"YOU BETTER NOT BOSS ME AROUND!": ACHIEVING SOCIAL PURPOSES THROUGH CLASSROOM WRITING

Shelley Peterson & Joyce Bainbridge

In writing workshop classrooms (Calkins; Graves), informal interaction among children is encouraged throughout the writing process. During author groups and the "authors' chair" (Graves & Hansen) children read their writing to peers and invite peers' responses to the writing. The stories that are shared with peers, particularly at the published stage during authors' chair, often reflect individual children's interpretations of the social expectations within the classroom. Children compose, draft, revise, and share their written texts within an atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration. Ideas for and understandings about stories that will entertain a peer audience are generated as the children talk to each other during writers' workshop. In addition, children learn the expectations, values, attitudes, and perspectives of the classroom social world so that they can operate within it. Through their interactions with peers, children create a place for themselves within the classroom social world and shape an understanding of who they are as individuals within the classroom social environment.

By providing "authentic" classroom contexts for writing (Edelsky & Smith), writers' workshop has added a new dimension to the demands placed on students in writing classrooms. When students are asked to harness written symbols to communicate an intended purpose within an authentic social context, their success

as writers is dependent on meeting their teacher's *and their peers'* expectations regarding the quality of their narrative writing. When granted authority over topics and formats for their writing, children typically use variations on topics, styles and plots that have previously evoked a desired response from peers during formal and informal interactions. Though a sense of audience (Graves) has always been an important factor in students' achievement of desired grades from their teachers, in writers' workshop a sense of audience is a critical factor in students' success in the classroom social world as well.

This study, viewed through a social constructivist lens (Fosnot, Halliday, Vygotsky), shows that a sense of audience in writers' workshop may both enhance and constrain student writing. Snapshots of two boys' literacy learnings in a combined fifth/sixth grade writers' workshop setting show that some students thrive in the democratic environment of writers' workshop because their individual social purposes can be achieved through their writing. Through their interactions while writing and their peers' responses to their stories, these students position themselves as socially powerful individuals, construct a view of themselves as good writers, and build social relationships with their peers. Writing confidently, they contribute to the classroom definition of socially acceptable writing through their sharing of great numbers of stories and through their responses to others' stories during authors' chair. These snapshots also show, however, that not all students write confidently and have a positive concept of themselves as writers. Positioned as less socially powerful individuals, some students share few stories with peers, are sought out infrequently for opinions on their peers' writing, and make few comments on the writing of their peers during authors' chair.

The two grade six boys in this study were students in a half-day heritage language program (Arabic) run by the local public school system. In selection of the sample for the study, the frequency with which the two focus students interacted with each other and with other peers as well as their writing abilities and confidence as writers were considered. Imad was a very confident, proficient

writer, while Ramey experienced difficulties with writing. Imad and Ramey were friends who generally wrote together at one table. They also interacted during writers' workshop with Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic-speaking students. Both boys were proficient in using the computer.

The school in which Imad and Ramey were students provided the half-day heritage language program in Arabic, just as other schools in the district provided half-day heritage language programs in Mandarin, Cree, and Hebrew. Children in the heritage language program spent half the day with an Arabic language teacher and half the day with an English language teacher integrated with non-Arabic speaking children. Most of the children in the program had parents who spoke Arabic at home, some homes using very little English. Almost all of the children had been in the school since kindergarten, and all the children in this study were fluent English speakers. The writers' workshop in which this research project took place was conducted in the English language classroom.

Gabrielle, the English language classroom teacher, was a lead teacher in the focus school, located in a middle-class neighborhood in a western Canadian city. At the time of the study, Gabrielle had been teaching a combined grades five and six class in the focus school for three years. In Gabrielle's classroom, writers' workshop was used for narrative writing on free-choice topics, as well as for assigned genre writing and writing related to other subject areas. While the fourteen grade five students had a math class with their teacher, the eleven grade six students (nine boys and two girls) wrote at thirteen computers on three tables at the back of the room. Each table held four or five computers. The two girls generally worked together at one table and did not interact with the boys. The boys at the other tables carried out most of the conversation that took place while the students were writing. Approximately once each week, the teacher taught mini-lessons on writing to the grade six students after she had finished a grade five math lesson. She had very little time to work with individuals as they wrote. Gabrielle held authors' group discussions about

students' in-progress writing, involving each of the grade six students twice during the four months of the study. Students read their drafts to two or three peers and Gabrielle. They received feedback from everyone in the group in the form of one positive comment and one suggestion for improvement or one question from each group member. Gabrielle set aside ten minutes at the end of a writing/math class periodically for students to read their published writing to their peers.

Data collection and analysis for the case studies (see Appendix A for description) were guided by two research questions: (a) Within an integrated classroom, how did two sixth-grade boys attempt to achieve social purposes through their participation in writers' workshop? (b) What were the potential influences of the boys' efforts to achieve social purposes using classroom writing on their views of themselves as writers and on their free-choice narrative writing?

Achieving Social Purposes in a Writers' Workshop Classroom

Observations of Imad's and Ramey's interactions while writing and the analysis of stories they wrote during writers' workshop show that the boys used story writing to achieve two primary social purposes: asserting individual status and building relationships with others. Many of the decisions the boys made while writing reflected a concern for their peers' reactions to their writing. Imad, for example, was conscious of putting words together to evoke his own and his peers' laughter and thus to perpetuate his view of himself as a humorous and entertaining writer. Because he felt that good stories were ones that were humorous, Imad perceived that his success as a writer was contingent upon his ability to draw out his peers' laughter through his writing.

As shown in Table 1, the two boys' primary tool for asserting their individual status within the classroom social network was the use of humor in their writing to gain positive attention from their

peers. Imad used humor to a greater degree than Ramey did, as 34% and 18% respectively of Imad's and Ramey's observed behavior and comments that were directed toward asserting individual status involved the use of humor to gain positive attention. Imad confided that occasionally his name had been the object of humorous comments made by other students. He claimed, "If I write something funny, they're not laughing at me, they're laughing with me." It appeared that, through his writing, Imad attempted to appropriate the use of humor, a tool that had been used by others to diminish his status within the classroom social network, to serve his own social purposes. Ramey also recognized the power wielded through the use of humor in his writing, as he identified the humorous parts of his story for a researcher before reading *Terminator 3* during authors' chair and smiled broadly when his peers laughed while he read his story aloud. Basking in his peers' laughter, Ramey appeared to feel that his competence as a humorous writer had been acknowledged.

Table 2 shows the important role which demonstrations of appreciation of the humor in peers' writing played in Ramey's and Imad's attempts to achieve a second social purpose, building relationships within the classroom social network. Falling out of his chair while laughing at a reference to slime in a peer's story as it was being read during author's chair was one way in which Imad showed an appreciation of his peer's use of humor. Ramey's responses to peers' attempts at humor in their stories were less frequent, but did play a significant role in his attempts to build relationships. An appreciation of peers' use of humor in their writing was observed in 10% of Ramey's and 19% of Imad's actions and comments that were directed toward the social purpose of building relationships. It appeared that the two boys viewed appreciative responses of their peers' use of humor in their writing as tools for developing affiliations with the writers. By accommodating other writers' needs for recognition of their humorous writing capabilities, the two boys were building relationships with those writers.

Table 1: Asserting Individual Status During Writers' Workshop

	Ramey		Imad	
	Percentage of observed behaviors	Examples	Percentage of observed behaviors	Examples
Using humor to gain attention	28%	[to Joey] "It will be hilarious. Everyone will laugh."	36%	[to the class after Bryan reads his "Chicken Fajita" story during authors' chair] "I like the font." [class erupts in laughter]
Contradicting peers	6%	[To Imad] "You better not boss me around!"	10%	[To Ramey] "No, you have to be a captain. You have to have a name."
Assigning lower status roles for peers than for self in narrative writing	0%		14%	[to Ramey] "Well, if you want to be Spy Man, you can be him 'cause he's got yellow and black teeth."
Asserting status of character named after self in own story	0%		5%	[To Ramey] "I'm the head guy of the police. I boss you around all the time."

Table 2: Building Relationships During Writers' Workshop

	Ramey		Imad	
	Percentage of observed behaviors	Examples	Percentageof observed Behaviors	Examples
Appreciating the humor in peers' writing	19%	[from field notes] in response to Bryan's "Chicken Fajita" story, Ramey says he liked the funny late note for Mr. Chiller.	20%	[from field notes] in response to Darren's reading of the part in his story referring to slime during author's chair, Imad and Adam fall out of their chairs laughing.
Inviting peers to be part of a story by having a character named after themselves	23%	[to Adam] "Do you want to be the good guy in my story? He kills the bad Terminator."	15%	[to Ramey] "Do you want to be this captain? He always gets in trouble."
Showing interest in a peer's writing	15%	[To Imad] "What are you writing about?"	0%	
Accepting assigned role in peer's story	9%	[To Imad] "Okay. I'll be C.D."	0%	

When thinking about their peer audience, the boys also considered the names of the characters in their stories. They recognized that the use of their classmates' names in their stories would assert the status of the individuals, thereby enhancing their peers' interest in the stories. However, Gabrielle found it necessary to enforce a rule where students were required to request permission to use their peers' names for characters in their narrative writing. Understanding that the rationale for this rule was to protect individual students from being hurt by the malicious assignment of their names to low-status characters whose actions would embarrass the student, students complied with this rule by negotiating roles for characters named after their peers.

The following exchange between Imad, Ramey, and Joey, a peer in the English classroom, is representative of the ways in which the boys negotiated names and roles for characters in their stories:

Imad: Do you want to be this captain? He always gets in trouble.

Ramey: Sure.

Imad: I'm the head guy of the police. You're this guy, the captain. What's your name?

Ramey: Change my last name. Ramey...

Imad: Ramey...How about Ramey Monster?

Ramey: Monster?

Imad: Okay.

Ramey: That would be funny. You put that down.

Imad (to Joey): Do you want to be in this story?

Joey: Sure.

Imad: Well, what do you want your name to be called? Do you want your name to be called...

Joey? His name is Ramey Monster (motions to Ramey). What do you want to be called?

Joey: Joey Zilla.

Imad: Joey Zilla, that sounds cool. Yeah. Joey Zilla. What rank do you want to be? You want ... to be in the police

or a mobster?

Joey: Uh, the mobster.

Imad: Okay. You can't be the Radical Mouse Machine 'cause he's the, like the biggest mobster in New York. And you're Captain Ramey Monster. You're just getting in trouble right here.

Ramey: From who?

Imad: From me. I have the highest rank in the New York Police. You're only a captain. I boss you around all the time.

Ramey: You better not boss me around.

In this exchange, Imad invited participation in his story through character naming. Imad enhanced Ramey's and Joey's status in the classroom through his use of their names and the macho attachments "Monster" and "Zilla." In this way, Imad used his writing to achieve the social purpose of building collegial relationships with his peers. Through his negotiations with Imad, Ramey also maintained affiliations with Imad. Ramey accepted the roles assigned by Imad, agreeing to be Ramey Monster. Earlier, he had initiated this conversation by asking Imad about the topic of his writing. Apart from Ramey's refusal to accept a submissive role for his namesake, his contributions to the conversation reflected his attempt to achieve affiliative goals. Ramey wrote and spoke about his writing with the knowledge that he did not have power in the classroom, but knowing exactly who the most powerful students were. His behavior during writer's workshop also demonstrated this knowledge. The admonition "You better not boss me around" was lost on Imad. In the end, Ramey was powerless to control the way the character named after him in Imad's story was depicted.

Throughout the four months of the study, Ramey's writing behavior and interactions with others showed an emphasis on building relationships, as 66% of his behavior was directed toward this goal. In contrast, 65% of Imad's writing behavior and interactions with others were directed toward gaining social

status. While Ramey's behavior focused on showing appreciation for the humor in peers' writing, inviting peers to be part of his story by having characters named after themselves, showing interest in others' writing, and accepting assigned roles in peers' stories, Imad's behavior centered around gaining attention through the use of humor, assigning lower status roles for peers' namesakes than for his own namesake, and asserting the status of characters with whom he identified.

Evans writes:

> Until we learn more about how factors such as gender, race, and status influence the positioning and discourse that occur in literature discussion groups [and we would add, in writers' workshops], we are likely to continue placing students in contexts that replicate the exact forms of silencing and marginalization that such contexts are meant to disrupt... The dilemma is how to help students develop discursive practices that not only allow them to disrupt oppressive positioning and maintain self-respect but also protect the self-respect of the people whose discourse and positioning are being challenged." (201)

The findings of this study reinforce this dilemma. In Gabrielle's classroom, Ramey's and Imad's growth as writers was linked to their peers' recognition of the two boys as socially competent members of the classroom social network. Thus, in order to create an environment in which all students could become competent as writers, Gabrielle needed to use her knowledge not only of children's writing development and of effective writing strategies for writing instruction, but also of the classroom social network and the values held by students.

With the goal of developing individuals who work together in respectful, cooperative, and supportive ways, Graves' and Graves' ecological approach has much to offer Gabrielle and other writers' workshop teachers. Their suggestions for building community through such activities as developing events that create unity

experiences for the class, celebrating the contribution of individual differences to the whole, providing occasions for learning and understanding all students' family and cultural backgrounds, and having students create whole-class symbols/icons that represent the characteristics/values/talents that all class members have in common (e.g., in Gabrielle's class, the students' pride in their computer skills could be illustrated with a banner showing the names/photographs of all students on a computer outline that could serve as the class icon) provide rich contexts for developing classroom social meanings that include respect for individual differences and a recognition of the valuable contribution of all students to the group.

In addition, a modification of the conflict resolution process proposed by Graves and Graves offers possibilities for empowering less powerful students in their negotiations over roles for character namesakes in their peers' stories. The modified process involves identifying significant aspects of the situation leading to conflict, analyzing each participant's experience, and identifying the actions needed to resolve the situation. For example, in Gabrielle's classroom, students could role play the process involved in negotiating the naming of characters within their stories after peers. This process could be taught and reinforced through role plays using situations from published stories, through the conflict resolution of stories written collaboratively during mini-lessons, and through the teacher's interactions with students throughout the day.

The Influence of the Classroom Social Web on Students' Writing Choices and Confidence as Writers

Imad's behavior during writing class and his contributions to conversations with a researcher consistently identified him as a confident and autonomous writer. He explained, "I do like to write. It's not because I have to (even though I do have to); I like

to write stories because they kind of make people laugh. It makes me feel good that at least one person in the world likes them. And I write because I just like to." Though Imad recognized that his peers struggled to find ideas and express their ideas through writing, he wrote in a carefree manner, singing under his breath on occasion. Imad's enjoyment of reading and his willingness to experiment with language and ideas were evident in his writing. His work resonated with the richness of the fantasy stories he had read and the detective television shows and movies he had watched. Imad's pride in his writing was demonstrated by his copyrighting of his *Chicken of the Night* stories. As an autonomous writer, Imad made independent decisions regarding the stories he would carry through to publication and those he would discard.

In contrast, Ramey did not consider himself to be a competent writer, though he expressed an enjoyment of narrative writing. Ramey's writing file contained numerous sports and action stories that were unfinished, and he expressed his frustration at being unable to finish stories. Ramey's lack of a sense of autonomy over his writing was reflected in his propensity to consult his peers frequently for writing ideas, for confirmation that his story was acceptable, and for assistance with writing conventions. Observations of his writing behavior revealed his difficulty in focusing on composing. The following excerpt from a researcher's field notes exemplifies Ramey's typical writing behavior: "Ramey writes *Poem*, then underlines, enlarges and outlines the word. He adds and then erases asterisks around the word and then seeks his teacher for directions for writing the cinquain." His three-page story, *Terminator 3*, based on a popular movie of the same name, was his only published story throughout the four months of the research study. While Imad had published two sequels to a *Chicken Man* story, each story approximately 30 single-spaced pages in length, Ramey voiced the wish not to publish his stories and place them in the class library because he thought it would be embarrassing .

The uneven sharing of power that characterized the two boys' social relationships within the classroom remained evident in

Imad's story. When Imad talked to researchers, he noted that Ramey often needed Imad's help, as Ramey was not a very good writer. In contrast, Joey, who enjoyed higher social status in the classroom than Ramey, was given the mobster role in Imad's story. Because mobsters exert some power over others and are able to carry out the violent actions which the boys enjoyed, Joey appeared to be content with the role his namesake would have and did not dispute Imad's proposal. The following excerpt from Imad's story illustrates the relative social status of Ramey and Imad, as Imad's writing "temporarily crystallize[s] a network of relations" (Morson 89) within the classroom. Imad's typed version of his story is presented unedited.

> **Chapter 3**
> **the Mystery**
> Two hours later five different files got lost from five different precincts. Some men guessed it would be the work of an old mobster named Duuuuuudeee mon {Real name Joey M.C. Rutley-Disco}. But then we found out it was not true. An hour later a captain named Ramey Monster barged inside my office {without knocking} and accused me of stealing the files to give a mobster. He said "sir I think it was you who took the missing files to give to mobsters. I'm sorry but if I get evidence against you I'll have to arrest you then take you to court."
> I started laughing then I said "Captain Monster you really are a monster and if you ever come in here again saying I am giving secret papers to mobsters I'll suspend you for not obeying an order from a superior officer and that's an order is that clear?" I stormed with anger. "Yes sir."
> "Good, now leave."
> "Yes sir."
> "What an idiot."

This excerpt illustrates how Imad used his writing "to declare and manipulate [his] social relations in peer worlds" (Dyson 205).

Imad's view of himself as a more competent individual than Ramey was carried over into his writing. In Imad's story, the Ramey Monster character was bumbling and inept, while the first-person narrator of the story, with whom Imad identified, was more powerful and judgmental. Imad and Joey are supported as more powerful members of the classroom social world through Imad's story.

As shown in Table 3, the first-person narrator was prominent in the story, with 27 actions attributed to him. In all of his actions, this character demonstrated competence and power over others. While the Joey character carries out fewer actions than the Ramey character does, 80% of the Joey character's actions reveal him as a powerful, competent character. All of the Ramey character's actions show his lack of power and his incompetence. Alas for Ramey, Imad's writing crystallizes a classroom social relationship that announces his lower status to the rest of the class. The status that Ramey may have enjoyed during author's chair by having his classmates hear about a Ramey character in Imad's story was mitigated by the low status of the character in relation to the Imad and Joey characters.

Unlike Imad, Ramey did not name his story's protagonist after himself, nor did he include his writing companion, Imad, in the story. Rather, Ramey named his characters after Bryan, Adam, and Shelbi, three non-Arabic speaking, socially dominant children in his classroom. The three characters in the story do not play submissive or bumbling roles, as the Ramey character in Imad's story played. While Adam's namesake has the highest status as the hero of the story, Bryan is a strong adversary and Shelbi is Adam's gun-toting, able police officer's wife. The following excerpt shows the status Ramey has given these three peers in his story, *Terminator 3*. This excerpt of Ramey's story is presented unedited.

Chapter 1

Once upon a time there was a Terminator that was called Adam he was a good Terminator and he was looking in the

Table 3: Showing Power Relationships Through Classroom Writing:

Imad's Story, The Chicken Man II Junior

Characters Bearing Students' Names	No. of Actions/ References to the Characters	No. of Powerful/ Competent Actions/ References to the Characters	Examples of Characters' Power/ Competence	Examples of Characters' Lack of Power/ Incompetence
First person narrator - Head Private Eye of the NYC Homicide Division	27	27	they gave me my old job back and they also made me the head of the Homicide division of New York and made me head Private Eye.	
Joey - mobster	5	4	the work of an old mobster named Duuuuuudeee-mon {Real name Joey M.C. Rutley-Disco}	"Bowling Ball, your the second hand man and you Joey M.C. Rutley-Disco you be the third-hand man."
Ramey - police captain who is a subordinate of the first-person narrator	7	0		a captain named Ramey Monster barged inside my office {without knocking}

streets because he was a police man. So he went looking for a Terminator that is wanted. Bryan robbed a bank and Adam heard it on the radio Adam was ready for Bryan Adam had a machine gun so he went looking for the robbers or drug dealers and the bad Terminator named Bryan. . . .

[Bryan shoots Adam in the arm in one encounter and then kidnaps Adam's and Katie's children. In the next "chapter," the two of them attempt to rescue their children.]

Chapter 3

Adam said, "If you drop my children I will kill you." Then Bryan shot Adam in the other arm in the middle and then Adam shot the Terminator nine times in the arm and then his wife Shelbi screamed and she shot the Terminator one time then she grabbed Adam and put him in the car then she went and took her children. . .

Table 4 shows the relative status of the four characters named after students in the classroom. The actions of characters bearing the names of three non-Arabic speaking children reflected their competence and power over others. This power/competence was demonstrated in 83% of Shelbi's character's actions, 89% of Bryan's character's actions, and 94% of Adam's character's actions. As the writer of the story, Ramey had the authority to name a powerful story protagonist after himself. When asked why he had not used his own name for the heroic Terminator character, Ramey was unwilling or unable to articulate his reasons. Overlooking this opportunity appears to reflect Ramey's perceived low status in his relationship with his peers. Dyson explains that "children's self-expression in the classroom is also their social expression, their voicing of how they are situated within the complex worlds of the classroom" (211). Perhaps Ramey felt that his characters would not be credible in the eyes of his peers if they were named after someone who was less powerful in the classroom social environment.

Table 4: Showing Power Relationships Through Classroom Writing:

Ramey's Story, *Terminator 3*

Characters Bearing Students' Names	Numbers of Actions/ References to the Characters	Numbers of Powerful/ Competent Actions/ References to the Characters	Examples of Characters' Power/ Competence	Examples of Characters' Lack of Power/ Incompetence
Adam - police officer	18	17	Adam was shooting at Bryan	Adam didn't know that his kids were kidnapped until his wife went home
Bryan - robber and drug dealer	10	9	Bryan robbed a bank	Bryan and the drug dealers were running through the woods and Adam was shooting at the drug dealers
Shelbi - police officer's wife	12	10	she shot Bryan the Terminator one time	his wife was at the hospital all night time and day time

Rather than risk the embarrassment of his peers' rejection of his story and highlight his lower status in the classroom social network, Ramey chose to reinforce the status of and to build a relationship with three socially powerful members in that network. Consistent with the relationships among characters in Imad's story, the positions in which characters named after children in the classroom were placed in Ramey's story reflect their relative status in the classroom social network. The absence of a character named after Ramey appears to indicate that Ramey's self concept as a classroom member is one holding little status in the classroom social network.

Lisa Delpit examined the culture of power that exists in society, especially in schools with racially mixed students. Delpit outlined five aspects of power, the most relevant to this paper being that those with power are frequently least aware of or willing to acknowledge the existence of it. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. Ramey's choice of names for characters in his story illustrates his awareness of power relationships in his classroom. He wrote about characters named after the most powerful non Arabic-speaking children in the class and did not create a character named after himself. Although the teacher attempted to address the issue of naming characters by requiring children to obtain the permission of the person whose name was being used, it was clearly insufficient to address the larger issue of power relationships within this particular classroom. Some other form of intervention on the part of the teacher was needed to create a safer environment for the socially vulnerable students such as Ramey.

The shaping of community expectations for the ways in which social purposes are achieved through story writing could take place during discussions revolving around published literature. Topics for literature discussions could include the social relationships among characters and the ways in which stereotypes are conveyed through the actions and descriptions of characters. For example, a discussion of *The Cricket in Times Square* (Selden) might center on the disparaging portrayal of Sai Fong, an Asian American character

whose language and actions are viewed as peculiar by the protagonist.A comparison of students' feelings about Sai Fong and about the European American protagonist, Mario, together with a discussion of alternate ways in which the author might have portrayed Sai Fong might enhance students' sensitivity toward developing well-rounded characters who act in ways that preserve their dignity. Students might compare the social meanings that are expressed in *The Cricket in Times Square* with those expressed in *The Clay Marble* (Ho), where the Asian protagonist is well developed and has integrity as a self-determining individual. With the goal of embracing all students as valued members of the classroom social world, all members of the literature discussion groups, including the teacher, could shape an understanding of acceptable writing in terms of the social meanings that are conveyed.

The classroom expectations for representing characters and relationships among characters in stories could then be reinforced in one-on-one conferences with individual students. In collaboration with their teacher, students could make explicit the social meanings and values expressed in their own stories and discuss possibilities for alternative roles for individuals whose namesake characters are stereotypically portrayed or are placed in undignified and embarrassing positions.

Recognizing the important link between reading and writing (Edwards & Peterson; Phinney), teachers may introduce published literature as a model for children's writing and as a source of possible characters, genres, topics and styles which children may choose to incorporate into their own fictional writing. The values, social roles, and perspectives that are expressed in published writing could be examined in a manner similar to that used for students' writing. Discussions about books such as *Hatchet* (Paulsen), for example, can focus students' attention on what makes a good story, a well developed character, and an appropriate setting. What makes this book exciting? What draws a reader into this book and keeps the reader engaged throughout the story? What types of action are the most entertaining and the most compelling? What has Paulsen done to create a context for the

action in this story? These questions can be explored in literature-response groups and can focus student writers on their own compositions. Through these discussions, writing teachers create an environment where children might explore and develop a range of narrative styles, expanding the definition of acceptable writing beyond that which is humorous and includes characters named after peers. Again, teachers could elaborate on students' definitions of good writing by asking similar questions and making suggestions that reflect the expanded definitions during one-on-one conferences on students' writing.

In addition to critiquing published literature, teachers must also become critical readers of student writing, demonstrating their own attempts to grapple with the power, gender, and race meanings that are embedded in students' writing. In Gabrielle's classroom, these critical readings could have been voiced during authors' groups or in written feedback to students in the absence of student-teacher conferences. Gabrielle might have asked Imad, for example, to think about how Ramey felt having a bumbling, inept character named after him. She also might have noted the absence of a character named Ramey in Ramey's story and asked Ramey which character he would have liked to name after himself. In addition, Gabrielle might have noted the stereotypical gender roles and the relative power of the characters named after European and Lebanese students in the class to initiate discussions of gender, race and power. Accompanying discursive readings of the students' stories, Gabrielle and her students also needed to acknowledge the difficulties that students faced when attempting to build social relationships while at the same time expressing themselves as competent, unique individuals through their writing.

In summary, social interactions during writers' workshop significantly influenced the two boys' writing and their views of themselves as writers and members of their classroom social world. Through their peers' responses to the boys' stories, Imad and Ramey came to know significant elements of the classroom expectation for narrative writing. The boys' awareness of these

expectations was reflected in their writing, in their responses to their peers' stories during authors' chair, and in their conversations with a researcher. While Imad used humor to a greater extent than Ramey did, they both used it as a tool to achieve two social purposes. Ramey and Imad asserted their status as competent writers through the use of humor in their own writing. Their peers' laughter in response to oral reading of their stories confirmed their competencies as writers. In addition, Imad and Ramey expressed their appreciation of the use of humor in their peers' writing to establish and maintain relationships with others. Similarly, the naming of characters after peers proved to be a social writing tool for the two boys. Both Imad and Ramey established and maintained relationships with their peers by including in their stories powerful characters named after their peers.

This case study of Ramey and Imad shows that the philosophy and organizational structure of the writers' workshop approach have much to offer teachers in their work with children. As a democratic learning environment which provides authentic purposes for writing, writers' workshop gives many students the freedom and support to blossom as writers. Accompanying individual rights and freedoms in any democratic environment, however, is a set of responsibilities for the welfare of others. Through the ongoing construction of social expectations emphasizing the complementary nature of rights and responsibilities, the writers' workshop can be an environment in which individuals are not "bossed around" against their will.

WORKS CITED

Calkins, Lucy M. *The Art of Teaching Writing* 2nd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1994.

Delpit, Lisa. "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children." *Harvard Educational Review* 58.3 (1988): 280 -298.

Dyson, Anne H. *Social Worlds of Children Learning to Write in an Urban Primary School.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1993.
Edelsky, Carol, and K Smith. "Is that Writing—or Are those Marks Just a Figment of your Curriculum?" *Language Arts* 61.1 (1984): 24-32.
Edwards, Joyce B., and Shelley Peterson. "Taking Teachers off the Shelf: The Reading-writing Connection." *Reading: Exploration and Discovery* 16.1 (1995): 36-44.
Evans, Karen S. "Creating Spaces for Equity?: The Role of Positioning in Peer-led Literature Discussions." *Language Arts* 73.3 (1996): 194-202.
Fosnot, Catherine T. *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives and Practice.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1996.
Graves, Donald H. *A Fresh Look at Writing.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1994.
Graves, Donald H., and Jane Hansen. "The authors' chair." *Language Arts* 60.2 (1983): 176-183.
Graves, Nancy B., and Theodore D. Graves. "Creating a cooperative learning environment: An ecological approach." *Learning to Cooperate, Cooperating to Learn.* Eds. Robert Slavin et al. New York: Plenum Press, 1985. 403-435.
Michael A. K. Halliday. *Learning How to Mean: Explorations in the Development of Language.* London: Edward Arnold, 1975.
Minfong, Ho. *The Clay Marble.* New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1991.
Morson, Gary S. "Introduction to Extracts from 'The Problem of Speech Genres'." *Bakhtin: Essays and dialogues on his work.* Ed. G Morson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. 89-90.
Patton, Michael Q. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods.* 2nd ed. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990.
Paulsen, Gary. *Hatchet.* New York: Bradbury Press, 1987.
Phinney, Margaret. *Writing and Children's Social Agendas.* Paper presented at the 5th Annual Whole Language Umbrella Conference, San Diego, CA, 1994, July.
Selden, George. *The Cricket in Times Square.* New York: Dell Publishing, 1960.
Vygotsky, Lev. S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1978.

Appendix A: Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected between January and April. The data sources included (a) transcripts of tape-recorded interactions between the two boys and of interactions between the boys and

their peers, together with transcripts of conversations between the boys and a researcher; (b) field notes of observations of the boys', their peers', and their teacher's behavior during writers' workshop; and (c) samples of the two boys' drafts and polished stories composed during the four months of the research study.

Observations of the boys' interactions and writing behaviors took place during 60-minute writers' workshop classes three afternoons each week. Field notes of the 42 hours of classroom observations were supported by ten hours of audio-recorded interactions involving Imad, Ramey and their classmates as they shared and asked for feedback on their in-process writing, discussed possible ideas for new stories, negotiated the use of their peers' names for characters in their stories, and responded to peers' writing during authors' chair.

Eight conversations with each boy were also audio-recorded. Together with questions about the writing in which the boys were engaged, these 10- to 15-minute conversations explored their views of writing and of themselves as writers. Conversations, usually beginning with questions or comments regarding the narrative writing with which the boys were engaged at that time or with one of the questions listed in the appendix, took place while the boys composed at computers.

Drafts of two stories and a polished, four-page double-spaced story completed by Ramey during the four-month period were gathered, together with a draft of a four-page double-spaced story and three poems he had written. Drafts of two stories and three completed stories, all single-spaced and ranging from two to eight pages in length, were gathered from Imad's writing file to serve as data for this research study. All of the stories, representing the two boys' narrative writing efforts during the four-month period, were type-written on the computer.

Inductive analysis methods were used to construct meaning from the data, as "the patterns, themes and categories. . . emerg[ed] out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton 390). The categories which emerged through this process highlighted the ways in which the

two boys used their narrative writing and their interactions during writers' workshop to achieve two primary social purposes: to assert their status as competent, autonomous individuals and to build relationships with others in order to be accepted as members of the classroom social network. Interrater reliability of two raters' categorization of the boys' comments and the researcher's observations was 97%.

Appendix B: Questions Used In Conversations With The Boys

1. Do you think that writing is easy or hard to do? What makes it easy? What makes it difficult?
2. Do you think you are a good writer? What makes you a good writer?
3. Why do you write stories?
4. Tell me about your best piece of writing. What makes it the best?
5. Do you like to write? Why? Why not?
6. What would you like to do better as a writer?
7. Who are some of your favorite authors? What have they taught you about writing?
8. How do you decide on the topics for your writing?
9. What kinds of comments are helpful to you in improving your writing?