy Learning: Teacher to Student**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Learning (T--&gt;S)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>figurative language</td>
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<tr>
<td>phonology</td>
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<tr>
<td>syntax</td>
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<tr>
<td>semantics</td>
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<tr>
<td>print conventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>print carries meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>conversational conventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>text conventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>comments on new word/phrase</td>
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<tr>
<td>recognition of confusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>book conventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>literacy registers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Literacy Learning: Student to Teacher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Learning (S--&gt;T)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>figurative use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phonology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syntax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>semantics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>print conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>print carries meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>conversational conventions</td>
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<td>comments on new word/phrase</td>
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<td>recognition of confusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>book conventions</td>
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<td>literacy registers</td>
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or commonsensical, descriptive or causal. They also point out that the frameworks are not meant to function as blinders or straitjackets, but rather as focusing and bounding devices.
Literacy Acquisition: Teacher (to student)

- literacy acquisition (T→S) figurative language
- literacy acquisition (T→S) phonology
- literacy acquisition (T→S) syntax
- literacy acquisition (T→S) semantics
- literacy acquisition (T→S) print conventions
- literacy acquisition (T→S) print carries meaning
- literacy acquisition (T→S) conversational conventions
- literacy acquisition (T→S) text conventions
- literacy acquisition (T→S) comments on new word/phrase
- literacy acquisition (T→S) recognition of confusion
- literacy acquisition (T→S) book conventions
- literacy acquisition (T→S) literacy registers

Literacy Acquisition: Student (to Teacher)

- literacy acquisition (S→T) figurative use
- literacy acquisition (S→T) phonology
- literacy acquisition (S→T) syntax
- literacy acquisition (S→T) semantics
- literacy acquisition (S→T) print conventions
- literacy acquisition (S→T) print carries meaning
- literacy acquisition (S→T) conversational conventions
- literacy acquisition (S→T) text conventions
- literacy acquisition (S→T) comments on new word/phrase
- literacy acquisition (S→T) recognition of confusion
- literacy acquisition (S→T) book conventions
- literacy acquisition (S→T) literacy registers

Information re Literacy

- information re literacy given child to self
- information re literacy given child to teacher
- information re literacy given teacher to child
- information re literacy given child to child
- references to literacy/by children
- references to literacy/by teachers
- references to literacy/others
- children's awareness of their own literacy skills
- definitions of reading (teacher's)
- definitions of reading (child's)
- definitions of writing (teacher's)
- definitions of writing (child's)

Questions/Answers

- questions asked by students/do get to the heart
- questions asked by students/do not get to the heart
- question/answer mismatches/teacher & student
- non-sequiturs
Learning School

learning school
language of school/foreign language

Definitions of Words

definitions of words/concepts (teacher's)
definitions of words/concepts (child's)

Children Trying to Make Sense

evidence of children trying to make sense of the world
evidence of children trying to make sense of school
evidence of children trying to make sense of literacy
evidence of children applying their schema
interesting comments--obviously still children

Names

anything regarding names

I was not quite satisfied with these categories. I had a nagging sense that I had left something out, that I had overlap, and that I had some "vagueness" associated with some of the categories. But, from previous experience with generating and conceptualizing ideas, I knew that I could not just sit around and wait until the concept became clear in my mind; I had to work through the nagging sense that it was not quite right until it was right. So, I knew I had to begin to apply and work with the categories until I got a better handle on what was wrong.

With these categories in place for the time being, I went through all my field notes for the first coding. I had made three photocopies of all my field notes so that I could leave the originals intact, and draw on, write on, or cut up
the copies. The first time through, I used colored pencils to color code the data. I expected that once I had my working categories, I would be able to zip through the data, coding it all very quickly. Unfortunately—well, not unfortunately—but suffice it to say that I was wrong. Although some of the data were clearly one category and not another, other data belonged in more than one category. And then some of the categorizing involved some fairly conceptual processing on my part—which is why the 'unfortunately' in the sentence above was the wrong word to use; because it was at this point in the analysis that I had to really determine what my definitions of these categories were and in order to do that, I had to ideate exactly what had previously been a bit nebulous. (I will be quite specific about the categories listed above as I get into specific discussions of them in the following two chapters). I was still working with a sense of uneasiness about some of my categories. Working on definitions was beginning to give me a better handle, but I was still uneasy. I knew I had to plow forward.

After the first coding (with the colored pencils), I went through the field notes again, this time listening to many of the audiotapes or watching the videotapes again to determine whether I had coded the way I had wanted. I also transcribed numerous portions from the audiotapes and videotapes to include with my field notes in this coding.
In this coding, I went through, cutting up the field notes (not the ones that were color-coded, since I wanted them left intact) and the transcriptions that now accompanied the field notes. I taped the excerpts on to colored paper (depending on the classroom the excerpt was from) and wrote illuminating notes regarding the excerpt. When an excerpt fit into more than one category, I so coded it. These colored sheets were then sorted into color-coded folders that were labeled by category.

Once that step was over, I began to go through the folders, again looking for patterns that might emerge—ones I had never seen before or ones that had not seemed viable on a previous encounter. It was really at this stage that the metaphor of "threshold" began to jump out at me. One of my friends who had done ethnographic research said that he thought "finding your metaphor" seemed to be some kind of rite of passage—and he was not sure if it was all that important. I believed the first part of what he said (i.e., that it was a rite of passage), and thereby had trouble shrugging it off to be able to agree with him on the second part (i.e., that finding the metaphor was not all that important). I also knew, though, that I did not want to FIND (as in FORCE) a metaphor. I had tried that for awhile during the summer of 1987—trying very hard to make my data fit something that I thought would be clever and would make for good article titles, and so on—and when I finally
admitted to myself how false that was, I knew I would never try to force it again. I would stay open if one happened to fly into my head, but I would not go out groveling for it.

One day, while I was working with the data, struggling with the coding, working hard to conceptualize what I was thinking and where I was going, the idea of threshold just came into my mind. I jotted it down and kept working. The next few days in my car, driving to work, I listened to audiotapes from my fieldwork, still mentally struggling with the coding and categorizing. The threshold idea kept popping into my mind until finally I decided I better figure out if this was the metaphor that would help me conceptualize and explain what I had found. I went to the library and checked out a stack of books about auditory perception. The more I read, the more I realized it fit with my data. And then I knew that for me, at least, I had not found the metaphor, it had found me.

I do not, in any way, want to give the impression that ethnography magically comes together, because that is not how it happens. I have worked hard—and am still working hard—to discover all that this research has to offer to teachers, parents, and researchers. Although there were times I kept hoping I would walk into my office and it would all be neatly compartmentalized and ready for publication, that of course, did not happen. Ethnography is
exhausting— in the field and in the office. But the sense of discovery and satisfaction are the reward.

Case in point: One day I was working on the chapter on literacy acquisition and grappling with how I was going to organize the chapter to most clearly support my assertion about young gifted children's lower threshold for language. I had written about ten pages, some of which I liked, and some of which I did not. I kept looking at my definition for metalinguistic sentience and my lists of categories (shown previously) and I thought, 'Wait a minute!' It was one of those times when the inside of my head feels like an earthquake or an avalanche is occurring. An earthquake or an avalanche involves the breakdown of one landform and results in the creation of a new landform. Pieces (chunks) of the old landform are still present and visible after the earthquake, but in a different arrangement. Likewise, my categories began shifting; there was a breakdown and a creation, with some of the original chunks still visible, but arranged differently.

I got out the category cards (color-coded, of course) that were arranged into the old structure (shown previously) and laid them out all over the living room floor. I arranged and rearranged and made new categories and combined old ones until I had the following adaptation.

1. pragmatics (S) (T) (S—>T) (T—>S)
2. syntax (S) (T) (S—>T) (T—>S)
3. semantics (S) (T) (S→T) (T→S)
4. phonological (S) (T) (S→T) (T→S)
5. orthographic (S) (T) (S→T) (T→S)
6. figurative (S) (T) (S→T) (T→S)
7. metalanguage (S) (T) (S→T) (T→S)
8. print "carries" meaning (S) (T) (S→T) (T→S)
9. book conventions (S) (T) (S→T) (T→S)
10. text conventions (S) (T) (S→T) (T→S)
11. referent/label arbitrariness (S) (T) (S→T) (T→S)
12. purposes of literacy (S) (T) (S→T) (T→S)
13. abilities (S) (T) (S→T) (T→S)

What I found was that many of the original categories I had established were either specifically related to one other category and could, therefore, be subsumed under that category, or generally related to several of the categories. In the latter case, data that had been sorted into one of those categories needed to be analyzed to determine into which of the other categories it should go. For example, the data in the "references to literacy" category could be analyzed in terms of phonology, purposes of literacy, book conventions, abilities, and so on.

The adaptation shown above still did not express what I wanted; it was still cumbersome and somewhat unclear. So, after further graphic grappling, I came up with the
following three-dimensional model for classifying children's evidence of their metalinguistic sentience. (Figure 18)
The Model for Classifying the Evidence Provided by Children of Their Metalinguistic Sentience

At this juncture, the cube has 120 cells, which may seem more cumbersome or unwieldy than my original listing at the beginning of this chapter. In terms of use and "tightness," it is much less cumbersome, much more organized, and much more manageable. Models such as the one shown above are called "morphological models," and are meant to depict their components as interrelated parts of a whole. No hierarchy is either implied or intended by any facet of the cube.

The model shown above is a cube, thereby allowing classification along three dimensions. One dimension of the model (shown above as the top face of the cube) allows for the classification of the evidence provided by children of their metalinguistic sentience into either Literacy Acquisition (i.e., natural procurement of literacy) or Literacy Learning (i.e., conscious attention to the manifestations of literacy).

The second dimension of the model (shown above as the right face of the cube) allows for classification of the evidence provided by children of their metalinguistic sentience into one of four "prompt states": (1) self-prompted, (2) child-prompted, (3) adult-prompted, (4) text-prompted. Self-prompted indicates that the evidence offered by the child came "from within," that is, with no external
prompt. Child-prompted indicates that the evidence offered by the child was stimulated by another child; the other child could make a comment, ask a question, or complete some action. Adult-prompted indicates that the evidence offered by the child was incited by an adult. The adult is usually the teacher, but this category also includes parent volunteers, high school aides, and researchers. Text-prompted indicates that the evidence offered by the child was motivated by something inanimate. This category includes books, workbooks, filmstrips, newspapers, bulletin boards, and the like.

The third dimension of the model (shown above as the front face of the cube) allows for classification of the evidence provided by the children of their metalinguistic sentience into the fifteen aspects of language and literacy discussed in Chapter 2 as part of the "form and function of language that can be manipulated," that is, (1) pragmatics, (2) syntactics, (3) semantics, (4) phonology, (5) orthography, (6) morphology, (7) figurative, (8) metalanguage, (9) print "carries" meaning, (10) print conventions, (11) book conventions, (12) text conventions, (13) referent/label arbitrariness, (14) purposes of literacy, (15) abilities.

For readers who are having difficulty imagining the cells, picture the Model for Classifying the Evidence Provided by Children of Their Metalinguistic Sentience as
one of those plastic multi-drawer organizers that many people have in their garage or tool shed for odds and ends (e.g., nails, nuts and bolts, keys, pieces of wire, and so on).

This imaginary organizer is two drawers wide, fifteen drawers tall, and four compartments deep in each drawer. So, if one was to pull out the 'top left drawer' of the model, this is what it would look like. (Figure 19)

![Diagram of an organizer with four compartments labeled LA/Pr/T, LA/Pr/A, LA/Pr/C, and LA/Pr/S.](image)

Figure 19. Schematic showing the conception of how the Model for Classifying the Evidence Provided by Children of their Metalinguistic Sentience serves.

After arriving at this model, I had to reclassify much of my data concerning the metalinguistic sentience of
the nine verbally gifted children who were the informants for this study. The information thus provided, allowed me to draw the conclusions presented in the following two chapters concerning the lower metalinguistic sentience thresholds of the nine verbally gifted children who served as the key informants for this study.
CHAPTER 9

LITERACY ACQUISITION

On Halloween, all the kindergarteners got to wear their costumes to school. Ramona was a witch and she finally gave in to her urge to pull one of Susan's curls.

"I'm the baddest witch in the world!" yelled Ramona, and ran after Susan whose curls bobbed daintily about her shoulders in a way that could not be disguised. After weeks of longing she tweaked one of Susan's curls, and yelled, "Boing!" through her rubber mask.

"Boing! Boing!" Others joined the game. Susan tried to run away, but no matter which way she ran there was someone eager to stretch a curl and yell, "Boing!" Susan ran to Miss Binney. "Miss Binney! Miss Binney!" she cried. "They're teasing me! They're pulling my hair and boinging me! A witch started it."

"Which witch?" asked Miss Binney.

Susan looked around. "I don't know which witch," she said, "but it was a bad witch."

That's me, the baddest witch in the world, thought Ramona. Which witch, thought Ramona, liking the sound of the words. Which witch, which witch. As the words ran through her thoughts, Ramona began to wonder if Miss Binney could guess who she was.\(^1\)

Like Ramona, the children on whom this study focused savored language; they noticed the sounds of letters, they noticed the meanings of words, they noticed how words were spelled, they noticed words that sounded like something else, they noticed metaphorical use of language, they noticed their own and others' abilities with language, and so on. These children also experimented with language--in

\(^1\) adapted from Cleary, Ramona the Pest, 87-88.
their speech, in their reading, and in their writing. They also locked on to various elements of language—new words, new phrases, new expressions—and used them in their speech, in their reading, and in their writing. Just by being "around" sounds, words, books, and speech, these nine children extracted a sense of language—not only how it is used for communication, but also how it can be used, that is, how it can be manipulated to suit the manipulator's ends. In other words, these children were extraordinarily metalinguistically sentient, that is they had a conscious and/or unconscious apprehension of, sensitivity to, and attention to language as something with form and function that can be manipulated.

In this chapter, I will focus primarily on these nine children's metalinguistic sentience as related to their literacy acquisition. In the following chapter, I will focus primarily on their metalinguistic sentience as related to their literacy learning. Even though each chapter has a primary focus, of necessity, there will be some crossover.

**Literacy Acquisition: Evidence from the Children**

Recall from the last chapter that literacy acquisition is defined, for this study, as "natural" procurement of literacy, that is, developing literacy by using it in natural, communicative, literate situations. Literacy acquisition is not necessarily a conscious process
since children can learn to read and write without ever thinking about the fact that they are learning to read and write. I do not mean to imply by the previous statement that literacy acquisition precludes consciousness of reading and writing, just that it is not necessary.

For the children in this study, however, it seems that they were conscious of what was happening as they learned to read and write. I think that their sense of what was happening as they learned to read and write moved from total unconsciousness to consciousness without the "benefit" of, or presence of, any formal instruction. The sense I have from these children's families is that they were not raising "superbabies," showing them dots on flash cards before they could even sit up, hauling them to "super-enriched" nursery schools where words and their corresponding pictures were flashed on the walls every few seconds, or forcing them to sit and fill out commercial phonics workbooks before they had even started school.

Rather, the nine gifted children in this study had parents who worked hard at work, who worked hard at home, and who tried to give their children a good upbringing by instilling strong values, a sense of family, and a sense of discipline. In my direct and indirect contacts with the parents of these children, I never got the impression that they had worked to "make" their child gifted or had worked to make sure that their child could read and write before coming to school.
For example, when I interviewed Christopher P., one of the first graders, he told me that his father did not want him to worry about spelling when he was four because his father did not want him to get "stressed out."

If anything, these were parents who, because of comfortableness with self, could accept their children as gifted or as non-gifted and who were somewhat surprised at the abilities that had surfaced in their children, even though the extraordinary abilities may have been obvious from the beginning. For example, the following is an excerpt from the notebook kept by Megan's parents, specifically for this study. Her parents, like all the others, were requested to keep a notebook in which I asked them to write down what they could remember about their child's language development and to jot down notes about "interesting comments their child made about language." The excerpt is long, but is quite representative of other parents' impressions, so I decided to include it.

Megan, born October 31, 1980, was our fourth child. To me she seemed a precocious child from the beginning. She could walk by the time she was eight and one half months old. At one year and two months she could speak in complete sentences.

The trait that most characterizes Megan's personality is her tenacity. At age two she decided that she wanted to tie her own shoes. She asked me to show her how. I thought by showing her once or twice she would give up and go on to something else. She wouldn't let me get away for over an hour of practice tying. During the next two days she practiced on her own for long periods. At the end of three days she could tie her own shoes and has been ever since.
When Megan was four years old she decided she wanted to ride a two wheel bicycle. Both Bonnie and I told her to wait until the next year. Megan got out an old 16" two wheel bicycle from the garage and started practicing on her own. This bicycle was old and the rear wheel wasn't even round. The pedal gear mechanism was not working properly. Within two days, without help from anyone, Megan could ride a two wheel bike.

Also around age four, Megan was making what I call "truly logical word associations." For instance, one day she asked me how candy could save someone's life. At first I didn't know quite what she meant. Then she pointed at some in the store—a roll of lifesavers....

Another thing that has amazed me about Megan's development is the depth of questions that she asks. In the evening at bedtime, she would begin to ask me questions about God and Jesus and what happens to people that die, etc. She would also build logical constructs to lead to a conclusion that I thought only adults could come up with. She not only would make her points verbally but would also use her hands while talking in a most emphatic and illustrative way.

I believe there are several reasons that might help explain Megan's verbal and cognitive development. First, Megan was breast fed by her mother for over three years. I have read much literature on this and I believe it to be a major factor. Second is the role models provided by her older brother and sisters. They too could read well at early ages and spent a lot of time reading. They could do things physically that she too wanted to do very much, like tie shoes and ride bicycles. Everyone in the family has a large vocabulary. There is quite a bit of competition among family members and this often leads to spirited verbal clashes. To keep up, Megan had to develop good verbal skills and develop physical skills that stretched her capability.

I also believe that positive praise for her accomplishments given by both her mom and dad contributed to her motivation.

Our family has always had a love for stories and books. Each evening at least one story has been read to each child.

Megan is a child that seems to understand her capabilities and her possibilities. She has the ability to express herself and communicate with peers and adults to achieve her goals. If only the educational experience she is about to get from the school system could foster and channel her drive. I am not very optimistic about it.
One can understand this father's lack of optimism if one considers the powers of learning already evidenced by his daughter before she ever entered school—her obvious interest in language and communication and her incredible acquisition of literacy. Since she is the fourth child, Megan's parents probably have a pretty good sense of "school" and although they probably do not articulate it thus, "school" primarily focuses on literacy learning, not literacy acquisition, with the literacy learning often coming in small steps, most likely behind where Megan has already climbed through her literacy acquisition.

How does this happen? How does a child acquire literacy—and not only acquire it—but acquire it much sooner than do agemates? These questions cannot be answered with certainty, just as the question of how a child acquires language cannot be answered with certainty. So, it is not with certainty that I offer this answer. It is, however, with conceptual support from my research that I assert that the nine verbally gifted children on whom this study focused were able to acquire (and learn) literacy sooner and faster than their agemates because of a lower metalinguistic sentience threshold. In other words, these children had a lower point at which a stimulus could be perceived (or could produce a given effect). In this case, the stimulus was language as something with form and function that could be manipulated. Literacy acquisition occurred sooner and
faster because of the lower threshold at which language (as something with form and function that can be manipulated) was perceived. Literacy learning occurred sooner and faster because of the lower threshold at which language (as something with form and function that could be manipulated) was able to produce a given effect. The latter will be dealt with in Chapter 10, while this chapter will concentrate on the former, literacy acquisition.

Using the Model for Classifying Evidence Provided by Children of Their Metalinguistic Sentience presented in the previous chapter, I will fill in the sixty cells that pertain to the left side of the cube, that is, the fifteen aspects of language, with evidence from the four "prompt" states. Recalling the analogy comparing this model to a thirty drawer organizer, for the upcoming discussion, I will present one "drawer" at a time, choosing the drawers from top to bottom, and proceeding from the front of the drawer to the back. In keeping with this analogy, the subheadings will be indicated by drawers, that is, Literacy Acquisition/Pragmatics will be Drawer 1, Literacy Acquisition/Syntax will be Drawer 2, and so on through Drawer 15. I hope in this way to help the reader keep track of where "we are" in discussing the model and the evidence. It is my intention that the exemplars for each of the sixty cells (or "drawer sections") of the model will explicate the model while offering support for my contention that the nine
verbally gifted children who served as the informants in this study have a lower threshold for metalinguistic sentience as it relates to literacy acquisition than do other children. In most instances, only one example will be given for each cell, but sometimes, I will provide more than one.

**Drawer 1**

Recall that pragmatics was defined in Chapter 2 as referring to the factors that govern our choice of language in social interactions and the effects of our choice on others. From a very young age, there is an unconscious acquisition of tacit knowledge of some of these factors, for example, around whom "cussing" is allowed and what the consequences are if the pragmatics are violated. Pragmatics is not a coherent field of study at this time, because so many factors govern the choice of language in any given situations. Therefore, several areas overlap in pragmatics, including semantics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and discourse analysis.²

Certainly there was evidence from all of the children in the classrooms where I observed that they had a tacit sense of when to use what language. However, pertaining to Drawer 1, the children on whom I focused

²Crystal, *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. 
provided evidence of a ready sense of when and how to use language effectively and appropriately.

Soon after I began using a remote microphone, I found what I can now classify as an example of Literacy Acquisition/Pragmatics/Self-Prompted [LA/Pr/S]. I found that the children on whom I was focusing determined that the remote microphone they were wearing was a link with me, whether or not I had the earphones on. The children knew that eventually, I listened to the audio and/or videotapes on which they were being recorded and when they remembered that they had the microphone on, they used this link to communicate with me. I often heard little messages that the child wearing the microphone that day had recorded for me. They also used "reporter" voices and language choices during some of these microphone-conscious times. For example, one day during "show and tell," Kelli acted as on on-site reporter. "Chris is showing a picture of his poodle. He says the dog is wearing red fingernail polish and looks mean in the mouth. Next, Jennifer is holding up the snowflakes she brought from home. Sarah asked Jennifer a question about how to make them and Jennifer told her that her mom made them with scissors."

These children paid close attention to other children's language and use of language. An example of Literacy Acquisition/Pragmatics/Child-Prompted [LA/Pr/C] involved David's reaction to some children who kept
repeating the same answer over and over. Mrs. Perrone had read the kindergarteners a story about Teto the Tadpole who had grown and become a frog. At the end of the story, she asked the children what name they thought Teto the Tadpole should have now. Six different children, when called on, said, "Teto the Frog." David said, in one of the few times I ever saw him express frustration, "Everybody keeps saying that! That's not it!"

One morning when I got to Mrs. Perrone's room, she had to run up to the office to take care of something, and she asked me if I would stay in the room and greet the children as they arrived. After the children had put their things into their lockers, I told them that they could "get a book to read." Joel informed me, "a book or a puzzle. Mrs. Perrone always says a book or a puzzle." Later the same day, he provided another example of Language Acquisition/Pragmatics/Adult-Prompted [LA/Pr/A]. I asked Joel and David if they liked to read about animals. Joel said he liked to read about "only a certain type of animal--dinosaurs."

The sign shown in the figure below is an example of Language Acquisition/Pragmatics/Text-Prompted [LA/Pr/T] provided by two of the subjects of this study. One morning Christopher P. and Christopher C. were asked to go to the computer room and get it ready for the rest of the class and to come back and let the class know when it was ready.
After they had been gone for about ten minutes, the boys dashed back into the room and said, "All the computers work but one and we made an 'out of order' sign to put on it. We drew a frowny face on it since we're sad that no one can use the computer."

![Out of Order!](image)

Figure 20. Sign made by Christopher P. and Christopher C. to indicate that one of the computers was not working.

Drawer 2

As with pragmatics, very young children begin to acquire a tacit understanding of syntax (the way words are arranged to show relationships of meaning within and across sentences) as they acquire language. The children in this
study, though, seemed to be more aware of syntax than just as part of the grammar that allows us to communicate.

Frequently, Christopher C. would finish a sentence for his teacher, Mrs. Benson, as if he had been anticipating what she was going to say (which apparently he was). For example, Mrs. Benson was telling the students in the Cubs group, "When you read to follow directions, you need to read--" and before she could finish, Christopher C. said, in exactly the same beat as she would have "--carefully." I have used this example here for Literacy Acquisition/Syntax/Self-Prompted [LA/Sy/S], but it could also be classified as LA/Se/S as well as exemplifying Christopher C.'s adeptness at learning school (as discussed in Chapter 7).

The following example of Literacy Acquisition/Syntax/Child-Prompted [LA/Sy/C] occurred one afternoon in Mrs. Yager's class. Ben was wearing the remote microphone and I overheard him "correct" one of the other children who had asked if he could take home a booklet he had colored by saying, "I can take this home?" Ben said, "You mean, 'Can I take this home?'"

Morning P.E. for Mrs. Perrone's class always involved playing some type of game, with directions given in Spanish, since the entire morning was conducted in Spanish. In May, the children were getting ready to go out and play a game that they had played many times before, "Squirrels in
the Trees." As usual, Mrs. Perrone told the children what they were going to play (in Spanish) and in so doing, was the stimulus for an example of Literacy Acquisition/Syntax/Adult-Prompted [LA/Sy/A]. As the class was headed out the door, Joel said to me, "She got mixed up, she said, 'Trees in the Squirrels' and she meant, 'Squirrels in the Trees'."

In February of the year I was conducting the research, I interviewed each of my informants for approximately one to two hours. One of the "tasks" that I had them do was to look at a group a books and tell me which one looked like the best book, which one looked second best, and so on. One of the books that was in my collection was Max's Breakfast by Rosemary Wells. Stephanie picked it up, read several pages. When she got to the one that said, "'BAD EGG,' said Max. 'Good egg,' said Ruby," Stephanie said, "BAD EGG? GOOD EGG? That sounds too short! It should say, 'This is a bad egg.' 'No, this is a good egg.' That's too short!" I classified this as an example of Literacy Acquisition/Syntax/Text-Prompted [LA/Sy/T].

Drawer 3

Certainly there is a great deal of focus on word meaning in the life of a young child. There are various estimates regarding the number of words and concepts learned by children in their first few years of life—an exact number cannot be cited, but suffice it to say that the
number of words/meanings learned in the early years is
staggering.\textsuperscript{3} Probably in no class was Literacy Acquisition/
Semantics more apparent than in the Spanish immersion
kindergarten. By its nature, the curriculum brought
"meaning" to the fore.\textsuperscript{4} I will use some examples from that
class, but will include an example from another class too.

\textsuperscript{3}Jeanne S. Chall, "Two Vocabularies for Reading:
Recognition and Meaning," in The Nature of Vocabulary
Acquisition, ed. Margaret G. McKeown and Mary E. Curtis
(Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1987), 7, cites the
following figures for children's vocabulary sizes: 1. Lorge
and Jeanne Chall, "Estimating the Size of Vocabularies of
Children and Adults: An Analysis of Methodological Issues,"
Journal of Experimental Education 32 (1963), estimated that
six-year-olds know approximately 5,000 words; Alden J. Moe,
A Comparative Study of Vocabulary Diversity: The Speaking
Vocabularies of Selected First-Grade Primers, and the
Vocabularies of Selected First-Grade Trade Books, Paper
presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational
Research Association, Chicago, ERIC ED 090 520, estimated
that six-year-olds know about 6,000 different words; R. H.
Seashore, "How Many Words Do Children Know?" The Packet 2
(1947), estimates that six-year-olds know 24,000 different
words. One can see the wide variation in estimates.

\textsuperscript{4}For those unfamiliar with 'immersion', Fred
Genessee, Learning through Two Languages: Studies of
Immersion and Bilingual Education (Cambridge, Mass.:
Newbury House, 1987), 1, offers the following definition:
"Immersion is a form of bilingual education in which
students who speak the language of the majority of the
population receive part of their instruction through the
medium of a second language and part through their first
language. Both the second language and the first language
are used to teach regular school subjects, such as
mathematics, science, or physical education, in addition to
language arts. The same subjects are never taught using
both languages concurrently or during the same academic
year. Different subjects are taught through the medium of
each language. Generally speaking, at least fifty percent
of instruction during a given academic year must be provided
through the second language for the program to be regarded
as immersion."
An example of Literacy Acquisition/Semantics/Self-Prompted [LA/Se/S] that I would not have known about had it not been for the notebook kept by Bryan F.'s mother involved his use of the word "miniature." Emmy, one of the children in Mrs. Benson's class, brought a little cardboard zoo that she and her mother had made at home. The children were invited to make some tiny animals to go in the zoo. Mrs. Benson said, "What's another word for little?" Several children offered answers such as "small" and "little." Mrs. Benson asked, "Have you ever heard of miniature?" Christopher P. said, "Like you could say miniature animals." Mrs. Benson asked, "Does it mean 'little tiny'?" to which another child said, "Yes." That evening, in a discussion at the dinner table, Bryan F. asked, "Is Coach George coming to the party?" His mother told him, "No, only little George." Bryan F. said, "You mean miniature George is coming."

In Mrs. Perrone's room, the children played many different types of Bingo games. In April, the blue group was playing number Bingo, and they were to be saying the numbers in Spanish. When one of the children called out, "viente dos," one of the other children said, "viente toast!" This caused a whole discussion about the word 'dos' and the word 'toast'. After a couple of minutes of this, David said, "That's enough toast, I'm full." I consider...
Mrs. Perrone had certain guidelines for the children regarding the number of people who could be at particular centers in the classroom. When the number of children at a center "exceeded the limit," she would ask, "How many people can be at the listening center?" Even when she would ask this in Spanish, the majority of the children would answer in English. From early in the year, though, I would hear the three children I was most interested in, answering in Spanish (e.g., "Dos"). I also noticed Megan, Joel, and David spontaneously translating various directions that they were given in Spanish. I considered all of these to be Literacy Acquisition/Semantics/Adult-Prompted [LA/Se/A].

One afternoon when the children were at various centers in the classroom, one of the children had his Superkids book at the table where he and Kelli were sitting. Kelli was looking over Gene's arm as he was looking at his book. She pointed to the word 'rest' and said, "'Rest' like 'rest in your bed'." I categorized this as an example of Literacy Acquisition/Semantics/Text-Prompted [LA/Se/T].

Drawer 4

Probably no aspect of language related to literacy receives more deliberate instruction in the early grades than does "phonics," that is, the sounds that letters
"make." I will discuss this deliberate instruction in Chapter 10, whereas in this chapter, I am more interested in children's spontaneous attention to the sounds and letters in words. As with the other aspects of language that I am referring to in this study, the sounds of language are not the most salient feature of language to young children. Meaning is most salient (which is to be expected). The following example demonstrates how meaning wins out for some children.

During recess one day, the children were playing various tagging and running games. Craig ran up to Megan, tagged her and said, "See you later crocodile." I was standing nearby; Megan looked at me and said, "He said, 'See you later crocodile'—he means 'See you later alligator, after 'while crocodile.'" Her emphasis on the sounds indicated that she understood, not only the semantics, but the phonetics of the phrase.

Literacy Acquisition/Phonology/Self-Prompted [LA/Ph/S] was evident one morning when the Spanish immersion kindergarten was playing Squirrels in the Trees. (For those not familiar with the game, pairs of children form "trees" by holding hands and raising them into the air. On a signal, other children, the "squirrels" run and try to get safely into a tree. Like musical chairs, there are not quite enough trees to go around). David and Leslie were a tree and Kelli was trying to get into their tree. David
said, "No K's are allowed." When Kelli questioned him, he said, "No K's are allowed. Like your name starts with K." Several nearby "trees" started saying, "No A's are allowed" "No C's are allowed" and so on--except that there were not any children around with that as a first letter of their name. Megan, who was part of one of the nearby trees, said, "No B's are allowed--that means 'no boys'." I classified this latter example as Literacy Acquisition/Phonology/Child-Prompted [LA/Ph/C].

On the very first day that I visited in Mrs. Yager's kindergarten, she was working with a small group of children on the floor. She would place a picture in front of each child and ask him or her to tell about the picture. One of the children was very reticent and would not say anything about his picture of a chicken in a farmyard. Mrs. Yager was trying to prompt him into getting started. She kept making her questions more and more specific until she was focusing only on the chicken. She asked, "What is this?" Although she was asking Jeremiah, Stephanie apparently could hold back no longer and she began to give hints about the word 'chicken'. She said, "It lives on a farm.../ch/ /ch/ /ch/...cluck cluck." Her second hint, "/ch/ /ch/ /ch/" is classified as an example of Literacy Acquisition/Phonology/Adult-Prompted [LA/Ph/A].

Because of the philosophy of Mrs. Perrone, the Spanish immersion classroom teacher, although she used the
same curriculum materials as the other kindergarten teachers, she downplayed the heavy phonics emphasis particularly with the reading group that included Megan, Joel, and David. Because of their lower threshold for metalinguistic sentience, they commented on sounds and words frequently anyway. One day, the children in this group were writing different words in their workbooks. When directed to write "flags," Joel said, "That sounds like eggs," after sounding the word out to write it. Mrs. Perrone agreed with his statement, now classified as an example of Literacy Acquisition/Phonology/Text-Prompted [LA/Ph/T].

Drawer 5

Orthography refers to the symbol system of a language and is also used more specifically to refer to the spelling system of a language. It is this latter reference that is used in this model.

Nearly anytime the children were writing on their own, examples of Literacy Acquisition/Orthography/Self-Prompted [LA/Or/S] were evident. If readers look through the examples in Appendix 1 of David's writing and at the examples shown in Figure 21, below, it is evident that although all the children in this class were encouraged to spell the best way they knew how, David obviously "knew how" better than did many other children.
Figure 21. Example of a child's story. Compare to David's 5/12/87 story in Appendix 1.

One example of Literacy Acquisition/Orthography/Child-Prompted [LA/Or/C] that also shows phonological awareness was provided one morning when the children in the Spanish immersion classroom were learning about rooms of the house. They had large cardboard "rooms" set up around the rug area and were singing a song (in Spanish) about each room of the house and about the child who was standing in that room. David was standing in the dining room and when the children started singing about David in the dining room, he said, "Da-veed" (the Spanish pronunciation). Afterwards
he asked me, "Did you hear me say 'Da-veed'?" I told him I had and he said, "It's spelled 'D-A-V-I-D.'"

Another example of LA/Or/C was supplied by Ben when his group was spelling words with letters written on fried eggs. William, one of the children in the group was given 'l', 'o', and 'g' (not in that order). He picked up his fried egg letters and set them down in the order to spell "log." When asked what he thought it spelled, he said, "I think it spells 'tongue.'" Ben, who was not asked what he thought, said, "Where's the 't'?"

The Superkids "Reading" program has many suggestions for games and activities for the children to play. Often, Mrs. Yager would make these games and have her parent volunteers work with small groups of children on these activities. One day, a parent volunteer had Stephanie's group spelling various words with some letters that she had given them. One of the children was given the letters 'd', 'd', and 'i'. The child had quite a bit of trouble deciding what word those letters would spell, so finally the mother volunteer arranged them so they spelled 'did'. When asked what the word was, the child guessed 'sit.' It was pointed out to her that it started with a 'd' and so she tried 'dad.' Finally, the mother said, "No, did. You did it." Stephanie said, "If it started with a 'u' it would say 'you did it'." I categorized this statement as Literacy Acquisition/Orthography/Adult-Prompted [LA/Or/A].
As so often happens, in three of the four classrooms in which I conducted my research, there was at least one pair of children with the same first name. In Mrs. Benson's class, there were the two Christophers and there were also two boys named Brian and Bryan. Both were attentive to the differences in the spelling of their names. When Mrs. Benson was working with punctuation and capitalization one day, she wrote a series of sentences on the board, each of which had punctuation and capitalization mistakes in it. The last sentence was, "did brian ride the bus to school". As soon as it was written, Bryan F. said, "You've got the wrong Brian on the board. I'm the one who rides the bus so you should have a 'y' not an 'i'!" He furnished an example of Literacy Acquisition/ Orthography/Text-Prompted [LA/Or/T].

Drawer 6

Morphology is one of the two primary areas studied by grammarians. This branch refers to the structure of words and in some languages includes units smaller than words and in some languages includes units we would consider bigger than words. For this study, children's awareness of morphology will include "morphemes" (i.e., those units such as '-ly', '-ness', 'un-', and words).

As presented in Appendix 3, researchers have used many means to assess children's concept of "wordness" (e.g.,
having them reverse word pairs given to them, and so on). However, one can watch and listen to children using language naturally and find evidence of Literacy Acquisition/
Morphology/Self-Prompted [LA/Mo/S]. For example, David was
telling me that his "brother went to a 'meet track'--wait,
no--that's backwards--a track meet." Other examples are
present if one looks at the children's writing. One cannot
just look to see if the children leave spaces between words,
but also to see where they begin a new line. For numerous
examples, see Appendix 1, David's stories.

I chose an example of Literacy Acquisition/
Morphology/Child-Prompted [LA/Mo/C] from some of my field
notes taken in May. One day, I was sitting at a table with
several of the children. One of the children had gone to
McDonald's for breakfast and he was telling the others that
he had had a McMuffin for breakfast. The other children
talked about other "Mc" food that is served at McDonald's.
All of a sudden, David said, "Hey, if you put your name and
my name together, it would be McDavid. Take the 'Mc' from
Ms. Mc and the 'David' from David and you have McDavid!"

All of the kindergartens I visited used the
Superkids Reading Program. In Mrs. Yager's class, the
children usually completed one part of the lesson as a whole
group prior to breaking into smaller groups for more
individual attention. The program includes a series of
tapes that introduce the lesson and that give various
instructions to the children. On one particular tape there was a song that included all kinds of adjectives to describe the Superkids, (the main characters of the program), including 'curious', 'conspicuous', and 'mischievous'. Mrs. Yager was explaining to the children about what the different words meant. She said, "Another way to pronounce mischievous is /mis-cheev-ee-ous/." Stephanie said, "Oh, I've heard that word on my tape." (She listened to books on tapes at home). This was an example of Literacy Acquisition/Morphology/ Adult-Prompted [LA/Mo/A].

Kelli provided an example of Literacy Acquisition/Morphology/Text-Prompted [LA/Mo/T] one day when she was writing a story. I was sitting beside her, taking field notes and copying down what she was writing (Figure 22).

```
Kelli: I hav
2 Dogs I love
my S Dogs I Plee
with my S Dogs
I kis my S Dogs
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Figure 22. Kelli's story taken from my field notes.
After she finished her story, she leaned over to read what I had written. She noticed that on one sentence, 'I kiss my 2 dogs,' I had the 's' marked out because she ended up putting it on the next line and I had incorrectly anticipated where she was going to write the final letter of that word (Figure 22). She read what I had copied, looked at me, said, "Oh, 's' should go here because it's 'dogs' not 'dog' 's'."

Drawer 7

Understanding of figurative language is considered a rather late developing skill in terms of language acquisition. The children on whom I focused, however, provided evidence nearly every time I saw them, that they not only understood figurative language, but could produce it, and appreciate it.

Bryan F.'s mother wrote in a journal about Bryan as a young child. She wrote, "Bryan seemed to remember things that he heard. Quite frequently, he would properly use words and phrases that he had heard other people use. His correct usage of the words frequently surprised us." From her journal and from my observation of Bryan F., I have numerous examples of Literacy Acquisition/Figurative Language/Self-Prompted [LA/Fi/S]. One such example was reported by his mother. Bryan was trying to listen to the radio and kept turning it up. He was asked, "Bryan, can you
hear the radio?" "No, Andrew (little brother) is causing interference."

An example of Literacy Acquisition/Figurative Language/Child-Prompted [LA/Fi/C] also provided by Bryan F. occurred in class one day when his reading group was talking about shadows and what causes them. Brian W. said, "When you turn out the light, your shadow disappears." Bryan F. said, "It disappears into thin air." Another example of LA/Fi/C was provided by Kelli during show and tell one day. Chris brought a "cowboy mouse" to show. He told the children that it was a bank, but not a piggy bank. Kelli said, "He's a mousy bank."

Stephanie also picked up figurative language very quickly, partly because of her low threshold for language and partly because when she noticed figurative language (although she did not call it that), she would ask about it. One day, I witnessed an example of Literacy Acquisition/ Figurative Language/Adult-Prompted [LA/Fi/A] when I sat with Stephanie and Melissa while they were working on a ditto sheet. They were telling me that they were supposed to go home and read their spelling words to their mother, to their father, to their mailbox, to their dogs, to their cats, and so on. I asked them if they had any pets and Stephanie proceeded to tell me about an entire menagerie that she had. I said, "Stephanie, do you really have all those animals, or are you just pulling my leg?" She looked under the table,
and said, "Pulling your leg?!? What does that mean?" I told her it was an expression that you could use to mean you were teasing someone. She immediately tried out its use and for the next several hours, and indeed, for the rest of the year, I got teased by Stephanie—so that she could use her new phrase. The first time she used it, I classified it as LA/Fi/A, but most of the subsequent uses were classified as LA/Fi/S since she set up the situations in which to use the expression.

Another example from Stephanie, that I classified as LA/Fi/S because its use came the day after she acquired it, was taken from her mother's journal. She wrote, "One night after our dog had been a real pest, I had exclaimed, "I'm gonna kill that dog." Stephanie came running in the room begging and pleading for our pet's life. I explained I really never intended to harm the dog. I was using a euphemism. The next day, Stephanie had a doctor's appointment. After the visit we went to the store to get a surprise for being so good when she had to get a shot. She picked out a decorated balloon and said, "Angie (her older sister) will be so jealous, she'll just die! That's a euphemism!"

I found that sometimes, when the children I was focusing on made a comment or in some way indicated their sentience of some aspect of language, such as figurative use, they would make a tag-comment, too, as if to ensure
that you knew that they knew they were making a pun, or whatever. An example of Literacy Acquisition/Figurative Language/Text-Prompted [LA/Fi/T] that included the tag-comment was when David was given a long piece of paper (different from the paper normally given to the children for story writing). He looked at the paper and said to me, "I can write a long story today." Then he held the paper next to my field notebook and looked at me and said, "Get it?" I laughed and told him that yes, I did.

**Drawer 8**

Metalanguage is the term used for language to talk about language, or for the literacy register, that is, words to talk about acts of literacy, such as letter, syllable, period, word. Researchers have conducted various investigations trying to determine what children know about such terms. In my observations, I was able to find examples of children's sentience regarding metalanguage just by listening and watching them at work in the classroom.

One day in January, Kelli was writing a story about what she had done over Christmas break. She wrote, "I witt two colo rodo I sged dan a black maten" [I went to Colorado. I skied down a black mountain]. When she finished her story, she said to me, "I put a line on top of the 'e' because it's a long 'e'. It says /e/" (she made the long
'e' sound). I considered this an example of Literacy Acquisition/Metalanguage/Self-Prompted [LA/Mt/S].

One afternoon as the Spanish immersion class was coming back on the bus from a field trip, the children began telling jokes. David said, "What do you get when you cross a jelly and a fish? A jellyfish!" Joel provided an example of Literacy Acquisition/Metalanguage/Child-Prompted [LA/Mt/C] when he leaned over and said to me, "That's a compound word."

As mentioned earlier, several of the children in Mrs. Perrone's room were aware that my first name was Meggin, the same 'sounding' name as Megan, one of the key informants for the study. One day Joel said, "Your name is the same as Megan's, right?" I told him, "Yes, but they're spelled differently." He wanted to know how, so I spelled the two names. He said, "The first letter is the same, the first vowel is the same, but the last vowel is different." His awareness of the terms and correct usage for the terms, 'letter' and 'vowel' are considered examples of Literacy Acquisition/Metalanguage/Adult-Prompted [LA/Mt/A].

On the day that the Spanish immersion class was learning about fruits and vegetables, the children were to write 'frutas y legumbres' on a piece of manilla paper and then cut out pictures of each to glue on to the paper. After David wrote "frutas y legumbres" on his paper, he said, "Legumbres is a long word," thus providing an example
Another example of LA/Mt/T was offered by Christopher P. during a reading lesson. The teacher had written a list of words on the board: can, set, pat, ten, pin, ham, not. She had not yet directed the students' attention to the words when Christopher P. said, "I notice something about those words. They each have a vowel in the middle and a consonant at the beginning and at the end." Later, when Mrs. Benson was meeting with another reading group, she tried to get the children in that group to notice something similar about the words, and was unable to get any response other than that they all had three letters.

Drawer 9

One very important connection that children must make before they can begin to read is that "print" or the symbols on a page, somehow represent "meaning"—be it words or sounds or logos, or whatever. The children in this study were sentient of this long before they entered school.

For example, Bryan F.'s mother wrote in the journal she kept for me that, "By the time he could talk, he recognized the signs, symbols, and words advertising businesses. When driving down the streets, he would "read," tell what the signs said, as "Conoco," "Gulf," "Burger King," and so on....We were in the car quite a bit and to
help him enjoy sitting in the car seat, we told Bryan which
trucks were Sangers, Neimans, Penneys, Wards, Sears,
Dillards and when he'd see one he'd say which one it was
without being asked or prompted from a choice of trucks,
just say Montgomery Ward truck. We also were surprised
about Bryan being able to tell the names of the gas
stations." One can see that Literacy Acquisition/Print
"Carries" Meaning/Self-Prompted [LA/Pc/S] was present in
Bryan's metalinguistic sentience even before coming to
school.

A magnificent example of two children who know that
print symbolizes meaning was provided in the negotiation

Figure 23. Story collaborated on by Christopher C. and
Christopher P.
between Christopher P. and Christopher C. as they were collaborating on a story (Figure 23). Throughout the writing of this story, the boys talked about the title, the punctuation, the word choice, and what they could write next, after this story. This literacy event is classified as Literacy Acquisition/Print "Carries" Meaning/Child-Prompted [LA/Pc/C].

Christopher P. delivered an example of Literacy Acquisition/Print "Carries" Meaning/Adult-Prompted [LA/Pc/A] on a day when he was working on a story that he had created. When he finished the story, he erased the title, "The Old Toy" and replaced it with "The Jack in the Box." I asked him why he had changed the title and he said, "Because it was called 'The Old Toy' and I forgot to put the old toy in the story." (The actual changing of the title is classified as LA/Pc/S, but since I asked him about it, his oral response is classified LA/Pc/A).

Something that struck me time and time again as I conducted my field research in the four classrooms where I spent the majority of my time was the fact that quite frequently, during "reading group time," "my" children laughed at funny parts of stories and other children did not. I consider such situations to be examples of Literacy Acquisition/Print "Carries" Meaning/Text-Prompted [LA/Pc/T]. For example, often when a group of children was listening to a tape of a book, if one of the nine children on whom I
focused was part of the group, that child laughed or smiled at funny parts while the other children did not. It struck me after I had been observing for several weeks and when I went back and viewed some of the videotapes again, I saw that it had been occurring since the beginning of the year.

Drawer 10

The term "print conventions" refers to various aspects of print that are customary or stipulated. Such aspects include punctuation, musical notes, how letters are made, various type faces (e.g., italics), and so on. All of these aspects have agreed upon "meanings" and it is the awareness of these aspects and their meanings that I classified in this category.

Joel provided the following two different examples of Literacy Acquisition/Print Conventions/Self-Prompted [LA/Pt/S]. In November, the children were talking about various things for which they were thankful. Then, Mrs. Perrone wrote "We are thankful for" on the board. The children were to copy the phrase on a piece of manilla paper and then glue pictures of things they were thankful for that they found in magazines. When Joel finished his project, he went over to Mrs. Perrone and said, "See, I didn't put a period here (pointing to the end of the phrase) because the rest of the sentence is pictures. See, I put a period here" (and he pointed to the last of his pictures, in the bottom
right hand corner of the paper). In April, Joel wrote the following story:

4-7-07 Joel
Onseapontime iwint
for a walk With
Ashley anelli an Craig
an John We saw a
rattl snak! We ran
an we ran into an c
Elaf id We smaked
right into his But
then we clapt up
a Grafsneck the end

Figure 24. Joel's story: 4/7 [Once upon a time I went for a walk with Ashley and Kelli and Craig and John. We saw a rattlesnake! We ran and we ran into an elephant. We smacked right into his butt. Then we climbed up a giraffe's neck. The End.]

Readers will notice the exclamation point after 'rattl snak.' When he read the story to the class, he definitely read his story with emphasis on that sentence--so much so that Mrs. Perrone said, "I think I heard an exclamation point." Joel
kind of smiled and turned his paper around so that she could confirm her suspicions!

In April, I began writing letters to some of the children in Mrs. Perrone's class. She had started the letter writing earlier in the year and I had chosen not to take part for awhile, but by April, I had decided that it was alright for me to do so. One afternoon, after David had received a letter from me, the children were writing their stories as they did every afternoon. One of the other children at David's table was writing a story and wanted to include my name in it. She asked David how to spell McIntosh. David pointed it out on his paper. Christin said, "What's that line supposed to be?" (When I write my name I put a small line under the 'c'). David told her he had seen my name and that I wrote it with a line under the 'c', so that's why he was writing it that way. His story is shown below and his comment is considered an example of Literacy Acquisition/Print Conventions/Child-Prompted [LA/Pt/C].

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5 Pelto and Pelto, Anthropological Research, 186, articulate the dilemma of the fieldworker, regarding how much he or she should "interfere" with the field site: "The dilemma of the fieldworker, then, is not whether to interfere in the local cultural scene but how much to interfere. Beattie comments....'But consciously or unconsciously, the anthropologist is affecting the people he is working with all the time'." I knew that I was affecting the teachers and the children in the classrooms where I was conducting my research, but I tried not to enter too much into the instructional activities, affecting curriculum in that way.
One afternoon, near the end of the blue group's reading lesson, Mrs. Perrone was summing up what they had learned that day. She said, "Now we have three punctuation marks." David extended the idea, "Now we have three punctuation marks at the end of sentences." His extension is an example of Literacy Acquisition/Print Conventions/Adult-Prompted [LA/Pt/A].

When Joel's group was preparing to practice making 'U's, both capital and lower case, Mrs. Perrone was making a few examples on the board. She made an upper case 'U' and then made a lower case 'U' that looked exactly like the upper case 'U' except that it was smaller. Joel said, "What
about the line?" indicating that he knew that the lower case 'u' was conventionally made a little differently. Another example of Literacy Acquisition/Print Conventions/Text-Prompted [LA/Pt/T] was furnished by Christopher P. when he brought the book *There Was An Old Woman Who Swallowed A Fly* to school to present during show and tell. First he got up and told the name of the book, then he opened it up to the first page and said, "It has the notes so you can sing it."

**Drawer 11**

Book conventions include "book handling" knowledge, as well as, knowledge about how books are organized and arranged, and how books "come to be," for example, that books have authors and illustrators, and so on. The nine children on whom I focused, as well as their counterparts, came from reasonably literate homes, that is, books were present in the homes, parents could read and write, and so on, so that it appeared that all of the children in these schools knew how to "handle" a book. Not all the children though, possessed the knowledge about the books that I saw in evidence in the nine children I studied.

In looking at the writing of some of the children I studied, I found that they included terms such as "Illustrated by." The only time I saw the phrase "dedicated to" (albeit spelled a little unconventionally) was in the
example shown below in Figure 26. Literacy Acquisition/Book Conventions/Self-Prompted [LA/Bo/S].

Mack and Bryan. October. 31, 1986

GI jool
deduckadide to Bryan F. and Mack B.
Once ther was two GI joes weth a nife
and weth a lazergune and we saw a
big big Eagle and we shot him and we
had fun on the playground.

Figure 26. Story written by Mack and Bryan F. [Dedicated to Bryan F. and Mack B. Once there was two GI joes with a knife and with a laser gun and we saw a big big eagle and we shot him and we had fun on the playground.]

One morning when I was in Mrs. Yager's room, the children were preparing to go to the library. One of the children in the class was looking at his book from back to front. Ben said to me, "He's not reading. You have to read from the beginning to the end." I coded this as Literacy Acquisition/Book Conventions/Child-Prompted [LA/Bo/C].

One day I was watching Joel as he read a book of nursery rhymes. When he finished it, he chose another book and began reading it. I asked him what book he had chosen. He turned back to the cover and said, "Words." When I asked him what he thought the book might be about, he told me, "It is just about words--words and pictures that go with the
words." He returned to the page he had been reading and pointed to various pictures, reading the label written underneath. His turning back to the cover of the book supplied an example of Literacy Acquisition/Book Conventions/Adult-Prompted [LA/Bo/A].

Christopher C. furnished an example of Literacy Acquisition/Book Conventions/Text-Prompted [LA/Bo/T] one day when I got the impression he was bored with what was going on in his reading group. The Cubs reading group was discussing a story they had just read in their basal reader. Christopher was flipping through his book, making comments under his breath to the boy sitting next to him (which I could hear because I had the remote microphone on Christopher C.). He got to the back of the book and said, "Here's the glossary. Maybe I'll look some words up in here."

Drawer 12

The term "text conventions" is coined to refer to accepted practices concerning various elements of text. For example, stories begin "Once upon a time" whereas reports do not; in Western cultures, text is read from left to right and top to bottom. I also include accepted practices about how to read certain types of text aloud under the rubric "text conventions."
Megan provided an example of this, specifically classified as Literacy Acquisition/Text Conventions/Self-Prompted [LA/Te/S], when, after a wonderful "real" discussion of chapter books, I sat and listened to her read aloud several books that she had chosen. When she read *Martin Crumpet*, she read with appropriate enthusiasm and flair. When she read *Buttons the Clown*, a rhyming book, she switched to the cadence appropriate for reading that type of book. I was astonished.

In the spring, all the kindergarten classes at Werner Elementary went on a field trip to the Nature Center. As we were walking along one of the paths, there was a sign that showed a hand holding a flower and the international symbol for 'no' was drawn across it. One of the children said, "What's that mean?" Megan said, "It means, 'no picking wildflowers'." I considered this to be an example of Literacy Acquisition/Text Conventions/Child-Prompted [LA/Te/C].

One day when Mrs. Yager was teaching her kindergarteners about sequencing of events, she was presenting a group of four pictures to the children and asking them what order they should go in. She asked, "What's next?" William said, "A boy." Mrs. Yager held the picture of the boy to the left of the one already designated as the first in the series and asked, "Do I put it on this side?" Ben answered, "No, because that would be reading in
the wrong direction." I classified this as Literacy Acquisition/Text Conventions/Adult-Prompted [LA/Te/A] and not Literacy Learning/Te/A since he offered more information than was asked for.

An event that I classified as Literacy Acquisition/Text Conventions/Text-Prompted [LA/Te/T] involved Megan at the listening center. She was listening to a tape of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and was reading the accompanying book. As the person on the tape was reading the story, whenever she came to the actual words said by one of the characters, Megan pointed to the voice balloons in the book and mouthed the words, complete with facial expressions. When there was narration, she did not mouth or act out any of the words. During this same literacy event, one crow said to another, "Aah, I bet it's another fake." Megan immediately wrinkled her brow indicating that she did not understand, looked at the accompanying picture, saw the scarecrow, and then a look of recognition came over her face. She knew that there were elements of the text (including the pictures) that could help her make sense of what she was reading/hearing.

**Drawer 13**

Very young children do not have a concept of the arbitrariness of language, that is, they do not understand that there is nothing inherent in an object that requires it
to be called by a certain name nor is there anything inherent in an action that determines that it must be labelled by a particular term. Various researchers in metalinguistics have investigated this phenomenon by asking children if a table could be called a chair, or if the sun could be called the moon, and so on. To me, this was one of those phenomena of childhood that I was not sure was real, until I saw the adamacy of a child insisting that something must be called by a certain name. Then, I knew it was real. In a previous chapter, I provided a description of Victor insisting that I could not sit where Megan sat—-that I could not also be named Meggin. Certainly, there were other examples that were similar, but in this section I will present examples from the nine children I studied, showing that they had determined that language was arbitrary.

I somewhat expected that the children in the Spanish immersion classroom would very quickly become aware that there was no inherent tie between referent and label. Based on my observations, though, I cannot make that statement unequivocally, although that is still my hunch, and something worth pursuing. The able children in this classroom, though, provided many instances to indicate that they did realize that names are not tied to their referents. One such example, classified as Literacy Acquisition/Referent-Label/Self-Prompted [LA/Re/S] was provided by Joel when the class was playing a chalkboard relay game. At one
point, Mrs. Perrone said, "Es une impate." Joel leaned over to the person sitting next to him and said, "It's a tie—that's what that means—it's a tie."

Late in January, I went with Mrs. Yager's class to the library. While we were there, Andy came over and showed Stephanie a book and said, "You checked this out." Stephanie told him she had not, but he showed her the name Stephanie on the card. Stephanie said, "That isn't me. That's another Stephanie." Andy's expression indicated that he had no idea what she was talking about. My feeling was that he did not understand the idea of "another Stephanie." Stephanie, on the other hand, did and provided this example of Literacy Acquisition/Referent-Label/Child-Prompted [LA/Re/C].

As mentioned earlier, there were several pairs of children with the same name in three of the classes in which I observed. Often, when Mrs. Benson would call on either Christopher or Brian/Bryan, at least one of the boys with that name would ask, "Which one?" But, this was apparently not an automatic function of having a similar name as someone in the room, because other children with similar names did not ask this when their name was called. As I have said before, I often had the impression that these highly able children had special sensors tuned in to the metalinguistic aspects of language, including, in this case, referent-label arbitrariness. The example given above is
In order to provide an example that is not "name related," consider the following: During a lesson to the children about different types of foods and the food groups into which each type went, Mrs. Perrone was saying (in Spanish) that some people pour "leche" into their coffee. Without missing a beat, David said (in English), "My grandfather does it just to cool it off a little bit." He obviously knew that there was more than one word to refer to milk and coffee (and indeed each of the words used in the exchange).

On the same day that Andy showed Stephanie a book with her name on the card, prior to going to the library, Mrs. Yager was reminding the children about how to fill out their library cards. She told them to write their names and then to put "'YA', which stands for Yager," so that the librarian will know whose class they are in. Ben supplied an example of what I classified as Literacy Acquisition/Referent-Label/Text-Prompted [LA/Re/T] when he said, "We call you Mrs. Yager but your real name is Yager." He apparently understood that she did not have one and only one name.
The purpose of literacy is, of course, communication. This category is somewhat of an extension of "print carries meaning" and goes beyond mere print to the larger picture of what we should expect to happen as a result of participating in literate activities such as reading and writing and speaking.

In Mrs. Perrone's room, children were allowed to bring books to read to the class. Joel, Megan, and David frequently brought books and read them to the class. Other children brought books that they had memorized or learned and "presented" them to the class. Regardless, it was valued by the teacher and by the children, even though everyone knew the difference. Often, the books that Megan, Joel, and David brought were so long that they had to be read over more than one day. On one April afternoon, Megan got up to read the rest of an Amelia Bedelia book that she had started the day before. When she got up in front of the class, she said, "I'll read the last page I read yesterday so it'll make sense." Her statement revealed an example of Literacy Acquisition/Purposes of Literacy/Self-Prompted [LA/Pu/S].

An example of Literacy Acquisition/Purposes of Literacy/Child-Prompted [LA/Pu/C] came in April in Mrs. Perrone's room. As per usual, the children were writing stories after lunch. David had gotten up to get a different
pencil and noticed that some of the children at his table were making lists of names on their papers. He said, with disdain, "Sometimes when people are supposed to be writing stories, they just write 'David, Kristin, Ashley, Joel. The End.'"

*Where the Sidewalk Ends* is one of my favorite poetry books. One day I noticed Christopher P. reading from it to the girl in front of him. I went over and told him I really liked the book and asked him what his favorite poem was. He told me it was the "Fourth of July" one. He then used the index to find it (it turned out to be called "The Fourth"), then he read it to me, obviously enjoying his literacy and displaying an example of Literacy Acquisition/Purposes of Literacy/Adult-Prompted [LA/Pu/A].

During show and tell in Mrs. Benson's first grade one day, Christopher C. got up to show a sign that he had made for the lunchroom. It said, "BE QUIET IN THE LUNCHROOM!!" He made this example of Literacy Acquisition/Purposes of Literacy/Text-Prompted [LA/Pu/T] as a response to the noise he witnessed in the lunchroom on the previous day. After sharing the sign with the class, Christopher C. took it down to Mrs. Carter, the principal, so that it could be hung in the lunchroom—which it was later that day.
One of the characteristics that researchers have found relative to poor readers and writers is that they have no concept of what their abilities are. Sometimes they have no idea what the standards are and other times they are not metacognitively aware enough to know what they can and cannot do. Able learners, on the other hand, tend to have a fairly realistic assessment of their own abilities. I wanted to see if I would find any naturally occurring evidence of this in my research. I did.

Joel commented to me one day after writing a story, "My paper was full of words! I can write pretty long stories." These two true statements were categorized as Literacy Acquisition/Abilities/Self-Prompted [LA/Ab/S].

One day several children were working at their table in Mrs. Yager's room when Stephanie said to another child, seemingly as a challenge, "You don't know how to spell daddy." Alene said, "Do you?" Stephanie responded, "Yes--D-A-D-E-Y." No one at the table argued. Even though her spelling was "incorrect," I still classified this as Literacy Acquisition/Abilities/Child-Prompted [LA/Ab/C] because she made a statement about her abilities.

Another incident involving Stephanie came one day in the library. She checked out the book, The Bear City School and brought it over to where I was sitting. She said, "I can read this--*The Bear City School*." I said, "That's
right. Why don't you read me some more." She said, "I can't read yet." I said, "I just heard you read the title of that book. Why don't you read just a few pages." She then proceeded to read about five pages, perfectly. Later that day, I asked her about why she had said she could not read and she told me that she could not read as well as her sister yet. (Her sister is fourteen). I classified all but her first statement as Literacy Acquisition/Abilities/Adult-Prompted [LA/Ab/A].

Kelli also provided frequent examples of LA/Ab/S,C,T, and A. The latter was given one day when Mrs. Culture told the children that she was going to have them practice spelling some words. Kelli informed her, "I already know how to spell."

The following is offered as an example of Literacy Acquisition/Abilities/Text-Prompted [LA/Ab/T]: Christopher C. and Christopher P. were both at the reading group table one day when all of a sudden they both jumped up and went over to the computer that was in their classroom. Mack and Kristin were working at the computer and had called up a program that involved unscrambling words. Without providing a verbatim account of the verbal exchange that took place, the gist of the conversation was that Mack and Kristin might as well not even try to do that activity because Christopher and Christopher were unable to do it. Neither one of the Christophers was being at all negative in what they thought
Mack and Kristin could do—but rather they were aware of the
difficulty of the task, because even they could not do it.

Summary

Any one of the examples provided in this chapter
would not have been enough for me to feel like there was any
kind of a pattern in the children I was using as key
informants. But there was not just one example, or two, or
three—each and every time I was around these children,
whether I was sitting with them in the lunchroom, following
them around in the classroom as they went about the business
of learning, interviewing them about their understanding of
reading and writing, or talking with their parents while
they also interacted with us—I was struck by the power of
their young minds. All children are amazing if we consider
what they learn between the ages of birth and five—but it
is naive and unobservant to ignore the fact that some
children are more amazing than others. The nine children
who served as key informants for this study fit in the "more
amazing than others" category.

When I interviewed Joel's mother recently, she said
that people will often overhear her talking with Joel and
because his language is so mature, they will often come over
and ask her what she did to "make him this way." She tells
them, as she told me, that she and her husband did not do
anything to "make him the way he is." She asserts that from
the time he was very young, his mind was like a sponge, especially when it came to anything involving language and the presentation of information through language. It has now become so commonplace for Joel to use a word that is extraordinary for a six-year-old, that his family no longer remarks on it and are reminded of the uniqueness of their child only when others comment on it—which they frequently do.

Joel is representative of the other children I studied. Their minds were actively foraging around for language and were able to locate it, as something with form and function that could be manipulated, from a very young age. That active seeking is paired with an unconscious sensor for language that is monitoring their environment, seemingly, at all times. Their threshold for language is so low, that concepts related to language and literacy that have no meaning whatsoever to other young children, are salient to these verbally gifted young children. It is not surprising, therefore, that these children acquired literacy easily and also, learned literacy easily. Chapter 10 will focus on their literacy learning, which was just as remarkable as their literacy acquisition.
LITERACY LEARNING

One day Russell brought something home with him that he didn't carry inside his knapsack or inside his lunch box. He carried it inside his head. It was discovered when Russell came home from school and saw that his little sister, Elisa, had been playing with his toy cars while he was away. Russell shouted at Elisa, and he used a word that made his mother angry with him.

"That was a bad word," she said. "We don't use that word in this family."

Russell was so surprised that for a moment he forgot his anger. "How can a word be bad?" he asked, puzzled. "Some words are not nice for people to use," his mother explained. "They are very rude."

Russell whispered the word under his breath. It didn't sound bad or rude to him. He couldn't help it if his mother didn't like that word. He did.

That night, he got out of bed and went into the living room. "I want a drink of water," he told his parents as he passed them on his way toward the kitchen. Russell filled a glass with water at the sink. He carried it carefully into the living room so it wouldn't spill. "Is water a good or a bad word?" he asked.

"It's a good word, of course," said his mother, smiling.

"But if I spilled this glass of water on the rug, you'd get angry," said Russell. "Then water would be bad."*

Russell had never thought about a word being either good or bad. Once this possibility was drawn to his attention, however, it became a point of fascination for him. He lay in bed thinking about it. He played with other words trying to determine whether they were 'good' or 'bad.'

A rather abstract concept became something that could be manipulated, because he had a handle on "word."

Similarly, the nine children on whom this study focused frequently had some aspect of language drawn to their attention—and often, that was all it took for them to begin thinking about the possibilities related to this aspect. Once again, because their thresholds for metalinguistic sentience were low, when literacy learning was the conscious or unconscious objective of the teacher or other adult in their environment, whatever aspect of language was the focal point, became the conscious focus of the individual children on whom this study centered.

In this chapter, I will concentrate primarily on these nine children's metalinguistic sentience as related to their literacy learning. In the previous chapter, I focused primarily on their metalinguistic sentience as related to their literacy acquisition. Even though each of the two chapters has a primary focus, of necessity, there will be some crossover.

**Literacy Learning: Evidence from the Children**

Recall from Chapter 8 that literacy learning is defined, for this study, as conscious attention toward the procurement of literacy, that is, developing literacy through conscious attention to various manifestations of literacy. Although literacy learning for most children
nearly always takes place in an instructional setting, it is not necessary that it be so. For the children in this study, some of their literacy learning took place before they ever reached a traditional instructional setting. It seems that some of them set up their own instructional settings in a conscious mission to become literate.

As I pointed out in the last chapter, these children's parents did not deliberately set up instructional situations in their homes, but rather they ended up in instructional roles because their children demanded it. In Chapter 9, I quoted from Megan's father's recollections of Megan's early experiences and in this chapter, I would like to quote from both of her parents' recollections of their daughter's early years.

Shortly after she turned five, she had what appeared to be a burning desire to learn to read. I told her that it takes quite a while to learn and that she should wait until she got to kindergarten where the teacher would help her. She insisted that I teach her. So we spent about 15 minutes practicing words like cat and dog. Afterwards, I thought she had forgotten about this until I discovered that she had her older sisters and brother helping her everyday. The next thing I knew she was reading her story books to me.

Her reading skill has improved everyday to where I am sure she is reading books even 6th graders would find difficult. She reads with enthusiasm and with dramatic flair. She recently started "making voices" for the characters in the books she reads.

Megan's mother continues:

At this same time, she was pesterling me for help. My thinking it was a passing thing, but willing to humor her, I made flashcards for rhyming simple words like rat, hat, cat, man, fan, pan, etc.
According to her mother, Megan's determination to learn was not limited to reading:

Megan has fine motor skills in that before age six she was embroidering as well as her two older sisters. I taught them and Megan insisted on learning at the same time. She is the only one of the three that could manage to learn to crochet. She took my afghan and after a short time (during the space of an hour) she was able to crochet. One could see the skill development in a stretch of 12 inches or so of stitches. By the time she had done that much, her stitches were fine and tighter, almost as good as mine.

Megan was not the only child to insist on being taught before entering school. Bryan F.'s mother writes that

Bryan seemed to want to know exactly what the common daily-used things were and did. Like he loved catsup and wanted to see the label and what was in the bottle and where you looked to see how you'd know what was in it. After that, the toothpaste and just everything we used, wanting to see the labels.

It has been fascinating to talk to the parents of these nine children and to read the accounts that they have kept on their children—and to discover the incredible similarities that there are among their perceptions of their children's language awareness development and the drive to learn that these children exhibit. Although I have not included much that is specifically from the parent-reports in the body of this book, it has definitely been part of the quagmire of my mind from which this book has been written. The information given to me by the parents about their children has reinforced much of what I learned in the classrooms about and from these children.
In the last chapter, I asked how it could happen that some children acquire literacy sooner than their agemates. In this chapter, I would like to ask how it could happen that some children learn literacy sooner than their agemates. The answer to this question is similar to the answer to the previous question and that is that some children, these nine in particular, have a lower metalinguistic sentience threshold than do other children. In other words, these nine children have a lower point at which a stimulus (can be perceived or) can produce a given effect. In this case, the stimulus is language as something with form and function that can be manipulated. Literacy learning occurs sooner and faster because of the lower threshold at which language (as something with form and function that can be manipulated) can produce a given effect.

Again using the Model for Classifying Evidence Provided by Children of Their Metalinguistic Sentience presented in Chapter 8, I will fill in the sixty cells that pertain to the right side of the cube, that is, the fifteen aspects of language, with evidence from four "prompt" states. Using the same analogy as in the previous chapter, I will present one "drawer" at a time, choosing drawers from top to bottom and proceeding from the front of the drawer to the back. In keeping with the analogy, the subheadings will be indicated by drawers, that is Literacy Learning/
Pragmatics will be Drawer 16, Literacy Learning/Syntax will be Drawer 17, and so on through Drawer 30. It is my intention that the exemplars for each of the sixty cells of the model will explicate the model while offering support for my contention that the nine verbally gifted children who served as the informants for this study have a lower threshold for metalinguistic sentience as it relates to literacy learning than do other children.

Drawer 16

For the purposes of this model, pragmatics refers to knowledge of how to use language in particular situations and how the meaning of what is said is affected by the way in which it is said, especially relative to certain cultural and social contexts. My sense about all of these children is that they were advanced in what they knew about how they should, and should not, use language.

In the Spanish immersion classroom, the entire morning was conducted in Spanish. Mrs. Perrone wore a green apron in the morning that said "Espanol" on the front of it and wore a red apron in the afternoon that said "English" on the front. Every once in awhile, Mrs. Perrone would change into her English apron in the morning if she had to explain something that required complete understanding by the children. Often, when she would change her apron, I would hear Joel say something like, "OK, now I'll try English for
awhile." Because the apron changing was a deliberate and conscious act on the teacher's part, I consider this a literacy learning situation and comments such as Joel's were classified as Literacy Learning/Pragmatics/Self-Prompted [LL/Pr/S].

Kelli offered an example of Literacy Learning/Pragmatics/Child-Prompted [LL/Pr/C] during a discussion, led by the teacher, about how to be specific when you want to know something. Mrs. Culture said, "What if I say, 'I'm thinking about a little girl,' do you know who I'm thinking about?" Several children said, "Yeah, Kelli." When Mrs. Culture exhibited her surprise as to how they had decided who she was talking about and said, "Kelli?" one child said, "Yeah, Kelli's little" and pointed at Kelli. Kelli said, "You're not supposed to point." To me, "body language" is part of language, particularly in a pragmatic sense. Since Kelli's comment was noted in my review journal as being "very deliberate (i.e., she was obviously conscious of what she was saying)," I classified it in this category.

As the Cubs reading group completed a story about a little girl who was quite impolite, the teacher led a discussion about whether or not various actions and words were polite. At one point in the story, the little girl said, "I hate eggs." Christopher P. responded to Mrs. Benson's question about what else she could have said by answering, "You'd say, 'No, thank you. I'll have something
else."

This was an example of Literacy Learning/Pragmatics/Adult-Prompted [LL/Pr/A].

Recalling that Text-Prompted includes pictures as well as printed text, the following example of Literacy Learning/Pragmatics/Text-Prompted [LL/Pr/T] is proffered. One afternoon, I was sitting at the table where the children were working on a rhyming activity sheet. Their task was to cut out the pictures from one row and match them with their rhyming counterparts in another row. I sat next to David and asked him a couple of questions about the pictures. "Does that look like your house?" "No," he replied, and then proceeded to tell me how it was different. "Does that look like your car?" I asked. "No," he replied, proceeding to tell me about the differences. "--and that doesn't look like my goat, either!" he said, laughing as he pointed to the next picture, knowing that he had anticipated my next question.

**Drawer 17**

Syntax refers to the structure of grammatical sentences in language, including the pattern or word order in sentences, clauses, and phrases. In school, there is a great deal of attention paid to grammar and word order, even at the primary grades. The children on whom this study was

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based, all used standard grammar and were all fairly well along developmentally. By that I mean that while other kindergarteners were still constructing sentences like, "The nurse said to tell you 'What time do you go to lunch'," the kindergarteners I was looking at were beyond that.

In a lesson about asking questions to get specific information, Kelli was called on to ask such a question regarding to which little girl the teacher was referring. She said, "Does he—it—she have on a dark blue sweater?" This example of Literacy Learning/Syntax/Self-Prompted [LL/Sy/S] demonstrates Kelli's monitoring of her own syntax.

Kelli not only monitored her own syntax, but the syntax of other children, too, especially in situations that I classified as Literacy Learning. One day when her reading group was supposed to be listening to statements made by Mrs. Culture and rephrasing them as questions, Kelli "caught" several children in errors ("caught" is the term used by Mrs. Culture). For example, Mrs. Culture said, "The teacher rang the bell." James said, "The teacher did ring the bell." Kelli piped up, "Did the teacher ring the bell?" This was classified as Literacy Learning/Syntax/Child-Prompted [LL/Sy/C].

One morning, while the kindergarten was working on their Superkids workbook and listening to the accompanying tape, Mrs. Yager directed the children's attention to a sentence that the voice on the tape had said. She said,
"Why did the man say 'they' instead of he or she?"
Stephanie responded, "Because it's more than one." Mrs. Yager questioned her further: "What if it had been two--would he have said they or he or she?" Stephanie emphatically replied, "They!" Both of these are classified as examples of Literacy Learning/Syntax/Adult-Prompted [LL/Sy/A].

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mrs. Benson often wrote sentences on the board for the children to correct. This activity is considered a literacy learning activity since it is intended to draw students' attention to some of the manifestations of written language. After the first several times that she had students complete this activity, they were nearly all quite successful at it. Unfortunately, it did not transfer to their writing--except in the cases of the children I was observing, particularly Christopher P. and Christopher C. For example, in March, the following three sentences were written on the board:

1. leroy was late for school
2. who played the violin
3. john, mary, and lou went to dallas

On that same day, the children wrote about a substitute that they had had the previous day when Mrs. Benson was sick. I collected all the children's papers that day. Figure 27 and Figure 28 show two stories written by children in the class--both of whom did perfectly on their sentences--but neither
of whom was able to transfer what they had learned to their
own writing.

The Good Day

Yesterday we had a
substitute at school.

Her name is Mrs. Wheat.

We had so much fun
yesterday? She gave us
tu-erols becos we wer so
good for her.

Figure 27. Story written by a first grader after correcting
sentences on the board.

Mrs. Wheat

is maen she
was screaming
at use and she
gave Brye, F two
efs and she gave
a toos rols.

Figure 28. Story written by a first grader after correcting
sentences on the board.
Christopher P. and Christopher C. both did well on their sentences and then applied this to their own writing of their "substitute" stories. When Christopher C. looked at his finished story and then commented that he had written two questions in his story, and that both started with 'wh-' words, I classified this as an example of Literacy Learning/Syntax/Text-Prompted [LL/Sy/T].

Drawer 18

As mentioned in the previous chapter, young children spend a large amount of time and effort acquiring new words and concepts. Much of this acquisition is incidental, coming about through their everyday interactions with people and situations. In school, however, there is specific attention paid to helping children learn vocabulary—both words as labels and words as concepts. Since one of the characteristics of young verbally gifted children is their precocious facility with vocabulary, it is not surprising that many of the words and concepts presented by their teachers are already familiar to them. When they are not, though, they learn them very easily and quickly.

One activity that Mrs. Benson used quite often was writing sentences on the board that had various and sundry mistakes in them, such as no end punctuation, no capital letters, and so on. This was an activity that was not difficult for the majority of the children in the classroom.
After the children had corrected the sentences on their own paper, Mrs. Benson would have children come up to the board and correct the sentences on the board. Christopher C. was called up to correct the sentence, "who is your best friend" He erased the lower case 'w' and replace it with an upper case 'W' and added a question mark at the end. Because he added the question mark, I considered this an example of Literacy Learning/Semantics/Self-Prompted [LL/Se/S]. What follows, though, I considered an example of LL/Se/Adult. Mrs. Benson asked, "Why did you put a question mark?" Christopher C. said, "Because who is your best friend?" The extreme emphasis on the 'who' indicates that he used this word as his clue that this was a question.

Each morning, the children in the Spanish immersion class would put up their calendar and determine the weather for the day. One morning in February, when Mrs. Perrone asked, "Que tiempo hace?" several answers were offered: "Mucho sol," "Hace frio," and "Hace mal tiempo." When the last answer was given, David said, "Hace mal tiempo?! Hace buen tiempo!" David's emphasis on 'mal' and 'buen' are examples of Literacy Learning/Semantics/Child-Prompted [LL/Se/C].

In listening to the audio-tapes and watching the videotapes recorded in Mrs. Culture's room, the predominance of Kelli's personality is pronounced. Also pronounced is her predominance in knowing what words mean--or at least
having a "sense" of what they mean, that is, being in the right semantic field for the term being asked about. For a few examples of Literacy Learning/Semantics/Adult-Prompted [LL/Se/A] provided by Kelli, I pulled from a lesson in which the teacher presented a book about the first Thanksgiving and two children who came over on the Mayflower. There were a number of words that were unfamiliar to many of the children in the class. Nearly every word that Mrs. Culture asked about though, Kelli provided a definition for. When the class was asked if they knew what 'passengers' were, Kelli said, "Passengers are people who board on the boat." A few minutes later when Mrs. Culture asked what 'calm, the sea was calm' meant, Sarah said, "Gentle," and Kelli offered, "It means it stopped waving, it was being gentle to the boat." Several pages later, there was discussion about where the children on the ship could play; they could not play on the deck. The class was asked what a 'deck' was. Kelli said, "It's something--there's a big thing--it's wooden. It has four legs and you have to walk across it so you won't get in the water and get wet and get to the land. I know because my grandfather has one." Mrs. Culture says, "That's a dock." Kelli says, "Oh, you wanted a deck--" and begins to tell what a deck is. Mrs. Culture goes ahead and provides a definition of a deck.

Another marvelous example of LA/Se/A was furnished by Joel one April afternoon during writing time. He was at
the writing center and asked me how to spell /oo/. I asked
him what word he wanted and he said, "Would, like 'I
would..." I wondered if he knew that there were two
"kinds" of would/wood, so in a few minutes I went over to
pursue the answer. "Joel, a minute ago when you wanted to
know how to spell /oo/, you said it was in 'would' like 'I
would...' Could you have said 'I pound a nail into some
wood?'" He looked a little bit like he did not know what I
was asking, but then he said, "I would like to do a puzzle--
that kind of would." I asked, "Is there any other kind of
would?" He replied, "Yes--like the wood from a tree."

The Cubs reading group in Mrs. Benson's room was
reading a story called "Here I Come" one morning. Mrs.
Benson directed the students' attention to the title of the
story. "Boys and girls, turn to the story that begins on
page 78. Read the title and see if you have an idea why it
might have that title." Christopher P. said, "Ready or not
--'here I come.' It's probably about hide and go seek." I
classified this as Literacy Learning/Semantics/Text-Prompted
[LL/Se/T].

Drawer 19

In reading and writing instruction (or instruction
that goes by the name of reading and writing) there is a
great deal of attention paid to teaching students the
sound/symbol relationship. It is not surprising, then, that
I had scores of examples of LL/Ph that I could have used in this section.

Near the beginning of the school year, Mrs. Benson was conducting a lesson on the soft and hard sounds of 'c' and 'g'. She had completed the part on 'c' and the children had read and provided numerous words beginning and ending with hard and soft sounds of 'c'. In the second part of the lesson, they were working on the hard and soft sounds of 'g'. After eliciting several words from the children, she was ready to move on to the next part of the lesson when Christopher P. said, "You should have writed 'garage' because it has the hard and soft sounds in it." This example of Literacy Learning/Phonology/Self-Prompted [LL/Ph/S] is also classified under LL/Me/S because he uses the correct terminology for the sounds to which he is referring.

One morning, the children were working on the Superkids activity for the day, which included telling the beginning sound of some words that started with the sounds that they had been learning. 'Anchor' was one of the words. One of the boys at Ben's table, when asked, said that the word started with an /o/ sound. Ben leaned over and said, /a/. This is classified as an example of Literacy Learning/Phonology/Child-Prompted [LL/Ph/C].

In a literacy event referred to in a previous chapter, Mrs. Culture was reading One Fish Two Fish, Red
Fish Blue Fish to her children. Even though the book (text) is the indirect prompt to the children's responses, I classified these responses as Literacy Learning/Phonology/Adult-Prompted [LL/Ph/A] because Mrs. Culture was eliciting many of the rhyming words by repeating certain passages and sometimes just coming out and saying, for example, "Where rhymes with ______," which was not part of the text.

During the lesson involving this book, Kelli picked up immediately on what the pattern in the book was and was not only able to supply the correct words nearly every time, but was also able to respond to the teacher's more direct requests for rhyming words. In other words, Kelli knew that she was supplying rhyming words and also knew where her clues were coming from.

As I have mentioned before, the Superkids program used in the kindergarten curriculum was a heavily phonics based program. A large component of the commercial program was the tapes that accompanied the consumable workbooks used by the children. During one of the lessons that emphasized /guh/ (the hard sound of 'g'), the children were supposed to listen to the tape and eventually to decide whether a particular word started with /guh/. If it did, they were to mark a 'g' on the line next to the trashcan and if it did not, there were to mark an 'x' next to the trashcan. To give readers a flavor of the task required of the children, the following is a transcript of part of the tape, as well
as Stephanie's example of Literacy Learning/Phonology/Text-Prompted [LL/Ph/T].

TAPE (man's voice): If you have your pencil and your book is open to page seven, you are ready to begin. Golly is sniffing some garbage cans to see what he can find. He will tell us about the things that he finds. If the thing Golly finds has a name that begins like Golly, you'll write 'g' next to the picture. If the thing Golly finds does not begin like Golly, you'll put an 'x' next to the picture. Whenever you hear this sound, (beep) turn off the tape and mark your answer, then turn the tape back on. First, look at the green garbage can. (sound of garbage can turning over) Golly (the dog) says: Uh-oh! Here's trouble. I just knocked over Cass's great big green garbage can. Some garbage has fallen out on the sidewalk. What a mess! I guess I'd better try to pick it up and put it back in the can. And then maybe I'll find some good smells. Or even a little snack while I'm cleaning up. (sound of sniffing) MMM. What's this? It looks like a little piece of cake with creamy custard, cookie crumbs, cocoa and—that's it. It must be left over from one of Cass's crazy concoctions. Smells good—but it sure is gushy! This is the most gushy piece of cake I've ever seen. Gosh, it's gushy.

Man's voice: Gushy. Golly said the garbage in the green can was gushy. Say gushy with me.

Class: GUSHY!

Man's voice: Does gushy begin like Golly?

A few children say "yes" tentatively, others do the unidentifiable mumble.

Man's voice: If gushy begins like Golly, write a 'g' on the lines next to the green garbage can. If gushy does not begin like Golly, then put an 'x' on the lines. If gushy begins like Golly, write 'g'. If gushy does not begin like Golly, put an 'x' on the lines. (Beep sound --turn off tape)

Student teacher: OK. Does gushy begin like Golly?

Several children, in a school voice chorus: Yes.

Student teacher: Everyone should be writing the letter 'g'. A little one. If you can't make the little one
because we haven't practiced it, then you can make a capital one.

[There is discussion at Stephanie's table because she notices that one of the other children has made her 'g' next to the wrong garbage can. There is also discussion about what kind of 'g' to make. The student teacher is walking around the room complimenting children during this time, as well as reminding them to be quiet.]

Student teacher: OK, listen (turns tape back on).

Tape/man's voice: Look at the orange garbage can. Golly (the dog): We're going to move along and see what's in the orange garbage can. (sound of garbage can dumping over). Here's two bits of yucky burnt toast. Not even grape jelly would make this toast taste good. It's yucky!

Man's voice: Golly said the garbage in the orange garbage can was yucky. Say yucky with me.

Children: YUCKY!

Man's voice: Does yucky begin like Golly?

Stephanie says loudly: No. (several other children say no after Stephanie's response).

Man's voice: If yucky begins like Golly, write 'g' on the lines next to the orange garbage can. If yucky does not begin like Golly, put an 'x' on the line. If yucky begins like Golly, write 'g'. If yucky does not begin like Golly, put an 'x' on the line. (Beep sounds).

Stephanie's ability to sort through all the muck on the tape in order to get at the task that the children were supposed to do provided evidence to me that she was able to attend to sounds and was aware of what it was she was supposed to be listening for—not surprisingly, unlike the vast majority of the children in the class.
One of the objectives of teachers in the early grades is to teach children to write and spell (i.e., to use the symbol system of our written language). The children in this study already were at least somewhat familiar with the orthography of the English language prior to coming to school and the instruction that they received once in school fell on fertile soil so that they learned whatever the teacher was teaching quite readily.

Certainly one of the most troublesome pairs of letters for young children to master is 'b'/'d'. One day in Mrs. Culture's class, the children were going to the board to write words that she would tell them. One of the words Kelli and the group she was with at the board were asked to write was 'down.' Kelli stood for a moment, then stepped back and looked at the drawing of a bed above the board (a bed made with an elongated 'b' as the headboard and an elongated 'd' as the foot). After looking at it for a moment, she went back to the board and wrote 'down'. I considered this to be an example of Literacy Learning/Orthography/Self-Prompted [LL/Or/S].

A learning activity that the children in Mrs. Yager's kindergarten completed during three different visits to their classroom entailed "spelling" the name of one of the children in the class. Each child in the group would be handed an envelope with another child's name written on the
outside of the envelope. Inside the envelope were the letters of that child's name. Whoever got the envelope was to tell whose name they had and then to use the letters inside the envelope to spell the name. Some interesting conversations took place while children were completing this task. One day, Stephanie got Meredith's name on her envelope. She immediately knew it was Meredith's. Another child said, "It might be William." Stephanie said, "It starts with an M. If William started with an 'M', it would be Milliam!" and she laughed. I considered this statement to be Literacy Learning/Orthography/Child-Prompted [LL/Or/C].

During this same activity, Stephanie got the envelope with George's name on it. She shouted out, "George!" as soon as it was handed to her. I asked her how she knew it was George and she replied, "Because I wrote his name on the board yesterday and I remembered it." Since I had prompted her response, I classified this as Literacy Learning/Orthography/Adult-Prompted [LL/Or/A].

An example of Literacy Learning/Orthography/Text-Prompted [LL/Or/T] was provided one day when Kelli was reading in her Superkids book. Kelli read the following: "I am fed up. I cannot lug the big—lug the big lemon up the—" At this point, Mrs. Culture pointed to the word 'melon' that Kelli had read as 'lemon.' Kelli said, "Oh,
melon—I said lemon—melon up the hill. I got the letters mixed up."

**Drawer 21**

There is a sizable amount of time devoted to learning the units that make up a word as well as words as units. For this study, this is classified as LL/Morphology. I do not have an example for the cell, Literacy Learning/Morphology/Self-Prompted [LL/Mo/S].

During a spelling lesson one day in Mrs. Yager's class, one of the words the children were to spell was 'lass.' Mrs. Yager explained that a 'lass is a little girl.' Stephanie said, "I am the lass at my home" (an example of LA/Se/A). Mrs. Yager asked the children, "Would Lassie be a girl dog or a boy dog?" One of the children said, "A girl." Stephanie then said, "If it had been a boy, they would have named him 'Laddie.'" Because Stephanie was able to make the connection between 'lass' and 'lad,' a word they had spelled earlier, and was able to extend 'lad' to 'Laddie,' I considered this an example of LL/Morphology. Because a child spoke just before Stephanie, I classified it as Literacy Learning/Morphology/Child-Prompted [LL/Mo/C].

One afternoon in the Spanish immersion classroom, Mrs. Perrone was having the children read and talk about the "mystery sentence" that she had written on the board (as she did everyday). Joel read the sentence, "Yesterday we made a
large snowman." Mrs. Perrone directed the children's attention to the first letter of the sentence and asked what it was. Joel said, "A capital 'y'." Next, the teacher said "There is a special kind of word in this sentence—a compound word. That's a big word isn't it?" (David said, as if savoring it, "Compound word.") Mrs. Perrone continued, "A compound word has two little words in it. Can any of you see a word in our mystery sentence that has two little words in it?" Immediately, David raised his hand and was called on. "Yesterday—it has 'yes' and 'day.'" Mrs. Perrone explained why that was not a compound word, but from the definition that had been given, David's response could certainly be legitimately classified as Literacy Learning/Morphology/Adult-Prompted [LL/Mo/A] because he was able to focus on parts of a word.

An example I classified as Literacy Learning/Morphology/Text-Prompted [LL/Mo/T] was presented when the children in the Spanish immersion class were talking about rhyming words. When Mrs. Perrone asked, "What is a rhyming word?" Kelli answered, "It has to match." Mrs. Perrone said, "Does it have to match completely?" Another child said, "It has to go together." Megan said, "The last few words are the same." Mrs. Perrone repeated, "The last few words are the same?" (thus, the oral "text") and Megan corrected, "The last few letters are the same."
Although the English language is highly idiomatic, and thus very difficult for non-native speakers of English to comprehend sometimes (and thus very difficult for kindergarten and first grade children dealing with the foreign language being presented to them), there is not a heavy emphasis on teaching figurative language in the early grades. I found, therefore, that I had far more instances of LA/Figurative than I did LL/Figurative. I was able to find examplars for each of the following, however.

One day when her class was in the library, Mrs. Yager told them to sit quietly at their seats until she called their row to go shopping for their book. As soon as the sentence was out of her mouth, Stephanie said, "Shopping?! What does she mean shopping for books?!" Her immediate zeroing in on the term "shopping" indicates her recognition that the word was used in a different sense so I classified this as Literacy Learning/Figurative Language/ Self-Prompted [LL/Fi/S]. Within just a few seconds, she came up with an answer for her essentially rhetorical question: "I guess we get to go along the aisles and pick up what we want and put it in our cart--like at the grocery store!" She laughed as she told me this.

During show and tell one day in Mrs. Benson's class, two of the children (who are twins) were asked to tell about their new puppy. Kristin said, "We got a cockapoo." Mrs.
Benson asked her to tell what a cockapoo was. She shrugged and said, "I don't know." Her sister said, "It's half cocker spaniel and half poodle." Christopher P. said, "Yeah! The front half is cocker spaniel and the back half is poodle." His statement is classified as Literacy Learning/Figurative Language/Child-Prompted [LL/Fi/C].

Christopher C. was telling the reading group the following: "My grandmother and me were in bed on Christmas Day—it was like we were in a toaster." Mrs. Benson said, "Like a toaster?" "Yeah," he said, "It was hot." The use of the figurative phrase I classified as LA/Fi/S, but his explanation of the analogy was classified as Literacy Learning/Figurative Language/Adult-Prompted [LL/Fi/A].

An example that was a combination of LL/Fi/A and LL/Fi/T involved a newspaper headline that Mrs. Benson brought to class. On February 3, she wore her America's Cup shirt to school to bring the America's Cup team good luck. Before she told the children about her shirt, though, she brought out the morning's newspaper that had the headline, "KOOKABURRA FALLS AGAIN TO US BOAT" and asked if anyone knew what that meant. Christopher P. said, "It means the U.S. won the boat race again."

In October, Mrs. Yager began teaching her kindergarteners about analogies. On the second day that she talked about them, she said, "I want to talk about our analogy," and she pointed to the rebus analogy that she had
printed on a piece of tagboard. The rebus showed a 'mitten' (is to a) 'hand' (as a) 'sock' (is to a) 'foot'. Stephanie said, "The mitten is a home for the hand and the sock is a home for the foot." Judging from the pleased expression on Mrs. Yager's face when Stephanie piped up with that, even though she had not raised her hand, I had the feeling that Stephanie's answer was original—not a rehash of yesterday's lesson. When I later asked Mrs. Yager, she affirmed my reading of the situation. Therefore, I could classify Stephanie's response as Literacy Learning/Figurative Language/Text-Prompted [LL/Fi/T].

Drawer 23

Part of the reason that the term "metalanguage" was coined was because of teachers' and researchers' realization that there were terms being used in the instruction of young children of which they did not have any notion of either meaning or referent. The nine children I studied apparently had both meaning and referent for the majority of the terms I classify as metalanguage because they used them in their speech and responded to them when they were used by others.

One day as I was sitting with the blue group at the reading table, I was looking around the room, making sketches of different bulletin boards and displays that Mrs. Perrone had up. Megan tapped my arm and almost as if she were testing me, pointed to the short vowel sounds chart
that was up on the wall and said, "Say all those sounds."
Her correct use of the term "sounds" indicated to me that
this statement should be classified as Literacy
Learning/Metalanguage/Self-Prompted [LL/Mt/S].

There are some 'metalanguage' terms that readers
could probably go through their whole lives without knowing,
but they are used in school anyway. One example of such a
word is 'schwa.' But, amazingly enough, it was being asked
for one day in the first grade I was observing, and not so
amazingly, it was provided by Christopher P. Mrs. Benson
had written the word 'above' on the board. She asked, "What
sound does this start with?" A child answered by making the
unaccented vowel sound. Christopher P. looked at the child
who was speaking and said, "schwa." This exhibition of his
knowledge of the term 'schwa' is considered Literacy
Learning/Metalanguage/Child-Prompted [LL/Mt/C].

One of the ways that Mrs. Yager worked at eliciting
oral language from the children was to play a game with them
where she had a box containing something special. The
children had to play a version of "twenty questions" to
determine what might be in the box. The first day they
played the game, Mrs. Yager told the children what they were
to do: "I have something special in this box and I want you
to ask me questions that I can answer 'yes' or 'no'."
Stephanie was called on first. She asked, "Is it soft?"
This would not be so remarkable except that the next several
children who were called on either had no response, made a statement like "kind of bumpy," or had to be prompted by Mrs. Yager practically putting the words in their mouths to ask the question. This example of Literacy Learning/Metalanguage/Adult-Prompted [LL/Mt/A] demonstrates that Stephanie understood what was meant by "ask a question."

Ben was one of the few other children who was able to ask a question without significant prompting by the teacher.

A parent volunteer in Mrs. Culture's room was going to play an upper and lower case letter matching game with the children. She had made copies of a ditto sheet on which the children were going to play. She asked the children, "What capital letters do you see?" Kelli looked at the sheet and said, "A, O, G, C." Then the parent volunteer pointed to the other side of the sheet and Kelli said, "Those are lower case letters of the same letters." Kelli demonstrated not only her recognition of metalanguage but her ability to use metalanguage correctly in this example of Literacy Learning/Metalanguage/Text-Prompted [LL/Mt/T].

As discussed previously, children must understand that the symbols on a page in some way signify meaning or ideas before they can learn to read. When teachers or others draw specific attention to a symbol or a written word
and indicate in some way that this symbol or word represents meaning, this is considered literacy learning.

At Shelton Elementary School, the kindergarteners took part in the IBM Write to Read program. Children who participate in this program go to the computer lab everyday and receive phonics instruction from the computer and go to different stations throughout the computer lab where they work with words and sounds. One of the stations is for the purpose of writing a story, which they may or may not eventually put on the computer. The children are always supposed to date their stories. One day, when Kelli sat down to write at this station, she said, "I have to know the date." She looked up at the sign on the wall where the computer lab aide always had the date written. She said, "February 24, 1987. That's today. That's what that says." I classified this as Literacy Learning/Print "Carries" Meaning/Self-Prompted [LL/Pc/S] since she was in a literacy learning situation (i.e., being directed to write a story and to put the date on her story) and because she prompted herself to seek out the information she needed from print—and then announced what it said.

One afternoon when Mrs. Perrone was out of school, a substitute named Mrs. Ford filled in for her. She wrote her name on the board and told the children who she was. Later that day, when it was time for the children to complete a flag activity that was planned for them, she also wrote
'American flag' on the board. There was other information also on the board (regarding helpers, the weather, and so on). Mrs. Ford told the children that they were to copy 'American Flag' from the board onto the paper on which they had colored the American flag. I was sitting at the table with David and several other children. One of the children was looking up at the board and saying each letter as she wrote it: "'f', 'o', 'r', 'd', 'a', 'm'--" All of a sudden, David said, "You're not writing 'American flag'. You're copying her name." The other child said, "She told us to copy off the board." David said, "But you're supposed to copy 'American flag,' not her name. It doesn't make sense to write 'Mrs. Ford' on the flag." I classified this as an example of Literacy Learning/Print "Carries" Meaning/Child-Prompted [LL/Pc/C].

Something that became quite noticeable in the first grade classroom where I was observing was the ever-widening gap between the highly able children in this class and the rest of the class, some of whom were also quite able. Sometimes even in the top reading group, Christopher P. and Christopher C. "blew away their competition." The following is an excerpt from my field notes, taken in December during the Cubs reading group.

Mrs. B: 'I notice that some of you are reading very carefully. That's good. Turn back to the beginning of the story. Not the story, but Part III. See if you can
remember the answers to these questions without re-
reading.'

1. Question/Christopher P. answers.

2. Question/Christopher C. answers. Christopher P. 
tells where Christopher C. found the answer.

3. Question/Christopher C. answers. Christopher P. 
tells where Christopher C. found the answer.

Mrs. B: 'On page 150, find the line that lets you 
know that little frog could not sing. Christopher P. 
reads the line.'

4. Question/Christopher C. answers. Christopher P. 
tells where the answer is.

(Christopher P. and Christopher C. have provided 
every answer. The other five children at the table are 
sort of out of it. Ryan and Ashley are sort of paying 
attention and hanging in there).

Mrs. B: 'The bird called the frog 'a little 
thing.''

Christopher C. said, 'That's because he didn't know what 
he was.'

Christopher C. keeps asking, 'Can I tell everybody 
what's going to happen?'

Amy reads.

Mrs. B: Question

Christopher P.: Answer
These children were not "hogging" the limelight nor was their teacher ignoring the other children. The other children were just not interacting with the text or the teacher or the group in a way that enabled them to participate. Christopher P. and Christopher C. were and they gave numerous examples of Literacy Learning/Print "Carries" Meaning/Adult-Prompted [LL/Pc/A].

One of the ways that Mrs. Perrone tried to help children learn that "print carries meaning" was to have various children call the roll by pointing to each child's name on a piece of poster board and calling out the name. Children were supposed to answer "aqui" if they were 'here'. I observed different children calling the roll using this procedure and it was apparent that many of them did not understand that the marks on the chart represented someone's name because they would point different places on the chart, and so on. Joel, Megan, and David, on the other hand, called the roll quite well from the beginning and would work at saying the person's whole name and pointing to both parts of that child's name when calling it. I classified these as examples of Literacy Learning/Print "Carries" Meaning/Text-Prompted [LL/Pc/T].

Drawer 25

One morning, Mrs. Benson sent children to the board to correct the mistakes in some sentences that she had
written. Bryan F. gave an example of Literacy Learning/Print Conventions/Self-Prompted [LL/Pt/S] when he went up to put a capital letter at the beginning of the sentence and to put a question mark at the end. He said (very softly), "I think I'll make this backwards," which he then proceeded to do.

Every morning, the children in Mrs. Perrone's class determined the weather as part of their morning activities. Because the entire morning was conducted in Spanish, this portion of the morning was, too. As usual, Mrs. Perrone did everything possible to demonstrate what she wanted and to provide "hints" about the meanings of the words used. For example, the children decided that the weather was "frió." So the sentence that was written on the board was, "Hace frió." Mrs. Perrone did not write 'frió' in the same way as she wrote other words, though. She wrote it with "wiggly" lines to give the feeling that the word was shivering. When the children went through the sentences written on the board about the date and the weather, the child who read the sentence, 'Hace frió,' said it in a rather monotone voice. David said, "Not 'Hace frió'," (said in a monotone voice) "'Hace frió!!'" (said in a quivering, shivering voice). I classified this in the cell labeled Literacy Learning/Print Conventions/Child-Prompted [LL/Pt/C].

One afternoon when the blue reading group was meeting with Mrs. Perrone, she had the children look at a
certain page. She said, "There is a particular punctuation mark on this page. Does anyone see it?" Megan pointed to the exclamation mark and said, "Punctuation mark." Mrs. Perrone corrected her and said, "This is called an exclamation point. That's a pretty big word." (And, in typical fashion, David repeated the words 'exclamation point' to himself). Megan's identification of the exclamation point, even though she did not call it by its proper name, is classified as an example of Literacy Learning/Print Conventions/Adult-Prompted [LL/Pt/A].

An example of Literacy Learning/Print Conventions/Text-Prompted [LL/Pt/T] was provided when Christopher P. was asked to re-read the sentence, "You are some little frog." When he read it the first time, he did not emphasize the word 'some.' Then Mrs. Benson asked him to notice the word in dark type and to re-read the sentence and when he did, he emphasized the word in bold type.

Drawer 26

Being taught about 'title pages', 'illustrated by', 'copyright dates', how to handle books, and so on, is literacy learning/book conventions. As with other aspects of literacy, any of these aspects that the children did not already know, appeared to be learned quickly and easily by the children in this study.
I have several examples from Bryan F.'s writing that provide instances of, what I consider to be, Literacy Learning/Book Conventions/Self-Prompted [LL/Bo/S]. Mrs. Benson would often point out various book conventions, either in reading group or when she was reading aloud. Each mention that I heard was quite deliberate and I inferred that she was intending to inform the children about the various parts and aspects of a book. Frequently, after she had presented one of these book conventions, Bryan F. would incorporate it, almost immediately, into a story he was writing.

After mentioning various book conventions to the kindergarteners in her class, Mrs. Perrone suggested one day that some of the children might like to incorporate some of these ideas in their own stories (e.g., illustrated by, and so on). Megan, Joel, and David had already been doing so. One particular afternoon, Mrs. Perrone again mentioned that some of them might like to include information about the illustrator of their stories as they wrote their stories. At Megan's table, one of the children leaned over and asked Megan what they were supposed to do. Megan explained to her, quite clearly, about the illustrator, and where that information should go. This was an example of Literacy Learning/Book Conventions/Child-Prompted [LL/Bo/C].

Early in the year, Mrs. Benson had a few of her best readers take home a book, Sounds After Dark. The next day
she had the five children come back to the reading table to talk about the story and to read it aloud. Christopher P. began spontaneously reading the "title" page of the story aloud. "'The Teeny Tiny Woman', a folk tale, drawings by Peter Lipton. Lettering by Ray Barber." Mrs. Benson said, "You know, most stories do not have 'lettering by' someone. Why would that be important to this story? Are the letters arranged any differently than in most stories?" One of the children said, "Yeah, they're close together." Mrs. Benson said, "They're close together? Are some of the words different sizes?" Christopher P. said, "Yeah." Mrs. B. asked, "What does that mean?" Christopher P. continued, "The ones that are real large make it louder." This example of Literacy Learning/Book Conventions/Adult-Prompted [LL/Bo/A] could also be classified as LL/Pt/A because the point of the discussion is the print, but because of the teacher's statement regarding "Most stories..." I decided to use it here.

I do not have an example for the cell, Literacy Learning/Book Conventions/Text-Prompted [LL/Bo/T].

Drawer 27

At the beginning of each month, Mrs. Perrone introduced some special words for the month. In April, the words were written on an umbrella. Several children were called on to read as many words as they could and frequent
help was provided. When Joel was called on, he read every word, but that was not why I chose to classify it as Literacy Learning/Text Conventions/Self-Prompted [LL/Te/S]. The reason for the classification is that he read the words from left to right and top to bottom. That arrangement is so strongly ingrained in his mind that to do otherwise would be quite strange to him, I am sure.

I do not have an example for the cell, Literacy Learning/Text Conventions/Child-Prompted [LL/Te/C].

Joel was the expert on dinosaurs. He had many dinosaur books and knew many of their names and was willing to "lecture" on dinosaurs in some of the other kindergartens. I brought him a couple of books on dinosaurs and encouraged him to bring some of the ones that he had to show me. He said, "Well, I have two kinds. One is a story and one is not." I began to probe him, trying to get the specifics from him regarding what the differences between the two kinds were. While he never used the term informational or non-fiction (and certainly not expository), it was clear from what he was telling me that he knew that there was a difference between story books and books that are about "real" things. Because I knew the answers to what I was asking him, I classified this as LL rather than LA, that is, it is an example of Literacy Learning/Text Conventions/Adult-Prompted [LL/Te/T].
Part of what I consider to be "text conventions" is pictures and graphics, and so on, that supplement the printed text. Therefore, I consider the following example to be representative of Literacy Learning/Text Conventions/Text-Prompted [LL/Te/A]. The children in Kelli's reading group were directed to look at a certain page on which there were several pictures with spaces under them in which the children were supposed to write. Mrs. Culture asked several questions about the pictures and got answers that did not indicate that the children were using the pictures to help them answer the questions. When she asked Kelli to tell about a picture, Kelli said, "He's sad because he lost the Cowboys' game." At first, I could not figure out exactly where her answer came from, but then when I looked at the picture, I saw that the individual in the picture was wearing a football helmet with a star, much like the Dallas Cowboys' symbol.

Drawer 28

I do not have an example for the cell, Literacy Learning/Referent-Label/Self-Prompted [LL/Re/S].

One morning, the children were playing a game involving numbers, similar to Bingo. When Christa called out, 'eight', Megan said, "You can also say, 'ocho'. This is Spanish and we should say, 'ocho'." I classified this as Literacy Learning/Referent-Label/Child-Prompted [LL/Re/C].
In the spring, Mrs. Perrone was teaching her kindergarteners about plants. She conducted the lesson in the morning so it was in Spanish. After the first part of the lesson, the children were sent back to their seats to draw the parts of the plant that they had talked about. Mrs. Perrone gave very specific directions on what part to draw and what color to draw each part (all in Spanish). In Spanish, she told them that they could color the flower any color they want. She repeated that phrase several times, in a voice that was inviting the children make "educated guesses" about what she was saying. David translated, "We can color the flowers any color we want." I coded this as Literacy Learning/Referent-Label/Adult-Prompted [LL/Re/A].

One morning, Christopher P. got his workbook back from Miss Jennifer, the high school aide who had graded it. He looked over the page and went up to her, pointed to a picture and said, "Are these sneakers?" which, from my days as a classroom teacher who had tried to figure out what a workbook was "calling" a picture, I inferred to mean, "What is the workbook calling these: sneakers or tennis shoes?" This example of Literacy Learning/Referent-Label/Text-Prompted [LL/Re/T] may not seem out of the ordinary, but just the day before, I had been in one of the other classrooms where some children were working on a task that involved matching pictures with letters. Several of them were having trouble because they were calling certain
pictures by one name and would not try a different name, nor would they accept my suggestion that they call a 'square' a 'box', for example.

**Drawer 29**

Christopher P. often gave evidence that he had quite an extensive sense of the purposes of literacy. For example, he brought books to school that had poems and songs in them and he would read them in the way that they were intended to be read. Even in literacy learning situations, he seemed to draw the most from what he was doing as possible. One morning, his reading group had finished the story for the day. Mrs. Benson directed the students' attention to the next page following the story. Christopher P. began softly talking/singing the song to himself, trying out the sounds (it was supposed to be the songs that frogs at a pond sing...) To me, this was an example of Literacy Learning/Purposes of Literacy/Self-Prompted [LL/Pu/S].

Nearly every afternoon in Mrs. Perrone's room, the children had free writing time. After they had written their "stories" they were given the opportunity to stand up and read them to the class. One afternoon, when Christa got up, she said, "I can't really read my story, but I know what it's supposed to say." Megan leaned over to me and said, "I can really read my story and I know what it's supposed to
say." I categorized this as Literacy Learning/Purposes of Literacy/Child-Prompted [LL/Pu/C].

In April, when Mrs. Perrone introduced the words for April that she had written on an umbrella, she first pointed out several individual words and then she asked Joel to read the words. He said, "I won't read the ones we've already read." The evidence he provided was classified as Literacy Learning/Purposes of Literacy/Adult-Prompted [LL/Pu/T].

In the IBM Write to Read computer lab at one of the elementary schools where I did my fieldwork, the computer lab aide would monitor the children's progress and would reward those children who were "on task" with scratch and sniff stickers and other tangible rewards. One day, she went around and stamped the children's work with a stamp that said, "Good work." As I observed her stamping several children's work, none of them said anything. When she stamped Kelli's work, however, she immediately asked the aide, "What does that say?" In this way, she provided evidence that she knew that the symbols "said" something and that this message was supposed to convey some comment about her work, since it was on her work. For this reason, I classified it as Literacy Learning/Purposes of Literacy/Text-Prompted [LL/Pu/A].
When children make spontaneous comments about their literacy abilities in a literacy learning situation or when they are asked about their abilities and then respond, I considered their responses to be instances of Literacy Learning/Abilities. One such example was provided by Joel. One day, when the children's attention was being directed to the mystery sentence, he said, "I can always read the mystery sentence." Then he continued, "Tonight we are going to have a great program!" Another example of Literacy Learning/Abilities/Self-Prompted [LL/Ab/S], regarding a different aspect of literacy, printing, occurred when Stephanie and her group were at the handwriting table making rows of 'u's. When she got to the second row of 'u's, she began assessing her progress and made either positive comments ("That's a good one.") or negative comments (That's not a good one.") about each 'u' she made until the aide asked her to stop commenting.

One afternoon in the middle of May, when it was quite warm in the classroom (causing severe lethargy in children and in researchers), the blue group was meeting with Mrs. Perrone. She asked the group a question about the story they were reading. David raised his hand nearly immediately. After a couple of moments, when no one else had raised his or her hand, David looked around the group and said, "Well, am I the only one with my hand up?" To me,
he was implying, 'Am I the only one who knows the answer?'
I therefore coded this as an example of Literacy Learning/Abilities/Child-Prompted [LL/Ab/C].

The children in the top first grade group were reading from the second grade basal that was going to go out of adoption at the end of the year. One of the stories is about a little bear who tries to make people think that he is special. Mrs. Benson asked the children in the group why they thought they were special. It took her awhile to get any answers, but eventually several children responded. Christopher C. said, "Christopher P. and I are special because we can set up the computer lab. And we can write stories that are long!" This latter statement was coded as Literacy Learning/Abilities/Adult-Prompted [LL/Ab/A].

In many situations when the children in the classes I visited were asked to read aloud (which I always coded as Literacy Acquisition), the children on whom I was focusing exuded such confidence in their abilities, that I consider this to be a statement of Literacy Learning/Abilities/Text-Prompted [LL/Ab/T].

Summary

The children on whom I focused have every right to feel confident about their abilities. They are bright, articulate, and literate. They are literate because of their low threshold for language--on both a conscious and an
unconscious level. While this lower threshold has enabled them to acquire literacy—naturally and seemingly effortlessly in some cases—it has also enabled them to learn literacy.

Based on my observations of these nine verbally gifted children, it seems that there are many aspects of language and literacy that need only be presented one time in order for the children to capture them. I use the word 'capture' very deliberately because I often had the feeling, when around these children, that their minds were like traps—waiting for their prey, language, to pass by—and to be captured.

I do not mean to imply that, in every instance, these children's teachers only had to present a particular literacy skill once—and it was learned immediately by the children on which I focused. But certainly, in many instances, this was true. I also do not mean to imply that these children were perfect in their writing and/or in their reading; they were not. They were, however, unusually adept at using language efficaciously; they knew that language was "theirs" and that it had form and function that could be manipulated. In this study, I was interested in their conscious or unconscious apprehension of, sensitivity to, and attention to language and how they manipulated it in the acquisition and learning of literacy. In the final chapter,
I will reflect on this awareness and on this manipulation and what it has to say to teachers and researchers.
CHAPTER 11

NOW WHAT?

For those who are avid readers of experimental research reports, if this is your first ethnography, you may be expecting this last chapter to be, what is typically labelled as 'Discussion,' which usually includes the generalizations that can be made from the study being reported. This notion of generalizations, however, does not fit with the ethnographic paradigm. Readers who were hoping that this final chapter held definite answers to the questions I posed at the beginning of my study or to the questions they have posed while reading--may be disappointed. I cannot make definite statements nor can I make broad generalizations. The nature of life and of truth and of reality precludes generalizations from being made. Although it sounds trite, each child, like each adult, is an individual; to draw conclusions about all children based on nine children (or based on one thousand children) is discarding too much valuable information.

1Goetz and LeCompte, Qualitative Design, 8, state that ethnographers, "Aim for comparability and translatability of generated findings rather than for outright transference to groups not investigated."
There are probably even some case study ethnographers who would be uncomfortable with the fact that I made some statements and assertions about the nine verbally gifted children who served as the key informants for this study. I, however, do not have any qualms about the statements or assertions I made herein because I have voluminous support from the data drawn from my field notes, the audio- and video-tapes, the parent notebooks, and the interviews I conducted with the children and their parents. On the other hand, I would be uncomfortable, based on this research project, to draw conclusions about all verbally gifted children's metalinguistic sentience.  

It was not my purpose at the outset to make generalizations about those persons demarcated by the intersection of the populations of gifted persons, verbally gifted persons within the domain of gifted persons, and young children (see Figure 29). It was my purpose to identify a small number of young verbally gifted children to

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2Lincoln and Guba, Naturalistic Inquiry, 124, contend that "Local conditions, in short, make it impossible to generalize. If there is a 'true' generalization, it is that there can be no generalization. And note that the 'working hypotheses' are tentative both for the situation in which they are first uncovered and for other situations; there are always differences in context from situation to situation, and even the single situation differs over time. It is said that a Chinese philosopher, upon being asked whether it is possible to cross the same river twice, replied that it is not possible to cross the same river even once! Constant flux militates against conclusions that are always and forever true; they can only be said to be true under such and such conditions and circumstances."
study intently and intensely and to determine whether there were any patterns to be seen or assertions to be made.

Figure 29. Diagram showing the demarcation of young verbally gifted children.

regarding their cognitive abilities, their metalinguistic sentience, and their literacy acquisition and literacy learning. I think that the value of this research lies in the close look at, and the extreme thinking about, these nine focus children.

I feel fortunate that, in addition to having data that allowed me to make assertions, the process of transforming field notes, videotapes, and so on, into data, led me to coin a new term and conception for this term, as well as to construct a working model for classifying the metalinguistic sentience evidence provided by young children. The further "testing" and ultimate refinement or
rejection of this model will serve as my research focus for the next several years.

If anything, this study, like nearly all good studies, raised more questions than it resolved. For those searching for potentially fecund areas for research, the following musings may be helpful:

1. Most of the children I studied talked nearly all the time. The only times they did not were those times when a task was particularly difficult. Is there any connection (i.e., more "cognitive powers" engaged and thereby less remaining for talk?)

2. What about determining a way to get a baseline of kindergarten or first grade children's metalinguistic sentience at the beginning of the year? Once a baseline is established, would it be possible to chart growth and change?

3. What about exploring the idea of kindergarten as a foreign country?

4. What about question-answer mismatches between teachers and children? For example, look at teachers' questions and children's answers and determine when they do and when they do not match? Who does the clarifying, if there is any?

5. Look at questions asked by children. Can they be classified, and if so, is it revealing?
(6) Look at teachers' "definitions" of literacy, that is, both the ones given directly and the ones given indirectly. Find out what definitions children have. Are there any connections?

(7) What kinds of "hints" do teachers give when children are trying to figure out a letter, a sound, a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a concept?

(8) How do teachers define words and concepts (both indirectly and indirectly)?


(10) How do children judge the difficulty of a literacy task?

(11) At what point do children begin verbalizing strategies to apply in literacy learning and literacy acquisition?

(12) Determine what children know about a particular aspect of language, then introduce that aspect through literacy acquisition and literacy learning situations and see what happens.

Specifically regarding the Model for Classifying the Evidence Provided by Children of Their Metalinguistic Sentience, I have numerous ideas for its assessment and refinement. I want to take this model into classrooms, as an observation instrument (with each drawer being a flip sheet) and look for instances of each cell in order to help
me more clearly specify the parameters of each cell. I would expect that in the process, the model will change, as I find instances of metalinguistic sentience that do not fit in with the structure described herein.

If the model withstands the process of refinement, which should result in an ameliorated version, I will attempt to determine whether it can be used in the identification of young verbally gifted children. To do that, I will train others to use an observational instrument, based on the model, as a means of looking for instances of young children's metalinguistic sentience. If it turns out that children who are verbally gifted either have more instances of metalinguistic sentience evidence in some cells than do other children or provide evidence in more cells of the model than do other children, then tentative use of the model as an identification instrument can commence. I see decision-making at this level several years down the road.

Summary

This ethnography is my report—my rendering—of nearly a year's worth of fieldwork and several years' worth of reading, writing, talking, and thinking. I see that it is only a beginning; there is a lifetime of fieldwork, reading, writing, talking, and thinking left to do. I constructed this rendering primarily as a narrative. This
ethnography was my story, my tale, my 'once upon a time' construction of nine verbally gifted children and what I learned from them. Certainly, someone else would have related the story differently and likewise, each reader will construct his or her own rendition of the story. But that is to be expected.

For any particular narrative, there is not single basically basic story subsisting beneath it but, rather, an unlimited number of other narratives that can be constructed in response to it or perceived as related to it.3

I hope that my construction and perception as a writer allowed readers to construct and perceive a sense of the wonder of these nine verbally gifted children, as well as, a sense of the wonder of human beings learning and acquiring that which makes us human beings—language and the ability to reflect on it and manipulate it.

3Smith, "Narrative Versions," 217.
10-15-86 David

wons a podatim.

ISO1 a Big.

MONstr. AND I.<

whnt. to MY

WS.

the END.

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10-1786 DaVid

wons. A POH, A Tim.

wons. A BiG.

MONstr. CAM TO.

MY, CASSL.

and HE.

skid THE BEING.
10-20-86 David

WOHNSAPONATIM
A BIG MONSTR
GO BLD UP A BIG
MANE AND THE END

10-21-86 Dave

WOHNSAPONATIM
THE GHOST
AND GOBLENS
WEL GIT YOU
10-22-86 David

WHNSA PON A. TIM.

A WETCH A PON, A TIM.

STORRY IN THE-SEL.

AND TEP A HANTIDAWS.

10-23-86 David

WHNSA PON A. TIM.

THER WOS A BIG.

PIG. AND, THAT.

BIG, PIG. WOS, A BIG.
10-27-80 Dav

W HoS a P on a T i' G M i' NOO A Big-
BooT ThaT Ran A Wa
AnD i NOO A Big GoRl.
AnD ThaT GoRl Ran A WaTo

W HoS a P on a T i' M
10-28-86 Dav Via
W HoS a P on a T i' M T aT WaS A BlaCk CaT
ThE ENd
David Trevor Welch
Wnngs u pon a time
THAR WAS A Pilgrim

THE END

11-3-86 David
IT WAS A DARK AND FOGGY NIGHT
AND DEM TAR WAS A TRCE
AND THAT TRCE TA
HAD A LANTHE END
11-4-86 David

Who saw that Tim

That was a terror to me

And that terror was a strange end

11-5-86 David

Who saw a terror time

Into a terror but that terror was a strange terror was even a scarey terror

The end
11-6-86 David
WANSAPONNATING THARWASA FROG
AND THARWASA A LOG
THE FROG WAS ON
THE LOG
IN THE END M/W

11-7-86 DAVID
W. NONSA PONNATING
IN A LAND MOUSE HOREES
THAR LOUVD A FOTHRT NOICE
A MOUTHRT NOCEE
AND ATOWSUN'T TORCEE
11-10-86 David
WONCAPONATIMOTHAR
WASHMONSTOR
THEEND

17-17-86 David

THERE WAS A TIME
A LITTLE KITTEN
AND KATE AND MEG WALKING IN THE FOREST
On 11-18-86, David Trevor and I created a story.

One day, in the pretense of being a gathering, The King was made to hide behind the trees.

The End
11-20-86 David
Wohns upononatime
Tnrewonsa itil
Dog

11-21-86 David
Wohns upononatime
Thenwa tockey
And a pilgrim
And they went walking
11-24-86 David

Who snips up on a time

And that big torcker

Lived in a pepper box house

12-31-86 David

Who snips up at a time

That was astrador

And molthine yowen

Be fuor
12-2-86 David
Whons u, PonATime
Santaclaus Kame to
My Nose And there was
A thing there hot Evin

12-3-86 David
Whons u PonATime Andrew was a man
Santaclaus And Wannig going
On His lace He ford a BigBigCrach
And it wasaholey ACnris tree

The End
12-9-86 David
Wohns upon a time
Aginley Pig Namd Sitiamin
Wint For a walk with me

12-5-86 David
Wohns upon a time
My friends and me
Woin Walking in the
Zoo furst we soe
In the zebras
And then we wint
On
12-10-86 David

When Upon A Time Santa was rocking thing king

12-11-86 David

When Upon A Time

There was a movie

In Omda Santa Claus

The movie
12-12-86 David

Who's Upon a Time
Santa was working
in his shop. And

Thine King

Wat He Wood

Story in the Story's

---

12-17-86 David

Who's Upon a Time

Jack and Jile

Wint up the Nile

Tofet Knuppel

Win Jack Kamehameha

Wata

Khon and Jile Kamehameha

Hebrokis
1-2-87 David

On my birth Day
I got a dog and puppy, an umbriall, and Cap Cid.
The end

7-1-87 David
It was cold, cold, cold.
One winter, Shoosh went the wend and out wint the lingt.
The end
Kristin and me were playing in the park. Suddenly a gorilla came upon us. The snow and the gorilla was off and the gorilla started to play.

Hoyes Smartes
1-20-86 David
A is for ⬧ Bis for 🧸
C is for 🧸 Bis for 🧸
E is for 🧸 Fis for 🧸
The end

ABC’s

David Welsh
January 22

Jack got an invitation. They went to the party where they opened the door.

And then they ate the cake and opened the presents.
One day John and me were watching Cadillac and then Mrs. Malone came and we had Hotchoclate.

He lived 178 years ago.

His mother died and he had a sister.

They cried and walked they used bear skin for kuyvers.
ota 3-8 7

there was a mystery
at 10 m in the corn mouse
and then came
the deaf dog. He said
there was a mystery
at the corn mouse
and it was not
they were then
the alarm
and it was moved

Kate and me were
walking in the forest
we found a tree
and Elmo did it and the next
day was Valentine's Day the end
George Washington was the first president.

George Washington was the first president and Abraham Lincoln was the sixteenth president. The end.

2-12-87 David
2-17-87, David
megan, craig, eristen case
Dusty, ana, and, mrs malone and
and had the fire
the e n q choclat

2-19-87, David

one upon a time i was
walking in the forest
and then i saw big
bird?
the end?
2-25-07

David Welch

Once I was at the Mall looking
for a watch and my brother was poking
at Pogo bills and I was wearing
my watch and now we got to try and
the End.

Once I was at the All American and my father
was taking picture and we went
to some interesting buildings
and it's insane non toeh at
the End

David
Once upon a time all the kids in this school were making pretzels and cheese. The end.

3-3-87 David

One time tirannosaurus and rex were playing together. The end.
Once upon a time

Baria
3-5-87

me and Kristen -
pasier

and April

Went to the

Dakarina

The End
once upon a time I was in the park and I
discovered a four leaf clover and had luck
for the St. Patrick’s Day

3-11-87
3-23-87 Paragraph

Korspring Bracki went to my
Grandmothers and Grandfathers
House and they had a new Bisickle
and used it a lot of the time I was
there I was there for four days and went
to the zoo and got a whale and fed
the animals and saw a Babie
Gerat two pay sold bearing March
and after that I stayed Patryans House
for Hisium Berparty and came home
from the party and used my new

3-24-87 Big Party For
with Victor and Craig in the
at Panesoutrap Rex and a
and the Rutap and we had a hard pay
getting out of that mustess there na
Once I went back in time
and saw the Dinosaurs
and he was giving them
rice ekoney the end

Dary Welch
4-13-87

Pawd 4 4-5-87

On Friday, I am

going to Brownwood

With my father

and brother

I've only been

there once

and it takes

lesstine

than going to my

grandfather's

house se

the end
David Welch

Once I went to Glorieta with my three aunts and my grandfather and Uncle Herb into the mountains.

David 4-21-87

Once I heard the ice cream man and got my wallet and bought a nickel for an ice cream sandwich and went to Jenny's house across the street the end.
David McLennan 4-23-87

Once I went to the park in Brown Wood and when I got there I played with the kittens that they only had for two months the end

David 4-24-87

Once there was a bear
Fairly and another son was a privet eye once he was in the basement and he saw a hole in the ceiling and nesa wan eye and it was a Germe sheperds eye the end
The Detective Mouse
Thank you
MRS. NEINTOSH
and Mrs. Neintosh
West to Rusha
Go to Rusha
Back to Rusha

David 4-30-87
04-27-87
84-2 e-tha

Queen of Righting Domes
On the Bridge
Maddock National Museum
Director of the Guiness
David Welch
5-4-87
curious George
was so curious
about the wall
with
a hole in it
that five
moving and one
day
recycled
over the wall
and then when
boys moving
the vines around
the end
5 - 6 - 87 David

Once there was a mouse -

Detective and one day he had a mister -

X) Oh he

Laid down on the couch and he saw an eye

and at the wolf jumped out

the end
Upon a time
I went to get liquor
and almost took him
darabbit and then
he hoped away
the end

the pay before last 5-1888
night I was at
the Rolerrink
and my friend from
church was then
and he broke his
arm and we clothed him
when I have play at church
last night
In 1987, David planted and grew many vegetables and flowers. He dug a hole, planted and saw lots of butterflies and dragonflies. He even saw a fox. The end.

5-22-87 Field Day David

We ran relay races and played tug of war and more.
My favorite part of kindergarten is math and when we go on field trips and a field day. I like the howley year.
APPENDIX 2

NUTS AND BOLTS
This ethnography was a fairly expensive project—for an individual. I was fortunate enough (and worked hard enough) to obtain significant funding for the project. I applied for and received, with my major professor, a National Council of Teachers of English research grant-in-aid and a North Texas State University faculty research grant. This money, along with a grant I received from the Gifted Students Institute, enabled me to purchase the equipment and materials that I needed to adequately conduct my fieldwork and analysis.

I purchased the following equipment:

(1) 1 Mitsubishi Diacam video camera and carrying case.

(2) 1 Bilora tripod (heavy duty).

(3) 1 handheld Panasonic tape recorder.

(4) 1 wide angle lens for the video camera.

(5) 1 Panasonic wireless remote VCR.

(6) 1 Sanyo memo-scriber/transcriber with foot pedal.

(7) 1 Sima Sound Catcher remote microphone.

(8) 70 two hour videotapes.

(9) 200 one hour audiotapes.

(10) Lots of batteries.
APPENDIX 3

TASKS USED TO ASSESS CHILDREN'S METALINGUISTIC AWARENESS
I have grouped the tasks used to determine the metalinguistic awareness of children and youth loosely into the following seven categories: 1) Focus on words, syllables, and sounds; 2) Focus on sentences; 3) Focus on grammar; 4) Focus on pragmatics; 5) Focus on symbols; 6) Focus on acts of literacy; 7) Interviews. In this appendix, I am merely presenting examples of the different types of tasks metalinguistic researchers have used; I am not discussing the strengths and/or weaknesses of any of the research tasks. This presentation is not meant to be exhaustive, merely suggestive of the types of tasks that previous researchers have used.

Focus on words, syllables, and sounds

Children and youth have been asked in many ways to focus on words, syllables, and sounds and to do tasks that indicated their understanding of the concepts "word," "syllable," and "sound," and of the function of words, syllables, and sounds. For example, children were asked to invent a word and then to produce an utterance using the word they had made up.¹ In other experiments, children were given a real word and were asked to put the word in a "story."² Still other researchers have asked children to

¹Berthoud-Papandroupolou, "Children's Ideas about Language," 56.
²Ehri, "Word Consciousness," 205.
"Tell me a long word that you know," "Tell me a short word that you know," "Tell me a hard word that you know," or "Tell me an easy word that you know." After providing a word, children are usually asked why they chose a particular word as their answer.3

In a rather unique way of finding out children's perceptions of "long" words and "short" words, Rozin, Bressman, and Taft designed what has come to be known as the "mow/motorcycle" test. Children were shown pairs of words, each on a card, one short and one long, and were asked to tell which word on the card corresponded to a spoken word. They were also shown plastic letters arranged in two different sized boxes (one long and one short) and were told that only long words could fit in the long box and only short words could fit in the short box. Then the subjects were told to close their eyes while the researcher rearranged (ostensibly) the letters. When they opened their eyes, they were to tell which box had which word in it (one long word was given and one short word was given).4

Other researchers have used different methods to find out if children can segment sentences into words. For

3 Berthoud-Papandroupoulou, "Children's Ideas about Language," 56.

example, showing the subject a sentence that has been
written on a sentence strip and having the child "Draw a
circle around each word." Another similar task involved
showing the child a sentence printed on a sentence strip and
then having him or her count the words, pointing to each
word as he or she counted it. The next task involved having
the children cut off one of the words on the sentence strip,
and then continuing to cut off each word as they came to it.

Another researcher, rather than having the children
look at a sentence, had them listen to a sentence, count the
number of words, and then tell what the words were. Mickish asked children to look at a sentence that was
comprised of six words written with no space between the
words while they listened to that sentence being read over

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5 Allan, "Metalinguistic Understanding," 91; Meltzer and Herse, Boundaries of Written Words.

6 Meltzer and Herse, Boundaries of Written Language.

7 Berthoud-Papandroupoulou, "Children's Ideas about Language," 61; Bowey, Tunmer, and Pratt, "Development of Children's Understanding," 504-05, expressed some concerns with this technique. They state that many experiments which require children to listen to whole sentences and then to segment them into word units may exceed children's processing capacities so that even when the children do remember the test sentence, there is a strain on their memories possibly "sufficient to disrupt segmentation performance. The task of repeating sentence-long strings while simultaneously identifying their word boundaries may be too complex for young children (Lundberg 1978)."
and over on a tape recorder and then to draw vertical lines between the words.  

One other listening task that has been used involved having subjects listen to two sentences (the first presented by the researcher and the second by a puppet) that were identical except for one word—either one word is moved, inserted, omitted, or substituted. Subjects were to listen to the pair of sentences presented and then to "identify how the puppet changed the words, whether he put in, left out, or mixed up any words, and what was the word or words."  

A task similar to the previous one, in that children had to listen and focus on words, was one where children were given two word sequences and were asked to separate or reverse the sequence, (e.g., 'it is,' 'red apple').  

Another frequently used task is the "tapping" task. This involves having a child tap on the table for each word or syllable that they hear (after seeing this demonstrated by the researcher). A similar task is having the child lay out a poker chip for each word or syllable he or she hears.  

Holden and MacGinitie used a different way to "get at" children's perceptions of "word." They had children

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9 Ehri, "Word Consciousness," 205-06.
10 Huttenlocher, "Word-Phrase Relationship."
listen to a recorded sentence and then to indicate on a 5" x 8" card (that had four one-line "sentences" typed on it) which of the four lines or rows had the same number of words as they had just counted on the recorded utterance. Each line on the card had a different number of letter clusters, some of which were nonsense clusters and some of which were actual words, but segmented unconventionally; for example, 'Red and green balloons popped.'

Other means have also been used to attempt to determine children's abilities to segment a speech stream into words or syllables. Fox and Routh gave children a short sentence (such as "Peter fell down.") and asked them to "repeat just a little bit of that sentence." If the subject said, "Peter fell," the researcher would then ask again, "repeat just a little bit of that." The subject might then say, "Peter." When asked again to repeat just a little bit of that, the child might say, "Pete." Often the researchers went on until the child gave only a sound.

Ehri's attempt to see whether children could select out of the context of a sentence certain words that contained first or final syllables involved a task where she

would first say a syllable, for example, 'gar' as in 'garden.' Then she would read a sentence that had the word 'garden' embedded in it, although when she read it, she would stress a non-critical word. The child would then be asked if he or she had heard the sound, and if so, to tell in what word it was heard.14

In his effort to determine children's concept of "word" and "sound", Downing prepared a tape of twenty-five auditory stimuli consisting of five different types: (1) non-human noise; (2) human utterance of a single phoneme; (3) human utterance of a single word; (4) human utterance of a single phrase; (5) human utterance of a single sentence. He played the tape for children and asked them to say "yes" when they heard "a word" and "no" if what they heard was "not a word." The second task was the same except children were supposed to listen for "a sound."15

Focus on sentences

The "sentence level" is another area where researchers have probed to find out what children's concepts are. In France, children were asked to produce a very short sentence as part of one experiment.16 In several other

14 Ehri, "Word Consciousness," 206.

15 Downing, "Concepts of Learning to Read."; Downing, "Children's Developing Concepts."

16 Josiane Boutet, Francoise Gauthier, and Madeleine St. Pierre, "To Know How to Talk about Sentence," Archives
experiments, subjects were asked to listen to sentences and to tell whether they were "good" or "silly" (or "good" or "bad" or some other similar attribution). If they were identified as "silly," they were asked to fix them up and/or to tell what was wrong with them.

Focus on grammar

Researchers have been working for decades concerning children's acquisition of grammar. Some of the studies included under the metalinguistic awareness rubric employed the following tasks. de Villiers and de Villiers used a pair of puppets with young children. They told the children that one puppet "did not talk properly. He says things all the wrong way round." The other puppet was going to help him learn to talk properly. After some modeling by the researcher, that is, having the first puppet say some correct and reversed-order imperatives and having the second puppet tell him whether it was right or wrong and correcting him if it was wrong, the child was asked to help teach the

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first puppet. Examples of the incorrect sentences are:
"Teeth your brush." "Throw the sky." "Apple the stone."\(^{18}\)

In an attempt to find out what children knew about creating different forms of words, Berko designed the now famous 'wugs' task for children. Subjects are shown a picture of a creature and are told, "This is a wug." Then they are shown a picture of two of these creatures and are asked to complete the sentence, "These are two ________." Berko also had subjects use some nonsense words as verbs, changing tenses, etc.\(^ {19}\)

**Focus on symbols**

Some researchers have found that young children do not know the difference between letters, numbers, and other symbols. In an effort to find out what children know about various symbols conventionally used in literacy, researchers have had them do various tasks. For example, each of the following was printed on a 3" x 5" card: 2, 5, 8, e, t, s, labor, for, boy. The cards were spread out in front of the child and he or she was asked to "pick up all the cards that have numbers on them." Next, another set of cards was spread out in front of the child. These cards had the


following on them: 324, 5927, 24159, m, a, h, foot, rest, plans. The child was told to "pick up all the cards that have words on them." 20

In an effort to get at "whole" and "part" concepts, the following set of tasks were presented to children: (1) first a child was presented with a 5" x 7" card on which full-sized photocopied pictures of pennies were shown. The child was asked, "What are these?" and then, "How many pennies are on this card?" (If the child did not know they were pennies after the first question, he or she was told). (2) Next, a child was show a card on which were pictures of four pennies that had been cut in half, each pair with a small space in between. The child was asked, "How many whole pennies are on this card?" (3) A similar task involved showing the child a card on which were pictures of two pennies that had been cut in half, with about two inches between the two halves, which were still in correct orientation to each other. The child was asked, "How many whole pennies are on this card?" (4) Next, a child was shown a card on which there were pictures of five pennies, four that were cut in half. The halves were variably spaced, but were in correct orientation to each other. The child was asked, "How many whole pennies are on this card?" (5) Lastly, a child was shown a whole paper cup and asked, 20 Meltzer and Herse, "Boundaries of Written Words," 5.
"You've seen paper cups like these before, haven't you?"
Then he or she was shown two paper cups that had been cut in
half lengthwise and were randomly tossed on the table and
was asked, "How many whole paper cups are there here?"21

Focus on pragmatics
Some researchers have given children various tasks
to do to determine their pragmatic awareness. One such task
involved having children explain to someone else how to do
something, for example, how to stack blocks a certain way,
how to put a puzzle together, or how to turn on a water
faucet.22

Focus on acts of literacy
Harste, Woodward, and Burke conducted a longitudinal
study of young children to determine what they knew about
written language. In addition to collecting data through
classroom observation, they also conducted special task
interviews with each of the children. One of the tasks
involved environmental print, (i.e., print taken from cereal
boxes, toothpaste boxes, McDonald's bags, etc.). First, the
child was shown the whole box (or bag, etc.) and asked what
he or she thought it said. Then, the child was asked what
he or she saw that helped him or her to know what it said.

21 Meltzer and Herse, "Boundaries of Written Words."
22 Ginsberg and Opper, "Intellectual Development," 89.
Thirdly, the researcher told the child to "Tell me some of the things you know about this." In the next part of the task, children were shown the product with all of the two-dimensional graphics removed and asked the first two questions, as above. Lastly, the subjects were shown typed print, (e.g., "Kellogg's") and were asked, "What do you think this says?"

In the second task, the researcher talked about a favorite story and then asked the child to tell about a favorite story. Next, after some play with toys, the child was directed to take two or three things from the toy box that he or she would like to use in a story and then to tell the researcher a story. The researcher wrote down the story as the child dictated it and then asked the child to read it. The next day, the child was again asked to read (or pretend to read) the story dictated the day before.

The third task, entitled "Uninterrupted Writing and Drawing," involved having the subjects write their names, write (or pretend to write) anything else that they could write, read what they had written, and then draw themselves. Later, children were given a book and told to look through the book to find out about the story (while the researcher read his or her own book). After the children finished, they were asked to turn to the beginning of the book and to read (or pretend to read) the book to the researcher.
Another task designed by this team of researchers involved having the subjects read (or pretend to read) a letter that someone had sent them and then having them write a letter to someone, which they were then asked to read. While they worked on their letters, the researcher worked on one, too. After reading their letter, the subjects were asked to address envelopes so their letters could be mailed.\textsuperscript{23}

**Interviews**

Numerous researchers have directly interviewed children and youth to determine their metalinguistic awareness. The following are some of the questions that have been asked.\textsuperscript{24} [Readers should know that only a few of these questions were asked at any one time to any one child].

1. Can you tell me a letter, any letter you know?
2. What do we use letters for?
3. What do we use words for?
4. What do we use sentences for?
5. What is reading? or What do you think reading is?
6. What do you do when you read?

\textsuperscript{23}Harste, Woodward, and Burke, *Language Stories*.

\textsuperscript{24}These questions have been asked in various studies, including: Downing, "Learning to Read"; Francis, "Children's Experience"; Mayfield, "Code Systems"; Reid, Learning to Think"; Templeton and Spivey, "Concept of Word"; Johns and Ellis, "Children Tell."
7. If someone didn't know how to read, what would you tell him or her that he or she would need to know?
8. Can you read yet?
9. Have you any books at home? What is in them?
10. Have you any books at school? What is in them?
11. Can you write something for me? Tell me about what you have written.
12. Show me your reading book. Is it hard? Is it harder than the first one? What is hard about it?
13. Show me today's page. Can you read it to me? How do you know what it says? What do you do if you don't know?
14. Can you write something from your book? Show me. (If this fails) Can you write pig? (or cat, dog, etc.) How do you know what to put?
15. What is 'b' for besides bed?
16. Can you read?
17. Who do you know who can read?
18. What does reading help you do?
19. Show me your reading book. What do you do if you don't know a word?
20. What are these spaces for? (Point to spaces between words). Are there any that are not words? (If yes,...) Show me one that is not a word. What is it?
21. The following list of words (selected from the Johnson Basic Sight Word List, 1976) and phrases were randomly
ordered for each administration. For each word or phrase
the experimenter asked, "Is ______ a word?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrases</th>
<th>Nouns</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>Functors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>from the house</td>
<td>table</td>
<td>give</td>
<td>the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>up and down</td>
<td>night</td>
<td>put</td>
<td>and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hide and seek</td>
<td>children</td>
<td>took</td>
<td>with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. For each word and phrase on the above list, the
experimenter asked, "Why is (is not) ________ a word?"

23. What is a word anyway? (Depending on response...) Tell
me something more. Tell me more about that.

24. Tell me a long word. Why is _________ a long word?

25. Tell me a short word. Why is _________ a short word?

26. Tell me an easy word. Why is _________ an easy word?

27. Tell me a hard word. Why is _________ a hard word?

An interesting variation on the interview technique
was used by Sanders. He not only conducted an interview
using some of the above questions, but he also had another
child conduct the interview, which he then taped.

The purpose of the near-to-peer interview was to elicit
a fuller exposition of metalinguistic insight on the
part of the three first graders than might be given to
the adult interviewer. An adult's request to be told by
a child what one does when one reads appears to be a
testing situation as the interviewer asks for

25Rita Watson, Definitions: The Conventionalization
of Word Meaning. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of
the American Educational Research Association, New York, 19-
22 March 1982, ERIC, ED 216 512, found that first graders
who were asked questions like, "What is an elephant?" laughed at the researcher. So, it is not surprising to have children laugh at questions such as, "What is reading?"
information he or she already knows. However, the questions about how one reads asked by a soon-to-be-first grader appear more as real questions which are deserving of a full answer.26

Summary

Countless researchers have experimented with countless tasks in their quest to elicit what children do and do not know about their own language. Some have proved powerful in eliciting information, others have not. Those who are interested are encouraged to try out some of these tasks with young children. Whatever their responses, information will be provided—even if it does not "get at" what the researchers who originally created the task intended.

26 Sanders, "First-Graders' Concept of Word."
APPENDIX 4

TRANSCRIPTION FROM A KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM
It is just after 8:30 on the second day of school. Numerous children are already in the room. Other kids are still arriving. This is a kindergarten class and the teacher is Mrs. Anderson, an experienced teacher.

Mrs. Anderson: "OK, next order of business. Look inside your pink folder if you have it. Look inside your pink folder if you have it."

Child: "I didn't bring mine."

Mrs. Anderson: "Look in your folder first. See if it has anything in it that mother has written. Notes that mother has written or anything to me."

Child makes a comment.

Mrs. Anderson: "OK, alright. If you don't have one yet. T.C. where's your folder? You should have your folder. Now, wait just a minute. Sometimes mother sends a note or puts something in there that you don't even know or don't remember and that's why it's necessary--good morning" (to mother who has just arrived with a child).

Mother: "Good morning. Is he in your room?" (indicating a little boy who is with her).

Mrs. Anderson: "No, oh, yes he is in here. He wasn't here yesterday. I'm sorry. I'm Mrs. Anderson. OK?! We're glad to have you today. Hold on to your lunch pail, there. Kevin's mother got his birth certificate mixed up yesterday and he had a problem."

Inaudible discussion between the mother and Mrs. A.

Mrs. Anderson: "OK, so now we have everybody. Alright, the folders. Let's look at the folders. Good morning, Rachel. Looking at your folders." (Child brings something up to teacher). "Hold on to it. Good morning, Angel. You want to just come in and sit down. Don't put anything in any locker for just a moment until we get it all straightened out. Alright, now. You have nothing--"

Announcements: (Mrs. Carter) "Good morning teachers and boys and girls. I would like for you to observe the school time. Teachers if your watches are not exactly with the school time, please adjust your time thinking to ours. This clock tends to run a little slow. We do our best to keep it, but in the event that it does not, we operate under the school time. Please remember to gather your children at
8:25. 8:25. I would be grateful if before you leave today there is a sign in the auditorium for your class before you leave the building today. All the boys and girls who arrive at your door who are not on your list, teachers do not accept them until we get them cleared through the office. Bob Shelton students, I am so glad to see you all here and we're going to have a wonderful year together. It takes a little while to get accustomed to our way of doing things, but please remember we expect you to do the very best all the time. I hope this is going to be a good day for you. Thank you."

Mrs. Anderson: "Remember to put your finger up. When Mrs. Carter came on—that was what I told you yesterday. See that little box up there—with the round silver circle. Mrs. Carter was talking from the office. She talks to everyone in the whole entire building and that means that everyone can hear her. However if she just wants someone in our room, she can always just turn on the intercom and call to our room. In the mornings she will give announcements, that's what that word means, announcements, she tells everybody what they need to know. First thing in the morning.

Child asks something (inaudible).

Mrs. Anderson: "Stephanie? No. Everybody has to have the same announcements in the morning, first of all and that's when you put your hand, your finger up. And you did a great job. Give yourselves a pat on the back. Good job! Very good job! Now we're looking at folders. If there is nothing in your folder, when I call your name, would you come and bring your folder." (A couple of kids get up to walk toward her with their folders.) "Not until I call your name. Alright, James, did you have folder that you brought back? James, did you have a folder that you brought back?"

James: "I didn't find mine."

Mrs. Anderson: "You didn't find yours? Now, people, that's what I told you. If you don't have one of these folders, you're going to have a very hard time getting everything back and forth. Alright, Brenda, do you have a folder with you this morning? Please bring it up here. While Brenda's looking for hers, Brian. There's nothing in your folder? Alright would you come and put it up here. Eric. Is there anything in your folder? Will you put it over here, please. Now, I'm going to take your word for this, that there is nothing in your folder. You have to be very responsible about knowing whether there is or isn't. Lauri will you
just sit down please, for just a moment. Wayne, do you have anything in your folder?"

Wayne: "No."

Mrs. Anderson: "I like the way you’re being quiet. That’s very, very good. Alright, Doreen, will you look in your folder and see if there’s a note that’s meant for me?Alright, will you come and put it right here in your mailbox. Thank you." (A woman comes to the door with a child. The child comes in, goes up to Mrs. Anderson and tells her he has not eaten breakfast.) "You haven’t eaten breakfast? You must be hungry. I’ll tell you what you do, let me have your coat—do you know how to get back to the cafeteria?) (The child looks rather dubious.)

The woman who brought him to the door says, "I'll take him. I found him just sitting there."

Mrs. Anderson: "I'm sorry."

Woman at door: "That's alright."

Mrs. Anderson: "He needs to eat breakfast."

Woman at door: "That's right."

Mrs. Anderson: "Thank you. Alright, Loraine, put your folder right here." (By this time, numerous children are hitting their lunch pails, rustling their lunch bags, etc. Mrs. A continues to call individual children up to put their folders up. Much of the conversation is inaudible.) "I'm sorry. Somebody's not being quiet and someone’s not being polite. I hear voices." (Inaudible discussion; more children are called up, individually.) "I know this takes a long time, people, but this way I'm certain that you know where your mailbox is. That's your mailbox, right here. OK, Amy, do you have yours with you this morning?"

Amy: "Yeah."

Mrs. Anderson: "May I have it please?" (Some discussion about where it goes.)

The child who has been crying all morning is sobbing now.

Mrs. Anderson: (Mrs. A discovers that the notes she sent home yesterday are still in the child's folder.) "Tell mother and daddy to take everything out of that folder tonight, will you please? Thank you. OK, after Amy is Brian. Brian. Brian. Brian, would you bring your folder
up here." (Child puts his folder in the "wrong place.")
Please put your folder in the right place. Alright,
Kristin, Kristin, do you have your folder? While Kristin is
looking for hers, we'll get Aaron. Aaron, Aaron, do you
have your folder? Bring your folder up here."

Aaron: "This folder?"

Mrs. Anderson: "No the folder I sent home with you
yesterday. The pink one."

Aaron: "I think I forgot it."

Mrs. Anderson: "Alright, would you please try to remember
to bring it back tomorrow. Alright, Michael. Michael. I
still hear two boys talking." (The crying boy continues to
sob away.) "Wayne, would you like to go sit on Miss
Muffett's tuffet?"

Wayne: "Yes."

Mrs. Anderson: "Sarah." (Inaudible, then talks to Wayne
about how she knows he's trying hard not to cry.) Do you
know why Wayne is crying? Because Wayne just moved here
from Iowa and he lives with his grandmother and grandfather.
And it's all new to him. The house is new and where he's
living is new and although he knows grandma and grandpa,
that's part of why he's crying. So we need to make Wayne
feel very much at home in Ft. Worth and especially at Bob
Shelton. Alright, Zachary got his folder. Don't put these
in here without giving me the note because then I don't
know. David, yours goes below. Your name is (inaudible
discussion). Alright, Michelle, have you got your folder?
Come and put it over here? Did you have any notes in there?
Chris. Did you have a pink folder?"

Chris: "No, not a pink one."

Mrs. Anderson: "Did you have a yellow folder?" (inaudible;
Wayne continues to sob quite loudly.) "Now, Trudy. Do you
have your folder? (inaudible) I like the way you all are
sitting. Eventually these are things you will learn how to
do yourself. Miss Anderson won't have to do them all, but
on the first day, I need to show you. Alright now. We got
all that done. Give yourselves a hand for that."

Children clap.

Mrs. Anderson: "Sometimes we give ourselves a pat on the
back and sometimes we clap. Alright now the next thing we
need to do is get rid of all these lunch pails. Now, last
night after you left, I put your name on a locker over here with a teddy bear. Miss Anderson is going to have a lunch pail this year, too. I wanted to show it to you because it's got her name on it. Miss Anderson has a daughter who's an artist and she writes, she does all kinds of things. She did the bathtub which we're going to talk about and she did the border over there, she did lots of things. So I have a lunch pail, too. Now, I'm not sure that my lunch pail is going to fit in this locker, because I have so many things in this locker, but we're going to give it a try, here and I saved my lunch pail first of all to show you what we're going to do with it. And mine is not going to fit in there. But, that's where we're going to put them. I'll have to leave mine in there. Now, when I call your name, you bring your lunch pail or if you have money for lunch, we're going to discuss that, too."

Child: "I have money."

Mrs. Anderson: "No, don't tell me now." (Another child tells her he has some money.) "No, don't tell me now. When I call your name up here, then you can tell me. That way we can keep everything straight. This is the money box. If you have money for lunch or for milk it goes in this box that has your name. You have to find your name, pull out the drawer, put your money inside the box. It will be over there under Mrs. Anderson's picture. For right now, we're going to do it this way so that you'll know how to put your money in here. We're going to start right here with Camillo, who's down eating breakfast, so he's not going to have a lunch pail. On the other side, on the other side is Rachel. Rachel, you have a lunch pail do you not?"

Rachel: "Yes."

Mrs. Anderson: "Will you bring it to me? Now I want to show you--this is the way you get in your lockers. Raise up on the handle and pull. Now that unlocks this side and then this side you just open the door. One side has a handle, one side does not. Alright, Zachary. Do you have a lunch pail?"

Z. rustles his paper sack.

Mrs. Anderson: "Do you have a lunch sack? Do you have money for milk? Alright, first of all I want you to put your milk money in there. Find your name. See it? The boys are in blue and the girls are in red. Good, very good. Drop it inside there. Now come over here. Grab the handle. Raise up. Raise up. You're on this side. Put it on the shelf. Very good. Very good. Alright, Amy is on the top
and T.J. is on the bottom. Alright Amy, do you have a lunch pail? Sometimes you can't reach. Can you reach the top? She can reach the top. Alright, T.J., do you have a lunch pail today? Do you have money? How are you going to eat? What did mother tell you about eating today? What are you supposed to be doing about eating today? Do you have money in your pocket? Come and let Mrs. Anderson see. Oh, wait a minute. I had a note, didn't I? Maybe that's what the note's about. Here we go. I bet it says, 'For T.J. Rinehart's lunch.' Is that right? It is a lunch card. OK, now here's our chance to see a lunch card. Lunch card. Guess what, lunch cards fit in a little drawer just like the money does. So, T.J. if you want to come over here and find your name. I don't have a T. and a J. on here, I have Thomas because that's what your first name is and that's what you are going to learn how to write. OK. Do you recognize Thomas? You may not do so. But there it is. Put it right in there. Very good. Good. Now, Michael, do you have a lunch pail? And who's on the bottom? Chita? Do you have a lunch pail today? Raise up on the handle. Now we've got (?) I tried to put the nice tall people on the top and the ones who are not quite so tall, there, very good. You all are doing great. You're going to be the greatest kindergarteners of the whole school. OK, Ryan is on the top of this one. Ryan do you have a lunch pail? Take it out, I know you have it (?) You're such a smart girl you already had yours in the right spot. Christopher, do you have a lunch pail or lunch money? Good. I like the way you're following directions. No, I'm not talking to you right now. I'll answer your questions in a minute. T.J.! Do you see that stump back there? Do you see this stump right here? Right here? You're going to be sitting on that if you don't learn how to sit down. Ryan, right here. Christin. No, Ryan didn't get here. Christin. Now look! Your name is right here and you all can recognize your name! Christopher. You're going to end up on the stump, too if you don't hush. This is a quiet time. I know that's hard to adjust to but that's school and we're going to have to learn how to do it. OK, on the other side is Sherry and Eric. Sherry, do you have a lunch pail? Will you bring it over here please, Eric, do you have a lunch pail like sack? Do you have a quarter in it for lunch? Do you have a quarter in it for milk? (?) Wayne, bring your lunch pail. Come on."

Tearfully, he comes up.

Mrs. Anderson: (Mrs. A helps him get his lunch sack in the locker.) "You're blue. See your name, right here? Put your money in the drawer." (?) Wayne cries loudly. "Um, (?) Um, Chris, do you think you could go sit next to Wayne?
I think he needs a friend sitting next to him. Could you just go sit next to him? Maybe you could give him a little pat and a hug and then he'll feel better. Brenda. Brenda, do you have a lunch pail? Here's your name. While Brenda's getting hers, Michelle, is this your lunch pail right here? Alright, you've got it in the right place. Good. Kevin. Your lunch pail is right here, dear. Alright, (?) Thank you. Alright, David. David. Maureen, do you have a lunch pail?"

Maureen responds.

Inaudible discussion.

Mrs. Anderson: "Alright, Sarah." (Wayne is sobbing loudly.) "Give him a pat Christopher. Alright, Jason. Jason. Do you have a lunch pail. Is it already in here? That's fine. Stephanie? Do you already have yours in here? Chris, do you have yours in here? OK. Now that takes care of--"  

Child: "Do I put my jacket in here, too?"

Mrs. Anderson: "Yes, your jacket in here, too. Alright, now you're going to listen to the last of the (?) Sarah is putting her lunch pail back in the window because hers doesn't fit. Mine's bigger than hers. And, I'm putting this box, everybody watch, over here. And it turns the drawers to the inside. If you're putting your money in (inaudible, too far away from microphone). Now, now let's look and see what we have, you're doing great. Doing great. OK, now I would like for you to just take your school supplies—the back row and put them up against that wall back there. Amy and Lauren and Sarah and Brian, Kevin— you've got supplies with you?"

Child: "I've got some money with me."

Mrs. Anderson: "What is the money for?"

Child: "Uh—"

Mrs. Anderson: "School supplies?"

Another child suggests, "A drink?"

Child with money: "Ice cream."

Mrs. Anderson: "Ice cream?! Boy you are on the ball because today is Wednesday. Ok, it needs to go over there, too. Get it out and bring it over there, and put it...OK,
the rest of you just set yours back there along the wall for the time being."

Child makes a comment.

Mrs. Anderson: "I know it is. We'll go look at it. Alright, Maureen, put yours back there. Just put it back there. Alright, the middle row do the same. Just go put it back there. No, you're the front row. Middle row, right here. Middle row! Go put yours back there. Middle row go put yours back there. Now, somebody's not listening-- Stephanie, the middle row, put your things, supplies back there. Maureen. Everything. So Mrs. Anderson can look at them in a minute. No! Back there. Look where I'm pointing. See where Stephanie is putting hers, that's where I want it put."

Child offers a suggestion about what another class does.

Mrs. Anderson: "I know, but we're not putting (?). Alright, front row, right here. Michelle. Is that yours? OK, front row, right now. We're getting there, people. Who's got a toy? You better put it up or it becomes mine. Alright, Ryan. Front row may put their supplies in the back. Front row! Greg, that's you, too. Front row?! Aaron. Front row, dear. Now we've worked our way around (thank goodness) to the morning activities. I thank you for being so patient and so quiet. Brenda, yours is supposed to be back there."

Child makes a comment.

Mrs. Anderson: "OK, will you put it on my desk, please. Christopher, you may sit on the little Miss Muffet's tuffet now." (Wayne keeps on crying, big time. Mrs. A. has him come up and stand next to her while she sits in her rocking chair.) "We're going to take what's called roll or attendance. The way we do this is that I say to you, 'Good morning,' and I say your name and you say, 'Good morning, Mrs. Anderson.' OK, here we go. See if you can answer like I asked you to. 'Good morning, Judy Lighter.'"

Several children answer, "Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "No, just Judy. If I call your name, then you answer. OK, let's try again. " Good morning Judy Lighter.""

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson." Someone answers along with Judy.
Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Rachel Calvin."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good! Good morning, Camilla True."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good! Good morning, Michelle Swan." She waits, then says, 'Good morning, Mrs. Anderson.' Please. Well, I guess, should I count you absent? Huh? Should I count your absent? Well then you better answer me! Say 'Good morning, Mrs. Anderson.'"

Michelle responds that she can't say her name.

Mrs. Anderson: "Well, say 'Good morning' then."

The child does.

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Zachary Edwards."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Anne Ball."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Mary Carter."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson." (By this time, the children are responding in a monotone voice, with little or no inflection or feeling of "greeting.")

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Daniel Herder."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Erin Hyder."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, James Frye."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Riley Meadows."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."
Mrs. Anderson: "Anderson is a big long name and its hard to say. Good morning, Brandy Malone."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Sarah McElvene. Is that right?"

"Good morning, Mrs. A--"

Mrs. Anderson: "I just found out that I know--do you have an Uncle Harvey? I know your Uncle Harvey. He went to school with my son. I just discovered that last night. How 'bout that? Good morning, Sammy Miller. Say good morning. Shall I count you absent? Say good morning." (End of tape side 1, several minutes lost.)

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Teddy Riley. Good morning, T.C. Riley. Say good morning ' Mrs. Anderson."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Mark Rill. Am I saying it right? Say 'Good morning, Mrs. Anderson.'"

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Wayne Shandy."

"Good morning." (This child has been crying for the past hour.

Mrs. Anderson: "Can you say, 'Good morning, Mrs. Anderson?'"

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Patty Deal."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good morning, Chris Shout."

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson."

Mrs. Anderson: "Where is Chris? There he is. You know what? We have everyone present. If we keep on doing this and we get everybody here everyday, then eventually, Mrs. Carter says something like, 'We're going to have an ice cream party for all the classes that had 100% attendance everyday all month long.' So we want to make sure that we
get here everyday all month long. Kevin got mixed up yesterday, so he wasn't here, but today we're going to add Kevin's name. Good morning, Kevin Allen."

"Good morning, Mrs. And(?)"

Mrs. Anderson: "Mrs. Anderson. We missed you yesterday. Say, we missed you yesterday. Did you miss us?"

He nods.

Mrs. Anderson: "You did?! Well, we're going to put your name right down here so that we'll know that you're here. Alright, now. We have to do a few other things. How many know how to say Pledge Allegiance to the Flag?

Several children raise their hands.

Mrs. Anderson: "Oh, very good. I'm going to tell you who the line leaders are going to be. And then I'm going to help you say the Pledge Allegiance to the Flag. Wayne, I need you to sit right here while I take care of this part of the morning. Thank you. Good. OK, I have a little song and it's about the days of the week, I thought I had it out here, but (?)." (Wayne keeps on crying, loudly.) "Now, every morning when we come to school we're going to have a calendar, we're going to do the Pledge Allegiance to the flag and we're going to sing a new song. We have a boys' line leader and the girls' line leader. One day one week we're going to have, one day the boys do--one week the boys do the flag and the girls do the calendar and the next week the girls do the calendar and the boys do the flag." (Wayne sobs loudly.) "NOW WAYNE! Mrs. Anderson, now, doesn't want to hear you crying. Pull yourself together. Pull yourself together. OK. The rest of the children can't hear. I know you're upset and I know you're unhappy. But, you're not unhappy about being here are you?"

Wayne: "I miss my mommy."

Mrs. Anderson: "I know you miss your mother, but listen to me. Mother can't come to school. Alright. I'm going to take her place right now. And I know I'm not your mother, but I'm going to take her place at school and be like your mother. And I'm right here and I'm not going off. OK? Now try to get ahold of yourself. Try to get ahold of yourself." (Several aside comments to me.)

Mrs. Anderson: "OK, for today. Line leaders. Who was line leader yesterday?" (Inaudible discussion about who it was--several children discussing.)
Mrs. Anderson: "OK, today I'm going to choose Zachary and Amy. OK. Amy is going to come and hold the flag. Wait a minute Zachary you're going to do the calendar. Amy's going to come hold the flag. Right here, just like this. OK, everybody's going to stand. Will everybody please stand up. Brenda? Where did Mrs. Anderson say you should put your back pack? Good. Alright, I need three nice rows. Three nice rows here. I need the front row, I need a middle row, I need a middle row, right here, and I need a back row. Sherry, do you want to come back here, please. Alright, now. Amy is going to turn and face this way. Wayne, I want you and Christopher to go back there so you can see the flag. Alright. (directions?) OK, now this is called Pledge Allegiance to the flag. I want you to look at the board and when you pledge allegiance to the flag, you take your right hand. And, your right hand, you're going to face the front board. And then you're always going to look to see where the door is. And that hand that is on that side that is next to the door is going to be your right hand. Alright, so everybody put up this hand that's next to the door. Put it—no, (to Amy) you stand straight. You don't—the person that's holding the flag doesn't put their hand—over your heart. This is your heart right here. It pounds, makes you breathe and makes you live. OK, put it on your heart. OK, let's practice again. Over by the door, and then on your heart. Pledge Allegiance. If you know how to say it, say it with me, if you do not, just listen and we'll learn together. 'I pledge allegiance, to the flag, of the United States of America. And to the republic for which it stands. One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.'"

(Several children say it with her.)

Mrs. Anderson: "Very good. Now put your hands down. And if you know this song, say it with me. 'My Country 'tis of Thee.' My country tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrims' pride, From every mountain side, let freedom ring."

(Virtually no one sang with her).

Mrs. Anderson: "That's a song about America. We're going to be talking about America. That's the country we live in. Now, let's sing a little song about the flag. It goes like this: I love my flag, my country's flag, red, white, and blue. Salute the flag, my country's flag. Red, white and blue."
(No one sang on this one.)

Mrs. Anderson: "OK, let's practice that. (singing): I love my flag, my country's flag, red, white, and blue. Salute the flag, my country's flag. Red, white and blue. (Several children join in on 'red, white, and blue.') OK, once more. I love my flag, my country's flag, red, white, and blue. Salute the flag, my country's flag. Red, white and blue. Very good, you may be seated with your feet crossed. Give yourselves a pat on the back. You did a good job. And, line leader, (?) Alright, now comes the calendar, people. The calendar. Alright, Zachary is the boys' line leader so Zachary needs to come up here. OK, this is a calendar, boys and girls. A calendar tells the days of the week. Like, if we didn't have days of the week, we wouldn't know what day to come to school. We wouldn't know what day to go to church. If people go to church. We wouldn't know what days to go shopping or all those good things that you do."

Child: "We wouldn't know when to go to Mayfest."

Mrs. Anderson: "That's right, we wouldn't know when to go Mayfest. We wouldn't know when to do any of these things. So, calendars tell us the days of the week. Now, I'm going to ask Zachary to sit down right here for just a second while I talk to you about this calendar. Alright, this is the calendar. And there are months. And remember we talked yesterday about persons having a month that they were born in. A birthday month. Well this birthday, this month is September and yesterday after I had your mothers fill out some things and it had September, some birthdays said September on them. And I saw somebody's birthday that was September the 7th! Coming up right away next week. But I can't remember whose it was. Does anybody remember whose birthday was September the 7th?"

David raises his hand.

Mrs. Anderson: "Yours David?! Good. Well next week we're going to celebrate your birthday. We're going to put it up and we're going to celebrate your birthday. And on birthdays I have an extra special something that you get to do. You'll have to wait til David's to find out what it is. Alright. September is the month and that's always up here and then we always have a story, a picture that goes with the month. Now, also, it is fall which is a season and we're going to discuss that a little bit later on. We have the days of the week which are Sunday, look, Sunday, Say them with me. Sunday--"
Children: "Sunday."
Mrs. Anderson: "Monday."
Children: "Monday."
Mrs. Anderson: "Tuesday."
Children: "Tuesday."
Mrs. Anderson: "Wednesday."
Children: "Wednesday."
Mrs. Anderson: "Thursday."
Children: "Thursday."
Mrs. Anderson: "Friday."
Children: "Friday."
Mrs. Anderson: "Saturday."
Children: "Saturday."

Mrs. Anderson: "Now, I'm going to give you a little hint. Something that only you're going to know. The ones that are at each end of the calendar—we get those days—we don't come to school on those days. We come to school on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. We don't come to school on Sunday and Saturday. We don't do that. Alright, Sunday. Raise your hand if you can tell me what you do on Sunday."

Children raise their hands.
Mrs. Anderson: "Chris, what do you do on Sunday?"
Chris: "Go to church."
Mrs. Anderson: "OK, go to church. What do you do Rachel?"
Rachel: "Go to church."
Mrs. Anderson: "Go to church. Lorene, what do you do?"
Lorene: "Um--"
Mrs. Anderson: "On Sunday."
Lorene: "On Sunday, I go to church."

Mrs. Anderson: "OK. Wayne, what do you do on Sunday?"

Wayne: "I play with my friends."

Mrs. Anderson: "OK. Now, let's talk about Saturday for just a minute. Put your hands down. Saturday is at the end of the week here. Raise your hand if you can tell me what you do on Saturday. Anybody know what they do on Saturday?"

Several children: "I do."


Erin: "Clean my house."

Mrs. Anderson: "Clean your house. I do that, too. Mine needs it right now! Uh, Chris, what do you do on Saturday?"

Chris: "Watch TV."

Mrs. Anderson: "Watch television. David, what do you do on Saturday?"

David: "Watch television."

Mrs. Anderson: "Watch television. Kevin, what do you do on Saturday?"

Kevin: "All kinds of stuff. Like play and --" 

Mrs. Anderson: "You play, alright, hands down, now. Hands down. Sunday and Saturday we do not go to school. Do we go to school on Monday?"

Children: "Yes."

Mrs. Anderson: "Tuesday?"

Children: "Yes."

Mrs. Anderson: "Wednesday?"

Children: "Yes."

Mrs. Anderson: "Thursday?"

Children: "Yes."
Mrs. Anderson: "Friday?"

Children: "Yes."

Mrs. Anderson: "Watch!! Sunday?"

Children: "No."

Mrs. Anderson: "Saturday?"

Children: "No."

Mrs. Anderson: "You're catching on so fast. I tell you what, you're so smart. Now, everyday we're going to put up one of these little schoolhouses in September. When we get to the next month, it changes. Every month is going to have a different little number for the day. OK, alright, yesterday was the second day of the month so if yesterday was the second day of the month, who can raise their hand and tell me what comes after 2? Raise your hand if you know."

A child begins to answer.

Mrs. Anderson: "Wait, wait, wait! Wait, wait! Christopher, what comes after 2?"

Christopher: "3."

Mrs. Anderson: "3 or the third. There's two ways you can say it. Three or the third. So, this is day three of the month of September or it's the third day of the month of September. Now. Added to all of this, we have the year that we live in. 1986. 1986. Alright, that looks like this 1986 (as she writes it on the board). So, if--I can't find my eraser yet, people. I don't know what I've done with it. But, it's probably somewhere and I'll just have to look it up somewhere. Mrs. Anderson was tired last night so she didn't do it. (She writes Sept. on the board.) This stands for September. That's September, we don't write out the whole word. Alright, here is the third for today, here is 1986. (while she writes this out.) Now what I'm going to teach you to do is to figure out what day it is, what day of the week, what day of the month, and what month and what year. So Christopher, I mean Zachary is going to bring it up here and he's going to stick it on this one right here and I'm going to show you."

Rachel starts to say something.
Mrs. Anderson: "Not yet Rachel. Right there (telling Zachary where to put the calendar). Oh, he's got it on there so straight. Wait a minute. So straight. Uh, I see two people that are not listening. I see Jason's not listening. He's going to miss out on everything all together. And I see Kevin who is not listening. Kevin, why do you have a bottle of glue? It needs to be all back in the back. Mrs. Anderson said to put all your supplies back in the back, please. Would you put everything in the back please?"

Kevin says something. (?)

Mrs. Anderson: "OK, Zachary is going to come up here and he's going to take his finger and he's going to put it right there where that last schoolhouse is and he's going to start with his finger on this side, and he's going to say, 'Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday'—so today is Wednesday, September 3rd, 1986. Say it with me, 'Today is Wednesday, September 3rd, 1986.' (Some children say along with her.) Very good, you can give yourselves a clapping hand for that."

Children clap.

Mrs. Anderson: "That was a hard one and Zachary may go over and get a piece of candy. Now, I have a little fun game I want to show you. OK, if you would like to be the day, Sunday, raise your hand. Alright, Christa you may be Sunday. (She puts a necklace-like label over her head.) This is a little game. She is Sunday. Alright, uh—does someone know what day comes after Sunday? David?"

David: "Monday."

Mrs. Anderson: "Monday. You may be Monday. This is Monday. This goes over your head. Alright, do you know, raise your hand, who knows what comes after Monday? Raise your hand. Christin."

Christin: "Tuesday."

Mrs. Anderson: "Tuesday, good. You can be Tuesday. (?) Who knows what comes after Wednesday? No--after Tuesday. What comes after Tuesday? Wait, no. Patrick."

Patrick: "Wednesday."

Mrs. Anderson: "Wednesday. Good. Alright. So you can be Wednesday. What comes after Wednesday? Stephanie."
Stephanie: "Thursday."


No answer.

Mrs. Anderson: "Wayne what comes after Thursday?"

Wayne: "Friday."

Mrs. Anderson: "Friday. Good. You may be Friday. Alright and who knows what comes after Friday at the end of the week?"

Barry says, "Sunday."

Mrs. Anderson: "Barry, what comes?"

Barry: "Sunday."

Mrs. Anderson: "No, not Sunday. Here's Sunday up here. Kiersten?"

Kiersten: "Wednesday."

Mrs. Anderson: "No, we've got Wednesday." (Other inaudible comment.)

Kiersten: "Saturday."

Mrs. Anderson: "Saturday! You may be Saturday. Alright now there's a little song that goes with this and I'll play it. It's called 'Seven Days in a Week.' Now, if we count over here, we count Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. (She touches each child as she says this.) Lori, how many days is that?"

Lori: "Ummmm"

Mrs. Anderson: "Count on your fingers."

Kevin says, "Seven."

Mrs. Anderson: "Good, Kevin. Uh--let's not talk out. OK, there are seven. Seven days of the week. Up there on that calendar you'll see Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Seven days and that's what my song says. Seven days in a week. Here we go. Listen first. Kevin! You're not listening. (?) OK, listen to
the song. Cross your legs and listen." (She puts record on.) "Seven, seven, seven, seven there are seven days in a week. Seven, seven, seven, seven, there are seven days in a week. There's Sunday. Monday. Tuesday. Wednesday. Thursday. Friday. Saturday. and then, Seven, seven, seven, seven and now its time for the week all over again. (Children clap with the record—they keep pretty good rhythm at first, then it begins to break down.) Seven, seven, seven, seven and now its time for the week all over again.

Alright, now we're going to put that on again. I'm going to show you." (She directs students to raise their names when their day name is called.) "Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday." (Song continues as before. Mrs. A goes down the row and helps the kids raise up their day names.) "OK, (?)"

A child says, "I'm ready to go play."

Mrs. Anderson: (Mrs. A goes down the row and has each kid raise their day name, without the record.) "Now, we'll go one more time, with the record." (as before) Mrs. A gives various directions as the record is playing. "OK, that's all we're going to do like that. But that is our record about the days of the week. AND, we did a good job. Give yourselves a pat on the back." (She goes along and takes off the day name tags from the children.) "Wait don't give them to me because we take them off in order of the days of the week as they come so when we get ready to put them back on again, they'll be just ready to give out in the correct way."

Child makes a comment.

Mrs. Anderson: "Alright, you may sit down and I'll tell you something. Thank you."

Child says something about the "unchee line".

Mrs. Anderson: "Alright, now I'm going to tell you, Zachary, you and Marie and Christin, I'm going to tell you, sshhh. You may be seated. (Wayne is still crying.) Who remembers the name of the line? What was the name of that line?"

Some child calls it something.

Mrs. Anderson: "No, not quite. Uhhh—somebody I haven't--T.J. what's the name of the line?"

He doesn't answer.
Mrs. Anderson: "Unchee—the unchee line. Right there is my unchee line. Who can remember why I call it the unchee line?"

Several children begin to answer.

Mrs. Anderson: "Chris, why?"

"Because kids unchee up to you."

Mrs. Anderson: "Right, because you unchee up towards me don't you? And that's fine, and I love to have you but there's only one of me and there's twenty-three of you and you can't all be together. So, that's your unchee line and you have to stay behind the unchee line. Remember I told you I put some tape on it. Please don't bother the tape. They really don't like me to do that, to tell you the truth."

Child: "Who?"

Mrs. Anderson: "The school. And—"

Child: "Why?"

Mrs. Anderson: "They don't like me to do that because it gets the floor dirty but I say I've got to have that unchee line. Otherwise everybody just loves me so much they all want to come up here and there's only one of me and 23 of you and you just can't do that. So, we'll have to love (?) Now, I want to tell you that this is going to be called the red table. This is going to be called the blue table. This is going to be called the yellow table. This is going to be called the green table. OK, red, blue, yellow, and green and then I tell you certain things that I want you—I'll say the red table can may do this, this, this. The yellow table may do this. The blue table. And I'm going to tell you now where to sit. Everybody listen. Stay put. I'm going to tell you where you're supposed to sit. OK. Uh—at the red table. Wayne will you go sit in this chair right here. (still crying) Looks like (?) Judy will you go sit next to him? Zachary will you go sit in the next chair please? Next to Judy. Sherry you may be at that next chair. OK. Christopher, you may be next to Sherry. Right there where Sarah's headband is. Sarah, will you get your headband, I tell you, will you put it in your locker? Please, for right now. If you're going to wear it on your head, if not, in your locker. Christopher, right here. Right. OK, let's see. Christin, will you come sit here, please. OK, now that's the red table. The red table. OK. Blue table. Michelle will you sit at the blue table please?
Go find a chair at the blue table, please. Brian, will you find the chair next to Michelle at the blue table please? Any of those chairs. Brian will you take the chair next to her please? Sarah, will you take the chair next to Brian's? Mike will you take the chair next to Sarah, please? Beside her. OK. Brenda, will you, no, not Brenda. Stephanie will you take the chair next to Michael please? Erin will you—no, you take the chair next to Stephanie. BESIDE Stephanie. Here beside her. Ryan, will you find a place at the yellow table? OK. Kevin you may take a seat BESIDE Ryan. (?) Brenda will you take a seat there beside Kevin, please? OK. T.J. will you take the chair beside Brenda? Uh--Amy will you take the chair beside T.J., please? David, will you take the chair beside Amy?" (Loud sobbing from Wayne.) "Alright. Chris. Uh--(?) Wayne. Eric. Alright now let's have a run through here about who's sitting where. Alright, if you're sitting at the red table will you raise your hand, please? Very good. very good. very good. You may put your hands down. If you're sitting at the blue table, would you raise your hand please? Very good. Put your hands down. If you're sitting at the yellow table, will you raise your hands, please? Brenda, that's you. Kevin. And Doug. If you're sitting at the green table, would you raise your hands please? Alright, now. That means that when I call those tables, you will get in line or whatever I refer to the yellow table doing something or the green table doing something or the red table doing something, that's what we're going to do. Now. Right now, we're going to take a trip to the bathroom. We're going to go over the rules. (to Wayne) You're going to make yourself sick. I don't want you to. I'm going to be here. Everybody is going to be your friend. Nothing is going to hurt you. OK? Pull yourself together now. You're going to make yourself sick."

End of tape (total time elapsed—approximately 60 minutes)
APPENDIX 5

SCHEMATICS
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APPENDIX 6

OTHER PEOPLE I WISH I HAD LISTENED TO/
OTHER THINGS I WISH I HAD KNOWN
As with most things in life, one learns what one needs to know as one is doing whatever it is. This was also the case with this research project. I hope, though, that someone might read this appendix and take heed of some of my suggestions, thereby saving himself or herself from learning it the hard way.

(1) To others who are considering doing educational ethnography as a dissertation, I can not say that I am totally against the idea, because certainly I learned a great deal, however, my suggestion is: BE AWARE OF WHAT YOU ARE GETTING YOURSELF INTO! There are easier ways of jumping through the final hoop of your doctoral program.

(2) To anyone considering doing any type of ethnographic research, you must develop a support system. This research was one of the loneliest experiences of my life. I essentially felt alone in what I was doing because, in this part of the country, there are a limited number of people conducting educational ethnography. Since this type of research involves so much introspection and reflection, it would have been very helpful to have someone with whom to talk about what I was feeling and learning. I will never begin another ethnographic study until I have a support system in place. It takes a strong sense of self to conduct ethnographic research and without a support system, of at least one other person, the physical, mental, and emotional toll is great.
(3) Prior to beginning the conduct of your ethnographic research, read the writings of other ethnographers—not only the ethnographies that were the result of their research, but also their musings, their essays, their articles. When I finally began doing so, I felt less alone—and more grounded.

(4) If you have a choice of working in ten classrooms or working in one classroom, choose one. If you have a choice of having twenty key informants or having five key informants (or fewer), go with the smaller number. Not only will that allow you to go into greater depth with the informant, but you will be allowed to be more focused in your discovery and analysis.

(5) Do a pilot, if for no other reason than to work out some of the kinks--like figuring out how to use your equipment!

(6) Have a contingency plan for having too few people willing to take part in your study, as well as a contingency plan for having too many people willing to take part in your study.

(7) If you are going to have anyone connected with your study keep a journal, keep in contact with them and give them some type of feedback. Do not expect that because you are excited about your research that other people are.

(8) Go with your gut feeling. Trust yourself in the research. If you feel strongly that one person would
serve as a better informant than another person, even if that latter person is being recommended or whatever, go with what you think is best. Trust yourself.
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