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The Literacy Ecology of a Middle School Classroom:

Teaching and writing amid influence and tension

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**The Literacy Ecology of a Middle School Classroom:
Teaching and writing amid influence and tension**

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Dissertation

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Dedication

To Sean, Jack & David, and Dr. Beverly David.

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The Literacy Ecology of a Middle School Classroom:

Teaching and writing amid influence and tension

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This embedded case study of an eighth-grade English language arts reading classroom employed an ecological perspective based on Ecological Systems Theory (EST) to examine the ways in which a myriad influences, often conflicting and originating in a variety of settings external to the classroom, intersected in that classroom. The findings from this research point toward the reality of literacy classrooms buffeted by conflicting Discourses around writing that originate in official school structures, as well as the difficulty students and teachers have navigating the tensions created by those conflicts.

The focal teacher for this study, a master teacher, navigated these conflicting discourses by being thoughtfully adaptive and balancing policy mandates with her own knowledge of and beliefs about literacy instruction, though she often made instructional decisions at odds with her knowledge and beliefs because she feared lack of compliance with administrative or district mandates risked her job. In this contested atmosphere, the teacher supported students in navigating the myriad literacy practices within the classroom, and the literacy practices from their lives outside of school, using writer's

notebooks. These notebooks served as boundary objects because they incorporated a variety of influences and Discourses in a single tool. Even in creating a robust literacy ecology in her classroom through the use of writer's notebooks, thoughtfully adapting to the myriad policy mandates, and having departmental and professional support for her work, she left the school at the end of the year because she could not be the type of teacher she wanted to be in that school.

The broader implication of her decision, and the research more generally, is that classrooms are not isolated from the settings within which they are embedded, and those settings often influence the classroom in ways that conflict and create tensions. Teachers and students, then, must make decisions about how to navigate those tensions, often at odds with their knowledge or beliefs. These conflicts and tensions within a classroom can be reduced, or mitigated through communicating, building trust, working toward consensus, and avoiding exercises of power.

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CHAPTER 1 CLASSROOMS AND CONTEXT: ECOLOGY AS A WAY OF SEEING COMPLEXITY

Introduction

What follows is a case study of the literacy ecology of one eighth grade English language arts reading (ELAR) classroom. Understanding classrooms as part of an ecology means considering not just what happens within the classroom walls, but also considering how what happens outside of the walls influences what happens inside. I spent the 2011-2012 academic year observing a single classroom and the contexts that surround that classroom, including district personnel, school administration, the department, and the teacher's professional community. Immersed as I was in the ecology of this classroom, I saw the complexity inherent in the work of teachers and students. I witnessed as the teacher navigated competing Discourses (Gee, 2002/1990) about what it meant to teach literacy and as the students worked to make the literacy practices meaningful for them. This study highlights how systemic influences at work in classroom contexts—specifically from the district, administration, and department—are at once supportive and unsupportive of the teacher's and students' work, often in conflict with one another, and amplify the challenges facing the teacher. The goal of this study was to use ecology as a way of better understanding the complexity of a single classroom, and with such an understanding, identify ways in which the ecology might better support the challenging work of literacy education in the 21st Century.

Classrooms are complex. Jackson (1990/1968) first set out to explain the richness and complexity that was a classroom in his seminal *Life in Classrooms* and his overwhelming conclusion was that

Classroom life, in my judgment, is too complex an affair to be viewed or talked about from any single perspective. Accordingly, as we try to grasp the meaning of what school is like for students and teachers we must not hesitate to use all the ways of knowing at our disposal. This means we must read, and look, and listen, and count things, and talk to people, and even muse introspectively over the memories of our own childhood.

(Jackson, 1990, p. Xxi-xxii).

Other research points to classrooms exhibiting complex characteristics. Moje, Dillon, and O'Brien (2000) look across the research on adolescent literacy to "present and discuss the complexities of secondary school literacy learners, texts, and contexts" (p. 165) as they adapt to one another in complex ways. Wilder and Dressman (2006) see the very different dynamics in two geography classes as the students seek to complete an assignment involving research on the Internet. And Guiterrez's (1999) counterscripts show how conversations and learning in a classroom happen in fits and starts, as students weave together their understandings of the world and the academic content with which they are confronted. But it was not enough to say that, yes, classrooms are complex. Jackson was also arguing for a more complex way of seeing classrooms. It was not enough to just count things that happened here, as much of the quantitative research done at the time did. Instead, research in classrooms needed to learn from composition and anthropology and sociology and a host of other sources as to how best to see and describe classrooms. And his calls for new ways of seeing have been echoed much more recently a call for research metaphors that would do more than "enlighten the path to a better world" (Reinking, 2011, p. 2), but also help to build that better world.

My own experience, as a teacher and student, researcher and teacher of teachers, has shown me both the ways in which classrooms are complex networks of relationships,

knowledges, languages, practices, and tools, as well as the great difficulty in seeing complex, messy reality that is a classroom.

Four vignettes

As a middle school student.

In sixth grade, I chose to write a short story about the morning my father died for a class assignment. My memoir fit with the task the teacher had set before us and his expectations of what ‘counted’ as relevant work in the class. After writing it, I submitted it for a competition and distributed copies to my family. In that process of writing my story and sharing it with my family, I became a writer. Despite myths to the contrary (Lortie, 1990/1975), classrooms are not closed, egg-crate-like rooms isolated from one another and the outside world (Britzman, 2003). Students, either invited or not, bring their lives into the classroom just as I did. There is a complexity inherent in literacy classrooms where students and a teacher work together crafting an understanding of what it means to be a reader and writer out of knowledge and experiences gained inside and outside the classroom walls.

As a teacher.

I still remember many of the students I had my first two years of teaching. Ed, long told he couldn’t do more than fix cars because of his disability, finished a “perfect” 20-page research paper on muscle cars because I told him, “Of course your paper can be about cars.” There was James who rushed home every day after school to delete the phone messages and destroy the letters warning his mother that he wouldn’t graduate—only to have her come to the school and threaten anyone she could find because her son wasn’t going to walk. Sam became the Horatio Alger of Adams High School by talking Yale into giving him a full scholarship. Or Clay, who was great during football season but slacked off in the spring. Apparently a small

conversation we had over some long-forgotten assignment nudged him to pursue an education beyond high school, so he joined the Army. These students all shared my classroom at Adams High School with 300 of their peers. Put 25 or 30 of these students in a room and things happened. Deep conversations about the nature of language, or power struggles about the validity of a particular test question were the norm. I could make plans, but the reality of the individuals sharing my time and space inevitably changed those plans in dynamic, unexpected ways. We all worked to navigate the complexity of the classroom, and how our lives entered that space, in productive, useful ways.

As a graduate student.

My first week of being a master's student in education challenged much of what I knew about education and being a student. As a teacher, I felt competent and successful. Similarly, I'd always succeeded as a student. Suddenly, in these graduate classes, I didn't speak the language and didn't quite know what was expected of me. This challenge, though, didn't mean that getting a master's degree wasn't for me. It just meant that I had to learn a new academic language, adjust to new expectations, and relearn what it meant to be a student. So I read and wrote and talked. I sought out mentors to help me navigate this landscape and learn the language. While my position as a graduate student marked me as a part of a tiny portion of all students, the lessons I learned about my position are applicable to all students. Learning in school is not a natural act, it is one that must be learned and, of course, taught. The fact that I had extensive resources to draw from—a high-quality undergraduate education and a family history of higher education—meant I entered the realm of graduate school with the confidence that I could succeed in that space. Many students do not enter school with either the same resources or the same confidence, though that does not mean that school, somehow, is not for them.

As a researcher.

Sitting in the darkened ballroom, something finally clicked. While I felt like I had mastered the language of being a graduate student when I sat in my classes or talked to my colleagues, but when I considered my own research—my dissertation of all things—I felt, if not completely in the dark, then in a very dark room where I didn’t know where all the furniture, or the light switch, was. I could use words like positionality and field notes, open coding and participant-observation, but I still didn’t feel like I got this thing called research. But during David Reinking’s (2011) Presidential Address at the Literacy Research Association Annual Conference, he began talking about metaphors for research and the light bulb started glowing a bit stronger. Laboratory and lens, ecology and evolution, the metaphors in that moment brought together the disparate pieces of knowledge I had about research into clearer focus. It was actually sitting in that auditorium that I remembered that I had read some things about ecology (Syverson, 1999) and that the metaphor had appealed to me at the time. I decided to reread Syverson’s work and explore more fully these ecological ideas as a way of better seeing the classroom I hoped to research. This research, then, is a reflection back on my time as a student and teacher and a look forward into the future of my work preparing teachers to teach in their own classroom ecologies. This research is not isolated from the student I was or the teacher educator I am. It is all part of my ecological understanding of this undertaking known as education.

Why This Study Now?

All of these examples—both personal and scholarly—point toward understandings of classrooms and the work that goes on there as complex, an intersection of people, knowledge, practices, experience, policy, languages, tools, culture, and history. This research, then, sought to understand this complexity by examining the literacy ecology of one eighth grade English

language arts reading classroom. More fully understanding this type of classroom is important because, while adolescents are engaging with a myriad literacy practices in their lives outside of school (Roberty, Foehr & Rideout, 2005), schools and classrooms are often not receptive to those literacies (Lenhart, Simon & Graziano, 2007). Flat National Assessment of Educational Progress (NCES, 2011, Nation's Report Card) scores in reading and writing for the last 30 years are just one indicator of the disconnect between adolescents' in and out of school literacy experiences. Exploring more fully how a teacher can design a classroom that engages adolescents in literacy that builds on their knowledge and experience, as well as engages them in academic literacy tasks, is one way of supporting the range of literacies that adolescents need. Understanding these issues around literacy and schooling is all the more salient for students who represent growing demographics in the United States, those who are multilingual, Latino/a, and labeled at-risk. The increasing demands for literacy skills in the workplace, especially around digital technologies, make adolescents' quest for an education all the more salient.

Finally, as the complexity of classrooms increases, teachers must navigate the competing demands around student learning, raising test scores, aligning curriculum and instruction with state standards, supporting their colleagues, and pleasing their principal. It is also a difficult time to be a teacher in a public middle school. Gerald Conti (2013), in his public letter of resignation from teaching after 27 years, went viral because it encapsulated what it is like to be a teacher. He explained, "My profession is being demeaned by a pervasive atmosphere of distrust...a one-size-fits-all mentality more appropriate to the assembly line than to the classroom." And he is not the only one. Kris Neilson (2013) and Sharon Springs (2013) also posted resignation letters online that went viral, each citing poor leadership, under-resourced and undervalued schools, and pervasive standardized testing.

The statistics, too, tell the story of how difficult it is to be the teacher. In 2008-2009, eight percent of public school teachers left the profession entirely and seven percent moved to a different school (NCES, 2011), which almost one in six teachers at a given school will change from one year to the next. In urban schools, the numbers are worse with up to 25 percent of teachers leaving each year (Kaiser, 2011). And when Newsweek's cover story was "We Must Fire the Bad Teachers" (Thomas & Wingurt, 2010), and the Los Angeles Times (2013) designed a teacher evaluation system and publicly posts the results, it is not hard to see why teachers feel under attack. So teachers are striking in Chicago, and refusing to give standardized assessments in Seattle, and marching for school funding in Texas. There are voices in the media calling for paying teachers more (Eggers & Clements Calegari, 2011) and trying to engage in conversations around education beyond rhetorical tropes (Strauss, *The Answer Sheet*). Teachers in their classrooms navigate the everyday challenges of teaching and learning with students, and the societal pressures toward accountability and assessment, all while hoping a revolution is on the horizon (Tierney, 2013).

A final reason for the importance of studying a middle school literacy classroom is because it is the space where political and cultural rhetoric, educational policy, budgetary realities, and the lives and knowledge of students and the teacher come together. The classroom is where, because of or in spite of the mandates around standards and testing, the teacher finds a way to reach out to students and convince them to engage in the tasks in front of them. Research on adolescents' literacy practices outside of the classroom pushes back against deficit understandings of adolescents' knowledge and skills (Black & Steinkuehler, 2009; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer & Morris, 2008). Developing broad understandings of how political rhetoric shapes educational policy can complicate understandings of policy as based on logic and

research. Finally, understanding what are the features of high-quality teaching, and how they might be realistically evaluated, could realign professional development toward those goals. But the classroom is where all of these different threads must intersect, and understanding that intersection is important. Having a more complete map of the literacy ecology in which students and teachers engage in the learning of literacy, with the myriad Discourses competing for dominance, can point toward ways of improving the literacy experiences students encounter in classrooms and the support teachers receive for designing those classrooms.

Research Questions

In order to examine the literacy work of a classroom from an ecological perspective, I explored the following questions:

- What characterizes the literacy ecology of an eighth grade English language arts reading classroom?
- How is that classroom's literacy ecology influenced by broader systems of literacy and schooling, acknowledging that systems can be both systems of thought and material instantiations of such thinking?

Overview of Research Design, Site, and Participants

I used an embedded case study design (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2008) with ethnographic elements (Foley, 1990; Heath & Street, 2008) to examine and describe the literacy ecology of this classroom. This research took place in an eighth grade English language arts reading (ELAR) classroom at Ortega Middle School in Del Rio Independent School District (ISD) located in central Texas (all names of places and people are pseudonyms). This district abuts one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country. This growth is driven by the technology, creative, and manufacturing sectors, though the families in this district are broadly classified as working poor. The students at Ortega are overwhelmingly Latina/o and over half are bilingual.

The state labels 88 percent of the students economically disadvantaged and 60 percent at-risk (TEA, 2011). For the district as a whole the graduation rate is 80 percent. With these demographic challenges, though, Ortega Middle School outperforms expectations on state standardized tests and has lower teacher turnover than similar schools (TEA, 2011). The teacher in the focal classroom, for example, had five years of teaching experience and a master's degree. In the ELAR department as a whole, the most experienced teacher had been teaching for 16 years and the least for four. And all but the most experienced teacher had been working at the school for almost all of their teaching careers. My knowledge of the focal teacher, school, and district was key to engaging in an ecology examination. I had worked in this district in various capacities, though never as a faculty or staff member, for five years when the study began. I have seen the ways in which the district, school, and teachers were working hard to educate their students in meaningful ways, using innovative instruction, and pushing beyond preparing for the ever-present standardized tests. This combination of students, teachers, and institutions, and my long involvement with the school and district, made this classroom a workable setting for exploring both the idea of an ecological case study and examining the actual literacy ecology of this classroom.

Ecology: A Timely Metaphor

Ecology, as a biological concept, was originally grounded in “notions of balance, of equilibrium” (Scoones, 1999, p. 481). In this way of thinking, then, ecologies aim for an “almost unchanging permanence of form, outline and proportion” (Marsh, cited in Scoones, 1999, p. 481). This conceptualization does not fit with the reality of biological ecologies as studied by scientists, and some scientists have articulated challenges to this idea of balance since the 1930s. A nonequilibrium understanding of ecology emerged in the 1970s and included such ideas as

“ecosystem complexity, variability in time and space, and the implications of nonequilibrium dynamic change” (p. 482). Ecologies, then, were re-envisioned as complex systems with no progression to some kind of perfect balance. Further, different parts of an ecosystem may change differently over time, responding to different pressures or influences. This shift in thinking around ecology, from a linear, equilibrium-based understanding of biological ecology to one of a complex and dynamic system mirrors shifts that occurred in the social sciences around the same time. Scholars moved away from positivist perspectives that looked for causal relationships and began to explore constructivist, critical, and postmodern ways of knowing, thinking, and doing research (Crotty, 1998). Scholars outside of biology have been exploring the possibilities for ecology. Both Hawley (1986) and Bateson (2000/1972) looked to expand understandings of ecology to include humans’ interactions with the natural world, one another, and institutions that grow out of those relationships. This research, then, seeks to use ecology as a metaphor to describe a classroom in ways that can more fully represent that work, and the people who engage in it, in all its complexity (Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, & Clark Papper, 2008).

Applied to classrooms, an ecological perspective acknowledges that classrooms are immersed in a world which includes the school, district, and state within which the classroom is located. That classrooms are also places where the web of relationships between students, teachers, and administrators across the school and district intersect. The lives of the teacher and students outside of the classroom walls are brought to bear on the work that happens within those walls, as well. Finally, there are larger social, cultural, historical, political, and linguistic pressures that find their way into the work of a classroom. What an ecological perspective brings to this conversation around classroom literacy practices is both a metaphorical alignment with

the reality of schools (Fleckenstein, et al., 2008) and a language with which to describe and analyze the complexity.

As described briefly above, Reinking (2010) argued that literacy research move away from the laboratory metaphor based in positivist thinking and the lens metaphor based on subjective interpretation toward design research that actively seeks to improve educational settings. While the focus of his argument drove toward design-based research to improve educational outcomes, he alluded to ecology as a metaphor that could “remind us of the many complex interacting variables in classrooms” (p. 10). As a metaphor, ecology allows for a complex understanding of a system—moving beyond the causal relationship implied in laboratory-based intervention research or even the passiveness of the lens. Ecology, as a framework, builds on the existing sociocultural tradition in literacy research (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1995; Gee, 1990) by honoring the ways in which particular practices are situated in larger historical, social, cultural, and ideological contexts. Similarly, ecology aligns closely with core concepts upon which activity theory (Vygotsky, 1986; Roth & Lee, 2007) is built including an understanding of the ways in which individuals interact through tools, both material and symbolic (Lompscher, 2006) with social, cultural, and historical contexts. Ecology also works with multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), grounded as it is in sociocultural tradition, but calling attention to the “multiplicity of discourses” that adolescents in a middle school classroom engage with and negotiate. Further, ecology accounts for the ways in which popular culture and out-of-school practices contribute to the new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) that students walk into the classroom knowing and doing. It also brings into focus the ways in which teachers’ knowledge (Shulman, 2004; Grossman, 1990), experience (Britzman, 2003), and beliefs (Pajares, 1987) shape their understanding of the classroom and their place in it. Ecology also balances

both the local settings and the larger cultural and historical trends in which the local setting expresses itself.

I see ecology as one way to answer Dressman, McCarthy, and Prior (2009) when they ask “Does our theoretical understanding of literacy development suggest that the classroom is an autonomous space of learning, or does a wider map that includes information interactions in school, at home, and in the community need to be considered to understand how children develop?” (p. 6). I also see ecology as a way of answering the critique that research positioned as sociocultural is too concerned with the local literacy practices at the expense of considering larger influences and realities (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Further, an ecological framework can account for the ways in which adolescents’ literacy practices move across various contexts in ways that challenge the in and out of school divide (Hull & Schultz, 2001). And it can empirically examine whether a “permeable literacy curricula may facilitate engagement and academic achievement for learners whose local knowledge would otherwise be displaced by conventional curriculum and instruction” (Brass, 2008, p. 473). It does this because it works against the ways in which a classroom can appear as a closed system (Lortie, 2002/1975), acknowledging that the people and tools within that system lived lives before they crossed the threshold. It can also show the challenge of being a secondary English teacher in the 21st Century. For all of these reasons, ecology—as a framework and methodology—holds possibility for moving literacy research forward. Though the present issue is that, within literacy research, ecology has not progressed far beyond metaphor. It has yet to be fully operationalized in a way that allows for its use as a robust theoretical framework for literacy research in particular, though this work of using ecology as a theoretical and methodological framework has been more fully

explored in areas outside of literacy research. So this research both examines a single literacy classroom, while also refining ecology as a framework for research.

Overview of the Dissertation

This research is an embedded case study examining the literacy ecology of an English language arts and reading (ELAR) classroom at Ortega Middle School in Del Rio ISD outside a growing southwestern city. I sought to understand the complexity that a single classroom could embody by more fully developing the ecological metaphor, theoretically and methodologically, to see better what happened there. Seeing better meant plotting a map of the ecology based on the systemic influences on the literacy practices of the classroom. It also meant pinpointing the people, policies, texts, and objects that circulated within the ecology and influenced the work that went on in that classroom. Chapter two is a discussion of my theoretical framework for this research, specifically ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), Discourse (Gee, 1990), and boundary objects (Star & Greisemer, 1989; Star, 2010). Because the following topics function as part of the ecology within which the classroom sits, chapter two reviews the literature around English language arts curriculum and instruction; teachers experience, knowledge, and beliefs; teacher's professional communities; and classroom contexts like school administration and school districts. Chapter three is a discussion of my methodology including the site and participants, research design, data collection and corpus, data analysis, trustworthiness, and researcher positionality. The findings chapters—four, five, and six—begin in the contexts furthest from the classroom and zoom into the classroom where the influences from the various contexts meet the lives of the students. Chapter four presents the findings focused on the district and school administration. Chapter five presents the findings from the English language arts and reading department. Chapter six presenting the findings from the classroom. Chapter seven discusses the

findings across the research and presents implications for theory, research, policy, and teaching, as well as the next steps I will take with this research.

The next chapter charts my use and reconceptualization of Ecological Systems Theory (EST) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1999) as a theoretical perspective capable of seeing the social, cultural, and historical situatedness of the literacy practices in the classroom, as well as a methodological tool to examine the literacy ecology. I also examine the research literature around critical components of that context, including the English language arts curriculum; teachers' experiences, knowledge, and beliefs; professional communities; and classroom contexts like departments, principals, literacy coaches, and districts. This examination of the research locates this single classroom in the larger social, cultural, and historical context of public school education in the United States in the 21st Century.

CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAME AND A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Literacy in the late-20th and early-21st Centuries is marked by rapid technological change (Collins & Halverson, 2011) paired with an intransigent literacy curriculum (Applebee, 1996). Understanding the complex, dynamic reality that is composing and meaning making in this flat, interconnected (Darling-Hammond, 2010) world, and the intersection of that world and classrooms, requires new metaphors for seeing literacy in all its “complexity and messiness” (Fleckenstein, 2008, p. 389). As mentioned in chapter one, ecology is an attractive metaphor for just such work and scholars within composition studies, human-computer interaction, and education have taken it up. To varying degrees, ecology takes on theoretical or methodological significance as researchers seek “to devise and argue for a systematic account of reality in ways that others find persuasive, useful, and widely applicable while remaining sensitive to the incompleteness and the distortions of a single account” (Fleckenstein, et al., 2008, p. 389). What follows is my charting a course through other scholars’ work on ecology, metaphorical and methodological, to craft a theoretical perspective that mapped as richly as possible the complex and dynamic ecology that was an eighth grade English language arts reading (ELAR) classroom in a public school in Texas.

The Ecology Metaphor in the Research

Composition studies and human-computer interaction.

Scholars in composition studies outside of explicitly educational contexts have used the ecology metaphor as one way to understand the relationship between a writer, the text, and the settings in which writing happens. Cooper (1986) used ecology to complicate cognitive

understandings of the composing process (Flowers and Hayes, 1980). Luce-Kapler (2004) layered feminist perspectives on the ecological metaphor and wove identity into questions of composing. And Hawisher and Selfe (2004) argued that cultural ecology is an “attempt to signal the complex web within which both humans and computer technologies coexist” (p. 2). Deepening the metaphor, Syverson (1999) pushed composing situations beyond the “triangle of writer, text, and audience” (p. 23) using a matrix of attributes and dimensions to examine one piece of the ecology. The specific case studies she took up included a poem, a group of writers, and an online discussion list. Within each of these case studies, she highlighted the salient elements of the ecology. However, Syverson’s use of ecology is limiting because she conceded that composition studies “have not yet developed a useful method for recognizing, sorting, classifying, recording, or interpreting significant features that emerge from the complexity of the context in which they occur” (p. 27). Nardi and O’Day’s (1999) build a series of case studies around information ecologies as a way of understanding composing and meaning making in localized contexts using digital technologies. And while they develop the metaphor more fully, their narrow focus on information ecologies as “scaled to individuals” limits, again, how the metaphor can be used to understand the complex reality of an ELAR classroom. Students and teachers in classrooms generally have only a vague sense of what happens at the district offices or during school board meetings, yet those contexts directly impact what happens in those very classrooms. So while Nardi and O’Day successfully used this perspective to understand the workings of a single classroom, it is less helpful in understanding the full range of contexts within which a single classroom is enmeshed.

Educational research and ecology.

Educational researchers and theorists have used the ecological metaphor as well. Postman (1974; 1981) was one of the first to use the ecology metaphor, and eventually linked it to his work in media studies. Within writings about school reform, Eisner (1998) and Goodlad (1987) applied the metaphor to position schools as living institutions, resisting more mechanistic metaphors of school and reform. Literacy scholars doing educational research have taken up the ecology metaphor for many of the same reasons composition researchers have, to see the complexity of the literacy practices individuals engage in. Barton (2007) developed a detailed definition of the metaphor in relation to literacy.

Rather than isolating literacy activities from everything else in order to understand them, an ecology approach aims to understand how literacy is embedded in other human activity, its embeddedness in social life and in thought, and its position in history in language and in learning. (p. 32)

Ecology, then, draws out the social, cultural, and historical layers embedded within literacy practices generally. Others in the field have used the metaphor as well, aiming to describe the complexity of literacy. Ecology describes the intertwined nature of the reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1978), or of technology and the physical world (Bruce and Hogan, 1998) and the classroom (Hagood, 2003), or of home and school contexts for adolescents' literacy practices (O'Brien, Stewart, and Beach, 2009). Though like much of the composition research discussed above, these uses of ecology are more metaphorical than methodological.

Educational applications of Ecological Systems Theory.

There are educational researchers who have deepened the metaphor in ways that strengthen it theoretically and methodologically. Zhao and Frank (2003) used ecology to understand how digital technologies become dispersed throughout a school and used in

classrooms. In operationalizing the metaphor, they drew heavily on ecological understandings of the different types of species—dominant, rare, keystone, and invasive—that exist within a given ecology. Similarly, Barron (2004, 2006) conceptualized a learning ecology to draw out the ways in which students engage in “learning across the life spaces of home, school, community, work, and neighborhoods” (2006, p. 195). Leonard (2011) engaged in a mixed-method, ecological examination of school-community partnerships as an attempt to reveal the characteristics of successful partnerships. Oliveira, Wilcox, Angelis, Applebee, Amodeo, and Snyder (2012) used ecology to uncover best practices in science instruction in a middle school by examining both classroom level practices, as well as administrative and district contexts that supported high-quality science education. All of these scholars deepened the metaphor by drawing on Ecological Systems Theory (EST; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) for their theoretical and methodological framework. I follow their lead by drawing on the rich analytic tools available in EST, while deepening the potential for those tools by weaving in sociocultural understandings of literacy (Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 2008; Street, 1995; Barton, 2007).

Ecological Systems Theory

To come to a more theoretical understanding of ecology that informs methodology, I drew principally from EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Discourses (Gee, 2002/1990). I also drew on the concept of boundary objects (Star & Greisemer, 1989; Star, 2010), which grew out of a communities of practice perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), to understand how people use tools to cross or dwell within boundaries between contexts. Taken together, these understandings of ecology make it possible to closely examine the literacy ecology of classrooms with its myriad contexts. What follows is a detailed discussion of EST, my reconceptualization of EST relying on Discourses (Gee, 1990/2002) and other scholars within EST, an overview of

communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) as it relates to EST, and a more detailed discussion of boundary objects within ecology.

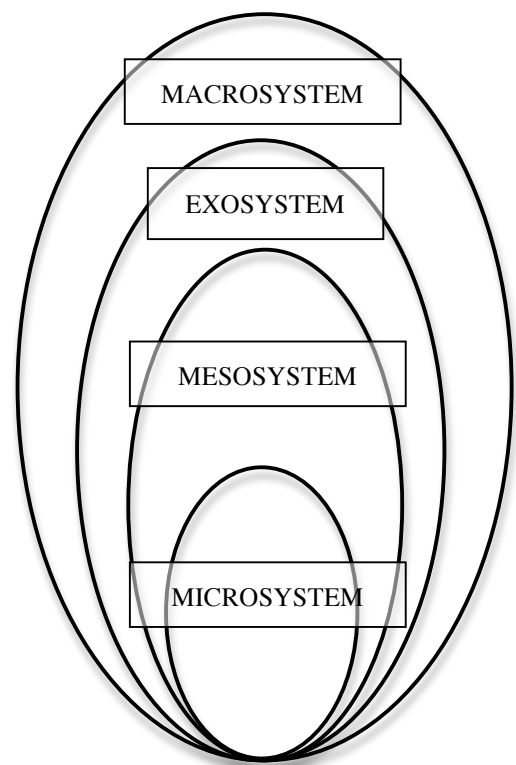
Working in developmental psychology, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed EST as a way of better understanding how context influences development. EST

involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings and by the ecological environment. (p. 13)

EST, with its focus on “immediate settings” was crafted as a way of examining development outside the laboratory, where most research took place, and in the actual environments where people lived and grew. Additionally, EST works from the premise that “what matters for behavior and development is the environment as it is *perceived* rather than as it may exist in ‘objective’ reality” (p. 4). EST, then, attempts to

understand the environment from a single perspective, which is the reality of that ecology for that individual. Shifting perspectives, even to another individual within the ecology, would then give a radically different understanding of the ecology. Looking out from a single perspective in this way, Bronfenbrenner operationalized the environment by describing an ecology as nested systems centered around an individual (Figure 2.1). Bronfenbrenner envisions the systems in an ecology as a way of fully exploring the

Figure 2.1: Nested Ecology



complex ways in which humans dynamically adapt to the world, and vice versa, by moving through these systems and experiencing the influences that originate in them. Table 2.1 defines each system within EST's understanding of ecology: the macrosystem, the exosystem, the mesosystem, and the microsystem.

Table 2.1: Systems in an Ecology

System	Description
Macrosystem	A pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22)
Exosystem	Comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25)
Mesosystem	Refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25)
Microsystem	Refers to consistencies, in the form of content of lower-order systems that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistency. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25-26)

Principally, in EST, these systems are physical locations that are connected by the relationships of people who move between them. Within a school, the classroom could serve as a microsystem, the cafeteria as a mesosystem, and the main office as an exosystem. The classroom walls contain patterns of activity among the students and between the students and teacher, and they build relationships around those activities. As students move to the cafeteria, a mesosystem in relation to the classroom, this physical space is related to the classroom because the students engage in activity in both places. Perhaps they even bring stories of the cafeteria back into the classroom. While the main office is a key setting because what happens there can affect the classroom, most students never visit or even understand the types of activities that go on there, which makes it an exosystem. So it is the combination of physical setting and social relationships within that setting that define a system.

In addition to considering these systems individually, EST considers how they interact and overlap through the concept of linking. Essentially, the more closely linked different systems, the more influential they are in the microsystem.

A mesosystem in which there is more than one person who is active in both settings is referred to as multiply linked. A mesosystem in which the only links, apart from the original link involving the person, are indirect or in which there are no additional links whatsoever is described as weakly linked. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 211)

This quote highlights the ways that a mesosystem is a system that the individual participates in beyond to the microsystem. This concept of linking carries across systems and also involves tools that link systems together. Using the above example, if several students in an English class also share a math class, those systems are linked in multiple ways. If the teacher and several of her colleagues are all on the same softball team, the systems of the school and the team are multiply linked. This original conceptualization of EST, while valuable for highlighting the intersection of contexts and developing a language for seeing those contexts and intersections, is static and too easily reductive. Complicating EST with understandings of Discourse (Gee, 1990/2002) , as well as drawing on work of scholars within EST, is an opportunity to retain the benefits of the perspective and improve its ability to reveal complexity of a classroom.

EST reconceptualized: Discourses and networks.

One way to deepen the potential of EST is to complicate its definitions of systems. Each system discussed above is more than just the physical setting or the current relationships of people in the setting. The systems are particular instantiations of social, cultural, and historical realities. As people move between systems, then, they can experience conflicts between different

sets of social mores, cultural expectations, or historical understandings. These conflicts arise from different Discourses (Gee 2008/1990), which are

composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too writing/reading, coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities (p. 152).

For Gee, Discourse, with a capital D as quoted above, is distinguished from discourse (small d) by scope, though others (Bourdieu, 2006/1977; Foucault, 1971) do not make such a distinction. Simply, conversations are discourse, but those conversations generally adhere to the rules of particular Discourses in which they take place. Each classroom, then, is an instantiation of particular Discourses about what a classroom is. A classroom is also likely the site of conflicting Discourses about the types of things students and teachers do in classrooms. But not only do classrooms embody a Discourse, so too do all of the people in the classroom carry with them multiple, sometimes conflicting Discourses (Gee, 1990/2002, p. 159-60) about what it means to be a girl, or Latino, in the drama club or on the robotics team. A teacher in the classroom takes on the ways of being a teacher in that space—perhaps standing in the front of the room and addressing all of the students simultaneously. But that same behavior would, with rare exception, not be fitting for a teacher in a school board meeting. Systems expect particular ways of being from an individual, and individuals in classrooms are often caught between overlapping Discourses with all the tensions that entails. Further, systems and “Discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power.” This power, then, means that “Control over certain Discourses can lead to the acquisition of social goods” and “These Discourses empower those

groups who have the least conflicts with their other Discourses when they use them” (p. 159).

Conflicts within systems often point to competing Discourses, which grow out of particular ideological stances. This layering of Discourses over the language of systems gives a better sense of the social, cultural, and historical situatedness of those systems than Bronfenbrenner’s original conceptualization of EST does.

Looking across research on writing and writing pedagogy, Ivanic (2004) outlines six discourses around writing and writing pedagogy (Table 2.2) that are particularly salient for the examination of a literacy classroom.

Table 2.2: Discourses around writing and the teaching of writing (Ivanic, 2004)

Discourse	Description
Skills	“...writing consists of applying knowledge of a set of linguistic patterns and rules for sound-symbol relationships and sentence construction.” (p. 227)
Creative	“In this discourse, ‘meaning’ is central, with the writer engaged in meaning making...writing is treated as a valuable activity in its own right: the creative act of the author, with no social function other than that of interesting or entertaining a reader.” (p. 229)
Process	“Learning to write should include learning the processes and procedures for composing a text.” (p. 231)
Genre	“Learners need to learn the linguistic characteristics of different text-types in order to be able to reproduce them appropriately to serve specific purposes in specific contexts.” (p. 233)
Social Practices	“The text and the processes of composing are inextricable from the whole complex social interaction which makes up the communicative even in which they are situated, and meaning is bound up with social purposes for writing.” (p. 234)
Sociopolitical	“Writing, like all language, is shaped by social forces and relations of power, contributes to shaping social forces which will operate in the future, and that writing has consequences for the identity of the writer who is represented in the writing.” (pp. 237-8)

These discourses serve as “constellations of beliefs about writing, beliefs about learning to write, ways of talking about writing, and the sorts of approaches to teaching and assessment which are likely to be associated with those beliefs” (p. 224). As these discourses play out across a school

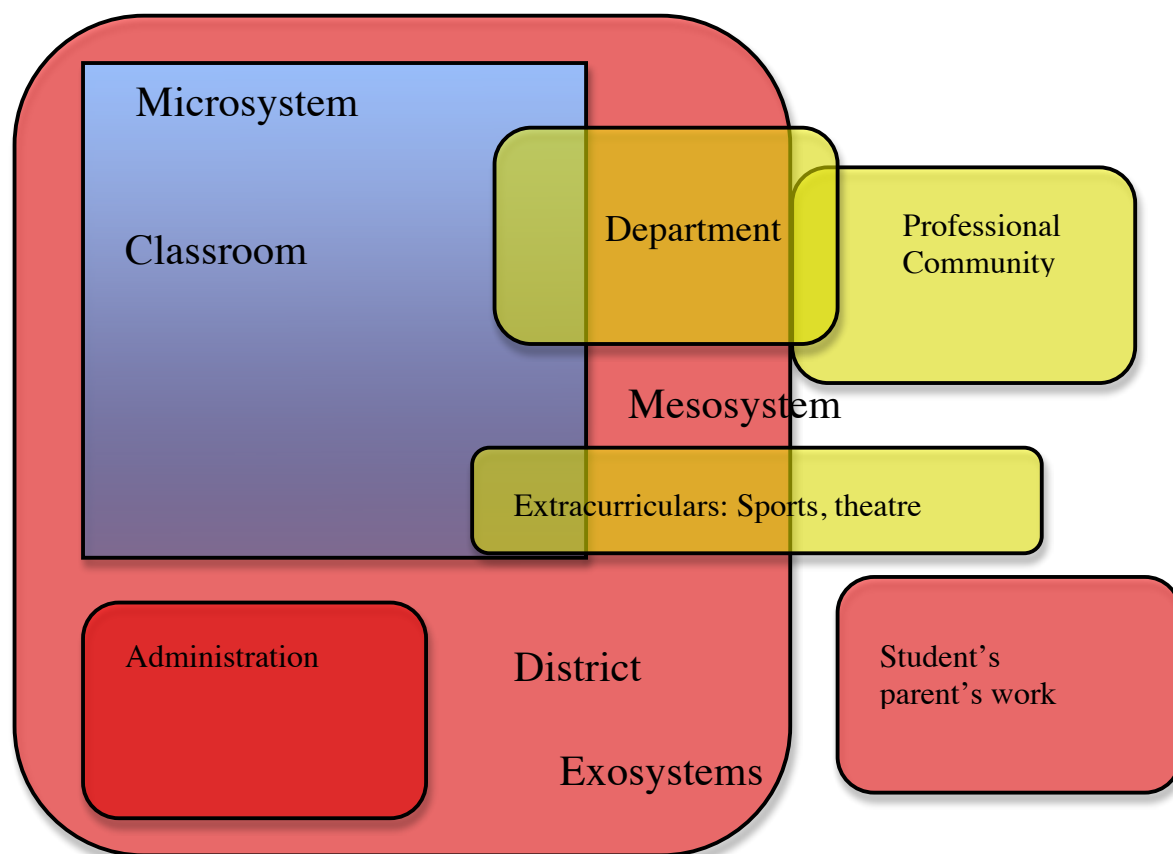
year, in a classroom, or through a school, they are blended and rejected or adapted to the particular interests or experiences of the teacher. Ivancic posits that the skills discourse dominates much writing instruction (p. 227) and that the creative discourse grew out of teachers existing love for literature (p. 229). These discourses are a way of looking specifically at the types of Discourses that individuals within a particular system invoke to think about writing instruction. While discourses make the concepts more robust, the nested organization of systems within an ecology needs complicating to more fully represent reality.

To protect against simplistic and static understandings of a classroom's ecology possible with the nested vision of ecology, I examined research within EST that attempted to envision different possibilities for the ways in which systems interact. Even trying to simply explain a classroom and school context using the nested diagram (Figure 2.1) shows its limits. While an English classroom is nested within its district, it is not nested within the department because all elements of the department do not overlap with the classroom. Nor are parents' places of work automatically nested within the district, unless the parent works for the district. Although most of these systems can be nested within the macrosystem of, say, Texas, though transnational students will participate in multiple macrosystems as they negotiate international border and all the Discourse shifts that entails. Simply, this nested representation does not allow for enough exploration of systematic interactions that can affect the microsystem.

Within EST, others have reconceptualized the nested systems of Bronfenbrenner. Reifsnider, Gallagher, and Forgione (2005) sought to complicate EST by combining similar, contextual models from epidemiology, and two other developmental and interactional models to "provide strength to each other" (p. 216) and complicate the ways EST can represent reality. Neal and Neal (2013) moved to a networked model of ecological systems, whereby multiple

microsystems are linked by social relationships between them. This networking of microsystems makes for a far more complex ecology and allows for seeing more fully how mesosystems and exosystems interact around the microsystem (p. 12). Both of these reconceptualizations keep the language of systems because this construct reflects the intertwined reality of various contexts reality, is theoretically robust, and provides a priori categories for analyzing data. Given these developments of EST, I designed a more representative graphic of an ecology (Figure 2.2).

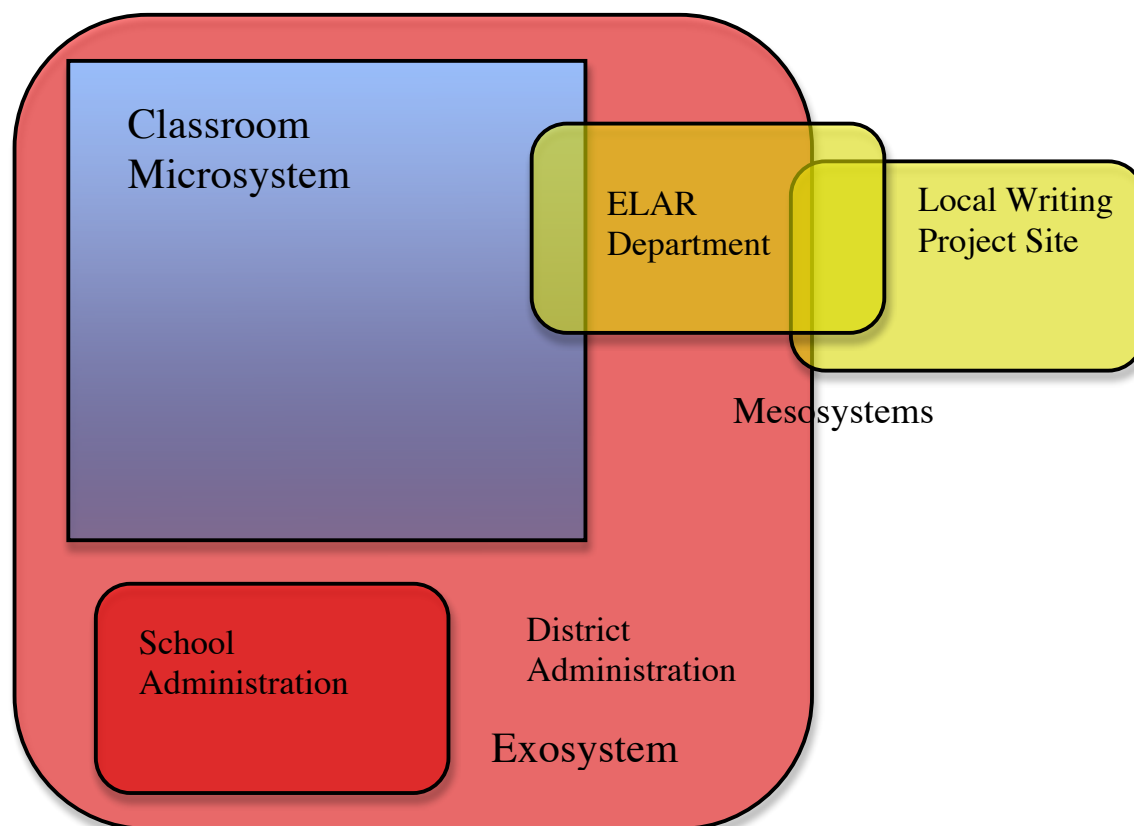
Figure 2.2: A reconceptualized ecology.



Here, the systems are not nested, but loosely networked based on how an individual, or cluster of individuals, might experience an ecology. Systems interact in more complex ways in this representation and there are more varied constellations of mesosystems and exosystems.

In using EST to examine the literacy ecology of a classroom, as opposed to a single individual, I am pushing the theory further. Given that I ground my understanding of literacy in sociocultural perspectives that acknowledge the situated nature of literacy practices, my repurposing of ecology achieves two goals. First, EST brings with it a robust conceptual framework and language to describe the complex and dynamic reality that is an ELA classroom in the 21st Century. Second, when deepened as discussed above, EST can acknowledge the importance of social, cultural, and historical contexts for the Discourses at work in a classroom through these systems. The literacy ecology of the focal classroom (figure 2.3), then, is an adaptation of the figure above (2.2), with the specific systems I encountered in the course of my research labeled and organized in a way that represents, as clearly as possible in graphic form, that ecology.

Figure 2.3: The literacy ecology of the focal classroom.



Envisioned this way, EST brings into relief the many and varied influences that work to shape the literacy practices that teachers can design or student can engage within a particular classroom. What follows is a more detailed discussion of elements of EST that are salient for an examination of a literacy classroom.

Characteristics of supportive systems.

Coming from a developmental psychology perspective, EST is specifically concerned with revealing an “ecologically compatible milieu” that supports an individual’s development. These characteristics include bidirectional communication, mutual trust and goal consensus, and balance of power, each of which are defined more fully below. Although I do not see literate practice as a linear progression toward some literate ideal, this perspective acknowledges that there are contexts that are more or less supportive of the range of students’ literacy practices and their development. Further, systems often overlap and there are usually tensions in those intersections. As people and practices move across systems, the greater the alignment between Discourses and systems the more supportive the ecology is of those people and practices (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). EST identifies characteristics of systems that can bring about this alignment, and the concomitant reduction or resolution of tension in productive ways, in ways supportive of individual’s literate practice. Engaging in bidirectional communication can lead to mutual trust and a goal consensus among people in the system. This trust and communication around a goal, further, can allow power and control to flow to those generally disempowered in particular system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 218). A discussion of bidirectional communication, mutual trust and goal consensus, and the balance of power follows.

Bidirectional communication is key to negotiating the Discourses that intersect when systems overlap. Bidirectional communication is marked by several features including the

personal nature of the communication, the accuracy of information reflected in it, and the potential for reciprocity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 209). Unidirectional communication, conversely, is marked by its impersonal character, inaccuracy, and lack of reciprocity. Bidirectional communication affords individuals and practices the potential to adapt to the intersections of Discourses in a classroom's ecology by being personal—ideally face-to-face (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.), communicating accurate information about other systems, and allowing for the communication to change the outcome of the interaction. Mutual trust is vaguely defined in EST as “affective relation” or “more pronounced feeling” (p. 58). Goal consensus is similarly vague, stating only that “the extent that [the feelings] are positive and reciprocal to begin with and become more so as interaction proceeds, they are likely to enhance the pace and the probability of occurrence of developmental processes” (p. 58). In many ways, this is a rephrased description of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1986). Finally, EST takes into account the power differential between the individuals in the ecology. In a supportive ecology, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that “the optimal situation for learning and development is one in which the balance of power gradually shifts in favor of the developing person...when [the person] is given increasing opportunity to exercise control over the situation” (p. 60). Power is an essential component of Discourses as well (Gee, 2002/1990, p. 159) as power accrues to those who successfully navigate powerful Discourses. Relationships built around communication, trust, and consensus are more likely to avoid the “debilitating impact of antagonism” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 60) caused by power differentials. These four characteristics—communication, trust, consensus, and power—serve to organize my examination of the district and school contexts—exosystems and mesosystems—for the focal classroom. Even with a perspective of such systems informed by EST and Discourses, the question remains

of how individuals navigate those systems and Discourses. This question can be answered by boundary objects, which grow out of a Communities of Practice perspective, both of which I discuss below.

Filling a Gap: Communities of Practice and Boundary Objects

While EST excels as a way of seeing the various systems at work in an ecology and the ways in which those systems intersect and overlap, it is less developed in examining how individuals navigate between systems and use tools to support that navigation. This gap around navigation is particularly salient given Neal and Neal's (2013) conception of ecologies as linked microsystems discussed above, and the intersection of systems and Discourses overlapping in microsystems. This gap can be filled by perspectives outside of EST, namely work that grows out of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1999), and the related work around boundary objects (Star & Greisemer, 1989; Star, 2010). What follows is a brief overview of communities of practice and then a longer examination of how boundary objects function in ecologies. The discussion around communities of practice centers on the ways it adds to EST's understanding of social and historical context. The discussion of boundary objects serves to develop an analytic tool for understanding how individuals within a classroom ecology use tools to support their navigation through that ecology.

Communities of practice: Context and connections to ecological systems.

As summarized succinctly in Barton and Tusting (2005), the idea of practice in relation to learning and communities has its roots in Scribner and Cole (1981), though it is most commonly associated with the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger and their work on legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1999).

Wenger's (1999) work in communities of practice aligns with EST is when he discusses the intersections of multiple communities of practice.

Communities of practice cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of the world, or understood independently of other practices. Their various enterprises are closely interconnected. Their members and their artifacts are not theirs alone. Their histories are not just internal; they are histories of articulation with the rest of the world (p. 103).

Here Wenger could be describing the systems within an ecology, particularly as they are networked together around social relationships between individuals and tools that cross those boundaries between communities of practice. Though, again, the attention to history adds an essential characteristic of contexts that is all but absent from EST. In addition to articulating the need to consider historical and social contexts of communities of practice, it fully addresses what it means to move between communities of practice and live within the boundary spaces where communities of practice cross. My focus here is on the tools that people use to support their work navigating boundaries and boundary spaces in an ecology. These boundary objects, with their own social and historical contexts, can serve as a way of tracing a teacher's and students' participation in and across systems and Discourses within a classroom's ecology. What follows is a discussion of boundary objects and their usefulness in mapping a classroom's ecology.

Boundaries and boundary objects defined.

Classrooms are the intersections of multiple systems and Discourses (Figure 2.3). That means they are often the site of multiple boundaries and boundary spaces. Boundary is often taken to mean the dividing line between here and there. Once a boundary is crossed, one is no longer here, but is there. Though considering how individuals move through the physical and social worlds, the dichotomous relationship between here and there is too simple, particularly

within the context of a single classroom that is the intersection of multiple systems where students could cross multiple boundaries without leaving the physical classroom. For example, if a student blends English and Spanish while talking to a classmate, they are crossing boundaries between languages, or if they tell a story of their family, they are crossing the boundary between home and school. A closer description of the reality of boundaries may be that “the boundary between...Discourses [are] constantly negotiated and contested in society and history” (Gee, 1990/2002, p. 166). Although even this quote implies that there are still clear boundaries between Discourses, even if they change over time. Instead, boundaries “mean a shared space, where exactly that sense of here and there are confounded” (Star, 2010, p. 603). This “shared space” is far closer to how classrooms are structured and the ways in which students must move through them navigating and negotiating the intersecting systems and Discourses. Seeing how they do this navigation, specifically the tools they employ for such work, and bring into relief the texture of the classroom ecology through which they move.

Further, this expanded notion of boundaries is important when considering a classroom because “boundaries are reported between school and everyday life” (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011, p. 139). In other words, school and life each contain communities of practice, Discourses, or systems in which students participate and those overlap to greater or lesser degrees. This overlap creates boundary spaces students must navigate. Those spaces are smaller or larger for students depending on the overlap between the systems and the confluence of the Discourses for those two different spaces. For students in school, a whole range of demographic, geographic, linguistic, or other characteristics often determines the size and scope of the boundary they cross to move between home and school (Hull & Schultz, 2001). There can be, then, “differences between these worlds [of home and school] and their discourses [that] make it difficult for

students to adapt, reorient, or integrate their experiences” (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011, p. 139). Teachers are often in a similar position to students, finding themselves caught between the opposing discourses of their constructivist teacher preparation program and data-driven models of assessment at work in most schools, or instructional strategies designed to support student learning and remedial programs imposed to raise test scores (Smagorinski, Lakly & Johnson, 2002).

This clash of Discourses, representing different contexts that are “life-absorbing” (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 302), asks students and teachers to engage in the difficult work of boundary crossing.

For people, managing multiple memberships can be volatile, elusive or confusing; navigating in more than one world is a non-trivial mapping exercise. People resolve problems of marginality in a variety of ways: by passing on one side or another, denying one side, oscillating between world, or by forming a new social world composed of others like themselves... (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 412-3)

Given the tensions in crossing boundaries, and the reality that they must be crossed, people rely on a whole host of strategies and objects to support them in their navigation of the boundaries within their ecologies.

Boundary objects, specifically, can support people in living in the confounded spaces between here and there—home and school, constructivism and standardization—by travelling with individuals and being useful in multiple systems. These objects, then, “come to form a common boundary between worlds by inhabiting them both simultaneously” (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 413). Going beyond notions of support, identifying with a particular Discourse through the use of boundary objects “can thus be described individually as the experience of

encountering objects and increasingly being in a naturalized relationship with them” (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 295). It is not just that the objects smooth the transition between home and school, administration and the classroom, but repeatedly encountering these particular objects in practice draws one into membership in the Discourse or a system. The recursive nature of boundary objects means, also, that these contexts within which people work with boundary objects are “defined in large part according to the co-use of such objects since all practice is so mediated” (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 289-9). In other words, people work together using boundary objects to embody particular Discourses within the systems where they live, work, and play.

Boundary objects, therefore,

...both inhabit several communities of practice and satisfy the information requirements of each of them Boundary objects are thus plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. They are weakly structured in common use and become strongly structured in individual-site use. These objects may be abstract or concrete.

(Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 297)

Individuals who move within and between different systems use boundary objects to communicate within and across the Discourses of those systems and the boundaries between them. Further clarifying, the object need not be a concrete object, but could be an idea, practice, or protocol. Examples of the types of objects or ideas that could be boundary objects include written records, scientific classification (Star & Greisemer, 1989). Though “[d]espite design intentions, it is stressed that boundary objects are only partially communicative and, therefore, can never fully displace communication and collaboration” (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011, p. 141). In this way, they facilitate the work of supportive ecologies by opening up the potential for

communication and consensus. Boundary objects are, therefore, “attached to cooperative work arrangements” (Star, 2010, p. 613) and “are used in the service of an action and mediate it in some way” (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 298). Finally, they “arise over time from durable cooperation” (p. 297) and “practice-activity” (p. 299) that allow for the object to have meaning in any given, and multiple, contexts. In classrooms, this cooperation can take place between teacher and students or between students. Though, importantly, this cooperation can happen “without agreeing about the classification of objects or actions” (p. 296). Simply, that means a student could see a poem as a vehicle for complaining about her mother, and the teacher could see it as an excellent use of rhyming couplets.

Because different groups of people can adapt a boundary object to specific system or Discourses needs, it becomes almost impossible to set standards for what a boundary object should look like within the context of an ecology. The very “weakly structured” nature of it, which is essential for it to act as a boundary object for individuals moving among “life-absorbing” contexts, is inimical to regulation by standard characteristics. Instead, the use of the boundary object is the defining characteristic, but that use shifts and changes across the systems within the ecology as boundary crossing occurs. Despite the near impossibility of setting standards for boundary objects—thus robbing them of their fluidity—Star (2010) observed that “people (often administrators or regulatory agencies) try to control the tacking back-and-forth, and especially, to standardize and make equivalent the ill-structured and well-structured aspects of the particular boundary objects” (p. 613-4). And while there are “clever ways people organize and reorganize when the local circumstances of their activities do not match the prescribed categories or standards” (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 293), there is a limit to the reorganization

possible when the object is standardized and that standardization invokes a clash between Discourses. Unfortunately,

Most schools are lousy places to grow boundary objects because they both strip away the ambiguity of the objects of learning and impose or ignore membership categories. In mass schooling and standardized testing, an attempt is made to insist on an engineered community of practice, where the practices are dictated and the naturalization process is monitored and regulated while ignoring borderlands. (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 306).

Because schools generally are engineered communities of practice, there is precious little room for the necessary moves students and teachers must make across boundaries to facilitate and engage in literacy practices that serve both individual and institutional Discourses. The boundary objects they may employ, such as planning guides or writing, are often subject to such standardization and weaken the objects, leading to less overlap between systems and less supportive ecologies. Identifying boundary objects within a classroom ecology and following them as they move through that ecology serves two purposes. First, it can help identify ways teachers and students negotiate multiple Discourses, navigating conflicts and tensions, as they move through the ecology. Second, the use of boundary objects can point to way of organizing and reorganizing systems in the ecology in more supportive ways.

Taken together, EST and boundary objects deepen the metaphor of ecology in ways that are both theoretically and methodologically robust. With this framework in place, it becomes more possible to see the complexity that is an ELAR classroom, as both a space that is the intersection of so many systems and their attendant Discourses and a unique instantiation of ELAR classrooms generally. The vantage point afforded from this perspective is a powerful way to see how an individual classroom mirrors the Discourses of classroom. This conceptual

combination also allows for seeing the whole ecology without losing sight of the people, practices, and objects that constitute it. Seeing outward from a single classroom is central to my understanding of the situated nature of literacy, alongside the local character of a classroom. What follows is a review of the literature that locates a single ELA classroom in its macrosystem contexts of curriculum and instruction, teaching, and the institution of school.

Review of the Literature: Macrosystem Influences

In the society at large—the macrosystem—education, teachers, adolescents, and literacy are all failing, in crisis, or at risk (Berliner & Biddle, 1996; Hull, Zacher & Hibbert, 2009; Franzak, 2006). Research from specific school and classroom settings makes it clear that macrosystem Discourses do not hold absolute sway over the particular literacy practices students engage with in individuals' classrooms, though they are powerful influences. The following review of the literature gives context to key systems under examination in this dissertation: the curriculum and instruction found in the ELA classroom, including writing, standardization, and adolescent literacy; ELA teachers' experience, knowledge, and beliefs as windows into their instructional practice; and contexts beyond the classroom, including professional communities, departments, administration, and the school district.

Curriculum and instruction in the ELA classroom: Echoes of history.

The English language arts curriculum is an essential macrosystem for an ELA classroom as an intersection of the cultural and historical macrosystems of the United States, the particular knowledges and experiences of teachers and students, as well as a particular expression of curriculum within the ecology of a single classroom (Apple, 2004). Looking more closely at the macrosystem of ELA curriculum functions can give a more complete context for possible ways

in which ELA curriculum can be expressed within the specific focal classroom (Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2009).

Applebee's (1974) history of the discipline of English finds that the ELA curriculum's focus on grammar and vocabulary rest with the origins of the discipline as similar to the study of ancient languages. As English continued to develop as a discipline, the study of literature was merged with grammar and vocabulary as a way of introducing "the Romantic conception of culture" (p. 29) into the curriculum. The study of English, then, was about "usefulness, discipline, moral value, interest, even patriotism" (p. 29). Myers (1996) and Smith (2002) likewise found an alignment between understandings of literacy and historical forces such as war, immigration, and technological change. Though as expressed through the literature assigned in most ELA classrooms, those ideas seem to have stalled sometime in the last 100 years (Applebee, 1993). Even if recent technological innovations around computers, the Internet, digital communication, and mobile computing have begun to be acknowledged as necessary elements of a coherent literacy curriculum (Alvermann, 2006; 2008), such acknowledgment has not lead to immediate or radical changes in practice (Cuban, 2003; Collins & Halverson, 2011). In this way, the ELA curriculum—like most planned curriculum (Apple, 2004)—serves the status quo, and a particular set of American ideals that reflects the teachers and students who are in any given classroom to a greater or lesser degree. The ELA curriculum, like many other aspects of schools and schooling (Tyack & Tobin, 1994) is resistant to change, even in the face of overwhelming cultural shifts (Sperling & DiPardo, 2008). The Discourses for what an English classroom should look like and what people do there probably involves Shakespeare and *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, even when students in the class are using Instagram and the teacher does most of his shopping on Amazon.

Writing.

Though reading and responding to literature often constitutes the majority of time spent in the typical secondary ELA classroom, writing has its own history. Berlin (1990), echoing the themes from above, argues that

writing instruction has been a ... scene of struggle over competing claims about the purposes of education, more specifically about the society the school and college should advocate and the kind of individuals they should encourage...curricular programs in turn will be seen as the responses to larger economic, social, and political debates during the past century. (p. 184).

This struggle has echoed larger shifts within psychology, understanding of the writing process, and the place of writing in the ELA classroom. While the developmental model of composing held sway over understanding of writing, it has been challenged by more process-oriented approaches (Hairston, 1982). That perspective, too, has its detractors (Bizzell, 2003). Generally speaking, research in writing has shifted from developmental models grounded in Piaget to situated understandings grounded in Bahktin and Vygotsky (Hillocks, 2003). Though despite this rich theoretical debate about writing, the way teachers are taught to teach writing tends to be general and lacking a historical perspective (Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995; Kennedy, 1998). So whether it was the Committee of Ten in 1892 pushing the “current-traditional rhetoric” model (Applebee, 1974, p. 188) or the growth of cognitive psychology and understanding of psychological processes as they relate to writing (Applebee, 1974, p. 208), writing curriculum, too, adapted to larger cultural shifts, though continues to lag the society at large.

Standardized testing, and the accountability discourse out of which it grows, is also a cultural shift that has had notable effects on writing instruction in the ELA classroom. As early

as the 1980s, Berlin identifies a shift to “nationally normed achievement tests” (p. 212) that did not include writing, which led to writing instruction declining precipitously. When writing became a tested subject, classrooms, then, adapted to such pressures and refocused on the teaching of writing. In Texas particularly, Hillocks (2002) found that “the testing program becomes a kind of surrogate theory of discourse for most teachers. It tells teachers the boundaries of knowledge about composition and it stipulates what should be taught” (p. 86). Instead of a nuanced understanding of the range of discourses at work in writing instruction, the skills and creative discourse predominate (Ivanic, 2004). Of course there are “interests...who will stand to gain politically or commercially from curriculum changes, from the introduction of new teaching materials, and from the adoption of one particular theoretical stance rather than another” (p. 241). And teachers must inevitably chart a path through these competing discourses as they work with students (Wohlend, 2009), making curricular and instruction decisions in this milieu. Though, as with so many other issues, this narrowing of the curriculum is more complex and dynamic than it appears on the surface. Instead, it can expand in some areas while it contracts in others (Au, 2007), or adaptations could vary across curricular (Au, 2007) or economic (McCarthy, 2008) contexts.

Even with these challenges, language arts teachers are generally assigning more writing in 2007 than they were in 1988 (Applebee & Langer, 2011), assigning a greater variety of writing, and adapting writing tasks for struggling writers at rates greater than their subject matter peers (Kihara, Graham & Hawken, 2009). And teachers across the curriculum are engaging students in writing that “reflect[s] a much more sophisticated understanding of writing instruction than was evident in 1979-1980” (Applebee & Langer, 2011, p. 21). Teachers’ sophisticated understanding, though, conflicts with the pressure for test preparation, which serves

to “constrain the amount of time given to writing instruction” (p. 21). English teachers generally use the process approach to teach writing, though teacher led activities still dominate collaborative work, and only 44 percent claim to use a workshop model for instruction (Applebee & Langer, 2011, p. 21).

A workshop approach (Atwell, 1998; Reif, 1992; Bomer, 1995; Bomer, 2011) is designed to have students engage in the work of writing in the classroom where the teaching takes place. It also invites students’ knowledge and experience of their world, and the literacy practices they engage in there, into the classroom. The vast majority of research on writing workshop instruction has focused on the elementary level (cf. Ray, 2006; Rowe, 2008; King, 2012; Troia, Lin, Cohen, Monore, 2011) perhaps because there are fewer classrooms using a workshop approach at the secondary level. In secondary classrooms, research points to writing workshop instruction supporting students exploratory talk around texts (Kerr, 1998), development of a writerly identity (Graham, 2000), and a critical perspective on the world and their place in it (Henry, 1998). Workshop instruction is not without challenges as it runs counter to the skills discourse so prevalent in secondary writing instruction, focusing instead on the process and social construction discourses. Also, by the very act of inviting students knowledge and experience into the classroom, the structure invites tension over which knowledges and experiences the students are allowed to bring into the classroom and who is the judge. In some classrooms, using a reading workshop focus, Stephen King may count and in others he may not (Chandler, 2000). So given the conservative tendencies of ELA curriculum and instruction, the tensions inherent in a workshop structure, and standardized testing pressures, ELA teachers are in a difficult position, making curricular and instructional decisions while navigating a host of tensions across a range of Discourses.

Adolescent literacy.

Over the last 30 years, researchers have focused their attentions on developing sociocultural understandings of adolescents' literacy practices just as adolescents have embraced rapid and vast technological change. Research in adolescent literacy has recognized the growing diversity of adolescents' literate knowledge and experience developed through rich literate lives outside of school (Alvermann, et al., 2011; Christenbury, Bomer & Smagorinsky, 2009; MacGillivray & Curwen, 2007; Black, 2005; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). Driven by many of the same technological forces, the literacy demands of life outside the classroom—from the postsecondary classroom to the workplace—have grown in breadth and depth and adolescents are expected to navigate this new landscape (Gee, 2004). While there has been a consistent encouragement from policymakers (Duggan Schwartzbeck & Wolf, 2012), professional organizations (NCTE, 2003), and students themselves to incorporate these digital tools into the curriculum, such incorporation is still generally highly dependent on individual teachers or the whims of funding (Cuban, 2001; Collins and Halverson, 2011). Though merely adding digital tools to current ELA curriculum, instruction, and classrooms is not unproblematic (Wilder & Dressman, 2006) as using digital technology for academic purposes still needs to be taught to students, which is something that continues to be challenging for many teachers (Hughes, 2013). This “cultural lag” between adolescents' work in classrooms and “increased expectations and heightened demand” (Trimbur, 1991, p. 284) for particular types of literacy is the perfect climate for the sense of crisis and risk in adolescent literacy (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Graham & Perin; Marshall, 2009). Teachers, then, are the interpreters of these macrosystem influences, replete with historical significance, tensions, and potential as teachers design classrooms for engaging students in relevant, engaging practices.

Teachers in the classroom ecology.

Teachers are central figures in the classroom ecology. Zhao & Frank (2002) see teachers as keystone species in the ecology of a school. Nardi and O'Day (1999), in examining a high school photography class, came to see the teacher as a key facilitator and nurturer of the information ecology of that classroom. The cornerstone federal education policy—No Child Left Behind—also places teachers at the center of the classroom and in control of student success, though its “conceptions of teachers and teaching are flawed.” They are “linear, remarkably narrow, and based on a technical transmission model of teaching, learning, and teaching training that was rejected more than two decades ago and that is decidedly out of keeping with contemporary understandings of learning” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006, p. 669). Generally speaking, macrosystemic influences push teachers to resist change. As detailed above, the English language arts curriculum has changed relatively slowly across the last century. Given this slow rate of change, the “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975/2002) leads ELA teachers to teach as they were taught, perpetuating the resistance to change. But even within this conservative profession, teachers take up and craft a teacher identity through the intersection of their experience, knowledge, and beliefs about teaching and learning.

The cultural expectations around what it means to be a teacher are powerful Discourses that preservice teachers negotiate as they move into the classroom. Britzman (2003) in examining preservice teachers as they make the transition from student to teacher, highlighted the ways in which the transition to the person of teacher is “deeply unsettling” (p. 3) as well as “deeply emotional” (p. 21).

...Learning to teach wavers on this precipice of meaning—of making sense of both personal and historical crisis—this is very difficult work and far more complex than the measures we have made. (p. 9)

The transition, however fraught, is not controlled solely by the personal. Britzman identified myths—historical Discourses—around the role of teacher: first, that everything in a classroom depends on the teacher; second, the teacher is the expert; and, third, that the teacher is self-made. These myths conflict with what ecology reveals about the ways in which much of what is possible in a classroom is constrained by forces well outside the purview of a single teacher including, of course, these very myths. Myths are only one of a constellation of influences that shape a teacher's identity and decision-making in the classroom.

Grossman (1990) examined preservice ELA teachers, as well, as they transitioned to inservice teaching. Building on the work of Shulman (2004), she focused particularly on the ways in which teachers' knowledge of pedagogy and content shifted across the transition from student to teacher. She found that teachers relied on their memories of themselves as students (p. 11; see also Hamel, 2003) as well as their disciplinary knowledge of English (p. 12) to control many of their instructional decisions. Further,

Teacher's knowledge of content becomes confounded with their knowledge of instructional strategies, since what prospective teachers learned is tied to how they were taught...[the] apprenticeship of observation supports conservatism of teaching as teachers replicate the strategies they experienced as students. (p. 10)

This is one more example of the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975/2002) as it influences how teachers take up teaching. Other work that looks closely at this transition from preservice to inservice teaching finds that conservative macrosystem trends continue to express

themselves in the instructional decisions of teachers. As discussed in the writing section above, the pressure to teach formulaic writing can be seen as a teacher negotiating various demands to do so and choosing, for her own reasons, to adapt to that pressure (Johnson, Thompson, Smagorinsky & Fry, 2003). Further, even many English teachers feel unprepared to teach writing, and so continue to teach as they were taught (Applebee and Langer, 2011). Though when content knowledge falls short or is fragile, like in writing pedagogy, teachers must rely on other resources to make decisions about teaching.

Teacher beliefs are central to the ways teachers navigate the myriad decisions they must make in any given day, and beliefs often dictate action far more powerfully than knowledge (Pajares, 1992). Most notably, beliefs take precedence over knowledge when “the teacher is uncertain of what information is needed or what behavior is appropriate” (Pajares, 1992, p. 311). This reliance on belief happens often because the classroom is an entangled domain of competing Discourses that only partially overlap or align (Nespor, 1987). These partial overlaps mean teachers often make decisions by relying on their beliefs, as well as partial knowledge and understanding of any given situation. Research on writing teachers’ beliefs about writing, which have focused mostly on preservice teachers, support this more general understanding of the intersection of experience and belief leading to practice (Norman & Spenser, 2005; Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; Daisey, 2009). Teachers, then, rely on beliefs, knowledge, and their experience to make decisions about the teaching of writing as they navigate tensions between competing Discourses and overlapping systems.

A lengthy enumeration of the tensions caused by overlapping discourse systems that English language arts teachers navigate might include

... the opposition between instructional methods and curricular outcome; the tension inherent in addressing student variability within normative expectations; the challenge of applying valid assessment measures to educative purposes; the difficulty of designing a developmentally progressive curriculum across grade levels and content areas; the tension of redistributing teacher expertise and authority with specialist support; and, not least of all, the struggle between standardized educational programs and assessments on behalf of efficient administration of mandated policies, and responsible teacher autonomy warranted by reflective practice and professional development on behalf of educational effectiveness. (Hruby, Read, Landon-Hays, 2011, np).

This list ranges over many of the issues covered above and highlights the myriad Discourses that intersect in a single classroom. Of this list, the last struggle is perhaps the one that encompasses so many others, the tension between standardization and autonomy. Policies focused on standardization include the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) (Boeher-Jennings, 2005) in the state, to larger trends toward the marketization of literacy (Luke & Woods, 2010). Phantom policies (Franzak, 2008), or implicit understandings of what counts in ELA curriculum and instruction, too, are also features of classrooms. They often move teachers toward standard instructional models or texts, sometimes in opposition to the explicit policies of the department, school, or district. Regardless of the origin of the policy, teachers must decide the ways in which policies will impact their classroom and students. Teacher autonomy accounts for the ways that teachers implement, or resist implementation, of policies in the classroom (Kennedy, 2005; Goldstein, 2008). This decision-making around policies, then, becomes the hallmark of how teachers navigate the contested spaces of their classrooms. Curriculum, then, is made from a series of such choices (Connally & Clandinin, 1992). The reality is that teacher decisions are

constrained by various Discourses and policies at various levels, within and outside the classroom.

Teachers' levels of control over different facets of their work, which affects the decisions available to them, vary across the contexts of their classrooms. They report

...major levels of control over selecting the particular concepts they taught daily in their classrooms and the particular techniques they used to teach those concepts... [a]

moderate to major amount of control over the objects for the courses they taught, over the standards by which they evaluated and graded their pupils, and over how much

homework they assigned. (Ingersoll, 2002, p. 75)

Within the context of an classroom, then, teachers have the most control over the decisions that dictate daily functioning of the microsystem of their classroom. But outside of their classroom

walls, "teachers also consistently indicated they held less-than-moderate levels of power in larger, schoolwide decisions that shaped their instructional program" (Ingersoll, 2002, p. 75).

Stated another way, decisions happening further away from their classroom—in mesosystems and exosystems of the ecology—teachers reported having less and less control. Important to

consider, as well, is that teachers' power is relative to that of the principal and that "principals view themselves as the most powerful of these groups within schools, and they see teachers as

the least powerful within schools... [and] are influential more often than their board or district"

(Ingersoll, 2002, p. 83). So even if teachers wanted to make decisions that allowed them to create

opportunities for "engaged academic literacy" (Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 2010, p. 99), they are

often constrained by individuals and policies, working within Discourses more powerful than they are.

Though these constraints are not all that define teachers and the decisions they make. Teacher agency and self-efficacy do play a role in the ways in which teachers make decisions within the ecologies of their classroom (Vaughn & Faircloth, 2011). These “thoughtfully adaptive teachers” (Fairbanks, Duffy, Faircloth, He, Levin, Rohr, & Stein, 2010) consider “*when* to apply ‘what and ‘how’ knowledge and *when not* to” (p. 167). More broadly, these teachers have “vision” (Duffy, 2002).

The best teachers are not followers. They evaluate directives from methods course instructors, inservice speakers, teachers’ guides, and other authoritative sources; override such directives when, in their judgment, something else will work better; and revise and invent yet again on the basis of instructional results. In short, they adjust, modify, adapt and invent; they do not emulate. (p. 333)

So even within the tensions, constraints, and lack of control inherent in a classroom’s ecology, a teacher can make decisions that navigate the classroom context in a way that fits the context of the decisions, the realms of knowledge the teacher brings to bear on the decision, and the beliefs that the teacher holds dear. It is no wonder, then, “that classroom teaching . . . is perhaps the most complex, most challenging, and most demanding, subtle, nuanced and frightening activity that our species ever invented” (Shulman, 2004, p. 504 as quoted in Fairbanks, et al). The above discussion may make it seem as though teachers are only faced with impossible decisions, made in isolation, that force them to question their beliefs and comply with policies outside of their control. This dire situation is not entirely the case as teachers have communities within and outside the school, that can support their teaching and continued development as a professional.

Professional communities: PLCs, departments, and Writing Project sites.

In an ecological model, professional networks are mesosystems as seen from the perspective of the classroom ecology. Classroom teachers actively participate in these systems and bring that knowledge and experience with them into classrooms. Professional communities can support teachers as they attempt to negotiate and adapt to the dominant Discourses that circulate within and beyond their classroom, notably the conservative trend in the profession (Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2001) and the skills discourse in writing. Though not all professional communities are supportive of teachers' development. In the context of schools, these networks can be formal or informal (Craig, 2009). Informal knowledge communities serve purposes identified by teachers, whereas formal professional learning communities" (PLCs) serve administrative priorities (p. 603). The goals of these informal and formal communities are often in conflict because they are different systems representing different Discourses. Most basically, informal knowledge communities are "organically lived" (p. 602) and concerned with practical views of knowledge (Connally & Clandinin, 1992). These communities meet teachers' needs in ways that are less responsive to administrative needs, but useful for teachers in their daily teaching lives.

PLCs, on the other hand, are formal knowledge communities that are fostered by administrative policies. They often take a "formal view of knowledge" and have "to do with teachers walking the administrative party line and being accountable to that line" (Craig, 2009, p. 614). Though "using the term PLC does not demonstrate that a learning community does, in fact, exist" (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008, p. 82). Ideally, a PLC allows teachers to, "[t]hrough collaborative inquiry... explore new ideas, current practice, and evidence of student learning using processes that respect them as the experts on what is needed to improve their own practice and increase student learning" (Vescio, et al., 2008, p. 89). Whether a PLC actually does this

work of inquiry and reflection is a question that must be asked individually of each PLC. Though imposed knowledge communities are likely to lead to teachers assuming ulterior motives of the administrators doing the imposing (Craig, 2009). Organizing teacher professional development around mandated PLCs can be one of the ways in which administrators exercise control over teachers, though such an exercise of control does not guarantee teachers will build professional knowledge or that participation in a PLC will advance student learning. Administratively sanctioned teacher communities, however, often fail to actually change instruction because there are other, more powerful, structures that hold sway over teacher decision-making.

Departments, unlike PLCs, are formal professional structures within schools that are, counterintuitively, less beholden to administrators and have the potential to be powerful social forces. Within secondary schools, departmental structures cordon off disciplines into subject-specific groups of teachers who are often physically separated from other departments in the school. Much like the English language arts curriculum is marked by its historical roots in higher education and general trends toward the specialization of knowledge, so too are departments the outgrowth of secondary schools' connections to higher education. The creation of departments grew out of a "modern understanding of knowledge as distinct fields" (Siskin, 1994, p. 4). This division of schools into subject-specific departments has meant that "disciplines shape not only the choices of content," but "understandings of what teaching and learning are all about" (p. 11). Though departments do not only serve these purposes, they are also "social worlds [that] both provide a potential site for strong and meaningful membership within a collegial community, and out of that community generate a cultural mechanism which can reinforce mediate, or transform school culture" (p. 92). English departments often have more control over curricular content than more sequenced subjects like math, though because student test scores in ELA are part of federal

and state accountability systems, there is an increased pressure for English departments to adequately perform on high-stakes testing (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995).

Departmental organization can, like other communities of teachers, serve to support teachers in their work in classroom. Supportive departments are marked by several characteristics (Hill, 1995) that include, “teacher learning, which sustains an environment of inquiry” (p. 126), “active sharing of teaching experience” (p. 128), “collaborative norms” (p. 128), “leadership [that] provides opportunities so that teachers can become comfortable assuming leadership roles [and] establishes democratic procedures for making key departmental decisions” (p. 130), and “teachers who actively contribute to school and district problem solving” (p. 132). There are also departments on the weak end of the spectrum marked by the lack of coherence or that act “solely as an administrative, rather than a social, unit” (Ball & Lacey, 1994, p. 105). So departments often define the ways in which individual teachers organize their work in secondary schools, and can have direct influence on the ways in which teachers teach, though much of this work happens because of the social relationships inherent in departments, not particular organizational features. Those social relationships are also essential to out of school professional communities in which teachers engage.

Professional networks that rest outside of the school setting can have advantages over those with explicit school ties (Grossman, et al., 2001). Lieberman and Wood (2000), in examining a site of the National Writing Project, found that teachers “gain confidence in knowledge and experience within the context of a community that values inquiry and dialogue [and that] tempers complacency and intransigence” (p. 300). So a mesosystem like a writing project site, which sits outside the control of administrators or districts, can support teacher learning in ways that PLCs or departments find more difficult (Grossman, et al., 2001). Further,

these external networks are able to “involve members in a variety of activities that reflect the purposes and changing needs of their participants” (Lieberman & Wood, 2000, p. 226). In these communities, administrative priorities do not take precedence; instead the teachers have control over the ways they engage in, and even the direction of, the community. Whitney (2008) finds similarly that teachers gain confidence through their experience of the Summer Institute of a writing project site, an intensive four-week professional development experience crafted around writing and the teaching of writing. Further, those teachers who most engaged with the writing aspects of the institute— weaving together personal and professional—were the most transformed in their learning (p. 176-8). Writing projects can also influence teachers after the summer institute when teacher return to the classroom and “immediate time restraints and tunnel vision [around] having their students perform well on state examinations becomes their primary concern” (Kaplan, 2009, p. 342). This engagement with teacher-directed knowledge, through the professional network made available through the National Writing Project, creates a community that supports teachers in working with many of the dominant Discourses of conservatism, standardization, and skills, navigating their classroom ecologies and teaching in thoughtfully adaptive ways. While these external communities can be very influential for teachers, so too can administrative structures at the school and district level.

Classroom contexts: Principals, coaches, and districts.

The notion that classrooms are surrounded by various contexts with different degrees of influence is not a new idea (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994). Though empirical research that focuses specifically on those contexts always seems to be wanting often because such research narrowly focuses on the classroom in isolation. Not often enough does research look at departments, administrations, or districts in an attempt to identify the ways that these

intermediary contexts influence what goes on at the classroom level, through that is changing. Researchers have begun to focus more on exosystem contexts, specifically principals, coaches, and school districts.

Researchers generally agree that principals and coaches can take on instructional leadership positions and influence instruction and learning in the classroom. Though the particular characteristics of principals or coaches that contribute to this influence, as well as how and when those characteristics are relevant, are questions under continued discussion in the literature that ranges across principalship, teacher leadership, and instructional coaching (Neumerski, 2012). And the field generally knows far more about this work of instructional leadership at the elementary level than it does at the secondary level, though the two contexts likely vary enough to make the difference salient. Generally speaking, “[t]he degree to which principals were able to carry out instructional leadership tasks depended in part on the extent to which they were able to deal with managerial issues first” (March, Kerr, Ikemoto, Darilek, Suttorp, Zimmer and Barney, 2005, p. 47). Though dealing with the minutiae of the job was not enough to be an instructional leader in ELA. Principals “who have strong knowledge of and belief in effective writing practices” are more likely to influence writing instruction by “organiz[ing] the school and act[ing] in ways that help teachers do their best work” (McGhee & Lew, 2007, p. 372). There is also research that points to a principal’s instructional leadership as the “most important factor in student learning in ELA, in part because of their indirect influence on teacher instruction through collaboration and communication around instruction between peer teachers” (Supovitz, Sirinides & May, 2010, p. 46). So, unsurprisingly, not only can principals directly affect ELA instruction and student learning, they can influence the climate in which instructional coaches and teachers work.

The work of instructional coaches is less defined and understood than that of the principal as the position is relatively new, dating to the 1980s (Neumerski, 2012). Though it is clear that the more support a principal gives to the work of the coach, the more likely teachers are to engage the coach for instructional support (Matsemura, Satoris, Bickel, Garnier, 2009; Ferguson, 2011). There is much conflicting research about exactly what roles coaches should take, modeling lessons or not for fear of making teachers feel inadequate, observing teachers and providing feedback, or not because the evaluative nature of that relationship promotes teacher resistance to coaching (Ferguson, 2011). Coaches navigate this complex intersection of roles, expectations, and relationships by taking on different identities as necessary for the particular situation they find themselves in, trying to both distribute power to the teachers they are coaching and exercise power to influence literacy instruction (Rainville & Jones, 2008). They walk a fine line between teachers and principals, building camaraderie with both to support teachers in improving instruction and supporting principals in enforcing administrative policies (Ferguson, 2011). The alignment between the coaches' roles in the classroom and school, and the teachers' expectations for the coach, determines the extent to which coaching can influence instruction. Like with principals, if coaches spend too much time not coaching, teachers do not see the coaches' role as one that is relevant to their work in the classroom (Smith, 2007).

Like principals creating school climates in support of coaching or collaboration, school districts can have an effect on the ways in which principals, coaches, and teachers engage in the work of managing and teaching (Honig, 2012). Though compared to teachers and principals, there has been less empirical focus on the role districts can play in shaping instruction at the classroom level. The work that has been done has been relatively decontextualized from actual school practice, most notably the research has ignored the subject-specific context in which

instruction happens (Burch & Spillane, 2005). However, research points to the ways districts can influence classroom instruction. One key role of the district, especially with ELA teachers, is that “districts can and do play a key role in focusing and shaping the concerns of new teachers and in providing opportunities for professional learning” (Grossman & Thompson, 2004, p. 281). And while district influences were generally weak (p. 295), “the structures districts create also have consequences for the nature of teachers’ conversations about teaching and learning” (p. 298). For example, district contexts were powerful indicators in the degree to which teachers implemented standardized testing requirements (Dooley & Assaf, 2009). Several factors contributed to a district being more or less successful in influencing classroom instruction, mainly the alignment between the array of district policies (Marsh, et al., 2005), the balance between standardized reforms and school-level flexibility (Marsh, et al., 2005), and the extent to which “teachers [could] see the relevance of the district initiative to their daily work” (Massell & Goertz, 2002, p. 60). One of the simplest, yet most powerful, ways that a district could influence classroom instruction was when district leaders visited schools and classrooms (Stein & D’Amico, 2002, p. 74). So while the district might often feel far removed from the work of daily instruction (Grossman & Thompson, 2004), it is a relevant system for a classroom ecology.

Conclusion

This chapter developed the metaphor of ecology into a theoretically and methodologically robust perspective. I discussed how I drew on EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as a way of examining the overlapping systems that intersect around a single ELA classroom, as well as how I reconceptualized the ways in which systems interact. I complicated a simple image of systems by drawing on Discourses (Gee, 1990/2008) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) to better understand the social, cultural, and historical contexts of these systems. Finally, I

discussed how boundary objects (Star & Geisemer, 1989; Star, 2010) can serve as a conceptual tool for understanding how individuals navigate the boundaries and boundary spaces between these multiple, and often conflicting, systems. All of this surrounds a goal of crafting an ecological perspective that can more fully reveal the complex and messy (Fleckenstein, et al., 2011) reality that is a classroom. The review of literature examined macrosystemic Discourses at work in education, specifically around the ELA curriculum, adolescent literacy, the role of the teacher in the classroom, teachers' professional communities, and administrative and district contexts for schools. Each of these elements of the macrosystem influence the literacy practices available to students and teachers in a single classroom. Chapters four, five, and six will follow up on these lines of thought, examining how district and administrative systems create tensions in the classroom, how professional communities can support teachers in navigating these tensions, and how the classroom at the center of the ecology functions. First, though, chapter three outlines the methodology for this research.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

Introduction

I engaged in an embedded case study of the ecology of one eighth grade English language arts reading (ELAR) classroom at Ortega Middle School in the Del Rio Independent School District in the State of Texas to answer the following research questions.

1. What characterizes the literacy ecology of an eighth grade English language arts reading classroom?
2. How is that classroom's literacy ecology influenced by broader systems of literacy and schooling, acknowledging that systems can be both systems of thought and material instantiations of such thinking?

In the chapter that follows, I describe the research site, participants, design, data collection and analysis, the trustworthiness of the design, and my positionality within the ecology of the research site.

Site and Participants

Purposeful selection: District, school, and classroom.

The selection of this district, school, and classroom as the focus of the case study has reasons unique, typical, and instrumental. This classroom is “a unique sample [that] is based on unique, atypical, perhaps rare attributes or occurrences of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriman, 2001, p. 62). The unique attributes include the teacher's knowledge of the workshop model for writing instruction, the workshop structure of the classroom, and the departmental cohesion formed by participation in a professional network focused on the teaching of writing. This classroom ecology functions represents a “typical case” (Yin, 2008, loc. 1228) because the teacher's and students' demographics increasingly represent the reality in the US. Further, like

most classrooms, schools, and districts across the United States, the teacher and students feel pressured to raise standardized test scores as a measure of student achievement for state and federal accountability systems. This selection is also instrumental because this classroom and its contexts “provide[d] insight into an issue or refinement of theory [and can be] expected to advance our understanding of that other interest” (Stake, 1995, p. 88). To engage in case study research with an ecological perspective requires extensive knowledge of and access to the various contexts within the ecology, as well as historical knowledge of the setting. While I discuss my involvement with Del Rio ISD, Ortega MS, the focal teacher, and the professional communities more fully below, at the time of the study I had been involved with the district for five years, known the focal teacher for six years, and held administrative duties with the local Writing Project site for three years. This deep involvement gave me both the historical knowledge and access that enabled the case study to engage in this instrumental work around ecology.

District history and demographics.

Ortega Middle School, in Del Rio ISD, is on the eastern edge of a growing metropolis in the Southwest. While the school itself lies within the boundaries of the anchor city for this metropolis, with a population nearing 1 million, the school district is situated in the area east of the city and serves eight unincorporated communities. Del Rio is an exurb and contends with the many issues that grow out of that precarious position, including lack of infrastructure, municipal government, and geographic coherence. Del Rio is currently the home of the international airport for the metropolis, which contributes both population and an economic engine to the area. It is also the site of a newly opened racetrack, which contributes tax dollars to the district and shuts down the schools for days at a time around major races. Prior to the municipal airport, Del Rio

hosted the US Air Force at the same site. There is a rural, agriculturally-based population in Del Rio that has a long history in the area. Many of the new subdivisions in the area were built on former ranches and pecan orchards. That traditional population is being augmented significantly by migration into the area that began in the 1990s. The exurban growth patterns for Del Rio focused on housing priced below \$100,000. Residents being pushed out of the anchor city due to gentrification, as well as the easy credit and push toward homeownership in the early 2000s, means that the median income for Del Rio is \$40,392. More detailed census data is unavailable for the district because it is not an incorporated community.

School demographics.

Ortega Middle School, located on the western edge of the Del Rio district pulls students from new subdivisions, the areas around the airport, and the far eastern edge of the anchor city. Ortega, one of three middle schools in the district, is a relatively large middle school with 906 students. Because of its feeder pattern, Ortega's demographics represent what would be traditionally considered an urban school (Table 3.1), even though the district is not primarily urban.

Table 3.1: Demographics of Ortega Middle School

African American	6.2%		Economically Disadvantaged	88.1%
Hispanic	87.3%		Limited English Proficient	24.1%
White	5.7%		At-Risk	60.7%
Mobility	19.7%			

Ortega is a school whose demographics reflect a growing reality in schools across the nation, particularly those in the southwest (NCES, 2010), as more and more students identify as non-white. The state does not distribute school or district level data on the specifics of student language proficiency collected by the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment

(TELPAS) so it is difficult to determine the number of students who might be long-term English language learners or have achieved levels of English acquisition beyond “Limited English Proficient.” While the state has only labeled a fifth of Ortega students as “Limited English Proficient,” according to the teachers at Ortega, more than half identify as bilingual or Spanish speakers. The demographics of Ortega MS are being echoed across the Southwest and the nation. For example, the latest projects from the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), expect a 36 percent increase in Latino/a students enrolled in school by 2019. So with its exurban location, mostly Latino/a, economically disadvantaged student population, many of whom are Spanish speakers, Ortega was a school where the literacy practices of the students deserve attention as a way of more fully understanding the literacy practices of a growing portion of the school population.

Within the current accountability system in Texas, standardized test scores are often used as descriptors of a school, as well as data from which policy and curriculum decisions are made. Examining the available data from the Texas Education Agency, it became clear that the language arts test scores from Ortega were both worse and better than average. Table 3.2 is the passing rates for students on the first administration of the TAKS reading test in the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years for both Del Rio ISD and Ortega Middle School (TEA, 2011).

Table 3.2: 2009-2010 Reading and Writing TAKS Scores for Ortega MS

	Year	District	Ortega		Year	District	Ortega
Grade 6				Grade 7			
	2009	75%	70%	Reading	2009	77%	74%
	2010	75%	74%		2010	78%	83%
Grade 8							
	2009	86%	85%	Writing	2009	88%	86%
	2010	86%	81%		2010	85%	88%

There is not data available for the 2011-2012 school year, the year of this study, because the state transitioned to a new test, the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and

the scores have not been released to the public. Ortega consistently has pass rates for the ELAR tests that are below the district average. Though generally the movement in scores is toward higher passing rates. Further, in comparison with demographically similar middle schools in Texas, Ortega outscores 60 percent of those schools in reading (TEA, 2010). While test scores are by no means the only measure of a school, these scores demonstrate that Ortega is doing acceptable, though not commended, while outperforming its peer schools.

Administration and ELAR faculty.

In 2011-2012, Ortega had 55 teachers and five administrators. One third of the staff was categorized minority and fully one quarter were new teachers with between one and five years of experience. What follows is a discussion of the adult participants in the study (Table 3.3; Appendix A).

Table 3.3: Key Participants

Name	Role
Alice	Del Rio ISD ELA Coordinator
Richard	Principal at Ortega
Dennis	Instructional administrator at Ortega
Annabeth	Eighth grade, focal teacher
Olivia	Eighth grade
Tina	Seventh grade, department chair
Harriet	Seventh grade
Jennifer	Sixth grade
Rebekah	Sixth grade

The principal, Richard, has been at Ortega for two years. He moved to Ortega after serving as an assistant principal for Del Rio High School for five years and taught for 16 years before that. Richard was the third principal in as many years. This was the first year at Ortega for the instructional administrator, Dennis. His job was to serve as an instructional coach to all subject

areas and coordinate the school's tutoring program. He came to Ortega from a math coaching position at a large, successful high school in the anchor city where he had previously been a highly regarded math teacher.

At the time of this research, the English language arts reading (ELAR) department from which the focal teacher was chosen consisted of six teachers, two at each grade level. In addition, there were three special education inclusion teachers, one at each grade level, and 3 Response-to-Intervention teachers who were all considered part of the ELAR department. Of the core ELAR teachers, all six were women with experience ranging from 16 years to four years. Three of the teachers had experience at other schools. Three had worked their entire career at Ortega. All of the teachers claimed to use a workshop model to organize their classroom literacy instruction. For the 2011-2012 school year, the eighth grade students will have had all of their previous middle school literacy instruction following a workshop model. Five of the six teachers are members of the local Writing Project site and are active participants in that professional community. This local site was also a presence in the school through professional development workshops and coaching throughout the 2010-2011 school year.

Focal teacher.

Annabeth, the focal teacher for this study, was demographically typical for the state of Texas. As a white woman teaching a class of mostly minority students, she fit into a teaching force that is 66 percent white and 77 percent female (TEA, 2011). The 2011-2012 academic year was her fifth year of teaching, which was similar to her district as a whole where the average was 4.8 years (TEA, 2011). She completed her teacher certification in English language arts for grades 8-12 at a nationally-known private school two-hours drive from the school she now teaches in. Annabeth earned a master's degree in education from the local Research 1, public

university. She was deeply involved with the local Writing Project site, as mentioned above, a key professional community for her and the ELAR department as a whole. At the time of the study, she was the co-director for site, which meant she was an instructor in the annual summer invitational institute, organized workshops with other teacher-consultants, and served as a consultant for other local school districts. She also participated in a study group focused on writing for college, career and life that I facilitated. At the end of this academic year, Annabeth actually left Ortega to take a middle school teaching position in a far more affluent district after being pursued by two district administrators there.

Annabeth's classroom ran on a workshop model of writing instruction (Bomer, 2011, 1995; Atwell, 1986). This meant students were generally involved in reading and writing of their choice for a majority of their time in the class. A typical class was as follows: Annabeth began the class with minilessons lasting from 10-15 minutes, then students worked independently for 30-40 minutes while Annabeth individually conferenced with students. Class ended with brief reflections on the work, if time allowed, and reminders about homework or other business. Annabeth tried to alternate days between reading and writing focused around particular genres, shifting genres approximately in line with the district's six-weeks schedule for grading periods. The instructional format and genre study was interrupted for test preparation or district-mandated testing for at least a few days every month. Sometimes the genre study aligned with tests, such as poetry in November and drama in February, though often the testing revolved around unrelated content. Annabeth had been refining her workshop instruction for three years, since attending the writing project's four-week summer institute focused on writing instruction.

Student participants.

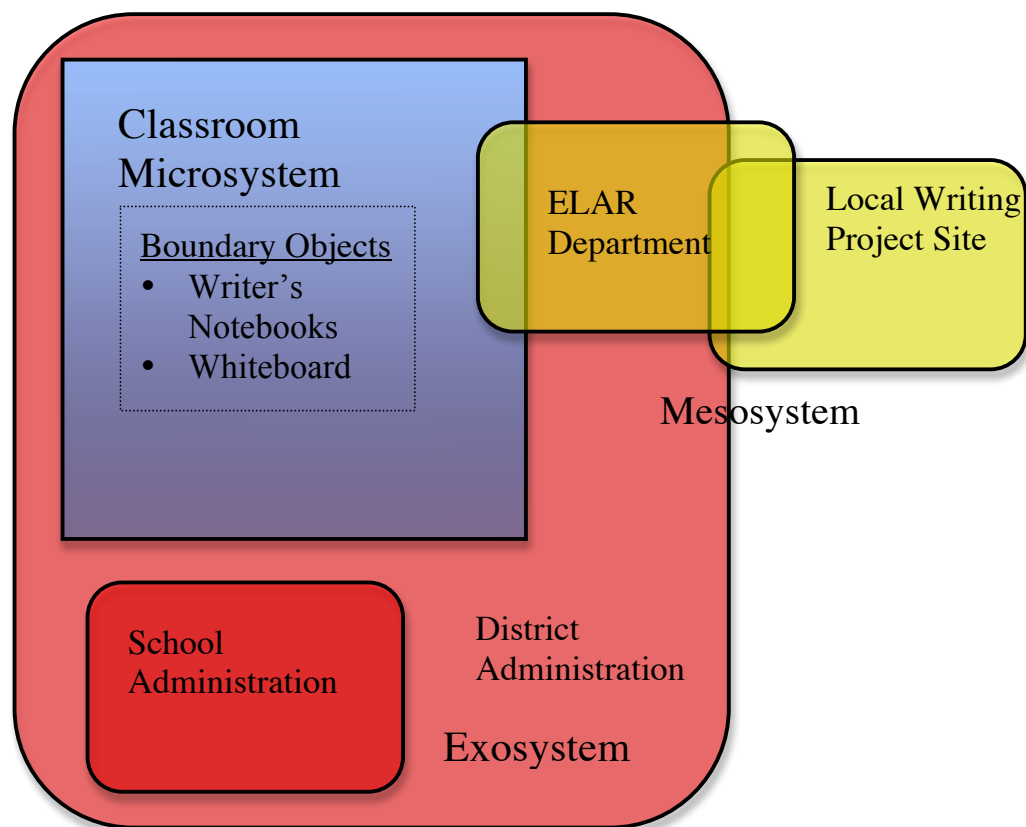
I observed Annabeth's third period class from October through April of the 2011-2012 school year. This was an on-level ELAR class that Annabeth reported as having the lowest scores of any of her classes on their seventh grade TAKS tests. This was also the class with the highest mobility rate. Thirty students were in this class across the year. Of that number, 23 were in the class for the whole school year. Eleven of the permanent students were female and 12 were male; three were Africa-American and 20 were Latino/a. I received informed consent from twenty-five of thirty students enrolled across the year. The purposeful selection of this class as typical, out of the six Annabeth taught, revolved around demographic, curricular, and personal considerations. Most of her classes had around 30 students, and the three on-level classes mirrored the school's demographics. I ruled out the pre-Advanced Placement classes as atypical because of their generally high test scores and concentration of white students. Of the remaining classes, one had only four girls in a class of 28 and the other the teacher specifically asked me not to choose because she felt she had not, as of late September, developed a rapport with them. That left her third period class. For reasons unrelated to the class demographics this proved a fortuitous choice as lunch and activity time, essentially recess, followed third period. This schedule meant that Annabeth and I debriefed after almost every in-class observation I did.

Research Design

Drawing on Yin (2008), Merriman (2001), and Stake (1995), I employed an embedded single-case study design (Yin, 2008, loc. 1194) to engage in my examination of a single ELA classroom. There were elements of ethnography to this case study, as I spent an extended time in the field. Due to my long experience with the school, the year of the study and previously, I had become an insider in the school's culture (Foley, 2002; Heath & Street, 2008). This model of embedded case study utilized two levels of sampling within the ecology (Merriman, 2001, p. 64-

5). The first was the bounded case of the microsystem of an eighth grade, ELAR class in the Del Rio Independent School District. This classroom is considered a case because it is “a specific, a complex functioning thing” (Stake, 1995, p. 2). The second level of sampling was from the mesosystems and exosystems within the ecology of the classroom. Specifically, I drew from the mesosystems of two professional communities to which the teacher belonged—the ELA department and the local Writing Project site—and two exosystems with direct influence in the classroom microsystem—the school’s administration and the district’s ELA coordinator. Figure 3.1 is a graphic representation of the specific cases examined.

Figure 3.1: Cases within the ecology



There are two common, and opposing, concerns with an embedded case study model that are mirrored in ecological examinations: either too local or too global a focus. I avoided a case study that is “conducted at an unduly abstract level, lacking sufficiently clear measures or data” (Yin,

2008, loc. 1275) by grounding my data collection in the microsystem of the classroom. At the same time, engaging in data collection in mesosystems and exosystems helped me avoid a case study that “focuses only on the subunit level and fails to return to the larger unit of analysis” (Yin, 2008, loc. 1292).

Data Collection and Corpus

What follows is a brief overview of my data collection practices, which are followed up more specifically in individual sections below. The data collection and analysis for this case study of an eighth grade ELAR classroom began with a “getting acquainted phase” (Stake, 1995, p. 49) in September and October. This phase was followed by intensive data collection from November through March. Data collected during this time included: field notes in the classroom, field notes from meetings, student work samples, photographs of the classroom, stimulated recall interviews with the teacher and students, documents, and emails. The first week of April was the last time I was able to visit the classroom to collect data because the focal teacher, who was pregnant, was put on hospital bed rest and under doctor’s orders not to talk about work. The substitute did not follow up on my requests to observe the class and did not follow the lesson plans that had been left for the class, although I was able to visit in May and say thank you and good-bye to the students. I spent the rest of month of April interviewing the faculty of the ELAR department and the principal, as well as attending meetings. These three stages of research and the tasks that I engaged in during them can be found in Table 3.4. Table 3.5 includes a count of all of the data I collected from September 2011 to June of 2012.

Table 3.4: Stages of Research

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
<i>September – October 2011</i>	<i>November 2011 – March 2012</i>	<i>April – May 2012</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe class • Collect field notes • Debrief observations • Informal conversations • Photograph student work • Photograph classroom • Collect documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview teacher • Observe class • Collect field notes • Debrief observations • Interview students • Attend meeting • Photograph student work • Photograph classroom • Collect documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview ELAR faculty • Interview principal • Attend meetings • Photograph student work
Initial analysis, memo writing	Ongoing analysis, memo writing, selection of embedded units of analysis	Ongoing analysis, memo writing

Table 3.5: Data corpus

Type of data	Amount	Type of data	Amount
Class observations	37 days	Monday Meeting agenda	3
Informal conversations	36	Official documents	teacher's instructional program binder; writing guidelines; philosophy statement
Planning meetings	2	Student work	1 set of published essays; 1 set of mock test essays; 3 sets of mind maps
Department meetings	2	Photographs of student notebooks	481
Monday Meetings	6	Photographs of students working	126
Focal teacher semi-structured interview	1	Handouts	10
Focal teacher unstructured interviews	18	Professional development handouts	3
Faculty interview	5	Photographs of classroom	75
Student interviews	9	Administrator interview	1

After each visit to the field, I tended the data I had gathered. I expanded my field notes in Scrivener, a composing program, and used the commenting function to note salient events, track

emerging themes, or make methodological notes. I would often use the university classroom, which was unoccupied during the day, to photograph student notebooks. I downloaded and tagged photographs in iPhoto. I also made photocopies of documents, labeled them with identifying information, and placed them in a binder. Interviews or informal conversations that had been recorded were downloaded and labeled as well. All of the data I collected, with the exception of hard-copies of documents or student work, was collated in a Scrivener file and stored in appropriate folders. Documents were stored in chronological order in a binder.

Bi-weekly throughout the research, I wrote analytic memos after reviewing all of the data I had collected. These memos focused on identifying systems using a priori categories from EST to develop a “firmer empirical grounding” (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 10) for the ecological perspective. After that grounding was established, the memos helped me move to more theoretical samplings of data (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). These memos also served to reveal gaps in the data around a priori categories and emerging themes. These memos were likewise filed in Scrivener.

Data from earlier research.

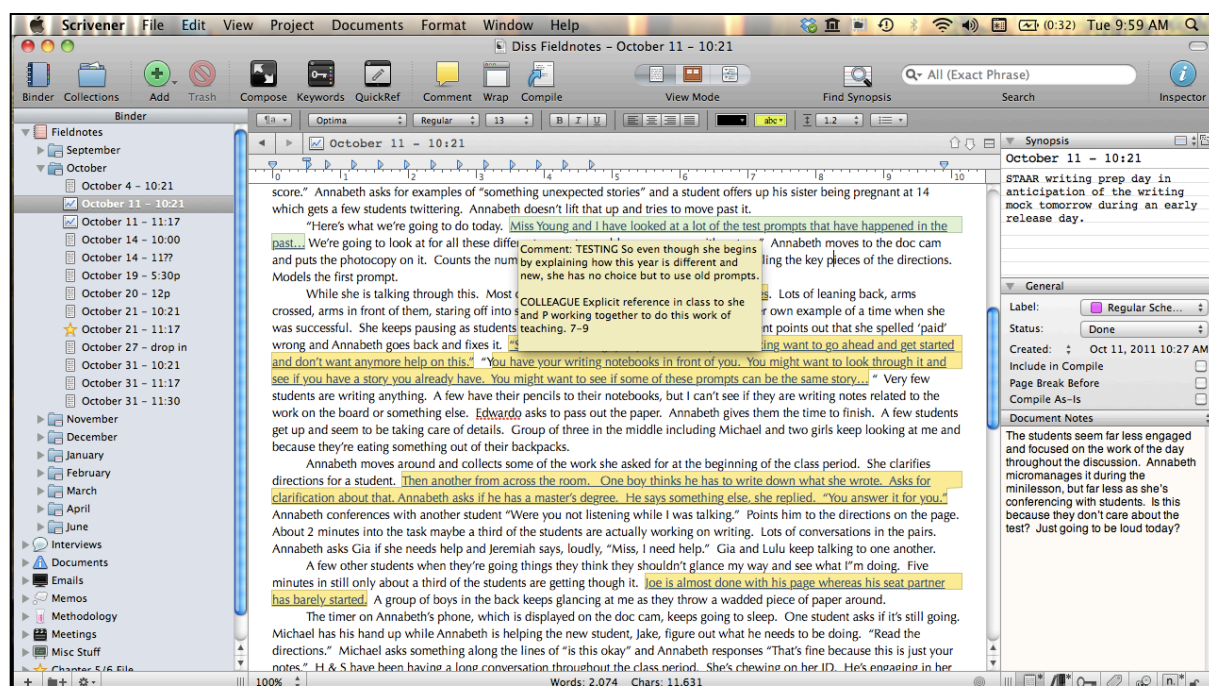
As mentioned above, I have been involved as a researcher at this school since the fall of 2010. The focus of my work before this study was on the ways in which the two eighth grade teachers were using digital technologies to enrich their writing curriculum. Across the 2010-2011 academic year, I observed classes and recorded field notes, went with classes to the computer lab, took photographs of the classroom, and interviewed the teachers. I also participated in planning sessions with the two teachers around their instruction around the digital technologies. When portions of this data became salient for answering historical questions that arose in the course of this research, I used it to deepen my understanding of the ways the ecology changed

over time by giving more detailed the context for events, documents, or policies that were salient for this research.

Electronic management of data.

As mentioned above, I kept an electronic field notebook as a Scrivener file on my laptop (Figure 3.2) that allowed for a myriad of research functions in a single program. Understanding how I used the program is useful for seeing how I handled a range of tasks involved in collecting and analyzing data. Along the left side is the list of documents I created including field notes, interview transcripts, documents, emails, memos, methodological notes, meetings, and miscellaneous files. The main screen in the center is an example of a field note. The highlighted text references both expanded field notes and coding comments. The floating text box is the comment that is attached to that highlighted bit of text. Along the right side is a synopsis of the day, my categorization of the type of document, and a brief reflective note that I did immediately after class ended.

Figure 3.2: Scrivener Interface



For each observation, I created a separate document within Scrivener. I labeled each individual document with the date and time, as well as a few short sentences that described the content of the note. An example might include “Beginning of drama unit. Activating knowledge activity and then pretest modeled on the STAAR” (field note, 11/29/2011). Each document was likewise organized by date, with file folders for each month I was in the field. Scrivener allowed for each document to have several categories of descriptive data associated with it. Each document was tagged a descriptor about the type of observation or data, including interview, doc/artifact, regular schedule, modified schedule, special event, meeting, informal convo. I uploaded all scanned documents and emails, as well as selected photographs and recordings, and similarly included descriptive data. Memos were also created in this field notebook. This same file was where a majority of data analysis took place, which will be described in more detail below. The ability of Scrivener to handle all of these files, display them in a variety of formats, and keep them all in one interface was incredibly helpful in being able to see both the whole ecology and the specifics of the classroom microsystem.

Participant observation.

On the spectrum between participant and observer, my role generally changed depending on the context. While observing the focal class, though my presence made me a participant, I worked to be an unobtrusive observer by staying in my seat, being in place before the students came into the room and leaving only after they had left. Generally the students ignored me during class, though on the rare occasion when they asked me questions, I would answer and assist them as I could. During the intensive data collection period from November to March, I did move around the class, reading student work and engaging in informal conversations with the students around their work. I avoided explicitly instructional language in these conversations,

focusing on asking them what they were doing and why. Though I acknowledge that these questions certainly could change the work the students were engaging in. During this time I jotted notes down in a notebook, which was more unobtrusive than my laptop. I would also carried my camera with me while walking around and asked to take pictures of students working or students' work.

Contexts with faculty also ranged on the participant observer spectrum. In departmental and Monday Meetings, I was an observer, sitting in the back and taking field notes on my laptop. In debriefing sessions with the focal teacher, she would often ask me for opinions on what I had observed, what she might try in the next class, or how to interpret students work or behavior. In PLC meetings with the eighth grade team, similar planning and curricular conversations would happen and I would be solicited for my opinion on ideas. Given my long history of working in a professional development capacity, this interaction model was one with which the teachers were very comfortable and I assisted as I could maintain the rapport we had built. As with all ethnographic research, I kept focused on the goal of the research while not removing myself so far from the community as to break the rapport I had built with the faculty and students. As a way of tracking my participation in the field, I kept reflective field notes attached to particular field notes that were "an introspective record of the [my] experience in the field [that] include[d] ideas, fears, mistakes, confusion, and reactions to the experience and...thoughts about the research methodology itself" (Merriman, 2001, p. 110). What follows is a more detailed explanation of the range of data collected and how I collected it.

Observations and field notes.

Observation is a key component of educational case study research. "Observation is the best technique to use when an activity, event, or situation can be observed firsthand, when a

fresh perspective is desired, or when participants are not able or willing to discuss the topic under study” (Merriman, 2001, p. 97). I engaged in observations of the focal class and a variety of meetings, formal and informal, across the case study. Early observations were done, as mentioned above, to become acquainted with the particulars of the class under study. Later observations were focused on salient aspects of the class’s literacy ecology that emerged from the previous data (Adler & Adler, 2008). I observed the focal class two to three times a week from October to March as they engaged in their day-to-day work of building a literacy ecology. I sat in the back corner of the room by the classroom library for these observations, which was unobtrusive to student movements and allowed for a full view of the classroom. My field notes were typed on my laptop. As mentioned above, I would walk around the class, engage students in conversations around their work, and occasionally take pictures. What I could not type while walking around was either written in a field notebook, or typed into a document as soon as I returned to my laptop.

Events and conversations that occurred outside of the focal class in other places in the school influenced the classroom’s ecology, so I made attempts to observe a range of activities that involved Annabeth and her students outside of regular classroom instruction. I was able to observe several types of meetings during my six months in the school. There were six professional development meetings, called Monday Meetings, that happened on Monday during activity time from 11:20-11:40. I attended the two department meetings in the spring, as well as three eighth grade PLC meetings across the year. I did not observe any faculty meetings because the two I had planned to attend were cancelled at the last minute and I was unable to attend them when they were rescheduled. In January I was able to observe a meeting including the district ELA coordinator, department chair, instructional administrator, principal, the focal teacher her

eighth grade teaching partner, and the partner's special education inclusion teacher. This meeting happened after the administration had spent the day visiting ELAR classes around the school.

Informal conversations were a key component of my observations outside of the focal class. These happened with the focal teacher before school began in her room, in the hallway, at lunch, or in the library. I had informal conversations with other ELAR department faculty, and occasionally the principal or instructional administrator, in the hallway, at lunch, or in the library. When unobtrusive, I took notes during conversations and recorded them. If that was not possible I created field notes as soon as possible afterwards. Beyond meetings and informal conversations, I also attended two open houses after school, the Halloween fashion show, several class trips to the library, a poetry slam in the school's lecture hall, and a gallery walk of student essays in the cafeteria. I also met with the focal teacher outside of school as part of our study group, and attended three writing project workshops at which Ortega teachers were in attendance.

During my observations, regardless of whether they were in a class, a meeting, or an informal conversation, I took extensive field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 107), in which I tried "to react rather than to sift out what [seemed] important because it is often difficult to know what will and will not be useful in the future" (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 15). The bulk of my field notes recorded during observations were descriptive notes, "which present as much detail as possible" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 64). These field notes were typed into my laptop in any setting where that method was not obtrusive, including the classroom, meetings, and informal conversations. Where notes could not be typed directly into my laptop, I wrote notes in a field notebook, which were then typed as soon as possible following the observation. During the process of taking notes, I would try to capture the verbatim speech of the participants as often as

possible and marked those selections of text with quotation marks. I also recorded the physical demeanor of the participants, including posture, facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice. Notes also included interactions between individuals, activities in which individuals were engaged in—individually or as a group, and physical settings.

After each observation I went back to my notes and expanded them. This generally happened immediately following the observation in the university classroom in the school that was unoccupied. If that space was unavailable, I used the library. Notes were expanded within 24 hours of the observation. At that time I would also add reflective notes, “which might also be called observer comments” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 108-24). I would add a short, general reflective note in the Document Notes section to record analytic notes or comment on my frame of mind (Figure 3.1; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 122-2). When I expanded my field notes following an observation, I would use the commenting function in Scrivener to comment on specific incidents. I also used the commenting function to make methodological notes or correct errors. Each of these types of notes were reflected in a different color comment. Finally, I would also link any electronic data—photographs, audio recordings, or scan—with the particular document. Scrivener also allowed for the uploading of transcripts, scans, photographs, or documents into the main field notebook.

Interviews.

I relied on interviews to “to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so [I could] develop insights on how subjects interpret” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 96) the classroom. My interviews sought to

engage in a ‘real’ conversation with ‘give and take’ and empathic understanding. This makes the interview more honest, morally sound, and reliable, because it treats the

respondent as an equal, allows him or her to express personal feelings, and therefore presents a more 'realistic' picture than can be uncovered using traditional interview methods. (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992, pp. 67-8).

In this way, interviews allowed me to see how the individuals within the literacy ecology of their classroom understand that ecology because their own understanding was far more important to understanding the larger ecology than some "objective" reality of the ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Interviews ranged from unstructured (Fontana & Frey, 2008), to semi-structured (Merriman, 2001), to stimulated recall (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p. 259). Interview protocol for all semi-structured interviews can be found in Appendix B.

The unstructured interviews occurred throughout the research process and served to establish "human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain" (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 57). I engaged in unstructured interviews with the focal teacher after classroom observations. Over the course of the data collection period I engaged in 18 unstructured interviews with the focal teacher. These interviews generally lasted less than 10 minutes, though would occasionally take up the full 30-minute period. She would usually be at her desk and I would sit across from her and type notes as she talked. These often began with me extending an invitation to talk or her relating her perspective on something that happened that day. I would record these conversation as well as take notes during them.

The semistructured interviews were used "in an attempt to understand the complex behavior" (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 56) of the teacher and students in the classroom's literacy ecology, as well as other individuals within the literacy ecology. I engaged in semistructured interviews with the focal teacher, several students in the focal class, the five other ELAR teachers, and the principal. I tried to interview the instructional administrator, but he was

promoted to the district to coordinate the math curriculum and did not respond to emails requesting to a time to meet. I engaged in an hour-long semistructured interview with the focal teacher in November of 2011 to establish her perspective on the various influences at work in her classroom's ecology. I was not able to do a semistructured interview at the end of the year because, as I previously mentioned, she was placed on hospital bedrest and ordered not to discuss work. In April and May of 2012, I interviewed each of the five ELAR department members in school during a time that was convenient for them. The goal of these interviews was to develop a more complex understanding of the English department at Ortega, the interaction of the school and the district, and their understanding of workshop instruction. Finally, I engaged the principal in an hour-long interview in May of 2012. The focus of this interview was his understandings of the English department, their instructional choices, and his larger goals for the school. I recorded each of these interviews and took notes during them as well.

Stimulated recall interviews relied on data from photographs, documents, and artifacts to spur the interviewees to reexamine their thoughts and decisions around the moment represented in the data. Some elements of stimulated recall interviews happened during my unstructured interviews with the focal teacher as I asked her about particular moments during class or writing that the students engaged in. In addition to talking to students about their work during observations, I engaged in five stimulated recall interviews with six students, including one pair of students who co-composed a piece, around their in-class writing. My goal with this set of interviews was to more fully understand students' composing processes. I wanted to both reveal the influences on their composing processes for particular compositions, as well as how they engaged in the work of composing more generally. Further, these stimulated recall interviews

were a space for interpretive questions (Merriman, 2001, p. 77) where I shared tentative interpretations of the data and the interviewee responded to the interpretation.

I used Inqscribe to transcribe the semistructured interview with the teacher, as well as the stimulated recall interviews with the students. These transcripts were then imported into the Scrivener document. Unfortunately, the files for the semistructured interviews with the ELAR teachers and the principal were corrupted during a file transfer, though I had taken extensive notes during the interviews themselves. The unstructured and stimulated recall interviews with the teacher were selectively transcribed as needed during data analysis.

Document and Artifact Collection.

Documents and artifacts served as an additional data source for this case study. Documents and artifacts from the classroom literacy ecology are those pieces of material culture (Hodder, 2008) that were not generated for the purposes of the research. For all of the documents that I collected, I worked “to determine as much as possible about the document, its origins and reasons for being written, its author, and the context in which it was written” (Merriman, 2001, p. 121). Documents also served as key pieces of data for triangulation as they allowed me to “explore multiple and conflicting voices, differing and interacting interpretations” (Hodder, 2008, p. 117). The documents and artifacts I collected were on a spectrum from official to personal.

The official documents I collected included Monday Meeting agenda and handouts, district mock tests, district-wide Writing Guidelines, and the faculty MCP framework instructional guide. These represented the official perspective (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992, p. 136) of the exosystems of the district and administration. From the department, I collected the philosophy, agenda, and emails around the district ELA coordinators visits to Ortega. I collected

documents from the teacher as well that included calendar, planning guides, handouts made for students, and emails. Many of these documents reflect the narrative the literacy ecology is constructing for itself (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 132 cited in Merriman, 2001, p. 115). For hard-copy documents, I placed each in a plastic sleeve and labeled a sticky note with the date I collected the document, who I collected it from, and a brief note about the document's purpose. The documents were then kept in chronological order in a binder. For electronic documents, I imported them into the main Scrivener research notebook, tagged them with similar information that was on the sticky note, and kept them in a documents folder.

I also collected student work in three forms: entries in writer's notebooks, worksheets or writing assignments completed for class, and final drafts of writing assignments. At the beginning of the research, I collected a complete set of the students' first writing assignment to get a sense of the genres and topics they were choosing. For October and November, I photographed all of the pages in their writer's notebooks on the days I observed. Across the remainder of my time in the field, I collected more focused work from the students. As discussed above, I photographed writer's notebooks from the focal students. I collected several other sets of student work, including mock essays, a test preparation worksheet, and a persuasive poster. For a span of days in January where the students were writing extensively in their notebooks, I captured most entries from most students via photograph. As mentioned above, these photographs were uploaded into albums in iPhoto and tagged with the students' pseudonym as well as a date and any other identifying information. Like with other documents, student work that was photocopied was stored in binders in plastic sleeves with sticky notes containing the relevant information about the dates the work was collected and the purpose of the work.

Data Analysis

Qualitative case study research seeks to present the texture and depth of a case with as much attention to detail as possible. My data analysis followed the constant-comparative (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriman, 2001; Dyson & Genishi, 2005) method and relied heavily on an understanding of ecology for a priori themes present in the data. This method allowed me to continually move between my growing understanding of ecology and the growing body of data that I was collecting from the ecology. By moving between analysis and collection, I was able to refine the theory in ways to guide the data collection and vice versa.

Analysis began as soon as I began collecting data in September and continued through the entire data collection period, through the summer and fall, and into the spring. Each week I reviewed the data—including field notes, documents, photographs, and interviews— and made analytic notes about my growing understanding of the ecology. I focused on how different influences from systems within the ecology were expressing themselves in the classroom and the teacher's or students' understanding of the work they were doing. These influences led to growing understandings of the systems at work within the classroom. At least biweekly, I wrote an analytic memo (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) that brought together my growing understanding of the ecology within which the classroom was embedded. The following is a selection from a memo as I was making sense of the writer's notebook as an intersection of systems in the classroom

Notebooks are huge as a conduit for the mesosystems of the students lives as they enter the classroom. Very infrequently do students share out loud their personal life or knowledge, occasionally it seeps in the edges (The comment about his sister being pregnant jumps to mind.), but Annabeth doesn't seek this kind of revealing from the

students. But it saturates their notebooks, at least the samples I had. And their final drafts of the first piece also had lots of explicit or implicit connections to the students lives. But, again, this content piece wasn't picked up, though students knew they'd be sharing this writing—what grew out of the notebook into a final draft—with their classmates. This is also a conduit that Annabeth seems intent on fostering, while she's often working to minimize the district's intrusion into the classroom. (memo, 11/4/2011).

These memos supported the development my thinking around particular pieces of data, categories, and emerging theories, testing them for internal coherence and correspondence to external understandings of ecology (Hodder, 2008, p. 126). I continued this open analysis phase—reviewing data, writing analytic notes and memos—through December.

At the end of this initial analysis phase in December I had identified five embedded units of analysis. In the ecology at large, these units included the exosystems of the district ELA coordinator and the administration, as well as the mesosystem of the department. Within the classroom microsystem, the embedded units of analysis were the front whiteboard and the students' writer's notebooks. This combination of units of analysis allowed for a broad focus on the landscape of the whole ecology, as well as a an understanding of the texture of classroom life within the landscape. These selections also allowed for data collection that could lead to category saturation because of my access to the individuals and physical spaces that made up these units. These units of analysis then guided the data collection for the rest of my time in the field. From January through March, I continued my weekly reviews of data with analytic notes and biweekly analytic memos, seeking saturation within the embedded units of analysis.

In addition to analytic memos during the data collection phase, I also developed matrices and network visualizations to analyze the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994) I continued

developing these throughout the analysis phase. Existing research using an ecological model lends itself to visual representation to facilitate data analysis (Syverson, 1999, p. 61; Zhao & Frank, 2003, p. 829; Barron, 2006, p. 195). The matrices initially relied on Syverson's (1999) dimensions and attributes of ecology, though during the initial analysis phase these categories did not help answer my research questions and were dismissed (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 226). Network visualizations supported me in "mapping salient properties of the context" (p. 104) in which the literacy ecology of the classroom functions. I continued to add to or draft network visualizations throughout the data collection process as a way of achieving category saturation and through analysis as a way of refining my understanding of the classroom's literacy ecology. Figure 3.3 is a network visualization I developed in the middle of data analysis.

Figure 3.3: Network Visualization for Data Analysis



After data collection ended in April, I returned to the complete data corpus to undertake the last stage of my analysis. Having identified the district ELA coordinator, administration,

department, notebooks, and front whiteboard as embedded units of analysis, I went back through the data coding for these units. I also began coding for specific themes that emerged from within these units, or that cut across units. Table 3.8 includes the codes I used.

Table 3.6: Codes for embedded units of analysis

District	Department	Notebook
Testing	HTWP	Texting
Administration	Colleague	Life
Testing	Board	

I reread all of my field notes, reviewed the documents and artifacts I had collected, and the interview notes and transcripts. I coded by using the commenting feature in Scrivener, including in each comment the code, in all capital letters, and a brief comment about how that piece of data fit into that code. I was then able to create collections within Scrivener that contained all of the files where that code appeared. Additionally, I used the search feature within Scrivener to search the entire research notebook for words associated with those codes to ensure, as much as possible, that I had not missed any relevant data. With the photographs of the student notebooks, I read each page and coded for mesosystem influences from the students' lives and other themes that occurred. For the hard-copy documents, I similarly coded using post-it notes. For both the iPhoto and hard-copy codes, I created a document in Scrivener to reflect those codes so that when I was reviewing the collections within the data corpus, those external sources were included.

After creating collections for the embedded units of analysis, I returned to the methodological tools available in EST and created matrices for each system around communication, trust, consensus, and power. I copied data snippets from each embedded unit of analysis into its own matrix and examined the results, looking for themes that cut across. Finally,

in examining the microsystem units of analysis—the notebooks and front whiteboard—traced the movement of the object or concepts related to the object across systems within the ecology.

Using boundary object concepts of structure and standardization, I categorized the uses of the objects along those spectra.

Trustworthiness

I worked to build trustworthiness in this study through long engagement in the field, triangulation of the data, and member checks. I was in the field from September through April of the 2011-2012 school year. I was involved in the school in other capacities, as a university instructor and professional colleague and as mentioned above, had been involved with the school and district for five years when the study began. This long-term engagement increased my ability to understand the general ebb and flow of the class and school, as well as my ability to discern truly unique events. Triangulation happened by approaching concepts and themes from multiple perspectives. These multiple perspectives came from collecting observations from the classroom and other sites within the school, talking to the focal teacher, her colleagues, and administrators, as well as collecting documents. Member-checking (Merriman, 2001, p. 204; Stake, 1995, p. 115-116) took place during stimulated recall interviews when I offered provisional interpretations of data to the participant and asked for their thoughts. I also shared selections of analytic memos as a way of checking my growing understanding of the data with the participants' experiences. As I continued to develop my understanding of the literacy ecology of this particular classroom, I strove to fulfill the following criteria for credibility (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, loc 4104): first, “sufficient detail and description so that the readers feel that they were vicariously in the field [and] sufficient evidence on how the data were gathered and how the analysis was conducted” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, loc. 4106).

Researcher Positionality

I have been familiar with the school, district, and many of the adult participants before I began this research during the 2011-2012 school year. In 2005, while working at the University of Texas Performing Arts Center, now Texas Performing Arts, I launched a fine arts experiential program that brought over 600 Del Rio ISD students to performances at the Bass Concert Hall on the UT campus, as well as presented performances in Del Rio High School and two middle schools twice a year. In doing this work I developed relationships with many teachers and administrators at the schools, as well as with district officials. I ran this program through May of 2008.

My experience at Ortega began with the above work, but continued through other connections. I knew all six of the ELA faculty from my previous research during the 2010-2011, professional development work in the school during the 2010-2011 school year, and my work with the local Writing Project site from 2009-2012. I was acquainted with many other faculty members because I had been visiting Ortega regularly since 2006. I knew the principal from my aforementioned work with the high school when he was an assistant principal there. During the 2011-2012 school year, I was also teaching a university teacher education class in the field at Ortega once a week. Further, the focal teacher and I were students in the same master's degree program, beginning in the fall of 2005. My long involvement with the site is an asset in terms of understanding the historical context of the ecology, as well as the level of access I was given to various sites within the school and district that may not have been available had I not had established relationships with many of the participants.

The caution with this level of involvement is, of course, the “danger of creating an *ecological distortion* by injecting into a natural situation elements that are unfamiliar and hence

disorienting and disruptive of the patterns and relationships that normally occur in the setting” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 123). To work against an ecological distortion, I sought ecological validity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Ecological validity is “the extent to which the environment experienced by the subjects...has the properties it is supposed or assumed to have by the investigator” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 89). EST suggests that the best way to achieve ecological validity is when “the observer has participated in the given setting in roles similar to those taken by the participants and is a member or has had extensive experience in the subculture in which the setting occurs and from which the actors come” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 31 citing Cole & Scribner, 1974; Cole et al., 1971). In this way, my long engagement with Ortega Middle School, my professional development work in the school, as well as in the local writing project site, and extended presence in classrooms through my previous research, contributes to the ecological validity of my interpretation of the actions of participants. I acknowledge that it is my interpretation of events and participants may have very different understandings of events, texts, tools, or even the literacy ecology as a whole. In the following three chapters I examine the classroom’s literacy ecology, beginning in settings most distant from the classroom—the district and administration—and moving steadily closer, through the department, to the actual literacy practices in the classroom.

CHAPTER 4 THE DISTRICT AND ADMINISTRATIVE EXOSYSTEMS: TENSIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

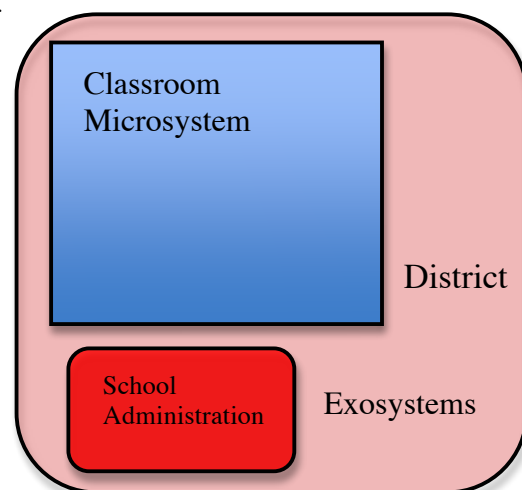
Introduction

This chapter is an examination of the district and administrative contexts for the focal classroom. I begin this chapter by reviewing the concept of exosystem from Ecological Systems Theory (EST). I then discuss how Alice, the district English language arts (ELA) coordinator fits into the ecology of the classroom as the district's representative. Next, I take up the relationships that Richard, the principal, and Dennis, the instructional administrator, have to the classroom. My analysis for these two systems, district and administrative, focuses on the characteristics of supportive systems introduced in chapter two: communication, trust, consensus and power. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of key findings focused on the ways district and administrative personnel amplify unsupportive characteristics between their contexts, and pass up opportunities to shape their systems to be supportive of the classroom microsystem.

Exosystems in Ecological Systems Theory

By beginning my examination with the broad milieu of the classroom, I lay the groundwork for understanding more fully the literacy practices supported within the departmental context and experienced in the classroom context, which will be taken up in chapter 5 and 6, respectively. I include a map of the exosystems within the ecology (Figure 4.1) to better see how the district and administrative systems interact with the classroom's microsystem.

Figure 4.1: Exosystems



Recalling chapter two, EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) explains mesosystems and exosystems as centered on connections.

The principle of interconnectedness is seen as applying not only [in microsystems] but with equal force and consequence to linkages between settings, both those in which the developing person actually participates and those that he may never enter but in which events occur that affect what happens in the person's immediate environment. The former constitute what I shall call *mesosystems*, and the latter *exosystems*. (p. 7)

Given this focus on connections, a classroom's potential exosystems are almost infinite, always changing, and yet essential part of the map of that classroom's ecology. Parents' workplaces, school board meetings, other schools within the district, or professional development communities could all be considered exosystems within the ecology.

My selection of particular exosystems to plot within the ecology of this classroom considered two factors. First, if the events in the exosystem did not explicitly influence action in the classroom in ways I could see and record, I discarded that exosystem from consideration, while acknowledging that there are potential exosystems whose influence was salient, though beyond the scope of this research. The second consideration was access. The ethnographic nature of my work, including my long engagement with various aspects of the school, meant that I was able to engage in formal meetings and informal conversations with personnel across the school. This position gave me access to conversations happening at the school-level, removed from the particulars of Annabeth's classroom. It meant that I could visit other classrooms, speak to teachers and administrators outside the confines of Annabeth's classroom, and attend meetings where Annabeth was not present. Further, I was often forwarded email exchanges between teachers and administrators, occasionally for advice, but often because the teachers wanted to

share information they thought to be relevant to the research. Gathering this data allows me to demonstrate how the school's administration and district's ELA coordinator influenced the classroom, as discussed above. I did not have the same level of access to some of the other external settings mentioned above, for example the school board or students' lives outside of school, and so could not gather the depth of data that was available in these school-centered contexts.

In the following sections I will discuss how the district's ELA coordinator, Alice, and the school's administration, Richard and Dennis, are within exosystems that influence Annabeth's classroom's ecology in salient ways for understanding the literacy practices there. This discussion focuses on the four characteristics of supportive exosystems and mesosystems: communication, trust, consensus, and power.

The District Exosystem: "I don't even know who was in charge last year."

History of a position.

The embodiment of the district's exosystem during the 2011-2012 school year was Alice, the ELA coordinator. As alluded to in the site discussion, the district experienced many administrative staff turn-overs within the last few years. Outlining the historical context for the relationship between Annabeth and the district English language arts (ELA) coordinator illuminates the unique place that the individual holding that position has as a representative of the district exosystem in the ecology of Annabeth's classroom. When Annabeth was hired in 2006, Susanne was the secondary ELA coordinator for the district. She had a portable near the district's administrative offices. She held several professional development sessions each year that focused on instruction, literacy strategies, and reading student work. Susanne left in the spring of 2008. The next secondary ELA coordinator was Sarah, who began in the fall of 2009

when Annabeth became ELAR department chair. Sarah supported a workshop model of instruction she learned from the New Jersey Writing Project in Texas, a private educational consulting company. While the stances of both the New Jersey Writing Project and the local writing project site draw on many of the same authors (Atwell, 1986; Reif, 1992), Annabeth understood the models as in conflict. Despite this philosophical difference, Sarah supported Annabeth in organizing a three-day professional development workshop in the summer of 2010 on writing workshop that Annabeth, Olivia, and I led under the auspices of the local writing project site. Sarah, however, never visited Annabeth in her classroom and rarely organized professional development for the ELAR department. In the spring of 2011, Sarah took a middle school principal position. While she was still considered the ELA coordinator, she all but stopped doing that work and any influence that she had in Annabeth's classroom faded. Alice began as the district's K-2 reading specialist and, when school budgets were cut during the 2011 legislative session, the district declined to fill the open position for secondary ELA coordinator and Alice's position expanded to include all grade levels (email, 3/18/2013).

The ELA coordinator's lack of physical presence in Annabeth's classroom, regardless of the person who filled the position, and relative lack of communication, across time, minimized the influence the district held over Annabeth's classroom. The shifts in personnel, more than any single individual in the position of coordinator, created an unsupportive dynamic between the district and the way Annabeth organized her classroom and instruction. In an interview in November, Annabeth said that

[The] negative influence is the huge turn over and changes that we've had the past couple of years with new school board, new superintendent, new curriculum instructor, new principal... New IA, new... All of these different people who have these different agendas

and different beliefs. Especially this year, every other week changing expectations and what the classroom needs to look like and what needs to be on your board and what test scores we need to be getting. (Interview, 11/8/2011)

There was no hesitation in identifying negative influences within her classroom and locating those within the exosystems of the district and the administration. Annabeth was not alone in her confusion regarding this position and the power it holds over her instruction. In an interview at the end of the year, Rebekah, Annabeth's sixth grade colleague, reflected back and admitted "I don't even know who was in charge last year" (field notes, 4/3/2012). As early as November, these shifts, changes, and unclear expectations affected Annabeth: "Um, I'm going to cry talking about that, it's exhausting and frustrating, and it's burning me out..." (interview, 11/8/2011). The continual personnel changes at the district level positioned Annabeth as having tenuous control over instructional decisions, even though neglect, not intervention, had been the hallmark of the district's actions.

Three ELA coordinators over six years, each with "different agendas and different beliefs," made it incredibly difficult for Annabeth to build any sense of trust or consensus with either the individuals who hold the position, or the position more generally. The lack of relationship between Annabeth and the district ELA coordinator, whoever it is, hindered the extent to which the district exosystem could have influenced, not to say supported, Annabeth's classroom. Below, I more fully examine the relationship between Annabeth and Alice, the district ELA coordinator during the year of this study. My analysis focuses on the complex ways that Annabeth's classroom instruction, and the ELAR department more generally, adapt to the district coordinator's perceived and real mandates, and uses the analytic tools of communication, trust, consensus, and power to frame the analysis.

Communicating with a phantom.

Alice, in her role of district ELA coordinator, was a phantom for the first half of the 2011-2012 school year. She was never mentioned by name in Annabeth's classroom or in her PLC throughout the fall, though her influence was felt in the classroom through district-mandated testing and the poetry unit. For example, in October, Annabeth contended with the following:

[T]he tests keep shifting. [The teachers] found out last Monday that the writing mock was taking place tomorrow. The reading mock changed the week before as well. They found out on Monday that they were giving a test on Wednesday. (Field notes, 10/11/2011)

Alice had control over these district level tests (field notes, 1/17/2012), but she was never mentioned directly as responsible for these tests or the scheduling changes. Later in October, when Annabeth explained the poetry unit organized around the SMAPHRO acronym (simile, metaphor, alliteration, personification, hyperbole, repetition, and onomatopoeia) she said that this is part of "the district's work with alignment" (field notes, 10/27/2011). Here again, Alice was not mentioned by name though as ELA coordinator for the district, she has control over curricular decisions like this. This absence even appeared in a departmental meeting. In January, the teachers were discussing their responsibility for creating the learning criteria for "a project [for the] last six weeks, we're going to write some kind of rubric that all the schools will be using for the final project" (field notes, 1/9/2012). Again, Alice oversaw just such projects and learning criteria when they moved between schools, but her name was absent from this conversation. This absent presence made Alice a phantom in that she had power over Annabeth and her ELAR colleagues, but how that power functioned or the goals that Alice identified for literacy instruction in middle school was unavailable to the teachers.

Rumors also defined how the teachers knew and experienced the district exosystem through Alice. In November, rumors circulated that Alice was taking an interest in what was going on at Ortega in the ELAR department. In late November, Harriet shared with me the small pieces of information she had about Alice:

the district early ELA coordinator was commenting in a meeting when some info about workshop came up, as she was ‘tapping her pen’, [she said] something to the effect of “So how do you teach them fluency?” Harriet called that “a direct assault on workshop...” (field notes, 11/29/2012)

Harriet hears the word fluency and maps a skills discourse onto the word, assuming what Alice meant was opposed to her process discourse around writing instruction (interview, Harriet).

Harriet returned to these little bits of information during a seventh grade planning session where Tina and Harriet went “back and forth” about the meeting, which Tina actually attended. Tina attempts to clarify the interaction by “chalk[ing] it up to elementary perspective.” Without any direct communication from Alice and not satisfied with information from Tina, Harriet did more investigation and Googled Alice, discovering “that she’d done work with the Meadows Center. RTI stuff, Dibels...” (field notes, 12/9/2011). The Meadows Center is a research center in the College of Education at the University of Texas at Austin that is heavily invested in standardized assessments of students at risk, including Response-to-Intervention curriculum and Dibels. When Harriet associated someone with the Meadows Center and those standardized assessments, she assumed they understood literacy very differently than she did (interview, 4/20). She was in “disbelief that this was the woman who was then exerting control over the instructional choices” (field notes, 12/9/2011) of her and her colleagues. Without any communication from Alice herself, Harriet was left to rely on history and her own skills to figure out the ways in which this

individual could have exerted power over her. And what Harriet found placed the district exosystem at odds with her and her colleagues' beliefs about writing workshop instruction.

The absent presence of Alice, created through the lack of communication, extended beyond Annabeth and Harriet to encompass the other important exosystem in the classroom's literacy ecology, the administration. In planning for Alice to visit the ELAR department at Ortega, Dennis, the instructional administrator, sent the following in an email to Tina, the department chair:

Alice might question and want to discuss some of our current practices. In my conversations with her she has not expressed an interest in "doing away" with Reading and Writing Workshop or led me to believe that she does not believe in it philosophically. What we have discussed is a concern to make sure that we are directly teaching some SE's, TEKS, concepts and skills. It seems as though there are some TEKS that must be directly taught and practiced, I would like to discuss this with all of our teachers and Alice during her visit. Do we have enough of a balance between our Workshop approach and direct teach to ensure kids are exposed and taught all of the TEKS. (email, 12/20/2011)

Here, because Alice has not defined herself for the ELAR department, she was known only to the teachers through second-hand information. Dennis was reporting on a conversation he had with Alice to Tina who then discusses this email and what it might mean with Harriet (field notes, 12/9/2011). Because there was no communication between Alice and the ELAR faculty, no trust had been built. This lack of trust manifested itself as perceived threats to workshop instruction. As Tina said to Richard, the principal, when rumor of this visit first circulated, "I don't want [Alice] coming in and scaring the crap out of teachers and making them feel bad" (field notes,

11/9/2011). When this lack of communication shifted through Alice initiating face-to-face communication with the department, the change was radical. The follow section details that shift and the teachers' reactions.

Actual communication: "Talking past each other."

Alice scheduled a visit to Ortega in January of 2012 and planned to observe most of the ELAR classrooms. In the department meeting preceding this visit, Tina said she would accompany Alice in her visits to classrooms.

Not that I think we need to be nervous or worried about her or what she's going to say or do. It's just after the conversations I've had about her business, I think it's important that I'm there to help illuminate...anything that she wants to talk about. (field notes, 1/9/2012)

Because of the lack of communication, trust, or consensus around literacy instruction—and the uncertainty around the way Alice could have exerted her power over literacy instruction—Tina moved to position herself as an intermediary between Alice and the ELAR teachers. In the following few paragraphs, I describe Alice's visit including her time in the focal classroom and the meeting that followed the observation. I also discuss the ways in which the ELAR teachers changed their perception of Alice because of her visit.

Alice visited on January 17 and observed Annabeth during third period, while I was present. Tina and Dennis were also observing. The group of administration came in about halfway through the period, having visited Olivia's class for the first half of the period. The students were in the middle of an intense few weeks of writing in their notebooks and Annabeth had asked them to mine their notebook entries for an idea—a seed or a gem—and then expand on that idea. While the administrators were present, the students were focused almost entirely on

their writing. This was not out of character for their writing time in January, though that many additional people had never been in the classroom previously and likely influenced their behavior. Tina walked around a lot during her visit, while Alice and Dennis stayed seated in desks. Toward the end of the period Tina talked to me and said “Their notebooks are amazing,” while “show[ing] me several quotes she’s taken from students’ notebooks.” As the period came to a close Annabeth said “I lost track of time, we’re going to do our reflection real quick.” They quickly discuss the writing they did and several students expressed frustration with the task. Annabeth tried to get the conversation going, but my field notes indicate extended pauses between her questions and the students’ responses. In trying to salvage the conversation, she ended with “Sometimes the strategies work for us and sometimes they don’t.” After the bell, everyone confirmed that they are scheduled to meet during sixth period.

Key to understanding this final interaction around reflections is that the reflection Annabeth was referencing is a specific protocol that is required as part of the Model Classroom Project (MCP) instructional framework required by the school’s administration. These reflections were specific questions that had been written on the front whiteboard as part of the larger Front-of-Class Set-up, which I discuss in much greater detail in chapter 6. Annabeth saying explicitly to the students that they would engage in a reflection, and going to the questions on the board, was a nod to the administrative power in the classroom as she did not engage in these types of reflections when administrators were not present. While she often asked students to think about the work they had done that day, or run out of time because the students were working so hard, this specific call to “reflect” was not part of her regular instructional repertoire. After the students quieted down she remarked, “It’s amazing how well y’all are listening now” and “the students laugh” (field notes, 1/17/2012). Typically this class had

challenges quieting down but their laughter signaled an awareness of the need for different behavior because of the presence of one additional teacher and two administrators. Here, both Annabeth and her students shifted their behavior to match the Discourse expectations of the additional people in the room, which was quiet and attentive students led through a discussion by the teacher. This shift was an example of how the district exosystems, when they moved into the classroom, directly influenced what happened there.

The debrief meeting for Alice's observations took place during the eighth grade professional learning community (PLC). It began with laudatory comments delivered by Alice.

This seems so basic but this doesn't seem to happen in every classroom, you guys have relationships with your kids... I think it makes it easier for them to write... That's the most writing I've ever seen... There's other classrooms where I've gone to where they can't get two sentences out of kids... The conversations you have with kids, you're comfortable with kids... You guys were doing writing lessons, so they were writing more on their own... Even just letting the kids listen to their iPods... That would never happen in other schools...

In the span of five minutes, Alice has delivered more personal, supportive communication to the eighth grade ELAR teachers than in the previous five months. She worked to build mutual trust by lauding the teachers for what was going well and by implicitly criticizing the practices she has seen in other classrooms and schools. The next move for Alice was toward consensus around instruction by asking Annabeth and Olivia to "Mak[e] sure to have more direct teach lessons" while immediately acknowledging that "You guys do such a good job of explicit instruction or modeling." The conversation continued around fluency with Tina attempting to come to a consensus on what that meant, Alice citing "Read Naturally," a reading intervention program

focused on repeated reading of computer selected texts, and Tina talking about “reading the way the text is meant to sound.” The conversation continued similarly, moving across a range of topics: writing in notebooks, authentic assessment, data analysis, testing units, and using benchmark sources. At the end of the meeting, Alice promised to come back to the campus and do a model lesson, but otherwise little consensus had been reached.

While the meeting did not end on a consensus, the bidirectional nature of the communication and the initial movement toward mutual trust were key to shifting the ways that Annabeth understood power in the relationship between her classroom, the ELAR department, the administration, and the district exosystem. Annabeth, given the knowledge and experience she had, expected to be challenged on her instruction. Instead, Alice expressed the positive aspects of her observation, saying, “you guys do such a good job of explicit instruction or modeling” and “you’re so comfortable with kids.” She listened as Tina discussed the types of work they did in workshop, and pushed for instructional choices she supported, specifically “direct teach.” But even as she advocated for her own ideas, she did not forbid workshop. She did not exercise the power she had by telling Annabeth and Olivia to stop their workshop instruction. Given the many unknowns about Alice’s position, her behavior was unexpected in many ways. Annabeth incorporated this new knowledge about Alice into her understanding of the district and this expanded understanding shifted her understanding of the power she had in her own classroom. While she may have always had that power, as Alice may have never intended to disallow workshop, Annabeth worked under the assumption that her instruction was always subject to the power of the district and acted under that assumption, erroneous though it proved to be. Even with this new knowledge and understanding, Annabeth, in leaving that meeting admitted that, “I feel that Tina and Alice are often talking past each other.” So this new

relationship between Alice and Annabeth, and the ELAR department more generally, continued to be tenuous, if not as rumor-driven.

The effect of her visit, and a repeated visit later in the year, as well as more open communication between the school and district, was that the teachers shifted their understanding of the district exosystem's level of support for their practices, which significantly lessened climate of fear (field notes, 1/9/2012; 3/19/2012; interview, 4/20/2012) and always being on the defensive (interview, 11/8/2011; field notes, 1/9/2012). Interviews with the ELAR teachers at the end of the year showed how marked the change was from the beginning of the year. When speaking about the district, Tina admitted she "was surprised" that Alice was an "advocate" for their practices (interview, Tina). Olivia echoed by saying "we're lucky that Alice...believes in what we do" (interview, Olivia). And Rebekah, too, stressed the personal nature of the communication and said "now that Alice has come to see what we do, [the district] like[s] what we're doing" (interview, Rebekah). Simply by showing up in the school and classroom, Alice increased the supportive potential of the district exosystem. But that is not to say that all of the tensions between the district and Annabeth, or the ELAR department more generally, were resolved with this visit. There was no resolution on the definition of fluency or the adequate number of days for direct teaching, both of which represented the real tensions between Discourses around literacy instruction. So while the connection between the district and Annabeth's classroom was strengthened in the spring, Alice did not cultivate communication, consensus, or trust to an extent that increased the district's presence in Annabeth's classroom in ways Annabeth's understood to be supportive. These were not the only tensions salient in the ecology of Annabeth's classroom.

The Administrative Exosystem: Tensions around an Instructional Framework

Like the district exosystem, the administrative exosystem influenced the literacy practices Annabeth designed for her classroom, though the influence was much more direct due to the school-level policies around instruction. Unlike the district exosystem, the people in the administrative exosystem were known to Annabeth and her colleagues because they saw one another in the hallways, attended the same meetings, and were more likely to communicate in multiple ways. Because there was more communication and more interaction and I had access to the administrators, the examination of this exosystem more fully explored the characteristics of a supportive exosystem. The following analysis focuses on the ways in which the administration required teachers to engage in instructional practices taken from the Model Classroom Project (MCP) Framework.

Figure 4.2: Model Classroom Project Defined

The Model Classrooms Project (MCP)

The Model Classrooms Project's primary goal is to bring about increased levels of student success through campus-wide or district-wide instructional continuity. Through brief staff development sessions, educators learn to refine their instructional techniques in the six MCP categories: content, thinking, product, assessment, facilitation and reflection. Through ongoing organizational development, educators coordinate their efforts vertically across grade levels and horizontally across subjects or departments to bring about consistency and predictability for their students. The process of teaching gradually becomes more efficient because teachers develop a common language and common practices throughout the agency. The process of learning becomes more efficient because much of the "mystery" is eliminated from students' daily lessons.

MCP Website – John Samara

The MCP Framework was an instructional framework that sought to make the “process of learning...more efficient because much of the ‘mystery’ is eliminated from students’ daily lesson” (document, 4/2/2012). Figure 4.2 was a document Dennis, the Instructional Administrator, shared at a district-wide IA meeting that summarizes his understanding of MCP. The Discourse in the document, while not specifically focused on writing, had a skills focus because it aimed for continuity, refining techniques, consistency, predictability, and efficiency. This document even claimed that teachers across disciplines would “develop a common language and common practices” by using the MCP Framework with no indication that different disciplines may require different languages or different practices to instruct students. Focusing on this dynamic interaction between the exosystem of the administration and the microsystem of the classroom makes clear the complex relationships the exosystem has to the classroom and the effects this influence has in the microsystem. What follows are five examples of the ways that the administration used the MCP Framework to control instruction on campus. Within each discussion, I take up the characteristics of supportive systems most relevant to the analysis.

MCP and teacher evaluation.

The MCP framework wove itself into all aspects of instruction at Ortega, inducing either through compliance or resistance. This coverage was accomplished because most instructional conversations over which the administration exhibited some control included MCP language, such as the teachers’ professional development at the beginning of the year, Monday Meetings as ongoing professional development, PLC planning guides, and the teachers’ annual evaluations. The most powerful influence was its link to teacher evaluation when it became the organizing structure for the teachers’ annual evaluations as part of the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS), the state-sanctioned teacher evaluation system. In January during a

Monday Meeting, one of the agenda items was “PDAS Pre-Conferences and Observations” (document, 1/9/2012). During the meeting, Dennis talked about what the administration was “looking out for” and he “[held] up a handout that is a teaching rubric” (field notes, 1/9/2012; Appendix C). These are extensive documents that encompass much of the MCP Framework. On seeing and hearing the reactions of teachers as they looked through these handouts, he followed up his display of these documents by saying, “No, we don’t expect you do to every single thing on this rubric in a 55-minute class. Use this as a guide...” He continued the lecture by asking teachers to focus on “two things that we really spent a lot of time on in the first semester...essential questions that...teach conceptually,” but then he goes on to list “written criteria, peer critique, self-critique” saying “[t]hese would be good things to implement in an observation.” The message from the administration, then, was that MCP was the tool that would be used for evaluation and that most things on the two documents were important. While the instructional practices highlighted on the forms were not inherently bad, and even aligned with some practices Annabeth used in her classroom, the imposition of the MCP format, and apparent unwillingness of the administration to implement MCP flexibly to meet the needs of an individual classroom, resulted in tension and conflict.

The pervasiveness of MCP, and its power over the teachers’ actions in their classrooms, was a persistent feature in the ecology. Long before the meeting in January discussed above, Annabeth stated an understanding about an explicit link between MCP compliance and job security. Annabeth said that there were “people in my ear who are in charge of whether or not I get to teach anymore or keep this job telling me to do [MCP]” (11/9/2012). While she may be overstating the impact MCP had on her entire teaching career, her perception that it held this kind of power put into perspective the control she ceded to the MCP Framework in her

classroom. Her reality contradicts previous research that found teachers had “major levels of control over...the particular techniques they use[d] to teach” (Ingersoll, 2002, p. 75). Linking MCP to her professional evaluation only served to reinforce Annabeth’s perception of MCP as a central component of the literacy ecology of her classroom. Further, this link meant that, even if Annabeth was uncertain about the implications of teaching reading and writing using an MCP model, she did as much as she could because the alternative, in her understanding, was not having a job. In addition to this overarching influence and effect, there are more specific instances of the administrative exosystem, via the MCP Framework, influencing and affecting what happened in Annabeth’s classroom. These instances are discussed below by focusing on communication, trust, goals, and power.

Goals imposed: The intersection of MCP and workshop.

During an interview in May, the principal said “I’m committed to a set of instructional strategies called Model Classroom Project” (interview, Richard). His commitment expressed itself through an infusion of MCP ideas and language throughout the professional communications, as mentioned above, including planning, meetings, drop-in visits, and evaluation. At the beginning of the year, teachers were given a handbook of information on the MCP framework that included documents and samples around key components of the program like questioning strategies, three-part objectives, and essential questions. Table 4.1 includes a list of the documents that were included in this handbook, which was 43 pages long. I include it here not because I analyze each piece, but to show the scope of the document, as well as the specialized language it contained.

Table 4.1: Model Classroom Project Handbook Table of Contents

Model Classroom Project Walk-through Form	MCP QS #5: Cognitive Verbs in Praise Statements
MCP Front of Class Set U – The 6 Elements	PLC Planning Guide – Core Classes: Weekly
Grading rubric for Math Warm Ups	Essential Question Analysis
Model Classroom Project Questioning Strategies Guide	MCP School-Wide/District Wide [sic] Goals
Model Classroom Project Questioning Strategies	Model Classroom Project – Concept Map Overview
MCP QS #1: Cognitive Verbs in Questions	Three Part Objective Checklist
Bloom’s Taxonomy Action Verbs	Three Part Objective Template
MCP QS #2: Simultaneity	TPO Tools
Tips for Using Pair Shares as a Simultaneity Technique	TPO Questions
MCP QS #3: Randomness	Model Classroom Project – Essential Questions
MCP QS #4: Wait Time & Coaching	Bloom’s Taxonomy – Question Stems

Most of the documents on this list required of a lot of training to make sense within the instructional landscape of Ortega. The administration, through the instructional administrator Dennis, used the Monday Meetings to train teachers in the multiple facets of the MCP framework. This included presenting information gathered from PLC planning guides, which align with the MCP framework, and analyzing student work using MCP guidelines. The handbook only reinforced the impersonal nature of the communication between the administrative exosystem and the classroom microsystem around MCP. It was an extensive, technical document over which the teachers had no control or input and which did little to honor the knowledge and experience they brought to teaching. The Monday Meetings, similarly, were often marked by unidirectional communication, in part because teachers had no control over the agendas for the meetings and because the meetings consisted of Dennis telling the teachers what to do (field notes, 12/5/2012).

The way the administration implement many MCP practices contradicted much of how Annabeth and her colleagues organized their teaching. Tina expressed her frustration at both the STAAR questions required as part of the board and the weekly scope of the planning guide for MCP (field notes, 11/29/2011). For her, crafting a workshop classroom required a much longer timescale than a week. Annabeth, then, was put in between two powerful systems—the administration and her department—one of which aligned with her own beliefs and knowledge, the other of which controlled her job. The result was

the battle, balance, the figuring out of I know what's best, I know what I want to do, and then I'm having people in my ear who are in charge of whether or not I get to teach anymore or keep this job telling me to do [MCP]. (interview, 11/8/2011)

Annabeth connected the fact that the principal and instructional administrator, who determine if she gets to keep her job, have told her to do MCP without seeking her input or advice or indicating flexibility in implementation. There was no consensus building in interactions around MCP, only imposition. In this way, Annabeth did not understand the administrative exosystem as supportive of the classroom microsystem because it imposed its instructional practices on Annabeth in her classroom. Even if workshop could, in the words of Tina, “absorb anything” (field notes, 11/29/2011) Annabeth feels the tension. Further, this imposition of a highly-structured instructional program pointed toward teacher proofing of the curriculum and instruction. Teachers reported that administrators had said that what was on the board—based on the MCP framework and discussed at length in chapter six—showed whether or not the teacher was good without observing instruction (field notes, 11/29/2011; interview 11/8/2011). The administrative approach to Monday Meetings, the regular communication around instruction

between administrators and teachers, only served to reinforce the distrust the ELAR teachers experienced around the MCP framework.

Unidirectional communication: Monday Meetings.

Growing out of an atmosphere of distrust and imposition, the MCP handbook served to guide the school-based professional development that teachers engaged in during the fall through the Monday Meetings. This professional development took place in a classroom during activity time most Mondays from 11:18-11:46. School faculty were expected to be present and attendance was taken. Dennis, the school's instructional administrator, ran the meetings, standing in the front of the room while the teachers sat in student desks. One focus of the Monday Meetings was on developing MCP strategies as indicated by the agenda for the meetings. For example, an agenda from October includes a focus on essential questions (document, 10/10/2011), and from March an item titled "Keeping our Instructional Focus" with several references to the MCP framework (document, 3/19/2012). During some meetings, teachers brought student or departmental work samples to discuss within the MCP framework, which were then added to the handbook. As listed in Table 4.3, those samples include a rubric for math warm-ups, a sample three-part objective for Annabeth's class, a planning guide for Annabeth's class the week of October 10-14, and a product from Annabeth's class, a student essay on abortion.

These meetings served to impose the instructional goals of the administration around the MCP framework and, because of that purpose, the communication in them was unidirectional. At one point, Harriet pointed out that the regular structure for Monday Meetings was "...Dennis up at the front talking about the board and everyone attacking him" (field notes, 12/5/2012). This sentiment was echoed by Annabeth when, in March, she said the Monday Meeting was

“supposed to be professional development [using air quotes], and it isn’t. It’s just what they want us to do” (field notes, 3/6/2012). The Monday Meetings, from the format to the agenda to the content, were not designed to facilitate communication between the administration and the faculty to build trust toward a consensus around instruction. They served as a delivery system for the administrative exosystem’s instructional priorities. Even when documents from classrooms made it into the handbook during Monday Meetings, those documents, or the classroom practices they represent, do not change anything about the MCP structure as it is understood and enforced by the administration. While there are other places in the ecology where there was more mutual adaptation between MCP and workshop practices, the intersection of the classroom microsystem and the administrative exosystem in the Monday Meeting was not where that adaptation happens. There was no bidirectional communication in those meetings and, hence, no opportunity for working toward a consensus on how MCP could have looked different in different classrooms.

Lack of trust codified: Planning Guides.

The MCP framework was further supported by Planning Guides that were to focus conversation within teacher Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and guide instruction in ways appropriate to the MCP model. These were the weekly planning guides Tina critiqued above. PLCs happened during a common planning period, sixth, shared by Annabeth and Olivia. Planning guides were designed around MCP categories such as three-part objective, working vocabulary, and agenda/criteria for success (Appendix D). They also contained the information that ended up on the board. During a planning meeting in November, Annabeth reported that “back in October Dennis told [Annabeth and Olivia] that [they] had some of the best lessons of the whole school.” She attributed this praise to quantity, not quality, saying “because we write a lot, not because he reads [the guides]” (field notes, 11/29/2011). Despite not placing much value

on the guides, they still served to control the conversation when Annabeth and Olivia plan together. Their position toward the guides, as a useless necessity, reinforced the lack of trust and consensus echoed above with other MCP structures, as well as the administrative power to control instructional conversation. What follows is a description of one PLC meeting between Annabeth and Olivia where the planning guide was the focus of the work of the day and controlled the instructional decisions that they made.

While co-writing a planning guide in January, Olivia was typing into the form on the computer while Annabeth watched on the projector screen and offered sentences to fill in the various boxes in the template (Appendix C) while also talking about other issues like management, attitude, and future plans. The following is selection of their conversation when they were focused principally on filling out the template.

Olivia: What's your objective today?

Annabeth: Um, generate entries in our writing notebook using a kind of [unclear]

O: [typing] Using a what?

A: I think it's a "kinds of entries" that's the title of the paper. List

A: Fluency too

O: [typing]

A: My warmups this week's just get your shit on your desk.

O: Then it's just make something up to make them happy. [Typing] okay

O: What kinds of stuff did you write about in 2011?

A: Sure

O: [typing]

A: Topics or people or I don't know.

A: That's a lot of what we're talking about, how you get started, so in my share at the end of my other classes, the share time is what did you do to get yourself started? Did you use this pink piece of paper? Did you...

O: [typing]

A: Think about memories, did you...

O: So, then, the objective is more we will isolate how we get ourselves started as writers.

A: I don't care, whatever, I don't really think anyone reads these.

O: Yea, I just really want to know for my board tomorrow, selfishly, you know?

A: So then I go over and review workshop, what does it mean, what do we do, I make a big deal about you get 30 minutes all for you to write about you... When do you ever get that in your school day and so exciting.

O: That probably hypes them up about that though. 'Cause in middle school it is all about them, everything's about them.

A: Yea. Trying to be more aware of how my attitude affects their attitude.

O: Me too. [sighs]

A: Um, and then, we will get the pink paper, we give them 5 minutes to glue it or tape it. Then I model, here's the one I looked at, here's the one I wrote, and then they work.

What marked this conversation was the ebb and flow between filling out the boxes and engaging in planning and reflective talk around instruction. Olivia began by asking for clarification around the objective and then they engaged in very scripted talk

A: Um, generate entries in our writing notebook using a kind of [unclear]

O: [typing] Using a what?

A: I think it's a "kinds of entries" that's the title of the paper. List

They are trying to create a three-part objective, the heart of all MCP lessons that followed this format: “We will [cognitive verb] [content] using [tool].” An example might be “We will examine sonnets using scansion.” This talk was in marked contrast to Annabeth’s utterance “My warm-up’s this week’s just get your shit on your desk.” Given that this was the first week back from Christmas break, Annabeth acknowledged that her students needed reminding about the rituals in her classroom. But knowing that such a warm-up was not allowed in the template, Olivia responded “Then it’s just make something up to make them happy. [Typing] Okay.” The “them” in this utterance being the administration or whoever might read this document. This tacking back and forth between the requirements of the template and talking about the specific needs of their ELAR instruction continued, constrained by the template, but trying to break out of it. They also built trust and consensus in this writing. While asking Annabeth to clarify an idea, Olivia claimed at one point “I just really want to know for my board tomorrow, selfishly, you know?” communicating that any contribution was for Olivia, not the administration. Annabeth repeatedly stated that she was not convinced that anyone read these guides and Olivia repeated acknowledges such, but still pushed them to continue.

Applying EST understandings of communication to this PLC meeting, the planning guides encouraged bidirectional communication within the mesosystem of Olivia and Annabeth, the eighth grade ELAR team. As they negotiated the words that would fill the boxes, trusting one another enough to share the futility of the work, they built a consensus around their own instruction, within the constraints of this format and deviating from it in their talk. But the communication between Olivia and Annabeth and the administrative exosystem was unidirectional because they did not see evidence that these Planning Guides changed anything about how the administrative exosystem understood their instructional practices. Further, this

blank template, with a set number of boxes to fill with words that fit the MCP format, was another impersonal form of communication associated with MCP. Again, there was no reciprocity between a blank template and all that Annabeth and Olivia knew about teaching literacy. This limited and impersonal communication contributed to Annabeth and Olivia's limited understanding of the administrative purposes for this Planning Guide work. While it was entirely possible that the administration read these templates, and believed that the templates were affecting teachers' instructional practices in the ways they intended, Annabeth and Olivia had no sense of this and that lack of knowledge dictated the reality within which they worked. Their decisions were based on their knowledge, limited though it was, that filling out the Planning Guide in the appropriate manner was more important than what they actually did with students. While Annabeth and Olivia's did important work while the time they met in their PLC, that work was not linked to the official structure of the PLC. In fact, that structure often got in the way of exploring "new ideas, current practice and evidence of student learning" (Vescio, et al, 2008, p. 89). As above with the Monday Meetings, the relationship between the administrative exosystem and Annabeth's classroom was marked by unidirectional communication and imposed goals following from a lack of trust. The final section of the discussion of the administrative exosystem explains how within this atmosphere of distrust and unidirectional communication, the power often fell not to the classroom microsystem, but to the administrative exosystem.

Responding to administrative exercises of power.

The above discussion covers the ways in which the relationship between the administrative exosystem and Annabeth's microsystem, through the MCP framework, Monday Meetings, and PLC planning guide, was unsupportive. The lack of bidirectional communication

created tensions between the administration and the faculty. Further, the imposition by the administration of MCP as the goal for Annabeth's classroom instruction revealed a lack of trust of Annabeth's professionalism. These administrative goals were also openly challenged within the department. These realities of the complex relationship between the administration and Annabeth in her classroom were clear without a view into Annabeth's classroom, but become even more so by looking at what happened when the administrative exosystem came into the classroom. There were specific moments in which the physical presence of a person from the administrative exosystem, or the imagined reaction of the administration, affected the ways in which Annabeth designed and implemented instruction in her classroom. Those moments, that happen in Annabeth's classroom with her students present, are the focus of the following discussion. These moments are also exemplars of how the balance of power between the administrative exosystem and classroom microsystem shifted often toward the administration depending on the context and purpose.

Poetry slam: Administrative participation in the classroom.

The first example of this relationship was when Richard, the principal, visited Annabeth's class during their poetry slam at the end of the poetry unit in November. This poetry slam is an annual event for the eighth grade that has been going for four years, through three principals and four district ELA coordinators. Annabeth and Olivia brought their students to the lecture hall and invited the other ELAR classes to join them. The lecture hall was a space in the school with tiered floor seating that, when full, seats approximately 120 students. On this day, the room was packed with almost 100 seventh and eighth graders. The general way the slam ran was that students were required to read a final poem that they wrote and once everyone had read, students chose to read other poems. They came to the front of the lecture hall and either stood or sat on a

tall stool and read. Annabeth and Olivia alternated readers from their classes. Generally the audience was respectful, clapping and encouraging their classmates. Sometimes students were encouraged to read by the group and other times they volunteered themselves. In addition to Annabeth and Olivia, Tina and Harriet were there with their students. Sylvia, the eighth grade special education inclusion teacher with Olivia was present, as was Cynthia, who held that same position in Harriet's class.

A few students into the slam, Richard came into the lecture hall to pull out a student. My field notes explained what happened after several students saw him.

Someone encourages [Richard] to read. He asks if they were listening to [Annabeth's] poem, and he says that his is a lot like hers. He's got a poem memorized about 'thinking about nothing.' He stops in the middle, saying he's messed it up already, but then starts over and finishes it. He declaims it while standing in the front of the audience, walking around a bit. (field notes, 11/22/2012)

Richard responded to students' requests that he recite a poem and linked his poem to what had already happened in the slam. He evidenced an awareness of how one was supposed to act in this poetry slam. Debriefing the poetry slam later, Annabeth explained that "Richard came in during fourth yesterday and watched the whole thing, came in second period today and said the same poem." In each of these instances, the principal's presence shifted the instruction to account for his inclusion in the classroom practices. He clearly had power in the classroom space to be included in the poetry slam and he was prepared for being included by having a poem memorized. But the instructional model did not have to change to accommodate his presence, he was simply given class time to participate. In this small but important way, the principal demonstrated that the classroom could retain power over instructional practices when the

administrative exosystem and classroom microsystem intersect. This dynamic, though, when the classroom retained the power over its processes, was the exception as opposed to the rule.

MCP reflections and instructional compliance.

More commonly, though, the balance of power was tilted toward the administrative exosystem. Also in November, Dennis, the instructional administrator, visited Annabeth's classroom unannounced. He came in with approximately 10 minutes of class left. The students had been acting out stories using only onomatopoeia, as part of their poetry study. My field notes describe what happened.

At about this time, Dennis comes in the door and stands against the wall. This is the first time the whole class claps [after a skit]. Dennis takes a seat at the cluster next to me.

[Annabeth says] "I feel like overall you guys did a really good job with your on your stories. You can communicate with people just using sounds. If you've ever seen the movie Wall-E... On your test next week, you've got to be able to know what these words mean... Find your warm-up page, underneath warm up write reflection real fast."

(11/4/2012)

Dennis' appearance changed the students' and Annabeth's behavior. She goes on to ask the student to explain which of the literacy devices they have been studying are the easiest and which are the hardest. This reflection was highly dependent on the skills discourse, resting on isolated definitions and identification of literary devices, which was the focus of both the poetry unit and the MCP framework. Annabeth tried to make this work relevant to the students by asking them to evaluate their knowledge, not just recall it. Discussing the class afterwards, Annabeth explained that "kids see [Dennis] as a disciplinarian as that is a majority of what he does that they see." His role, then, as an enforcer of student rules encourages the students to clap

at the end of a student skit, the first time they did that. Annabeth also admitted “His presence is why [I] quickly made sure to do a reflection at the end of class” (field notes, 11/4/2012). The reflection, as mentioned above, was part of the MCP framework. It was a piece that did not appear in the Monday Meeting agenda, and something she had not invested time in since the beginning of the year, but Dennis’ presence reminded her of the MCP structure and pushed her to incorporate a reflection into her lesson. When pushed to choose between her own plans and MCP, she does MCP when an administrator is present.

As mentioned above in the discussion of the district exosystem, the same thing happens again in January when Dennis, Tina, and Alice are in Annabeth’s room observing. At the end of the period she said, “I lost track of time, we’re going to do our reflection real quick” (Field notes, 1/17/2012). For all of the days I was in Annabeth’s classroom, this time in January was only the third time I witnessed her engage her students in an MCP reflection, and there was scant evidence of reflections in students’ writer’s notebooks. The presence of the administration in her classroom, far more than the MCP framework, pushed Annabeth’s instruction toward practices that she did not engage in without their physical presence. In this way, the balance of power was not tilted toward Annabeth exercising control over the instructional practices in her classroom, but toward the administrator engaging in oversight of the MCP Framework. While Annabeth had the power to ignore the MCP framework generally, as shown through her lack of MCP reflections during most classes, she did not ignore it when actual administrators were physically present in her classroom, though she did try to adapt it. Working from the knowledge she had about the administration’s support for the MCP Framework, she made decisions based on the belief that there would be negative consequences for failing to follow the Framework. Whether or not the consequences would ever materialize actually did not matter as she believed there

would be negative consequences and acted on that belief by shifting her instruction. With all the structure designed to support the MCP framework in classrooms—documents, meetings, drop-in visits, and PLC planning guides—Annabeth still managed to avoid having MCP change much about the way she organized her classroom instruction. By not allowing much room for classroom-specific implementation or working to incorporate teacher professional knowledge, Annabeth treated the MCP framework as merely one more box to check to get on with the real work of teaching. When faced with an actual administrator in her classroom, monitoring her implementation of the MCP Framework, however, she did change her instruction.

Discussion: Unsupportive contexts

What follows is a discussion of the interactions between the exosystems of the district ELA coordinator and the school's administration with the microsystem of Annabeth's classroom. The discussion focuses on the ways in which these exosystems embodied the characteristics of communication, trust, consensus, and power in their relationships with Annabeth's classroom in the ways outlined by EST. On balance, neither of these systems were supportive of the microsystem of Annabeth's classroom, though each system presented different reasons for this unsupportive stance. The district and administrative exosystems both explicitly supported the skills discourse around writing, supporting the idea that "learning to write consists of learning a set of linguistic skills" (Ivanic, 2004, p. 227). This discourse was in direct conflict with Annabeth's focus on process and social practices discourses, which posit that "the text and the processes of composing it are inextricable from the whole complex social interaction which makes up the communicative event in which they are situated" (p. 234). The intersection of these two discourses created tensions that were never resolved, despite moments of potential. What

follows is a discussion of the specific ways in which neither system was supportive and how that lack of support was amplified across systems.

With her absent presence, rumors about her goals, and a general atmosphere of uncertainty at work within the department and between the department, the administration, and the district, Alice personified a “shared belief in a perceived mandate” (Franzak, 2008, p. 486) that the district did not support workshop instruction, a walking phantom policy. Before her visit to Annabeth’s classroom, not only was the personal, bidirectional communication necessary for a supportive exosystem lacking, almost all communication was lacking. The main information about Alice’s position on literacy instruction the teachers received was the district-mandated standardized tests, which Alice designed, and the poetry unit, which she approved. Otherwise, teachers relied on history, rumor, and Google to supply information. With this limited knowledge of Alice’s position, broad understandings of the skills discourse that testing represented, and historical precedent, the teachers concluded that Alice valued testing, data, and direct instruction. This conclusion, by extension, reinforced the teachers’ belief that their workshop instruction, focused on process and social practice discourses, was precarious in the eyes of the district. Given the complexity of the situation and the paucity of information about Alice, the district, unintentionally, “thwarted subject-specific conversations about teaching and learning” (Grossman & Thompson, 2004, 294) that aligned with the teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and experience. The extent to which the teachers “let go of what...work[ed] with students and compl[ied with] district expectations” (Dooley & Assaf, 2009, p. 387) shifted depending on a range of factors, but they made decisions based on their belief in workshop instruction and their concomitant belief that if they did not adapt their instruction, they would lose their jobs.

This tension between the Discourses surrounding literacy instruction is key to understanding the ways in which the district exosystem interacted with the classroom microsystem. So much of Annabeth's understanding about herself as a teacher was tied to her workshop instruction and a view of literacy that valued students' knowledge and experience (interview, 11/8/2011). When the only information she received from the district revolved around didactic units and standardized testing, she saw herself as constantly on an existential precipice. Giving up workshop instruction would shake her very understanding of herself as a teacher. But ignoring the district, or administrative, expectations meant losing her job. So every conflict over instruction became existential. Which is unsurprising given that Discourses are ideological in nature. So the Discourse from the district prized a skills understanding of writing, and "marginaliz[ed] viewpoints and values central to other Discourses" (Gee, 2011/1996, p. 159), which led to Annabeth's feelings of powerlessness and marginalization. Further, because Annabeth and her colleagues belonged to both Discourses—because of their beliefs and employment status—they felt "call[ed]...to accept values in conflict with other Discourses of which [they were] also member[s]" (p. 159). This tension, too, bled into her interactions with the administrative exosystem when the principal or instructional administrator engaged in questions around instruction. The conflicts and tensions within one system resonated with the conflicts and tensions in the other system amplifying them.

Though the story of the district exosystem is not completely lacking in supportive characteristics. Alice's position with respect to the teachers shifted markedly after she visited Annabeth's classroom and sat down to talk to her (Stein & D'Amico, 2002, p. 74). Despite the continued tensions between the exosystem and departmental mesosystem, Annabeth and the other ELAR teachers saw Alice as taking steps toward building trust and a consensus around

literacy instruction by showing up and watching their teaching. She engaged in bidirectional communication in this one moment, though not much beyond, and did not exercise her power by forbidding workshop instruction. Through her more powerful move in visiting ELAR classrooms was to bring together the district and administrative exosystem together around the classroom microsystem. By multiply linking the microsystem to various elements within the ecology, Alice enhances the supportive elements of the ecology in multiple ways. The relationship between the district and Annabeth's classroom is less negative than in the past—Annabeth no longer fears being told to immediately stop teaching workshop—and that opens up the developmental potential for the classroom and the students in it. Unfortunately, this potential was squandered through a lack of follow-up by either the teachers or Alice. In this way, the tension remained. This meeting also shifted the power between the classroom microsystem and the administrative exosystem. Alice demonstrated the value that the district exosystem placed on the work that Annabeth and Olivia were doing in their classrooms, in the presence of administrators. No longer could the administrative exosystem claim that the district questioned workshop instruction. Though this visit, because it was isolated and not part of a larger shift to more involvement in the classroom by the district, did not shift the power completely or reliably. In other words, the teachers did not see Alice's relevance to their "daily work" (Massell & Goertz, 2002, p. 60), which limited her positive influence, and Annabeth continued to feel insecure in her workshop instruction when it came to either the district or administrative exosystem.

As opposed to the present absence of Alice, the administrative exosystem was a constant presence in the microsystem of Annabeth's classroom, regardless of whether an administrator was physically present or not. Many of Annabeth's instructional choices stemmed from the ability to "be defensible" (interview, 11/8/2011). And Annabeth understood this administrative

presence as demanding compliance to a narrow set of instruction practices aligned with MCP. She perceived these practices and MCP in general as coming from a lack of trust between the teachers and administration. In this way, the administrative focus on compliance—as opposed to professional growth or student learning—dictated the terms of engagement and these were terms that Annabeth only reluctantly accepted to keep her job. From her perspective, the only goal of the administration was adherence to MCP instructional policies. The goal of compliance would be policed by visits to the room and photographs of her board, in addition to her annual evaluation structured around the MCP framework. Her goals were focused on supporting and extending students' literacy practices and preparing them to be life long learners (interview, 11/8/2011). While these goals were not inherently at odds, the skills discourse circulating in the district exosystem, and reinforced by the MCP Framework in the administrative exosystem, did conflict with her more process and social practices stance toward literacy instruction. This administrative monitoring seemed the work of managing, not leadership, which limited the ways in which it could influence her instruction (March, et al., 2005). Further, the administrative choice to organize instruction around MCP so misaligned with her understandings of high-quality writing instruction (McGhee & Lew, 2007) that she chose to implement the bare minimum of the MCP Framework. Annabeth understood any questioning of instructional practices from the administration as existential, even if the MCP Framework could be made to fit workshop instruction.

The systematic examination afforded by EST of the different influences within the ecology of Annabeth's classroom allowed for a more complete understanding of her decisions around MCP and her reaction to the district ELA coordinator's visit. Within an atmosphere where she fears being told in an instant to stop using workshop, any questioning around

instruction becomes a threat. And when any question becomes a threat, trust and communication become difficult to foster. Further, examining the exosystems of the district and administration through the lens of EST and highlighting the ways in which communication, trust, goal consensus, and power function make it more clear how Annabeth's decisions are protective of her core beliefs about teaching and learning literacy, not simply defiance of a new mandate.

Conclusion

As I stated in the beginning of the chapter, the interactions between the district and administrative exosystem and the microsystem of Annabeth's classroom were complex and dynamic. Alice moved from being a phantom to reality and, in that move, began establishing trust and working toward a consensus around literacy instruction. But even with this new relationship, it was unclear if any consensus emerged around concepts like fluency and direct teach. The administration, with little exception, told teachers what to do and expected compliance. Annabeth's understanding of her place in her own classroom as the designer for literacy instruction and the district and administrative mandates that seemed to challenge her control over instruction caused palpable tensions in the classroom ecology. These challenges were made livable, in part, because of the support of her colleagues and department, as evidenced by Annabeth and Olivia's relationship in the PLC and the general consensus among ELAR colleagues around the MCP framework. Chapter 5 looks more closely at the ELAR department as a supportive mesosystem for the microsystem of Annabeth's classroom.

CHAPTER 5 THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS READING DEPARTMENT: A SUPPORTIVE MESOSYSTEM

Introduction

After discussing the district and administrative exosystems for the focal classroom, chapter five takes one step closer to the classroom by looking closely at the English language arts reading (ELAR) department. As in the previous findings chapter, I begin by reviewing the concept of mesosystems from Ecological Systems Theory (EST) and explaining my selection of the department as a focal mesosystem. Next, I examine the ways in which the department exhibited the characteristics of supportive systems from EST, specifically in department meetings and through a shared understanding of beliefs about literacy. I also discuss the local writing project site and how it served as a professional knowledge community for the ELAR teachers by being linked in multiple ways with the department. Finally I examine the ways in which the ELAR department and administrative systems conflicted by focusing on competing policy documents and the role of tutoring. I close the chapter with a discussion of the ways in which the department served as a supportive mesosystem both socially and instructionally, though the philosophical contrasts between the department and the administration were stark and often added to the tensions in the ecosystem.

Mesosystems in Ecological Systems Theory

Mesosystems, again, are the interrelations between two settings where the developing person is an active participant in both. For the purposes of this study, the mesosystem became the interrelations between settings in which classroom participants took an active role. Further, like the exosystems above, the experiences in mesosystems outside the classroom must have had the potential to influence what happened in the literacy ecology of the classroom for that external

setting to be considered a relevant mesosystem. Some examples of mesosystems that individuals in the classroom participated in, then, included other classes a student attended, department meetings the teacher attended, a sports team the student is a member of, or a study group the teacher participated in. Going further afield, mesosystems could have included students' and the teacher's families, friends outside of school, social groups, or professional organizations.

Like with exosystems, I relied on EST to consider the salience of particular mesosystems to Annabeth's classroom. Mesosystems, in this conception of ecology, are organized on a spectrum between weakly linked and multiply linked, described as follows

A mesosystem in which there is more than one person who is active in both settings is referred to as *multiply linked*. A mesosystem in which the only links, apart from the original link involving the person, are indirect or in which there are no additional links whatsoever is described as *weakly linked*. (Loc. 2823)

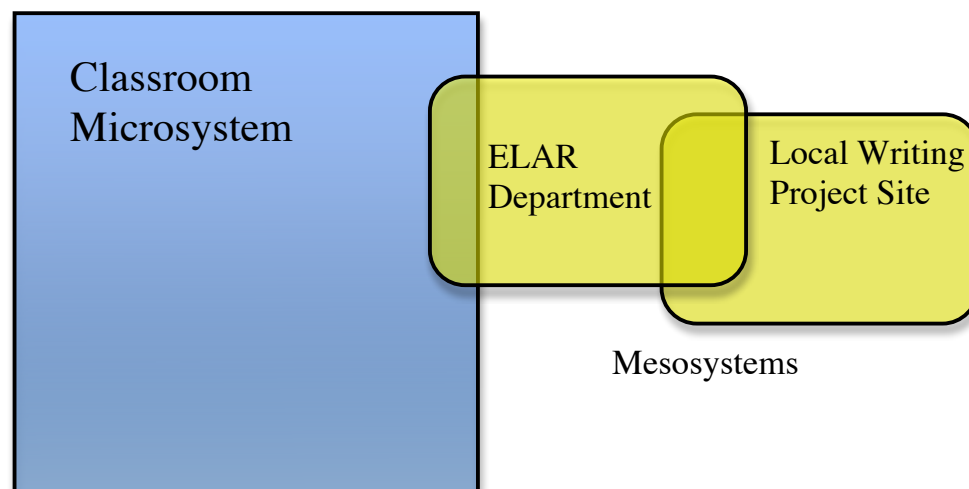
There was no single mesosystem that was multiply linked for the students and had strong evidence of influence. The students did not discuss sharing other classes, teams, or even strong social groups outside the classroom in the time I was in the classroom or in their writer's notebooks. There was no single mesosystem within the students in the classroom that was multiply linked in ways that led to influence in Annabeth's classroom.

Colleagues in the Classroom: The ELAR Department

Without a clear mesosystem originating in the students, I shifted my gaze to Annabeth and identified mesosystems which she moved through. Of all the potential mesosystems in which Annabeth moved, her ELAR colleagues stood out as being most valuable. Through Annabeth's works and actions, her colleagues lived in her classroom. In introducing poetry, Annabeth told a story of how Ms. Young introduced this poem to her (field notes, 10/21/2011). In reminding

students about how to tend their notebooks, Annabeth talked about the students' experiences last semester in Ms. Beck's and Ms. Spruce's classes (field notes, 12/12/2011). Her colleagues also were a part of the classroom through her students' experiences in their classrooms in previous years. Given the stability of the ELAR staff at Ortega, there was a continuity in the students' experiences with workshop instruction and process and social construction discourses of writing. In debriefing classes or discussing student work, Annabeth referenced things she has learned from colleagues and books she has read as part of her professional community (field notes, 1/4/2012). Given how much of a presence her colleagues were in her classroom and how her relationships with them infuse her instruction, I focused on the mesosystem of the ELAR Department to add another layer of detail to the map of the classroom's ecology (Figure 5.1). As discussed in more detail below, the ELAR department overlaps considerably with the local writing project, which makes it a complimentary mesosystem.

Figure 5.1: Mesosystems



The ELAR Department consisted of 12 faculty members who were ELAR teachers, special education co-teachers, and Response-to-Intervention teachers. Within this mesosystem, participants had different levels of influence over Annabeth and the way she understood her

classroom, teaching, and literacy with the core ELAR faculty figuring prominently in her thinking. Table 5.1 is a list of the faculty in the department, their grade level, and information on any direct relationship to Annabeth beyond sharing the department.

Table 5.1: ELAR faculty

Faculty Name	Grade level	Roles
Annabeth	Eighth	Focal teacher, former department chair
Olivia	Eighth	Eighth Grade PLC partner
Tina	Seventh	Department chair
Harriet	Seventh	Team leader
Rebekah	Sixth	
Jennifer	Sixth	
Sylvia Lewis	Eighth	Special education co-teacher with Olivia
Heather Stevens	RTI	
Cynthia Ramirez	ESL/RTI	

The ELAR faculty generally met only once or twice a semester as a group. They more frequently met in grade-level PLCs during common planning periods as discussed in chapter four. They ate lunch together when their schedules allowed and many of them knew one another socially. To understand the departmental mesosystem and its place in Annabeth's classroom, I sat in on two ELAR department meetings in the spring of 2012, multiple PLC meetings across the year, ate lunch with ELAR department members several times, and had multiple phone and email conversations with most of them. Finally, in April and May, I interviewed all of the ELAR teachers about their history at the school, their understandings of the department, school, and district, as well as their instructional practices and professional development experiences. In the first section of findings, I examine how the department built mutual trust through bidirectional communication during meetings, achieved an implicit consensus around literacy instruction through a supportive professional community. The second section takes up how the department

codified their consensus when challenged by the administration around literacy curriculum and instruction. The final section examines another conflict between the department and administration, this time over mandatory tutoring for the upcoming standardized tests.

Building trust: Confessions in a department meeting.

In her interview at the end of the year, Olivia explained what it was about the ELAR department at Ortega that engendered trust:

We all have the same beliefs. In department meetings, we lay stuff out in meetings.

We're all risk takers. If we're teaching something new like partnership or social issues...

we're not afraid. [pause] We're not the type who do the same thing every year, we're always changing and growing because our kids are always changing. Risk-takers and open to change. (Interview, Olivia)

She began with a statement of her understanding of the belief alignment within the department. This alignment was then linked to the ability to “lay stuff out,” to admit difficulties, ask questions, and share triumphs with colleagues. This “lay[ing] stuff out” then leads to the risks that they took up with instructional practices around literacy, like reading partnerships or social issue projects. Unlike a whole class reading of a novel, a standard model for reading instruction in middle school, reading partnerships asked the teacher to monitor up to 15 different conversations happening between pairs of students around self-selected books. The social issue projects asked students to explore issues of importance to them like obesity, dating violence, or immigration, which were all topics that asked teachers to navigate challenging social and political terrain. Importantly, Olivia attributed this risk taking to not being afraid. Finally, Olivia linked this combination of risk taking, trust, lack of fear and communication to reflection on and refinement of instructional practice.

Olivia's understanding and perspective on the department, is echoed across the interviews with the ELAR faculty, which all took place in April. Rebekah answering the same question during the interview, echoed many of Olivia's comments around ideas of risk-taking, saying "Everybody is willing to change and try new things. If they hear about something that works they want to try it...[that] share books 'I think you would like this.'" This sharing of books and ideas engendered a spirit of collegiality within the department, enhancing the trust that existed. Jennifer echoed these sentiments in calling the department "caring" and "supportive." A supportive and caring environment within the department, among colleagues planning literacy instruction, then influenced the classroom. Harriet linked that support specifically to instruction when she claimed " I get smarter talking to Tina every day, I get smarter going into Olivia's and Annabeth's rooms." Early in the year, Annabeth had taken a similar stance, only in relation to her students, "Like, you put yourself out there in front of them as a reader and writer and thinker and take risks doing that, right?" (interview, 11/8/2011). So in this departmental setting, talking about taking instructional risks built trust, which led to teachers reflecting deeply on their practice, and echoing those same behaviors with their students.

An example of this risk taking were the teachers' interactions during department meetings. What follows is a transcript of the talk that happened at the beginning of the department meeting on January 9, 2012. This meeting happened at the end of a day that Annabeth characterized as "superfast, supercomplicated" (field notes, 1/9/2012) and the beginning of a challenging unit on reading partnerships, which were coincidentally happening in both eighth and seventh grade.

Tina: alright, so I don't know if our all the admin said they were gonna come, but I think we should

[Lots of people say some form of “Get started” all at once]

T: Maybe we can go from the bottom up then? Wherever y’all want to start. Where do y’all, where do y’all want to start?

Annabeth: I need to hear happy things the kids are pissing me off today.

[Laughter]

T: Okay, so the only thing happy [laugh] on there is what is going on in our classrooms?

Veronica: We did prefix, um, studied just like, the six or seven most common prefixes and like made samples of words. And they came in having a lot of, like, they knew how to use the root, they knew how to do a lot of prefixes. They hadn’t memorized all of them, but you know, or anything, but they came in with a lot on that, so I, it was a way quicker lesson than I thought it was going to be. So that’s good.

Rebekah: Today we’re doing nonfiction, we’re doing all about projects, they can pretty much pick what they want, and, um, the best topic I think we’ve had, I think they’re going to tell all about, a whole poster, about the universe.

[Laughter; much overlapping, unintelligible conversation happens between now and when Tina speaks.]

R: The whole universe, on a poster or something.

[Unknown]: In 10 minutes.

R: yeah, on a poster, yep.

Margaret: Quite ambitious

R: The whole universe.

Jennifer: The universe.

R: Yep. But they’re really enjoying that.

T: I'm so glad that Olivia and Annabeth immediately hopped right to the observation of the colleague's classroom.

[Annabeth laughs.]

T: I'm so glad y'all came in. They came into my...I'm glad y'all came in. I'm glad I got to... It was cool. Very interesting partnerships, seventh grade's doing partnerships...

Even though I've done talk and clubs and partnerships before, I started it differently this time because I read Randy's book this weekend and I read his part on talk and I started thinking, actually I've been thinking a lot about kids at this school and what we're doing to kids at this school, actually. But, he talks about how in schools, talk is regulated by the adults, adults are always walking around saying be quiet, stop talking, stop talking, and even when and maybe start thinking about essential questions, and how the responses when we ask kids questions and we give them time to think about it and we call on random kids to, even when we're doing that, we're asking kids to think the way we want them to think and respond the way we want them to respond, we're not really teaching them to think and talk. So it totally changed the way I introduced the partnership thing... So, that's how we started, I think it changed, it like, it felt really good. I was excited about coming in and teaching that today.

Several things mark this interaction. First, none of the teachers expected the administration to come to the meeting given their dismissal of Tina's unstated suggestion to wait to get started until the administrators arrive. Second, Annabeth felt safe enough to admit, strongly, that she had a tough day and her colleagues responded with commiserating laughter. Third, Tina's tone in suggesting that the happiest thing on the agenda was what was happening in classrooms acknowledged the irony of responding to Annabeth's complaint about students by

directing attention to students. The enjoyment the teachers got out of the idea of a sixth grader deciding to cover the whole universe in a poster was evidenced by the overlapping talk and the repetition, with different tones of voice ranging from disbelief to humor, of “the whole universe.” Although the lack of similar enjoyment after the sharing of prefixes point to the discourse expectations in the departmental mesosystem. Because “Discourses are resistant to self-scrutiny and criticism” (Gee, 2011/1994, p. 159), the difference in responses was not taken up, merely elided. The RTI teacher, whose mandated curriculum focused on isolated linguistic skills (Ivanic, 2004), while a member of the department, was marginalized because her contribution did not align with the process and social practices discourses evident in Rebekah’s and Tina’s contributions.

Tina’s extended speech that ends this selection was noteworthy for several reasons. She began by thanking Annabeth and Olivia for taking care of an administrative requirement, the colleague visits. But she quickly pivoted that into an extended piece of thinking around the reading partnerships four of them are doing. First, by acknowledging that she was reading a book by the local writing project site director, she claimed her credibility with her colleagues who are all members of the writing project, though she is not officially. Second, she interrogated the Discourses around talk in schooling, wrapping in pieces of the MCP framework including essential questions and randomly calling on students. She clearly critiqued MCP when she said “we’re not really teaching them to think and talk.” This thinking, then, led her to change the way she began partnerships and which led to her feeling of excitement. This brief encounter at the beginning of a department meeting demonstrated trust, risk, vulnerability, reflection, critique, and community-building. It embodied that description of the department from Olivia that began this section. In this way, the department exhibited all of the characteristics of supportive

mesosystems. There was conversation around when to start the meeting and what order to move through the agenda, and the teachers influenced those decisions. Annabeth trusted her colleagues enough to admit difficulty. There was a consensus around the whole universe being an awesome, if overwhelming, choice for a project. Tina, likewise, trusted her colleagues enough to think through her ideas around talk in school and critique the MCP Framework, even though that musing placed the department firmly at odds with the administration. But this type of talk, and the trust she displayed in her colleagues, was not limited just to department meetings, or even official structures.

The PLC conversation in chapter four was just one example of the trust apparent in the relationship between Annabeth and Olivia. This trust was particularly apparent in the relationship between Annabeth and Olivia. When asked to talk about how she and Olivia worked together, Annabeth explained:

We work very well together. She'll notice things about kids and writing that I don't notice and I'll notice things that she doesn't notice so we usually meet probably if not every day if not every other day for about an hour and talk about the kids and talk about what's going on in our classrooms and even when we're not at school, we'll text at night or we'll chat through FB or we'll call each other on the phone, we hang out on the weekends...

(interview, 11/8/2012)

The connection between Annabeth and Olivia extended beyond their PLC and into their social lives. And evidence of this connection was abundant. An example of their collegial relationship came in October during a lunchtime conversation around SMAPHRO (simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, repetition, and onomatopoeia). During lunch, Olivia talked about being “frustrated with her kids because they were whiney and needy” (field notes, 10/31/2011).

Annabeth responded by reminding Olivia that “this was a different participation structure than the students were used to and that could be affecting their behavior.” Olivia agreed with that observation and then moved on to discuss how long her minilessons had gotten, though also deciding that “perhaps this year is actually more workshop-y because the students are just having to read across poems and look for these examples of figurative language.” Just like in the department meetings, the conversation began by admitting difficulty. This risk led almost immediately to a reflection on practice and seeing what was happen in the classroom from a new perspective. The first piece, the admitting of difficulty, evidenced the trust. That trust then moved the teachers toward the consensus around literacy instruction and designing engaging work for the students. All of this work, as well, happened in an atmosphere of bidirectional communication. The combination of trust and communication then led to an ability to build a consensus, which is the focus of the next section.

Goal consensus within the department.

The members of the ELAR department built a consensus around workshop instruction as the mode of instruction in their school. The teachers built this consensus because of the trust developed in discussing their practices within the supportive environment of department meetings and PLC planning time, as well as participation in, a professional community. The following section discusses the perception of a goal consensus among departmental members, the ways the consensus was built across time, and the moved toward an explicit consensus.

The teachers’ belief that there existed a goal consensus among the ELAR department came through most clearly in the series of interviews I did at the end of the school year. In each interview, I asked the teacher to “Describe the English department here at Ortega.” Table 5.2 includes excerpts from each interview focused on ideas of consensus.

Table 5.2: ELAR philosophical alignment

Teacher	Quote
Olivia	We all have the same beliefs...Our department believes if you're just teaching the child to the test you're not really teaching, you're not showing them that there's more to life than just a test. We give them more authentic learning experiences. (4/30/2012)
Harriet	I don't know too many departments where everyone is philosophically aligned... I like that we're doing meaningful things at Ortega and we have the space to do it... A political idea that we're on board with, that students should be empowered, especially students who have historically not been empowered, we have a philosophical approach for how that happens. It's research based, but it's also pretty progressive. It doesn't happen everywhere. (4/20/2012)
Rebekah	Everybody's my friend; get along and work together; friends outside; same interests. Educated, everybody wants to learn more; life long students, all of us. (4/3/2012)
Tina	The cool thing about Ortega, it was already going on: everybody was doing writing workshop. (4/19/2012)
Jennifer	I want my students to be lifelong learners and reading [sic] and writers. I want them to not stop reading and writing. I think we all have that mentality. (4/12/2012)

Olivia, Harriet, and Jennifer all made the explicit reference to the idea that each member of the department is “philosophically aligned.” Harriet went further still and linked this philosophical alignment to student learning by saying “the kids get smarter because they have teachers who all agree with each other, it’s seamless.” She pointed more specifically to the instructional practices that underlie this philosophy when she expanded on those initial thoughts about alignment and continuity with “The sense of having a literate community on campus, we are readers and writers, that doesn’t have to be created every year. Language has value for us. Part of our personal and professional lives” (interview, Harriet). This consensus at the department level then set the expectations for what classroom instruction looked like. While that was also the purposed goal of the MCP Framework discussed in chapter four, the process of this consensus set it apart.

The consensus around literacy and literacy instruction was implicit insofar as the teachers, during conversations, meetings, or interviews, did not point to a particular document or policy that they have agreed on. But there was a resonance between the different responses even without that explicit policy. Olivia and Harriet talked about “authentic” and “meaningful”

experiences. Jennifer built on that idea by pointing to the desire to create students who are “lifelong learners and reading [sic] and writers.” Rebekah, like Annabeth in the section above, linked the practices that the teachers engaged in among one another to the types of practices that she hoped for her students. And Harriet echoed this focus on friendships and practices when she discussed the “literate community” on campus saying, “the kids get smarter because they have teachers who all agree with each other, it’s seamless.” This implicit consensus, the shared language around literacy and the community of colleagues who share these beliefs did not grow out of the Monday Meetings or even PLCs, where the administration controlled the conversation. Even in departmental meetings, the focus was mostly on day-to-day details, not working on building goal consensus around the departmental philosophical stance toward literacy. Instead, this alignment had its genesis in a professional community—a complimentary mesosystem—that was linked in multiple ways with the departmental mesosystem that the two systems amplified one another in powerful ways.

The writing project: Overlapping mesosystems.

The local writing project site was a professional community which was a multiply-linked mesosystem for the ELAR department at Ortega. While it was also a mesosystem for Annabeth’s classroom, because she actively participated in both sites, the salient links were between the writing project and the department. Within this writing project community, teachers discussed literacy practices they wished to foster in their students and how to go about successfully fostering them. According to Harriet, this goal consensus was linked to the writing project, “we’re all writing project and writing project has a similar approach...because we’ve all been through the institute and we’re all part of the writing project we all buy into that as well” (interview, Harriet). Because they shared this community, Harriet assumed they all shared the

same philosophy around writing and literacy. Five of the six ELAR teachers at Ortega Middle School have attended the local writing project site's Invitational Summer Institute, a four-week intensive workshop focused on writing instruction and writing workshop, as well as the participants as writers. Attendance at the Institute was through an application process that ensured some philosophical alignment around supporting diversity and asset-based understandings of students with regards to writing. The writing project supported the process and social practice discourses around writing and included elements of creative and sociopolitical discourses (interview, Harriet). Further, the local writing project site supported the building of professional communities in schools, and so was more likely to accept teachers from schools where there are already teacher-consultants. Participation in this professional development experience was not mandated by the department, school, or district for Ortega teachers. Instead, participation spread through the department by way of personal connections between teachers, encouragement from department members, and teachers' own desires to improve their practice. The trust and personal communication made it possible for teachers to opt in to the next phase of developing as professionals, knowing they had the support of the department behind them. What follows is a discussion of the way in which membership in the writing project was built over time, relying on trust, communication, and consensus.

Annabeth and Liz, a teacher no longer at Ortega, were the first to attend the Institute during the summer of 2008. The following year, Annabeth encouraged the other eighth grade teacher, Olivia, to attend because she "knew nothing about workshop" (interview, 11/8/2011). Harriet was recruited by Liz, who also taught seventh grade, because "Liz and I had similar bachelors degrees [in creative writing], we had talked about we missed writing" (interview, Harriet). Harriet was interested because of "something I saw in a teacher's room, she was...

having her students write in their notebooks, in May, in the afternoon, and all the kids were quiet and writing in their notebooks. They were serious and I wanted to know more about that” (interview, Harriet). Even though Liz left Ortega, Annabeth, Olivia, and Harriet possessed this experience and knowledge around writing workshop instruction and continued to develop their practice in their classrooms. Further, they all continued to participate in professional development workshops sponsored by the local site, continuing to enriching and developing their understandings around writing workshop. While this focus on workshop instruction was not intrinsic to the work of every writing project site, it was a focus of this site.

Annabeth, Olivia, and Harriet continued to recruit their colleagues to become members of this professional community. Jennifer attended after Harriet, Olivia, and Annabeth all said “It will change your life” (interview, Jennifer). Rebekah attended the following summer because it “was advertised by lots of people,” but also because “they were more confident in their teaching” and she thought “This is the thing I want to do. I’m not going to feel bad about not doing TAKS practice and reading the book” (interview, Rebekah). The shared instructional practice of workshop that grew out of this shared professional development then became a draw for Tina to come work at Ortega. Tina’s path to workshop was different. She started structuring her classroom around workshop with the support of a mentor teacher early in her career and then began attending the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. But she came to Ortega because “it was already going on: everybody was doing writing workshop” (interview, Tina). From Annabeth’s first experience in the summer institute to Rebekah finishing, and Tina’s hiring, was four years. Being “nudged” (interview, Harriet) and encouraged by colleagues who were also friends, the teachers in the department shared a professional development experience and joined a community of teachers focused on workshop instruction. And the community that

supported that experience moved them toward a place where they could claim a philosophical alignment with one another around the workshop model of instruction.

In interviews, the teachers claimed this link between their Writing Project experience and their instructional practices. Annabeth, when asked if she could teach without workshop, responded, “Oh, God no. NO, I don't know why you would. Doesn't make sense not to... [the students] have to engage in the work they're learning about. I can't imagine how [students] would learn how to [write] unless you let them do it” (interview, 11/8/2011). The other teachers similarly claimed the value of workshop as an instructional strategy and their experiences with writing project as essential to their practice as teacher. Echoing Rebekah above, when Jennifer is engaged in workshop instruction, she “feel[s] like [she's] doing the right thing” (interview, Jennifer). Harriet, similar to Annabeth, linked workshop inextricably with her practice and her experiences with the writing project. “It would be very hard for me to teach now without [workshop] because like all these things that I had thought before were touched in every way by the writing project” (interview, Harriet). Tina, similarly, claims the teaching of workshop central to how she envisions her teaching practice. “I remember laying in my bed and going, ‘This is what I’ve been looking for’” (interview, Tina) after reading a book about workshop written by the director of the local writing project. Finally, Rebekah’s continual involvement with the writing project “reminds me, every time we have a Saturday [workshop], ‘Oh yeah, this is why I did this, this is why I’m doing this in my room’” (interview, Rebekah). Again, without sitting down in a meeting and codifying their beliefs, the teachers claimed a consensus around literacy instruction influenced by membership in a professional community outside of school that supported that consensus.

In this way, the mesosystem of the ELAR department overlaps quite closely with the mesosystem of the writing project. The strong professional community of the writing project, a multiply linked mesosystem, claimed by the teachers across these interviews, directly supports workshop instruction. Workshop instruction, then, is a key component in the literacy ecology of Annabeth's classroom. The process and social practices discourses around literacy practices and instruction originated in the writing project mesosystem and were taken up by the departmental mesosystem that supported workshop's implementation in the classroom microsystem. And there was certainly the expectation that these were the Discourses that were valued in the department. When Tina, as department chair, explicitly questioned the MCP Framework in the department meeting, she made clear that a different set of understandings around literacy were valued in the department. That placed two sets of powerful systems in conflict, the district and administrative exosystems with the department and writing project mesosystems. This conflict and the tensions that arose from it helped to reveal more of the texture of this ecology and the complexity that Annabeth navigated on a daily basis. The next section of this chapter examines a moment of conflict over workshop instruction that included all the systems previously discussed, the district and administrative exosystems, the departmental and writing project mesosystems, and the classroom microsystem.

Challenges and responses: Conflicts between the administration and the department

Both this chapter and the previous chapter describe the ecological context within which Annabeth's classroom is situated including the district and administration. The data supports a position that the district and administrative exosystems expressed characteristics the teachers understood to be unsupportive through a lack of communication, trust, and consensus. The departmental mesosystem expressed characteristics the teachers understood to be supportive

through communication built on trust, toward a consensus around literacy instruction and shifting decision-making power to the teachers. The teachers' understanding about the supportive and unsupportive characteristics of these two systems, then, determined how they perceived the reality of their classroom. How these two systems interacted, and how that interaction failed to resolve the tensions between the systems' competing Discourses around literacy curriculum and instruction was another feature of the ecology of the classroom. Annabeth summed the irresolution of tension between the administration and department in a debriefing session after a model lesson by Alice by wondering "It will be interesting to see if anything changes or we keep having the same conversation" (field notes, 2/29/2012). The failure to resolve tensions was a consistent marker of the relationship between these two systems. The beginning of the year set the stage for these tensions. The administrative exosystem challenged the departmental mesosystem by moving to impose a policy aimed specifically at literacy instruction. The department responded to that challenge with its own document, co-composed by the faculty. And this tension carried right through the spring when the department and administration clashed over the school's tutoring program. What follows is an examination of moments across the year when the department and administration intersected, the tensions that arose, and lack of resolution to those tensions.

A clash of Discourses: Skills and process.

One conflict arose between the administration and department over curriculum and instructional practices within literacy classrooms, and echoed the conflict discussed in chapter four between the classroom and the district. As mentioned above, there was an ongoing tension between the district and administration, on the one side, and the department and teachers, on the other, around whether or not workshop instruction was an acceptable model for literacy

instruction. This conflict was between the skills discourse of writing from the administration and district and a combination of the process and social construction discourses from the department. This tension codified into two documents with influence over ELAR curriculum and instruction at Ortega: the “Non-negotiable Writing Guidelines” (Appendix E) supported by the district and administration and the “Philosophy of Approach on the Teaching of Reading and Writing” (Appendix F) from the department. When the teachers talked about the documents, the first document was referred to as the Non-negotiables and the second as the Philosophy, which is the terminology I use as well. These documents were two of the key boundary objects that attempted to carry meaning across multiple systems within the ecology. Each object was designed within a particular system to both serve the immediate needs of defining literacy for that system, as well as communicate those definitions across systems influencing definitions elsewhere in the ecology. Because the two documents encapsulated incompatible understandings of literacy curriculum and instruction, the relative strength each had in a given context or point in time revealed power at work between the systems. An examination of the process by which each document came into being for Ortega, circulated among the teachers, and influenced instruction, revealed the tensions between supportive and unsupportive systems.

Writing non-negotiables.

The “Non-negotiable Writing Guidelines” (Appendix E) was a list of eight guidelines for student writing in assignments and three quotes about the “Value of Writing across the Curriculum Initiatives.” It had a history at Ortega. This document circulated in the high school English department for an indeterminate period of time before being adopted by the whole school. Annabeth’s copy of the Non-negotiables from 2010 included notes she made on the document when it was presented to her as relevant to her eighth grade students. She had circled

words or phrases in all but one guideline that highlight the prescriptive nature of the document. The word “should” appears three times. She also pointed out phrases that highlight the skills-based nature of the document: “proper,” “most appropriate,” “legible,” and “standard.” Next to guideline five, “Writing products should follow guidelines and format prescribed by that particular writing’s purpose,” she’s written “whom?” in response. Another telling note at the top of the page is “the administration liked it a lot.” While there was no indication who she was quoting, this note fit into her perception that the administration sought to change her literacy instruction to a more skills-based model, which proved to be the case given the interactions discussed below. This document codified the skills-based discourse around literacy circulating within the district and demonstrated one more way in which Annabeth faced challenges because she approached literacy from a different, and incompatible, stance.

Tracing the history of this document in Annabeth’s classroom is a way to see how this specter of administrative and district power to change literacy instruction was always with her. At the end of the 2009-2010 school year, these non-negotiables appeared in Annabeth’s classroom as part of the unit ending the year, preparing the eighth graders for high school. She said the non-negotiables “are crazy and have little to nothing to do with quality writing” (field notes, 4/22/2010). At the same time, they became a limited part of her instruction because “the kids will be expected to function under these constraints when they start school next year” (field notes, 4/22/2010). She handed the list to her students and they read through the list together, but it did not shape her curriculum, instruction, or expectations for student writing. In deciding to teach the non-negotiables as part of the eighth grade transitional unit, Annabeth acknowledged the reality that these writing behaviors would be a part of her students’ future success in high school. While the list, being propagated by the district exosystem, has some power because of

Annabeth's perception that it controlled her students' writing in high school, she chose when and how to make it a part of her instruction. Annabeth retained control over the implementation of these guidelines and minimized their influence. So she retained some power, though did end up incorporating the list even though she philosophically disagreed with it.

But the Non-negotiables did not stay relegated to this minor roll. In the summer of 2010, Richard became principal at Ortega, moving from the high school, and he brought the Non-negotiables with him. At the start of an extended email conversation between Annabeth, her colleagues, the Writing Project director, and me, Annabeth related how the Non-negotiables became a part of the conversation around literacy instruction.

...from what I've gathered, [Richard] thinks the way they do things [at the high school] is the way we should do them in our middle school. So, his plan is to adopt this "writing across the curriculum." The admin team sent the leadership comitee [sic] (of which Beck, Young, and I members) an email today asking on feedback on this and several other things (email, 6/22/2010)

Annabeth, by using the word "adopt," saw a future in which this list has become an integral part of her writing instruction and, because he presented the list and thinks it successful, the principal supported this shift. In this moment, Annabeth saw herself as losing control over her instruction and the power to make instructional decisions shifting away from her in her classroom to the administrative exosystem. Though after the initial flurry of emails around the introduction of this document and how to rebut its influence, the mentions of the Non-negotiables receded and the teachers continued focusing on workshop instruction. This fade was similar to the way the MCP framework was minimized in Annabeth's classroom, or suggestions from the district ELA coordinator failed to change Annabeth's instruction. When there was not consistent support for a

policy from the district or administration, Annabeth ignored the policy in all but the most basic ways. Her decision within an atmosphere thick with mandates and thin on support or follow-up served to protect her beliefs in what literacy instruction should be. So while the incident left Annabeth's classroom instruction much as it had been before the emails, the lingering threat of the Non-negotiables was only reinforced by these occasional, intense pushes against her instruction from other systems. The explicit nature of the Non-negotiables allowed for them to be a goal for writing that had the potential to be imposed on a teacher and her students by those with power over the classroom.

Opposed to these prescriptive, explicit goals were the general understandings held in the ELAR department about literacy instruction discussed above. These understandings about literacy instruction using workshop and the types of curriculum available for a literacy classroom relying on workshop instruction were not, before September of 2011, explicit. There was no document teachers could look up to remember these understandings, to shape their instruction, or even to challenge. But, in this case, their very implicitness—the fact that they were arrived at by consensus over the course of years—made them far less powerful in conflicts between the administrative exosystem and the other systems. Out of this imbalance of power, the department created its own policy document, the “Philosophy of Approach on the Teaching of Reading and Writing” (Appendix F).

Statement of philosophy.

The Philosophy (Appendix F) worked to counteract many of the ways in which Discourses circulating in the systems around the classroom imposed skills-based goals on literacy. It sat opposed to the list of Non-negotiables by speaking of the ways in which readers and writers act through reading and writing, not what students should not do. The best example,

perhaps, was the contrast in approaches to understanding grammar. The Non-negotiables began by with “Avoid all texting language, slang, abbreviations, stylized lettering.” The Philosophy states, “The craft, structures, and conventions of language (grammar, usage) are acquired both through explicit instruction and immersion in language. Writers make purposeful, informed grammatical choices when they have an understanding of the power of language.” In the first, students are directed what not to do by an unseen reader. In the second, they were given power over their language choices. The Philosophy encapsulated many of the beliefs that the teachers claimed at the end of the year in their interviews, placing the emphasis not on right and wrong, but on “a certain way of being” literate (interview, Harriet). And that way of being happened in specific ways in classrooms aligned with the philosophy.

With regards to the actual classes in which students would be writing, the two documents, again, starkly differ. The Non-negotiables make the blanket statement that “students should adhere to these [non-negotiable writing traits] at all times with all assignments,” with no sense of the classroom contexts in which these traits may or may not be appropriate. There is also no admittance that students may have writing lives that exist outside of classroom or school contexts where these guidelines run counter to the Discourses in those contexts. This, despite the fifth guideline that “writing products should follow guidelines and format prescribed by that particular writing’s purpose.” The Philosophy, on the other hand, lists nine “Essential Characteristics of the Reading/Writing Workshop classroom.” Most notable about those nine characteristics is that eight of the nine focus on the literacy practices available to students in workshop classrooms. Students “have time each day to read book they can and want to read,” “choose books,” conference, “gather together around a shared text,” “read and talk about books together,” “have time each day to write about topics and issues that interest and concern them,” “use mentor

texts,” and “use Writer’s Notebooks as recursive tools for thinking, learning, and growing as writers.” Placed side-by-side, these documents powerfully illustrate the tensions between the department and the administration that grew out of incompatible Discourses that Annabeth navigated in her daily life as a teacher.

Importantly, despite its focus and explicitness and the rebalancing of power that might have been achieved through its creation, the document never was mentioned again by any of the ELAR teachers in meetings or conversations with me. It came up once during my interview with the principal at the very end of the year, when he remembered its creation by saying, “[The ELAR department] got together and wrote a philosophy [and] defended it to central office and here on campus” (interview, 5/21/2012). So despite the complex tensions the teachers navigated and the department attempted to buffer, the document that could have given them power to explicitly argue faded into the background. Even in moments of extreme tension between the departmental mesosystem and the administrative exosystem, when the Philosophy may have been a useful document to support the teachers’ work, it was silent. The findings that follow center on one such moment, a clash of systems, Discourses, and individuals that eventually led to an ecological disruption of Annabeth moving schools.

Tutoring: Conflicts, tension, and release.

Though I have not discussed explicitly the district and administrative focus on test scores, standardized testing, and test preparation curriculum, this focus was a reality most schools faced and Ortega was no different. Annabeth acknowledged this focus when she identified one of the negative influences on her classroom as “what test scores we need to be getting” (interview, 11/8/2011). Particular test scores have become yet another goal imposed on the teachers by the district or administration, and that goal grew out of a skills discourse around literacy. Testing

was a part of the talk within the ecology across the year. As early as October, Annabeth told her students that “Miss Young and I have looked at a lot of test prompts that have happened in the past” (field notes, 10/11/2011). The department meeting in January included discussions of mock tests and “learning criteria responsibility” (personal communication, 1/9/2012), which was a reference to a district landmark test. Three Monday Meetings were devoted to discussions of test preparation, tutoring for the test, or giving the test (documents, 1/9/2012, 2/13/2012, 3/19/2012). Agenda items from these meetings included: “Mock Data / Landmark Data” (1/9/2012), “Day of Test” (2/13/2012), and “Testing Updates” (3/19/2012). When Annabeth talked about her interaction with Dennis as, “He’s been hounding [her and Olivia] about their ‘plan’ for the test that is coming up” (field notes, 2/23/2012), the tension was clear. Testing was the background noise behind all the conversations about fluency and teaching, philosophy and workshop. This focus on testing contributed to a “climate of fear” (field notes, 3/19/2012) that eroded the trust between the administration and the teachers.

One key component of the administrative exosystem’s response to testing requirements was tutoring and test preparation instruction. The administration expected teachers to tutor students who were at risk of failing the test and devote adequate time in their classrooms to test preparation instruction. The tutoring required a lot of time and manpower to make work as evidenced by the time and attention it received from Dennis in the Monday Meetings and in his communication with faculty. Faculty, too, volunteered time during breakfast, activity time, lunch, and after school to do this tutoring. Within the departmental mesosystem, though, tutoring was not an unquestioned good. Tina, during a department meeting, said that signing a student up for tutoring was like saying that “You don’t get it you need to come to tutoring... I’m on a little thing where we don’t realize what we’re doing to the kids. We’re disenfranchising them. We’re

letting them know over and over again how they are not good enough for this school” (field notes, 1/9/2012). Instead of seeing tutoring as preparing a student for the test, Tina read the message that tutoring was one more way that student hear that they were not good at a particular, narrow set of skills that were prized on tests. Annabeth echoed this tension to her students, one day in the middle of their preparation for the test, when she said:

Every single person in this room is a literate person. That means you can read and write. I know that because I’ve watched you for the last 7 months of your life. I know that part of reading that you’re really, really good at. There are parts that you struggle with. (field notes, 2/25/2012)

Because testing provided the backdrop to all of the conversations around literacy, and so many students were unsuccessful on the tests, the teachers worked to push back against the skills discourse when they could.

The communication from the administration around testing and tutoring echoed the communication around MCP, imposing and expecting compliance. But the lack of trust and communication that was exhibited in other intersections between the administration and the teachers was also apparent in the intersection around tutoring. In working to ensure that students were being tutored, “Dennis was ‘stalking’ the whole ELAR department yesterday seeing if they had people in their rooms” (field notes, 3/22/2012). The language that Annabeth used to describe Dennis, stalking and hounding, showed an environment in which there was little trust and the administration had much of the power to do the hounding and stalking. Annabeth went on to explain the purpose of his visit to her classroom, “He confronted me as I was eating lunch. He asked if there were supposed to be kids in my room and I said yes, but that they didn’t show. He asked what I was going to do about it. I said I’d talk to them tomorrow. He said ‘well, you’d

better’” (field notes, 3/22/2012). Again, Dennis, as part of the administrative exosystem that valued particular test scores, showed a lack of trust in Annabeth’s instructional decisions around tutoring. And while his question about why she did not have students was valid, because it took place in an already tensions-filled atmosphere, it only served to amplify the tension by presenting no solution. Further, it demonstrated an unwillingness to see the specific ways in which teachers might be trying to implement tutoring, only assuming that if the students were not in the classroom at the appropriate time, then the teacher was at fault.

Annabeth was not alone in her adversarial relationship with Dennis that was marked by this unidirectional conversation, a lack of trust, and exercises of power. Around the same time, he sent an email to all of the seventh and eighth grade ELAR teachers saying

I did not see any students being tutored in your classrooms today during Activity Time.

The expectations is for teachers to assign tutorials for students in need of reading and writing tutorials and for those students to attend...I would first and foremost expect to see us tutoring students in need, especially the week before STAAR. (personal communication, 3/21/2012)

Again, while his question is a fair one, asking why students are not being tutored at the expected time, his comment reflected a lack of knowledge about what is happening in the ELAR classrooms leading up to the tests. Olivia responded to this email by focusing on the students and making an essential connection to the ELAR department.

My students and I have BOTH been working extremely hard IN class. I also tutor students every morning during breakfast time...Please understand I am a teacher, that is part of a department that deeply cares for our students success. We do not want them to be over anxious or stressed before the big test. (email, 3/21/2012)

Even as she responded clearly and forcefully in favor of her practices and her students, she questioned that response, asking me “Did I sound okay? Too emotional?” (email, 3/21/2012).

The climate of fear referenced above, despite Tina’s open questioning of administrative policies in department meetings, made Olivia doubt her position. This tension between the position of the department on matters of literacy practices and instruction, even as it related to test preparation, exacerbated the lack of trust that marked many of the intersections between systems outside the classroom around practices inside the classroom. This contributed to an atmosphere in which it was challenging to be a teacher, and an administrator. Though in approaching these intersections with accusations and confrontations, again, these tensions were compounded instead of dispelled.

This series of interactions around tutoring students made Annabeth admit if she were rich she wouldn’t be here today. My field notes starkly reveal the pressure she is under from the administrative exosystem to act in particular ways toward her students: as she is telling me about the email and confrontation above, “she starts crying a little bit” (field notes, 3/22/2012). The unsupportive nature of the relationship between the classroom microsystem, including the teacher’s deeply held beliefs around workshop instruction and literacy practices (interview, 11/8/2012), and the administrative exosystem with priorities around testing and tutoring created tensions that Annabeth had experienced, to greater or lesser degrees, for years. These were tensions between Discourses of literacy that focus on skills or process and social construction of knowledge. They are tensions between Discourses valuing statistical data on students produced by standardized tests and ethnographic data collected by teachers as they interacted with students in classes across time. The confluence of these tensions, regardless of the support she received from the department and her professional communities, must be resolved and she made a decision to take a job in a different district. There were quite possibly a myriad of reasons that

Annabeth decided to move districts and schools, just because this research does not focus on personal mesosystems does not mean they did not exist and exert very real influence. But given the events discussed above, and her own words, the tensions within the ecology of this classroom contributed to her decision. In discussing the move with me, she admitted that how "wonderful it was to feel wanted, pursued" (field notes, 7/23/2012) by the administrators in this other district. Though she felt "guilty for leaving Ortega and... the community she'd built" (field notes, 7/23/2012), that feeling was not enough to induce her to stay. In explaining her reasons for leaving, she cites many of the above events as part of the "bad year" she had experienced. So it is not enough to have supportive systems in the ecology to navigate its inherent tensions. In some ways, the supportive systems of the department and writing project highlighted exactly where these tensions within the system were and because the differences between what Annabeth believed and what the administration required of her were so stark, she made a decision to move.

Discussion: Caught between systems

As with the examinations of the district and administration in chapter four, systematic analysis of an ecology afforded by EST parses out the particular lines of influence that originate in the departmental mesosystem and move into the classroom microsystem. As the research on departments shows (Siskin, 1994; Hill, 1995) the departments can become powerful social forces within an ecology. And, in this case, those social forces were leveraged to support the work the teachers were doing against real and perceived pressure to change from the district and administration by having the department "come together [and] tackle issues laden with conflict" (Hill, 1995, p. 131) like the MCP Framework. While the department was certainly a formal structure within the school, and sanctioned by the administration, it was not a system that enforced administrative mandates on its teachers' curriculum and instruction. Instead, it was a

system where teachers worked collaboratively to solve problems that arose, both in individual classrooms and across the department (Hill, 1995).

Looking at the department through the lens of supportive systems, it exhibited many of the characteristics of supportive systems. When teachers talked in the department, their talk had the potential to change the system, like in the departmental meeting. They trusted one another to think through ideas, take risks, and reflect. They achieved a consensus around literacy instruction with the support of the writing project as a knowledge community (Craig, 2009) separate from the school (Grossman, et al., 2001). Importantly, the teachers' participation in the writing project knowledge community was actively supported and encouraged across the department, so "a tremendous power [was] productively unleashed" (Craig, 2009, p. 641). The critiques of the district or administrative exosystems were located in the knowledge gained from the writing project. More importantly, the combination of the department and the writing project allowed the teacher "to form valued professional attachments with their students and colleagues, and to their work" (Kaplan, 2009, p. 342). From this position of power, gained across time and through social connections, the department could then work toward expanding its vision of the teaching of writing.

While the department did not seek to impose its own mandates like the administration, it certainly had Discourse expectations around workshop that required teachers to speak the language of workshop. Unlike the administration, the department did not police its teachers. The enforcement that did happen in the department meeting, not responding as strongly to an experience located in the skills discourse as to one coming out of the process discourse, was more social than administrative, though it was a form of enforcement, nonetheless. Another key difference between the Discourse expectations of the department and those of the administration

is that the department was a knowledge community that grew organically across time with the support of the writing project. Also, it was more voluntary than, say, the MCP framework. So even with Discourse expectations in the department, the teachers engaged in “strategic compliance” because “the rewards of cohesion are tangible and immediate” (Ball & Lacey, 1994, p. 99) such as friendship, community, and a space to be valued as a professional.

This clash of Discourses was embodied by the district document around Non-negotiable Writing Guidelines and the departmental Philosophy. Both of these documents attempted to cross the boundaries between classroom microsystems, the departmental mesosystem, administrative and district exosystems. Though the potential for these documents to become boundary objects existed, neither was taken up by systems outside of where they originated. This failure to influence practices outside of their system of origin shows the power of the Discourses within each system and how opposed to one another they were. These two texts then, were not “plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints [while] maintain[ing] a common identity across sites” (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 297). There were, though, moments within the data that point to alternative ways that the departmental mesosystem and administrative exosystem could interact around the classroom microsystem. The creation of the Philosophy was one clear moment when the administrative exosystem turned to the departmental mesosystem for its input and opinion. Though, like with the never-realized potential of Alice’s engagement with the literacy work happening at Ortega, the complete lack of conversation around the philosophy within any system meant its influence was far less powerful than it might have been.

Conclusion

Despite a supportive departmental mesosystem, and an active and engaged professional community in the writing project site, Annabeth still chose to leave her school. Her

understandings of the tensions between the district and administrative systems on one hand, and the departmental and writing project systems on the other, were irresolvable. Chapter six takes a close look at how these two powerful sets of discourses—from the administration and district, and department and writing project—intersect in Annabeth’s classroom. I take up the Front-of-Class Set-up, the writing on the board dictated by MCP, as an exemplar of a boundary object designed in the administrative exosystem for use in the classroom microsystem that fails to fulfill its potential. I conclude by examining writer’s notebooks, which embody the Discourses of process and social construction and become successful boundary objects because of their ability to be of use in multiple systems.

CHAPTER 6 THE CLASSROOM: THE INTERSECTION OF SYSTEMS

Introduction

Chapters four and five charted out the large map of the literacy ecology of Annabeth's classroom by highlighting the district, administrative, and departmental systems within the ecology. I discussed the ways in which the district and administrative exosystems were generally unsupportive, and the departmental mesosystem supportive, using communication, trust, consensus, and power as analytic tools. The competing Discourses within those two systems resulted in constant and near irresolvable tensions within the ecology. Chapter six, the final findings chapter, zooms into Annabeth's classroom, the microsystem at the center of this ecology, to examine the literacy work that happened there and how that work fit into the larger ecology. To show the ways in which the microsystem was the intersection of all these influences, and others as well, I relied on the notion of boundary objects (Star & Greisemer, 1989; Star, 2010), which allowed me to track how individuals responded to the influences from various systems and moved among them within the classroom and beyond.

This chapter describes two boundary objects in the classroom, the Front-of-class Set-up on the whiteboard and writer's notebooks. Each was a specific instantiation of the two competing Discourses around literacy circulating in the ecology. I close the chapter with a discussion of how the expression of these two discourses through these objects offers lesson about both how to cultivate powerful boundary objects in schools settings and how to use boundary objects to navigate Discourse tensions.

Boundary Objects within the Classroom

Two key boundary objects anchor this examination: the Front-of-class Set-up on the whiteboard and students' writer's notebooks. Each object attempts to facilitate boundary crossing

within the ecology. The Front-of-class Set-up (Figure 6.1) was the writing that Annabeth was required by the MCP framework to put on her board.

Figure 6.1: Front-of-Class Set-up Template

Model Classroom Project – Front of Class Set Up

MCP Front of Class Set Up
The Template

Three Part Objective	Working Vocabulary		Essential Question										
	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 50%;">Agenda</th> <th style="width: 50%;">Criteria For Success</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Agenda	Criteria For Success										Reflection
Agenda	Criteria For Success												
			STAAR										

As the figure shows, it included seven components of the MCP Framework: agenda, vocabulary, essential questions, and STAAR alignment, that are aligned with MCP goals. All components were supposed to change daily to reflect the lesson plan. The information contained in the Front-of-Class Set-up was echoed in the PLC planning guides, which were discussed in chapter four. The Front-of-Class Set-up was a distillation of the MCP Framework meant to shape the teacher’s instruction according to administrative priorities. Writer’s notebooks were a very different tool. They “fill the gap” (Bomer, 1995, p. 44) in the writing process between blank page and final

draft. They can “help students collect data about their lives and to begin to reach for meaning” (p. 47) through writing. Critically, writing in a notebook is writing to think, not writing in a particular genre to be published to a particular audience (Bomer, 2011). In Annabeth’s class, students wrote in writer’s notebooks almost every other day, in ways guided by Annabeth with topics chosen by the students.

The success of the individual boundary objects, or the concepts they represented, in supporting individuals in doing this work of moving among systems is a matter of the complex relationship within and between the people, tools, and systems that intersect in the classroom. The effectiveness of the boundary object was judged by how effectively it facilitated engagement across systems, served the system-specific needs of individuals using the boundary object, and became naturalized as a part of the microsystem in which it lived. In this final chapter, I examine the Front-of-class Set-up as a key artifact, originating in the administrative exosystem, that was tended and resisted in the classroom microsystem. I also examine how writer’s notebooks were a practice supported by Annabeth’s mesosystems and that supported students in navigating the literacy ecology of the classroom, which included student-centered mesosystems outside of the school and classroom.

Front-of-class Set-up: A Standardized Boundary Object

In this section, I discuss the front of Annabeth’s classroom, specifically her whiteboard. Annabeth’s front board was the intersection of the administrative exosystem and her classroom microsystem and had the potential to be a boundary object existing in the spaces between systems and easing the transition between them. As one piece of the MCP framework discussed in chapter four, the Front-of-class Set-up was shorthand for exactly what was to be on the board at all times. Its standardized nature reflected, administrative goals for instruction and made

During the poetry unit it often included literary devices, and during the drama unit, words specific to drama. The criteria for success includes both behavioral and content expectations. The essential question is a big idea question that the students should be able to answer by the end of the lesson. The reflection was an activity that the students were to do at the end of the lesson demonstrating their knowledge. The STAAR category was how the lesson connects to the STAAR exam that students would be taking.

Variations of this text lived on Annabeth's board, taking up a majority of the space, all year long. This Front-of-Class Set-up was the cornerstone of the administrative exosystem's influence on the classroom through MCP because it was visible each day in the classroom, students could interact with it—though they rarely did and did not always understand it (interview, 11/8/2011)—and it commanded a lot of Annabeth's time and attention. Further, these categories were at the crux of the conversation when Annabeth and Olivia were planning together in their PLC meeting in chapter five. Though the content of each category changes, with more or less regularity across time, the template remains. The design of a successful boundary object allows for the object to be purposeful in multiple systems. It is not defined by fidelity to a perfect form, but by the idea of flexibility and site-specific use. The Front-of-class Set-up did not provide for this flexibility as the expectation was adherence to the template and teachers were evaluated based on that expectation. In this way, the Front-of-class Set-up extended the power of the administration over instruction, much like linking the MCP Framework to teacher evaluation. In the case of the board, administration staff used the front-of-class set-up to monitor teacher instruction in ways both informal and formal. The informal monitoring happened in the form of drop-ins.

Surveilling a well-structured form.

In November, Dennis visited Annabeth's classroom unexpectedly. While he walked around the room and looked over students' shoulders, he also took a picture of both sides of the board (field notes, 11/4/2011). He did this just after the bell rang to dismiss class, but in full view of the teacher, so his monitoring of the board was made explicit. Annabeth never mentions a follow-up to these photographs, but did remember photographs of boards being displayed during faculty meetings, but does not remember the details of the conversations around the board. Another administrator dropped into Annabeth's classroom in November (field notes, 11/14/2011) and wanted to know why the Front-of-class Set-up was incomplete, even though it was a day that the students were testing and they were not supposed to have the support of the board. And there was the monitoring described in chapter four when I discussed reflection. That drop in by Dennis, too, included photographs of the board. This type of monitoring was not an isolated incident or limited to Annabeth, as Tina and Harriet both talked about Richard visiting PLCs and commenting on what was on the board, but rarely visiting classes when students were working (field notes, 11/29/2011). In this way, the monitoring was explicit and conveyed the message that conformity was expected, but the lack of follow-up, either constructive or not, undermined the overall message.

When the front-of-class set-up came to be a tool of oversight and compliance, instead of a boundary object open to site-specific use by the teacher and her students, another site of tension developed. Returning to a key section in Annabeth's interview, days after Dennis' unannounced visit to her classroom, Annabeth talked about "this way we have to do our boards and being all anal about it" (interview, 11/8/201). Her comment links the board to administrative oversight, not curriculum, instruction or student learning. The administration's focus on the board as an

exemplar of high-quality instruction and student learning moved it from being a tool the teachers could use to guide instruction into a form that was monitored for compliance. In this way, oversight of the board began to be understood as surveillance, intrusions into the classroom that positioned Annabeth as in need of monitoring, not as a knowledgeable professional. And Annabeth's emotional reaction to the Front-of-class Set-up grew not out of disagreement with many of its instructional goals, such as reflection, but the power the administration exercised over her around it. Instead of the tool of the Front-of-class Set-up interacting with the practices at work in Annabeth's classroom to create a tool useful to both systems, the administration used it to enforce a set of mandates imposed on the teachers. Moreover, these mandates were not organized to incorporate teachers' existing pedagogical or disciplinary knowledge, but to improve "efficiency" (Figure 4.2) and a narrowing of teachers instruction around six elements. This perception of deprofessionalization around the MCP Framework made it a target of teacher resistance. Further, the influence of the board on instruction was tenuous at best, given the lack of follow-up on the surveillance, which specifically opened the enactment of the board to resistance and adaptation by Annabeth.

Teacher resistance.

Despite the difficulty in adapting the board, Annabeth tried to make the template work for her through individual resistance, and some sanctioned by the department. One of the most obvious ways that Annabeth resisted the board was by simply not mentioning it during class. In my year in Annabeth's classroom, I only saw her call the students' attention to the information contained in the Front-of-class Set-up once and that was when Dennis was in her room taking pictures of the board. So even though she wrote the front of class set up every day, Annabeth did not explicitly reference the information during her teaching. Instead, she wrote her entries in a

way that completed the template, with little thought as to how the template could change her instruction. As with all the other mandates around MCP, Annabeth made the decision to do as little as possible to pass inspection, without engaging in the work of the Front-of-class Set-up to a degree that would influence her instructional choices.

Departmental actions supported Annabeth's resistance as well. Many other departments interpreted the STAAR section as a different STAAR question each day (field notes, 11/29/2011). But the definition page in the MCP binder included the question "How does this help me on the STAAR?" So instead of putting up a different STAAR question each day, Tina, the department chair, "gave...permission" (field notes, 11/29/2011) for her department to write a statement that actually answered the question posed in the binder. This resistance grew out of Tina's refusal to plan from a test question and, as evidence above, a continual critique of much of the MCP Framework. During a conversation, she discussed Richard and Dennis' focus on essential questions, which she saw as conflated with the STAAR questions. When she talked about this intersection of planning and STAAR, she could not complete the sentence in a logical manner. "If we're backwards planning from a test question... that's not... A test question?!" (field notes, 11/29/2011). Tina tried to make sense of planning backwards, which she found helpful, from a test question, which did not align with her understanding of backwards design, or the process and social practices discourses she supported as department chair. So instead of driving her instruction with STAAR questions, Annabeth crafted sentences that often included the words stamina and fluency in relation to the students' reading and the idea that student would be required to answer questions. A few examples from across the year follow:

- On STAAR, students will read, analyze, and answer questions about poetry. (photograph, 11/4/2011)

- On STAAR, students will be expected to read several passages with clear comprehension, stamina, and fluency, and to answer questions about those passages. (photograph, 1/13/2012)
- On STAAR, students will have to have reading stamina and fluency on the passages and be able to answer the higher level multiple choice questions. (photograph, 2/7/2012)
- On STAAR, students will be required to read multiple passages with stamina and fluency and answer various multiple choice questions that assess comprehension and critical thinking skills. (photograph, 2/29/2012)

These are essentially the same phrase reworded. They all fall into the skills discourse by focusing on the reductive ability to answer multiple choice questions. Further, instead of a new statement each day, Annabeth's STAAR statements carried across days, which allowed her to, in a small way, minimize the amount of time and cognitive attention she needed to spend on her board. Finally, though fully half of her class is focused on writing, there was never a STAAR statement on writing because it isn't a tested subject in eighth grade. So Annabeth left the reading statement up through the writing days because a blank section was more troubling than an incorrect section.

The Front-of-class Set-up failed as a boundary object specifically because its standardized form refused to acknowledge "the ambiguity of the objects of learning" (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 306) and support Annabeth or the students moving between systems. Within the MCP framework that the Front-of-class Set-up tried to impose a skills discourse and limited the scope of the instruction for the day. The reality of Annabeth's classroom and the complex ecology in which it sat was not a category on the board. And even shifting the categories to reflect that complex ecology required Annabeth to skirt what she perceived as the rules of the

board and risk unknown repercussions. While it is challenging to design a successful boundary object in a school context, there are tools with far more potential than the Front-of-class Set-up evidenced. It was designed in such a way that it hindered movement between the only two systems it was really concerned with, the classroom and administrative exosystem.

Writer's Notebooks: Serving Many Masters and Moving Across Systems

Annabeth's classroom was not only a story of a failed boundary object. Writer's notebooks exemplified the potential for a boundary object that was cultivated in the classroom and responsive to the myriad Discourses that intersected there. Notebooks were weakly structured across the ecology and strongly structured in individual systems. They served particular exosystem needs around a skills discourse for writing, and at the same time the process and social practices discourses of the department. Most importantly, they served the needs of Annabeth and her students. They served Annabeth's desire to incorporate students' literate practices from their lives into the work of school. And for many students, they served as bridges between the literate work they are expected to accomplish at school and their lives outside the classroom walls. What follows is a discussion of how notebooks served the different needs of different systems through which notebooks, or the idea of notebooks, circulated, including the district, department, the classroom, and students' lives outside of school.

District concerns with quantity.

Though Annabeth understood workshop instruction as tenuous and subject to the whims of the district, notebooks served as a boundary object between the work of the classroom and the expectations of the district. When Alice visited Annabeth's classroom in January as described in chapter four, the students were writing in their notebooks. Alice saw their engagement with the immediate writing task, as well as the writing that the students had previously done that was

housed in the notebook. Seeing this evidence of writing, she remarked “that’s the most writing I’ve ever seen” (field notes, 1/17/2012), understanding the object as a repository for writing and being impressed with the amount. In talking more about the writing, the focus continued to be on quantity when she remarks “There’s other classrooms where I’ve gone to where they can’t get two sentences out of kids.” Notebooks, then, served Alice’s need to see students writing a lot of text. So for a skills discourse that, on one level, values quantity over quality, notebooks served Alice’s purposes. Though notebooks could not cross far into a system that valued the skills discourse.

When writer’s notebooks more explicitly met the skills discourse in district contexts outside the classroom, Annabeth forcefully rejected the combination. One of her students was assigned to the disciplinary academy for the district and chose to take his notebook with him for the time he was gone. When he returned, Annabeth saw that the teacher had corrected the grammar in his notebook and graded the pages. Annabeth’s email, which included a photograph of a notebook page covered with grammatical corrections, conveys her disbelief. “I can’t f***** [sic] believe it. And there is more. She graded almost every entry; wrote the grade, in pen, at the top” (email, 10/25/2011). Annabeth saw notebooks as a place for thinking and a valid place for students to bring their life into the classroom. For this teacher to bring a skills discourse to a tool that Annabeth understood central to supporting students’ literacy practices was unbelievable to her. The district was suffused with the skills discourse of writing and that influenced at least one teacher outside Annabeth’s department. And though this teacher brought the skills discourse to notebooks, Annabeth strongly rejected that approach. The department, too, supported her in this perspective of notebooks as tools for process-oriented work and the social practices of writing.

Departmental unity around writer's notebooks.

Notebooks served different needs of the departmental mesosystem, and the local writing project site. First, the practice of notebooks served as a source of consensus for the ELAR department, though not just as an anchor for instruction. As Olivia explained, the running joke among the ELAR teachers was that “[Other teachers] think we just let kids cuss in their notebooks and write about their feelings” (interview, 4/30/2012). Whether or not this was a valid critique, it served as a consensus building moment for the ELAR department. They bonded over this joke because the teachers “in the know” understand that cussing is not what the notebook is about. Instead of being angry that the other teachers misunderstood, they laughed it off. Further, Olivia understood this use of notebooks to signal a particular set of beliefs about literacy and literacy instruction, echoed in the department’s philosophy. The notebooks also signaled the community surrounding the writing project. Before doing the summer institute with the writing project, Harriet noticed the ways in which Liz and had students using notebooks in her classroom (interview, 4/20/2012). Olivia, too, remembered seeing notebooks and wanting to know more about how that instructional practice worked with students (interview, 4/30/2012). Notebooks and students’ work with notebooks signaled a particular kind of classroom structure, one that the teachers wanted to belong to, and one the department supported.

Notebooks in the classroom.

Annabeth explained one of her key goals for students was “to see themselves as literate beings and the things they do in their lives as literate practices...And to develop their reading and writing habits for their lives” (interview, 11/8/2011). Annabeth designed instruction intended to “ask [students] ...what it is they do at home [and] to bridge that” gap they perceived between the literacy work in their lives and at school. Here, she articulated the movements her students

made through the literacy ecology of her classroom, which included moving between the systems of home and school. Notebooks, then, supported students in their movements between the classroom microsystem and the various mesosystems through which they moved by serving as a repository for experiences and knowledge cultivated by them outside the classroom and translated into notebook entries. Annabeth specifically encouraged students to look beyond the classroom walls for topics for their writing in their notebooks. She did this by encouraging them to draw in memories, experiences, or stories from their lives into the notebooks (photograph, 12/6/2011; photograph, 1/31/2012).

She talks about the “complicated person” that each of them is and that they can “talk about friends and family and life. Writer’s workshop is a time to sit with your notebook and think about that stuff. You get to figure some things out.” (field notes, 1/4/2012)

Further, several of the tools for making notebook entries included references harvesting to memories, stories, and experiences to encourage writing (photograph, 10/26/2011; field notes, 1/4/2012). In this way, this object, and the practices that it supported in the classroom, was a key boundary object in Annabeth’s classroom, opening up the potential for students to move between and within their overlapping systems that intersected in the classroom not just school-based systems. What follows is a detailed discussion of notebook practices in Annabeth’s classroom and the way those practices supported movement between systems within the ecology. This discussion includes sample entries from students’ notebooks, a description of how class periods were organized around notebooks, as well as how the students used notebooks in and out of class.

Writer's notebooks from Annabeth's students held hopes, dreams, opinions, scribbles, conversations, and ephemera. The following figures are four different pages from four different students' writer's notebooks that cover the range of composing students engaged in. Linda (Figure 6.3) wrote about her quinceañera, while experimenting with the form of her writing. Otto (Figure 6.4) wrote about a frequent topic in his writer's notebook, soccer. Written on the same day that Linda was, he was experimenting with the expository format, including pictures and a legend with his writing. Virginia (Figure 6.5), writing outside the classroom, explored multimodality in a piece about sadness in a relationship encasing the writing in a teardrop and using markers. Finally, Monica (Figure 6.6) used the cover of her writer's notebook, a binder unlike many of her classmates, to prominently display the photograph of an eighth grade student who was slain earlier in the year. The notebook cover included a collage of other images brought together a range of cultural influences. These four notebooks were representative both in form and content of the range of possibilities students developed in their notebooks across the year. Students experimented with multimodality and the design of their notebook writing, they explored topics as varied as relationships, speaking Spanish, soccer, and hair, and they explored genres like poetry, expository, and text.

For many, but not all, of the students in Annabeth's classroom, notebooks supported their movement between this particular classroom and lives outside of school. Notebooks that stayed in the classroom came to hold stories of students' lives outside of the classroom. Below, I discuss some of the classroom rituals around notebooks, how they lived in the daily world of the classroom. This includes how students entered into the notebook, and how Annabeth taught around it, and how students engaged with it. Some of those practices included circulating the notebooks among the students, sharing their literate explorations, co-creating content, and

sharing a developing understanding of what it meant to be a literate person in this classroom space.

Almost every class I observed began with Annabeth's verbal and written instructions for students to collect their notebook and answer the warm-up questions. Notebooks lived in a crate on a shelf by the door and were usually collected by students when they walked in the door. A few students carried their notebooks with them between the classroom and the rest of school and home. Very rarely were students without a notebook once they had been a part of Annabeth's class for a week. The warm-up generally asked students to access some idea from a previous day or to reflect on their own experience and knowledge and write ideas down that related to the topic of the day. Two examples of warm-ups are "1. What poem did you write down yesterday? 2. Why did you pick that poem?" (Photograph, 11/8/2011) and "What are the rules of your favorite sport or game? 2. Why do games/sports have rules?" (Field notes, 1/27/2012). The warm-ups' prompt-like structure, generally a practice not associated with notebooks, was because warm-ups were another administrative mandate for instruction and Annabeth adapted the questions to draw students' knowledge and experience into whatever the topic for the day was. In this way, the notebooks navigated the required aspects of Annabeth's class while still leaving room for the students' to adapt them. After a warm-up, Annabeth would engage in a short minilesson about the type of writing that students could try out in their notebooks. Generally these were short, less than 10 minutes, conversations around a particular feature of a genre or ways to get started.

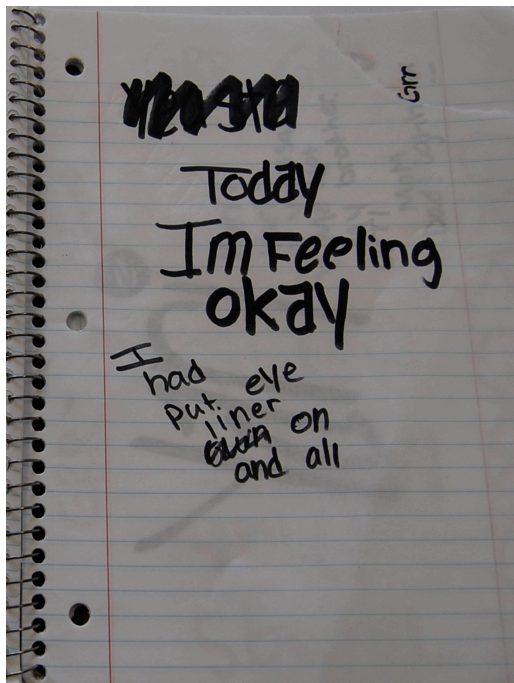
After the minilesson, students engaged in the work of writing and Annabeth conferred with students over the notebook. In this way, the notebooks were nested within rituals and work in the classroom among students and between the students and teacher. Annabeth relied on

writer's notebooks as a locus for her writing instruction. Conversations about the writer's notebook's contents, uses, and place in the students' lives became one the main topics of conversation and instruction between Annabeth and the students. On October 4, Annabeth moved from conference to conference, beginning with "Here's what I noticed" (field notes, 10/4/2012) as she spoke to students over the writing in their notebooks. Annabeth knew what help specific students needed around the notebook, like talking to Jeremiah first when he was working in his notebook. "If he struggles just for a little bit he gives up for the rest of the class period" (field notes, 1/10/2012). The conferences acted as ways of formatively assessing for individuals and the whole class. For example, on January 23, Annabeth finished a conference with Josh, then turned to the whole class and explained, again, a piece of the lesson because she noticed many students' confusion (field notes, 2/23/2012). Annabeth and the students, individually and as a group, were co-constructing literacy in these conversations over the notebook. Students, individually or among themselves, were equally active during worktime.

During this work time, students made choices about how to engage with their writer's notebooks and relied on experience and knowledge from outside the classroom for writing topics. Annabeth invited students to experiment with particular strategies on these days, but she did not dictate where the information for this experimentation came from and did not punish students for trying something else. On these days, students dipped into their own lives for ideas for writing as evidenced above (Figures 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4). Otto and Edward wrote about soccer, extensively and with great passion. For one stretch of writing days, regardless of what Annabeth discussed or suggested in her minilesson, Edward crafted the story of a tournament that his traveling soccer team attended in San Antonio (field notes, 1/6/2012). For him, the notebook served as a place to process a challenging series of events and a devastating loss for his team.

Soccer was life absorbing and the notebook acknowledged that reality within the context of schooling. In another instance, Otto wrote about the different ways he spoke Spanish and the social situations in which there were different expectations around the type of Spanish he was supposed to be speaking (photograph, 1/13/2012). Again, the identity work around language was, for Otto, life absorbing. Whether it was a New Year's Eve party or a best friend's poor relationship choice, the students relied on their own lives for content to fill their notebooks with words and images. In these moments, the writer's notebook existed as a boundary object, supporting students in occupying the worlds of school and life simultaneously. Beyond the academic literacies of stories and expository essays exploring language, students filled their notebooks with doodles, drawings, and notes. Figure 6.7 includes an example of one student's experimenting with the notebook in a way that was not a clear example of an academic genre.

Figure 6.7: A Note in a Notebook



Who the audience for this piece was is unclear. What it was doing in the notebook is also unclear. But this note, and others like it in other notebooks, lived next to the formal essays,

warm-ups, and MCP reflections. The appearance and frequency of these types of texts depended on the student, but most notebooks held some kind of marginalia. But, again, these specific instantiations of notebooks did what the students needed them to do and strengthened their use for Annabeth's purposes of valuing student experience and knowledge.

Though the notebook was still, at its core, an academic literacy, these marginal moments open up alternative routes through the students' school day when life was welcomed into school in a way not possible when adhering to a standardized way of engaging with the notebook. The almost daily engagement with the notebook, the practice-activity with it, opened it up to the multiple potentials it held as a boundary object. In addition to the regular engagement with the notebooks, history plays an equally important role in the naturalization process of the notebook for students. For most of these students, notebooks have been a part of their life for at least two years as the ELAR department adopted them as a common practice in the 2010-2011 school year and were used by several teachers before that. Elena (Interview, 1/4/2012), Virginia (Field notes, 2/14/2012), Alex (interview, 1/24/2012), and Dede (Interview, 1/6/2012) mentioned specifically that they began keeping a notebook last year in Ms. Spruce's class. Dede still had hers and enjoyed looking through it. Michaela (interview, 2/29/2012) said she began keeping a notebook in sixth grade. This history with writer's notebooks was part of how students became naturalized to the object and practice of the notebook. Writer's notebooks facilitated students transition from sixth to seventh to eighth grade, and created a coherent structure through which they could navigate any given day. In this way, notebooks were linked across the ecology in multiple ways, through history, across classes, between teachers, between home and school, and between different parts of life.

Trading notebooks.

While the history with notebooks enriched their practice in the classroom, the trading of them was a key practice to support the naturalization process and allowed for immediate feedback from friends and enjoyment. Trading and sharing were practices this class generally engaged in. For example, Annabeth frequently shared her own notebook and other students' work on the document camera (photograph, 10/26/11; 10/30/11; 11/8/2011; 1/30/2012; 1/31/2012; 2/21/2012). During their study of poetry, the students were frequently trading photocopied packets of poems that Annabeth made available (field notes, 10/21/2011). And the students traded notes, mirrors, and other objects and writing outside the realm of academic literacy. There was no explicit instruction around the trading of notebooks, though it was a frequent occurrence. The trading of notebooks combined academic and social incentives to become an important part of the students general notebook practices. In the trading of notebooks, the social practices discourse for writing is met, and students managed to build this ethos of trading without explicit teacher support. This trading was important because it demonstrated how the material object of the notebook realized its work as a boundary object, supporting the students in navigating between the intersecting mesosystems of their social worlds and academic worlds within the classroom microsystem.

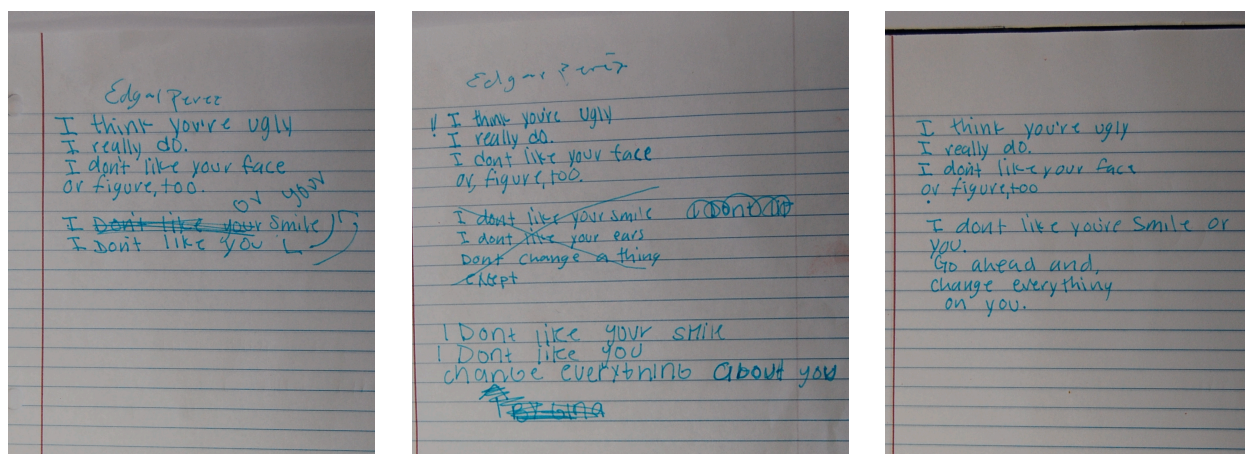
Students traded notebooks to read and appreciate one another's work, relying on their classmates to become a real audience for their writing. The first day back to writing after Christmas break, two students who tended to write less than their classmates, were immersed in writing. After a period of this concentrated writing, which caused Annabeth to mouth "Holy crap" (field notes, 1/4/2012) at me from across the room, Gabriel and Joshua begin trading Joshua's story. Gabriel laughed a lot while reading the story and talked about it with Joshua. I

asked later in the period what was so good about the story and Gabriel told me that it was successful because Joshua made fun of someone they both knew and really “got it right” (field notes, 1/4/2012). Two days later, Linda and Jacob were enjoying something from Gia’s notebooks (field notes, 1/6/2012). The next week, Michael and Dede were trading notebooks and reading aloud to one another from both notebooks. The notebooks lived in the spaces between social and academic worlds within and around the classroom. They were boundary objects that students crafted in highly individual ways, in and out of school. They served both the teachers instructional goals and the students academic and social goals. For some students, it was not enough to simply trade notebooks, they co-composed in the notebooks

Co-composing in notebooks.

Co-composing was another embodiment of the social practices discourse of writing. In this moving between people, and living simultaneously in the worlds of school and life, the notebook was serving as a boundary object for both students. In November, Edwardo and Gia traded Edwardo’s notebook back and forth while to co-composing a poem. Figure 6.8 shows the progression of the poem across several drafts.

Figure 6.8: Co-composing between Edwardo and Gia



The first photograph shows, Edwardo's first attempt at rewriting the poem and some of Gia's corrections with arrows and writing that is on a slant. The second photograph is his continued attempts on the second stanza, and Gia's suggestion for a complete revision on the bottom, perhaps after she had tried to correct it along the side and given up. The final photograph is Edwardo's copy of the final poem. In a stimulated recall interview around the drafts, Edwardo talked about Gia helping him come up with the idea of rewriting a poem he had read in a packet, and shared with the class, by making the poem about being ugly instead of cute. He was comfortable with her helping, he said, because he had helped her with things in the past and they were friends outside of class as well. Edwardo had even had help with other poems from another girl in the class (interview, 11/30/2011). So in the trading of the notebooks and the co-constructing of poems, Edwardo is also able to tend to his social relationships, particularly with the girls in the class.

Michaela and Anna combined social and academic literacies in their work co-composing in Michaela's notebook. They talked on paper in a way that might look like passing notes in another class. But the academic instruction for the day was for students to try something different than what they normally would in their notebook. Of the many types of writing in these girls' notebooks, this back and forth writing, or text writing as they called it (interview, 1/28/2012), was not in evidence. They found a way to navigate the ecology of Annabeth's classroom while combining academic and social purposes and the notebook was flexible enough to allow all that work to happen. Co-composing by moving the notebook between students was how the notebook moved within the microsystem, but some students took moving one step further and moved notebooks out of the classroom entirely.

Moving between school and life.

Not only did writer's notebooks support students in moving through time, but, as discussed to above, it also supported their travel between the contexts of home and school. Nine girls in class shared with me that they either took their notebook home or kept a separate notebook at home: Monica, Dede, Elena, Linda, Alex, Anna, Virginia, Michaela, and Gia. With the exception of winter break, none of the boys took their notebooks home or revealed to me that they kept a notebook at home. Most of the girls kept separate notebooks for home and school, though Alex, Dede, and Monica had notebooks that they used both for home and school. Monica and Alex both wrote so much in their school notebooks that they ran out of space, so transitioned their home notebooks to school. What follows is an examination of the notebook practices of several of these girls who used the notebook to facilitate crossing between the microsystem of the classroom and various mesosystems in their lives.

Anna (interview, 2/28/2012) and Elena (interview, 1/4/2012), who kept separate notebooks at home, both had problems with family members finding notebooks and being angry about the contents. Anna actually threw her used notebooks away because, she reported, if her brother found them and saw she has written about boys, he would have been angry. For Elena, the notebook served as a place where she "writes about [her] feelings and [she] keeps [the notebook] away from everyone" (interview, 1/4/2012). Her mother was particularly strict about dating, so Elena often imagined possible worlds where she got to go out on dates and she wrote those worlds in her notebook. Here the writer's notebook served as a boundary object between an imagined world and the actual world, moving far outside the classroom. She adopted the concept of the notebook for specific practices important for her life and unrelated to the academic world of school. Elena also used her notebook to collect song lyrics, write songs, and collect quotes

from her cousin. Alex, like Elena, collected quotes and used her notebook to connect to a cousin (interview, 1/24/2012). The cousin recently moved away, so she wrote to remember the things that they did together on the ranch where Alex continued to live. Michaela actually had separate notebooks, for school and personal things, but carried the personal one with her to school, which is where she and Anna co-composed their text conversation. This moving outside the classroom demonstrated how notebooks had become, for some students, naturalized far from the academic origins of the notebooks. This process, along with all the other notebook practices students engaged in around notebooks, show that notebooks were a robust boundary object for the literacy ecology of Annabeth's classroom.

These examples show that the writer's notebooks moved outside the classroom into students' lives or opened a door into the classroom through which students' lives could enter. This object became the "compass" (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 286) that students used to navigate their academic literacy ecologies, which included their lives because of the flexibility of the notebook and Annabeth's support of the process and social practices discourse of writing. The writer's notebook allowed students to move between Annabeth's classroom and their lives in ways valid in both systems. The notebooks also served Annabeth's purposes as a teacher and her role as an ELAR departmental colleague. They served Alice when she needed to quantify student writing. In this way, writer's notebooks, unlike the Front-of-class Set-up, was a robust boundary object in the classroom's literacy ecology.

Discussion: Robust Boundary Objects and Multiple Systems

Layering ecosystem understandings of linking systems onto boundary objects allowed for seeing better how particular boundary objects were more robust than others. EST argues that a system that is linked in multiple ways to the microsystem holds more potential than a system

with few links (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 210). The same is true for boundary objects. The more links it has with multiple systems, the more it is used, which leads to naturalization. Once an object has naturalized, it is robust and has great potential. Given the discussion of both boundary objects above, it becomes more clear why writer's notebooks were more robust boundary objects and the Front-of-class Set-up less robust. Writer's notebooks were multiply linked across multiple systems and regularly the focus of engagement between teachers and students and among students inside and outside of class. The Front-of-class Set-up was weakly linked, however, across just the classroom microsystem and administrative exosystem and was given almost no attention in the class. Since the students and teacher did not work together on the board, it did not become naturalized despite its uninterrupted presence in the classroom.

Writer's notebooks served the purposes of the students, teacher, department, professional community, and the administrative and district exosystems. For the students, notebooks sanctioned their lives as relevant and valuable in the classroom and helped them to tend social relationships there, doing the work that research points to as powerful for adolescents' literacy practices (Alvermann, 2006, 2008; Moje & Sutherland, 2003). For the teacher, notebooks served as an instructional tool. Conversations around writing in the notebook were about building school-based literacy practices that began in the students' lives (Kerr, 1998) and building identities as writers through their notebooks (Graham, 2000). For the department and professional community, notebooks signaled belonging: a particular way of understanding literacy and of being an ELAR teacher that focused on the process and social practices (Ivanic, 2004) discourses around writing. The teachers joked about kids writing about their feelings and cussing—which they did do in the notebooks—because the ELAR teachers understood that the literacy practices in the notebook were about more than feelings and cussing. For the

administration and district, notebooks were quantifiable proof that students were writing and, importantly, students writing in notebooks were writing more than other students. Because notebooks were ill-structured generally, but strongly structured in individual use, they supported students in navigating large swaths of the classroom's ecology, not just the microsystem.

Notebooks managed to support individuals in so many ways because they negotiated the tensions inherent in the different discourses (Ivanic, 2004) each of these systems brought to their understanding of writing instruction and school-based literacy practices. The students and teachers often worked out of process and social practices discourses, moving between them as necessary. Whether it was experimenting with form or content, rewriting a mentor text, or having a conversation, one tool sufficed. The students certainly worked out of a social practices discourse, co-composing, trading, and being writers together in the class. They also took notebooks and the concept of the notebook outside the walls of the classroom and out into their lives. The department and writing project site supported these discourses as well. Further, as mentioned above, the department used notebooks to signal a knowledge of all of these discourses around writing instruction. The department excluded the skills discourse from writing in the notebook, and reinforced this exclusion with one another, with the students, and with other teachers. There were, without question, sanctioned ways of "doing" notebooks at Ortega. Even though notebooks at Ortega minimized the skills discourse, a focus of the administration and district systems, the notebooks still held value in those places. The idea that the writing could be quantified, students using notebooks wrote more than students not, fit into the quantified ways in which the administrative and district exosystems approached literacy normally through testing. All of these systems found a use for the notebook, so it was a robust boundary object within the ecology of this classroom. This multiply linked use, and the students' and teachers' long

engagement with the notebook also led to its naturalization within the classroom's ecology. An ELAR class at Ortega would not be complete without a notebook. Recursively, this naturalization was possible because notebook practices were fostered in the classroom and across systems.

The Front-of-class Set-up was a very different object from notebooks when viewed from a perspective that takes into consideration the robustness of the boundary object across the ecology. The writing on the whiteboard was weakly linked within the ecology because it was only supported by the administrative exosystem. The students rarely engaged with any of the information on the board. While the teacher engaged with it regularly enough to change the words on the board, she did not use it as a tool to deepen her thinking about her practice, or engage in reflective conversations with her colleagues in PLC. The Front-of-class Set-up did not signal belonging to a community like the notebooks did and the department only took it up reactively. It certainly served the needs of the administrative system as a standardized way of presenting the work each classroom would engage in and an easy tool to review for compliance to the MCP framework. This isolated support, usually in the form of monitoring for compliance, and the standardized form that was resistant to discipline-specific interpretation, meant that Annabeth never naturalized the object as part of her classroom microsystem. The potential for naturalization was not inherently missing from the Front-of-class Set-up. The individual sections, like agenda or reflection, included useful information for students, teachers, and the administration. Annabeth often shared exactly that information with her students orally at the beginning or end of class. But fact that the Front-of-class Set-up, and the MCP framework more generally, only served to exacerbate what she understood to be existing tensions between the microsystem and administrative exosystem over workshop instruction positioned the board as a

tool to control Annabeth's instruction in her classroom (Ingersoll, 2002). In seeing it as an object that she had little control over, though it had great control over her, Annabeth's focus was resistance, not adaptation.

When looking at a classroom's ecology, then, focusing on the boundary objects allowed for a more complete vision of the work going on within the microsystem and across the ecology. Important to note, as well, is that both types of boundary objects—robust and not—are instructive about the tensions and potential within the ecology. Notebooks, because they are so naturalized within this ecology, could move out into students lives and back into the classroom. Annabeth's resistance to the writing on the board might be seen as intransigence, until it is viewed with a larger ecological perspective to see how it reinforces an already tension-filled relationship between her classroom and the administration. Boundary objects, in this way, are a way of seeing how systems within an ecology interact, avoiding an examination of systems in isolation.

Conclusion

The next and final chapter draws together the findings from chapters four, five, and six. It also comments on Ecological Systems Theory as a framework for engaging in educational research. It also offers implications across a range of topic touched on in the course of this examination, specifically around education policy, as well as teaching and teacher education. Finally, it takes up the next steps for this research, both with this data corpus and with ecological research more broadly.

CHAPTER 7 – DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this examination of the ecology of one eighth grade ELAR classroom at Ortega Middle School, the affordances of EST became clear. The systems outlined in EST, and deepened by understanding of Discourses, make more visible the lines of influence on practices in the classroom, highlight moments of tension between and among systems, and bring into relief the ways in which systems amplify or mitigate one another. This view allows for seeing the classroom and its participants neither as isolated from contexts nor as at the whims of forces beyond their control. Instead, this ecological examination revealed individuals working within a myriad of systems complying, resisting, and shaping the Discourses circulating therein. What follows is a discussion that brings together the threads from chapters four, five, and six. Three key points focus this discussion: first, the way in which the robustness of relationships between systems and across the whole ecology contributed to the supportive nature of particular systems, second, the ways in which unsupportive systems failed to communicate, cultivate trust, build consensus, and balance power, and third, the ways that Annabeth navigated these systems in thoughtfully adaptive ways. Following this discussion is the implication section which takes up issues of policy and teaching, and also comments more broadly on EST as a framework for engaging in literacy research and next steps for my research.

Discussion

Relationships: Links and support

I begin this discussion by returning to chapter six and the idea of multiply linked systems or boundary objects. The multiply linked nature of writer's notebooks across systems contributed to both the robustness of the boundary object, including the level to which it supported navigation throughout the classroom's ecology. The weakly linked Front-of-class Set-up, on the

other hand, was neither robust nor supportive of navigation across the range of the classroom's ecology. Notions of linking across systems is not limited to boundary objects. For example, in chapter four I discussed how Alice, when she became physically present in the classroom (Stein, & D'Amico, 2002, p. 74), increased the links between the district exosystem to the microsystem of the classroom. Instead of the district appearing in the classroom only through static objects like assessments or calendars, the link represented by Alice opened up the potential for communication across the classroom microsystem and the district exosystem. Alice was also able to approach issues important to her, like fluency or direct teaching, and suggest that those become a more prominent part of the daily literacy practices at the school (Massell & Goertz, 2002). Though, even in adding to the links between the district and the classroom, the district footprint on the classroom's ecology remained light (Grossman & Thompson, 2004) because it was not as multiply linked to the classroom as other systems within the ecology.

The department and the writing project site serve as examples of what happens when systems are multiply linked with personal relationships. While it is not a new finding that departments can be powerful social forces (Siskin, 1994), the unique combination of a department and the knowledge community of the writing project site make the structure of this particular part of the ecology worth considering further. First, the writing project site supported Ortega teachers by offering a professional community that was responsive to their work in classrooms (Liebermann & Wood, 2000; Kaplan, 2009), it also supported their inquiry, sharing, and collaboration—markers of strong departments (Hill, 1995). There is, then, an amplification within the classroom between the knowledge communities (Craig, 2009) of the department and the writing project site community. Annabeth took her work from the classroom, like writer's notebooks, to the writing project site and found support for her practices there, which then

supported her return to the classroom to continue those practices. This supportive amplification was salient when considering how unsupportive amplification also happened within the ecology.

Unsupportive systems: Distrust and deprofessionalization

The tensions around the MCP Framework—through the Monday Meetings, PDAS, the Front-of-class Set-up, and the MCP handbook—are made more traceable with an ecological perspective. Annabeth’s resistance to the framework also takes on more texture with an ecological perspective that acknowledges her understanding and perception were the reality of the classroom ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 4). Considering the macrosystem in which teachers’ professionalism was constantly under attack, the MCP framework was understood as an attempt to teacher-proof instruction, and grew out of a lack of trust for teachers’ professionalism, particularly in the reductive way it was surveilled by the administration. The administration implemented MCP in ways that were impersonal, unidirectional, and without attempts at consensus. This list of practices surrounding the implementation of the MCP Framework exemplifies those characteristics of an unsupportive system: Monday Meetings with little conversation, high-stakes assessment of teacher performance, one-off photographs of whiteboards, no constructive feedback on planning guides, and no room for site-specific flexibility. So the implementation served only to amplify the macrosystem trends toward lack of trust and deprofessionalization of teachers instead of building on the nascent moves toward trust and consensus seen in other visits to the classroom by Alice or Richard. Annabeth’s knowledge of and experience with the exosystems of her classroom shaped her perceptions of reality in a way that put her consistently on the defensive (interview, 11/8/2011) and fearful of her job security (field notes, 11/9/2011) and she made decisions based on that reality. Seen from the historical perspective—with three district ELAR coordinators and three principals in four

years—it made sense for Annabeth to resist the additional work of MCP because experience told her that the MCP Framework would just fade away after another year, whereas the department and the writing project were communities she would likely belong to for longer periods of time. The department’s resistance to MCP only solidified this decision. Finally, Annabeth understood the MCP framework as one more way policies that supported Discourses she did not believe in were trying to exercise control over the last place she felt she had any, the daily work of her classroom (Ingersoll, 2002). This amplification of unsupportive influences, then, laid down a path that led Annabeth out of the classroom’s ecology.

Thoughtfully adaptive: Never quite enough

The larger lesson from this ecological examination of a single classroom was the difficulty of charting any path through the ecology given the tensions between the multiple and conflicting Discourses that intersected within a classroom. In this setting, Annabeth was as thoughtfully adaptive (Fairbanks, et al., 2010) as she could be, though her leaving indicates that for all her work to adapt, it was not enough. The district and administrative exosystem’s focus on raising students’ performance on standardized tests, and the policies put in place to affect that change constrained everyone within the system: district personnel, principals, instructional administrators, teachers, and students. Resistance to this skills discourse from the teachers came in a myriad of forms, from passive to active, constructive to destructive. Whether it was adapting tutoring requirements, doing the bare minimum of work on the board, or leaving the school, these actions are all ways the teachers were resisting the discourses circulating in the ecology of the classroom. Attempts to engage in conversations that did not adhere to these discourse norms, like Alice talking around what the students were willing to write about in Annabeth’s classroom, had little staying power against the existing Discourses with topics like fluency. Important to

note, though, was that the departmental mesosystem was no less immune to this policing of the Discourses. When Alice or Dennis suggested instructional strategies that did not adhere to the department's understanding of workshop instruction, focused on the process or social practices discourse, the suggestion was generally dismissed. There was little allowance for a way of being a middle school English teacher outside of the discourses within the department, reinforced by the writing project. Given this near irresolvable tension between Discourses, it was unsurprising how difficult it was to have the systems engage in supportive behaviors like communication toward a consensus around literacy instruction built on trust and giving power back to teachers in the classroom. It was also unsurprising that Annabeth was faced, continually, with what she understood to be an existential choice between teaching as she believed and knew she should and the way she needed to keep her job and eventually decided to leave. Her leaving was, perhaps, the worst possible ecological disruption, though one that, upon reflection, was perfectly predictable. Given the predictability, then, this research points to ways that systems within classroom ecologies more generally can shift to be more supportive of a teacher's work and development as a professional.

Implications

What follows below is a discussion of the various implications for this research. In keeping with the dissertation's overarching structure from macro to micro, I take up implications from the micro to the macro. I begin thinking through theory and educational research and the ways that ecology works as a theory to broaden and make more relevant the work of educational research. Then I move to the macrosystem surrounding teachers, administrators, their schools and districts, education policy, and offer some implications for understanding policy ecologically as well. Nested within policy are districts, administrators, and, finally, teachers. I close the

chapter by considering next moves for both the existing data corpus from Ortega, ecology as a perspective, and my own work as a teacher and researcher.

Implications for education policy: Macrosystem trends and local contexts.

Education policy is the macrosystem of the ecology of Annabeth's classroom those "generalized patterns of ideology and institutional structure [that are] characteristic of a particular culture or subculture" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 9). What is notable about education policy is how it gets expressed in local settings as each district, administration, department, and classroom has a unique implementation of those larger policies, despite continual efforts toward standardization. Alice's focus on reading fluency and direct teach were part of the macrosystem of beliefs about high-quality literacy instruction pegged to the TEKS and long components of the skills discourse in writing (Ivanic, 2004). The tensions that escalate between the teachers and the administrators in the spring around state testing were an example of the macrosystem influencing the ecology, though the local expression was a fraught tutoring program. The conflicting understandings of literacy evidenced in the Non-negotiables and the philosophy were part of a much larger debate within the literacy community about what are best practices for teaching literacy at the middle school level. What was most clear, at the end of this research, was that Annabeth's classroom and beliefs are most often at odds with the prevailing skills discourse circulating in the educational macrosystem and expressed locally in a myriad of ways. She found support for her beliefs and practices in the conversations with colleagues and in the writing project, however the work that happened in those systems was almost always at opposed to the power that flowed from official policy promulgated by the State of Texas and federal policies like No Child Left Behind, enforced by district and school administrators, and focused in Annabeth's classroom almost solely on high-stakes standardized tests.

The macrosystem within which Annabeth and the other ELAR teachers at Ortega sit held most of the power over education policy, imposed testing and scoring goals on school, teachers and students, evidenced little trust for teachers' expertise or students' abilities, and did not regularly communicate with teachers. Given this ecology, the resistance that Annabeth and her colleagues put up against these prevailing understandings was all the more laudable. While the final chapter of this dissertation is not a place to fully examine the intersection of state educational policies and classroom literacy instruction, and many others have done a more thorough job of such examinations (McNeil, 2000; Hillocks, 2002), an ecological perspective sheds new light on this relationship and offers exemplars for supporting teachers in how to be thoughtfully adaptive in contexts outside of teaching. The teachers' work with the writing project, a supportive exosystem, and their work in creating a supportive departmental mesosystem showed how teachers can both resist and work for change. More locally, the ways in which district and school administrators created and promulgated local policies was as important, and often more salient, to teachers in classrooms.

The potential for the district to become a supportive exosystem for Annabeth in her classroom, and the ELAR teachers more generally, happened the moment that Alice stopped being a phantom and stepped into Annabeth's classroom. By watching what the students were doing, sitting down and talking to the teachers, and staying engaged at the school, Alice opened up the district as a potential source of support for teachers who had traditionally been at odds with much of what they understood to be the district's position on ELAR instruction. By engaging in bidirectional communication, by seeing the students' writing as evidence to trust the teachers' instructional decisions, and by working toward a consensus around ELAR instruction, Alice's actions pointed toward the ways in which district personnel can stop being phantoms.

Even though there was the persistent thinking that Alice and Tina were “talking past each other” or that Alice wanted to impose things on workshop that would not be appropriate, several teachers in the department saw Alice as an advocate for their work at the district level. There exists, then, the ability to cooperate without consensus around what counts as high-quality literacy instruction. Alice’s engagement in the classroom, and the teachers’ willingness to participate in dialogue, move the district exosystem from one that is vaguely non-supportive to one with the potential for support. So while acrimony often marked the relationship between teachers and district administrators, another path was available and there are concrete steps that individuals in district positions can take to not only diminish the tension, but to actually create constructive relationships across systems.

Richard and Dennis demonstrated two different ways in which administrators can shape an administrative exosystem within the ecology of a classroom. Richard, who spoke in support of the teachers, appropriated the language of instruction, and visited classes—not to punish, but to engage, demonstrated an administrative exosystem cultivating trust and not using power to impose change on the classroom. In this small way, Richard supported Annabeth and her students as they engaged in the literacy practices of the ecology. Dennis, in his position of instructional administrator, charted a less supportive course for the administrative exosystem. As evidenced in the Monday Meetings and his visits to Annabeth’s classroom, he was more concerned with imposing goals and surveilling compliance. The overt surveillance through the taking of pictures of the board and dogging teachers about tutoring students, showed an atmosphere almost completely absent of trust and communication. Within this environment, the teachers discount much of what Dennis suggested about their instruction, such as what counts as tutoring, and distrust compliments of their work, such as saying the eighth grade planning guides

were some of the school's best. As with Alice at the district moving from phantom to reality, two paths are laid out before the administrative exosystem. One path, exemplified by Richard, works to tilt the power toward the classroom and teacher and trusts the teacher to do good work with students. The other path relies on fear and surveillance to work toward compliance. Given these two paths, and the teachers' reactions, the path of trust and giving control back to the teachers appears, in this context, more likely to lead to teachers working with the administrative exosystem and not leaving.

Implications for teaching.

Teaching is about much more than simply making curricular and instructional decisions that best serve the needs of students. Teachers are navigating far more needs than those of students, and making difficult choices involving students' needs, administrative mandates, and personal knowledge and beliefs, while trying to consider the implications of each decision. These decisions can become existential and lead to questions like "What kind of teacher am I going to be?" and "Can I be that kind of teacher here?" Teacher educators and veteran teachers can no longer say "shut your door and teach" because that image of the isolated classrooms of Lortie (2002/1975) is not applicable, if it ever truly was. Annabeth constantly felt pressure from the district and her administrators to adhere to a particular ways of being an English teacher, ways that conflicted with her stated beliefs about literacy. Often, when finding herself at a decision point with this conflict, her instruction changed in response to that administrative pressure in ways that did not align with her stated beliefs. She was working to adapt to constantly shifting expectations and mandates, but in ways that had little to do with student needs or learning. Acknowledging this reality of a classroom immersed in an ecology full of supportive and unsupportive mesosystems and exosystems is the first step to then cultivating supportive systems

or shift unsupportive ones. All this is not to say that teaching is not isolating for individual teachers, or that there are not moments when teachers can carve out space for instructing in ways that align with their beliefs about teaching and literacy. But those spaces are smaller now than they may have been a decade or two ago. The answer, in some way, seems to lie in finding communities that support individual teachers in their beliefs about teaching and literacy.

For Annabeth, the first of these communities was the department. Being able to meet with and talk to teachers who shared a similar set of experiences and beliefs buoyed Annabeth through the year. The trust Annabeth placed in her colleagues by admitting difficulty was returned within the meeting by attempts to support her through difficulty. Other teachers demonstrated this trust by admitting to taking risks in their teaching and being willing to inquire and try things out without fear of departmental repercussions. As long as these experiments adhered to departmental expectations around workshop. Within this atmosphere of trust, then a consensus emerged around literacy instruction and was codified as a philosophy. Each teacher in the department individually laid claim to a philosophical coherence and alignment around understandings of literacy. This claim was built through shared experiences with the writing project, the shared workshop structure, and the shared tool of the writers' notebook. And the department worked to give teachers power over their classroom by encouraging reflection and questioning administrative mandates. Being surrounded by supportive colleagues, and working to strengthen a supportive mesosystem like the department, can serve as an invaluable lifeline in answering these existential questions around teaching. Though, being immersed within the system, the department is not immune to those pressures individual teachers feel. The option, then, is to find a community external to the school that can be a part of a classroom's ecology.

Annabeth and her colleagues found that by joining a community of teachers outside the school, they could participate in a community of like-minded individuals that served as a touchstone when thinking about the answers to those existential questions of teaching presented to them in their classrooms. The fact that this community was linked in multiple ways within the ecology of Annabeth's classroom—that so many of her colleagues participated in the writing project—made the connection all the stronger and allowed them to push back with some force against the administrative and district exosystems in ways perhaps not available to less supported teachers. Though, and this is a key point, even with two supportive systems in the department and the writing project, Annabeth still did not feel as though she could be the type of teacher she wanted to be at Ortega and left. While policymakers can lament the attrition rate of 50 percent of new teachers within five years, Annabeth's story makes clearer the difficulty of adequately supporting a teacher when existential conflicts are at the heart of her decision to leave. Having watched Annabeth struggle with the conflicts between how she understood literacy, appreciated her students' knowledge and experience, and desired to be a teacher who honors the connections between those two things, I have a tough time telling her to just stick with it. Even though the alternative, teachers leaving, robs schools and children of master teachers who have the knowledge and experience to push back against reductive understandings of those same students and their literacy. EST was a key piece of developing a complex and multifaceted understanding of the tensions Annabeth spent her year navigating. What follows is a discussion of EST as a framework for engaging with literacy research, as well as a discussion of the ways EST had the potential to address persistent gaps in the research.

Developing and reconceptualizing ecology.

Relying on EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to map the ecology of a single classroom revealed much about the classroom, and about the potential for ecology as a theoretical perspective. While already an accepted and well-used perspective in developmental psychology, early childhood education, and clinical education, applying it to a classroom and school context revealed ways that stretching the theory both accommodated the reality of the site and enriched what was possible for the theory. What follows is a discussion of three ways to reimagine EST so that it can more fully illuminate schools as contexts full of potential for ecological examination.

First, while Bronfenbrenner's original conception of ecology was a set of Russian nested dolls, that image fails to account for the reality of the ecology of a school or classroom. A more dynamic, complex graphic representation (Figure 7.1), which I developed from this research, reflects the ways in which a school or classroom can be organized. The nested image (Figure 7.2) may represent some piece of an ecology, but it does not reflect the reality of how students, teachers, tools, or literacy practices within the school exist.

Figure 7.1: Complex ecology

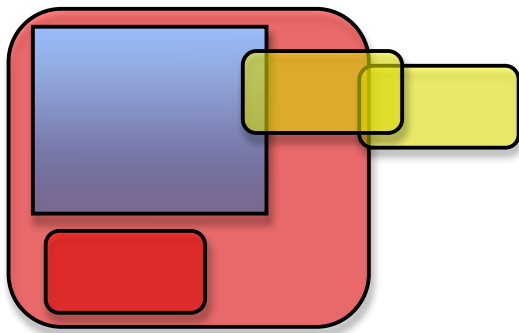
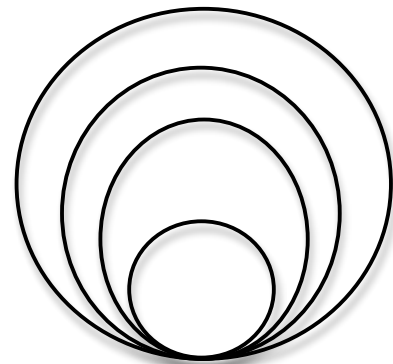


Figure 7.2: Nested ecology



So while Annabeth moved between her classroom, department, and the writing project, the relationship between these different settings was not purely hierarchical or nested. The classroom was wholly nested in the department, but the department was not nested wholly within the

writing project, as not all of the teachers were members of the community. And the writing project certainly was not nested within the school. From the students' perspectives, the nested idea fell apart in trying to place the New Year's party or soccer game within the school walls, even if one understanding of those events was inscribed in the writer's notebooks. But, these events did not take place in school, obviously, and the school cannot impose rules or expectations on such events that take place wholly outside of it. In this way, an ecological perspective complicates understandings of schools as purely hierarchical in nature, or a nested set of boxes with the classroom, or even the student, in the center.

Second, It was only through the layering on of Discourse concepts, through, that I was able to pinpoint the reasons for the particular types of communication, consensus, trust, and power between the unsupportive and supportive systems. The original conception of EST did not develop the kinds of analytic tools that could reveal the clashing Discourses so apparent at Ortega. Though the language of systems was incredibly helpful in revealing the sites of specific tensions and tracing the origins of particular Discourses. Third, EST did not take up questions of how individuals at the center of the ecology navigate through the systems and Discourses that make up the ecology. Boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989; Star, 2010), then, filled that gap. Being able to trace particular objects, and the Discourses they embody, across the ecology added another layer of complexity to the classroom ecology. By watching notebooks move from the classroom to students lives, and out into the department or district even, was to see the potential for consensus among systems whose relationship was far more often marked by tension than consensus. And to see such an ill-structured object prove robust and resilient across all of those systems speaks powerfully against Discourses focused on standardization as a means to high-quality literacy instruction.

Finally, and most basically, EST always places an individual at the center of the ecology, but an individual need not be the center of the ecological map. In the case of this research, the classroom served as the hub around which I mapped the ecology. While Annabeth was certainly a locus of much of the ecology for this research by reaching out into her department, professional exosystem, and the district, she was not the only locus. MCP, notebooks, and the ELAR department also served as nodes around which information was organized. And writing up the work differently, the locus could just as easily have been a student or a different text, tool, or practice in the classroom. Moving away from a focus only on a single developing individual allows for the strengths of ecology, of looking more broadly without losing site of the specific, to be applied to other key organizing structures, texts, tools, and people within a classroom or school.

Considerations for literacy research.

Remembering chapter two, I claimed that ecology answered the critique that sociocultural research within education has been too concerned with local literacies and not able to think broadly about how lessons learned in one site can have salience for another site (Brandt & Clinton, 2000). Given the work above, and my discussion of next steps below, I know that ecology can work as a theoretical perspective to chart the local and place it within the global. For example, chapter six closely examined student practices around writer's notebooks and teacher resistance to a mandated instructional text, this was a charting of the local. These practices within a classroom were then contextualized within the departmental, administrative, and district actions that influenced and affected those very practices. This expanding of the map was a move toward contextualizing local practices within a more global context. And those systems were then often tied to larger Discourses of writing. But this contextualization does not go as far as

possible with ecology. In fact, as I discuss more fully below, ecology—that is the exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem approach—can be transferred to different research sites. Lessons learned at Ortega—about departmental cohesion or administrative support—can be examined within other school and classroom sites because exosystems, mesosystems, and microsystems are present in every classroom and school context. Additionally, characteristics like communication, trust, consensus, and power can be examined within each context as they express locally, and add to more general understandings of those characteristics globally. So while the ecological maps of individual classrooms or schools may vary, they will all be based on a similar set of characteristics that both honor the individuality of each site, as well as identify the similarities across sites. Thinking broadly, this balance between the local and global provided by ecology may open the possibility for a more effective scaling up or transfer of successful literacy ecologies from one setting to another. As long as, of course, allowance is made for the way in which successful policies grow organically and offer site-specific implementation.

In a second claim, I posited that ecology would open up the classroom and its context to a more complex examination leading to a dynamic understanding of the literacy practices in a classroom. Broadly, ecology seeks to answer the question that Dressman, McCarthy, and Prior (2008) ask

Does our theoretical understanding of literacy development suggest that the classroom is an autonomous space of learning, or does a wider map that includes information interactions in school, at home, and in the community need to be considered to understand how children develop? (p. 6).

I would have to answer that, yes, given the three chapters above, a wider map is necessary to understand the classroom and the children's development—or the myriad other people and

practices in a classroom—within it. Knowing the atmosphere surrounding the MCP framework, particularly the ways in which it was imposed on the ELAR department, makes it more apparent why Annabeth did not use the board to shape her instruction when an administrator was not present in the classroom. Hearing Alice laud the amount of student writing that she saw in Annabeth’s classroom, and compare it with a lack of writing in other school contexts, revealed that the department’s philosophical coherence did make a difference to the ways in which students engaged in literacy. Seeing all of the tensions and conflicts that surround the literacy practices Annabeth fostered in her classroom—tensions existing at district, administrative, departmental and personal levels—her decision to leave at the end of the year became more clear. It was less about being frustrated with a single group of students or policy, as it may have looked when only considering the classroom, and more about the lack of control and power that she had over the practices in her classroom. While this research did not delve into all of the possibilities for systems around a classroom, the preponderance of evidence is toward the classroom as one location on a much larger map, anything but the isolated egg crates of Lortie’s schoolteacher.

Bringing forward a final consideration from chapter two, given the focus on boundaries between home and school in adolescent literacy research (Hull & Schultz, 2011; Brass, 2008), ecology and boundary objects offer a theoretical perspective that can illuminate the multiplicity of boundaries that adolescents cross and live among and between as they engage in school-based literacy practices. Mapping the ecology of a classroom offers ways of seeing how students move between school and their myriad other mesosystems. My examination of student writing in chapter six revealed the ways that students were able to bring in their knowledge and experience gained outside of English class into the writing they were doing in their notebooks. A more

complete map of the ecology could have followed the students out into their lives and mapped the mesosystems that influenced their experiences in English class is less visible, but no less powerful, ways. Research examining just such moves on the part of adolescents (Skerrett, 2013; Skerrett & Bomer, 2013) has contributed to this conversation in important ways. That said, there continues to be a need for understanding adolescent literacy practices across the myriad systems through which adolescents move, and how those practices are mapped onto classrooms. There are many possible next steps for this work

Next Steps

Obviously in the ecology of Annabeth's classroom there are more unexplored paths than those mapped in this dissertation. That is both the challenge and strength of an ecological perspective on the literacy practices in a classroom. Given the wealth of data I collected in the course of the year I was at Ortega, there are many more avenues to explore. Certainly more could be learned from filling in the blank spots on the maps around the connections between the ELAR department and the writing project or between the administrators and the district. The student compositions that I collected, both from the writer's notebooks and other sources, are a wealth of information about the ways in which the students chose to use the tool of the notebook as a boundary object to chart their paths across the multiple systems they move through on any given day. Hinted at, but not fully examined in the work above, are the ways that this composing that the students did, and the literacy practices they cultivated more generally, moved out into the classroom to influence the literacy practices within the larger school context. And there is yet much data around high-stakes standardized testing to be analyzed, including the instruction Annabeth chose to prepare students, the Discourses around testing within the school, and the

ways in which school calendars functioned to control much of what happened across stretches of days. These are all possible paths within the data from this particular study.

Within the theoretical perspective of ecology there are also more paths to chart and explore. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) notion of roles is one of the paths that, given what I saw at Ortega, hold great potential. Broadly, his thinking about roles is summarized below.

The placement of a person in a role tends to evoke perceptions, activities, and patterns of interpersonal relation consistent with expectations associated with that role ... The tendency to evoke perceptions, activities, and patterns of interpersonal relation consistent with role expectations is enhanced when the role is well established in the institutional structure of the society and there exists a broad consensus in the culture or subculture about these expectations as they pertain to the behavior both of the person occupying the role and of others with respect to that person... The greater the degree of power socially sanctioned for a given role, the greater the tendency for the role occupant to exercise and exploit the power and for those in a subordinate position to respond by increased submission, dependency, and lack of initiative. (p. 92).

While research has examined teacher's roles and professional identities (Connally & Clandinin, 1999) building on this research within an ecological framework may offer answers to questions of local expression of global realities. Further, within an ecology, Bronfenbrenner posits that the more similar a role across systems, the more likely the person in the role will develop. From this perspective, looking at how teachers move between the roles of novice and expert, or how they shift among their roles within a school, from teacher to colleague, or coach to administrator. Shifting focus, looking at how roles are defined for students and how those roles shift and change between systems and across time may continually fill in our understandings of the border

crossing that adolescents do as they move between the myriad systems within which they are enmeshed. Hawley (1986) also touched on ideas like resilience, adaptation, and dynamic equilibrium. These concepts, too, hold potential for deepening an ecology framework from which to engage in more research.

Ecology can also be used to look at other school contexts. Examining the literacy ecologies of other contexts would serve to refine my understanding of how ecologies function across contexts, as well as develop insights about those particular literacy ecologies. Within this moving of contexts, there are myriad questions that present themselves, shaping the way in which an ecological perspective can illuminate the work that is happening in schools.

- How can an ecological perspective help in the design of curriculum and instruction that supports the range of students' literacy practices, within and beyond school?
- Can mesosystem and exosystem practices that support student literacy practices be consciously cultivated in schools, districts, and communities?
- Can the cultivation of supportive systems be linked to improved student learning?
- Can an ecological perspective identify successful boundary objects and less successful ones?
- Once identified, can an ecological perspective and an understanding of the place of boundary objects within specific ecologies help administrators to accept ill-structured boundary objects that serve important purposes for student learning?

These are questions that I wanted to answer in the process of this first round of working with an ecological perspective and analyzing the data from one site. Given the potential of ecology to chart new understandings of schools, and schools as sites hungry for understanding, I expect a myriad more questions will follow.

Conclusion

Closing on a more local, personal note, I face the challenge of communicating what I have learned through this work with the people at Ortega. As of this writing, I continue to teach a college-level preservice teacher course at the school, provide professional development to the ELAR department, and consider many of the teachers friends and colleagues. This continued connection offers both the possibility of continuing research at the school, but also calls me to engage the teachers and administrators in conversations around some of what I have learned from this intense study of their work. It is this move from research into action where I want to focus my energies. While growing theory, and coming to a rigorous, scientific understanding of a particular literacy ecology is interesting and important work, applying those understandings and learnings is where the work can move from the theoretical to the real, can inform practice and work toward educational equity for the students at Ortega.

Appendix A

Table 3.3: Key Participants	
Alice	Del Rio ISD ELA Coordinator
Richard	Principal at Ortega
Dennis	Instructional administrator at Ortega
Annabeth	Eighth grade, focal teacher
Olivia	Eighth grade
Tina	Seventh grade, department chair
Harriet	Seventh grade
Jennifer	Sixth grade
Rebekah	Sixth grade

Appendix B

Interview Protocol for Focal Teacher

- What do you see as the most important “pieces” of your classroom? Things like texts, tools, curriculum, furniture, and the like.
- What are the influences you feel working on your classroom, things that affect what you and your students do?
- How do you think about the lives of your students in the context of your class?
- What are the ways ideas from your class go out into the larger school community?
- How did you come to workshop instruction and what place does it have in your teaching?

Interview Protocol for English language arts reading faculty.

- How did you come to teach at Ortega?
- When you were interviewing, why did Ortega appeal to you?
- What makes you stay?
- Describe the English department here at Ortega.
- How would you describe your place in the English Department?
- How would you describe the place of the English Department in the school?
- How would you describe the influence the district has in the school or your classroom?
- How did you come to be a teacher-consultant?
- How does the writing project fit into your teaching?

Interview Protocol for the principal

- What do you see as the big goals for your school?
- What sorts of literacy skills do you think it is important for your students to have as they move through and eventually leave Ortega for the high school?
- How do you think the district’s testing program supports students acquiring the knowledge and experiences you’ve identified as important?
- How do you think the ELAR department’s work does that same thing?
- Can you talk more about what you see that the ELAR department is doing well?

Appendix C

PLC Planning Guide – Core Classes: Weekly

2011-2012

Grade	8	Subject	ELAR	Week	Nov 28-Dec 2
TEKS:	<p>8.5 Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. (A) Analyze how different playwrights characterize their protagonists and antagonists through the dialogue and staging of their plays.</p> <p>8.13 Students use comprehension skills to analyze how words, images, graphics and sounds work together in various forms to impact meaning. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater depth in increasingly more complex texts.</p> <p>Figure 19 Reading/Comprehension Skills. Students use a flexible range of metacognitive reading skills in both assigned and independent reading to understand an author's message. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater depth in increasingly more complex texts as they become self-directed, critical readers.</p>				
Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
3 Part Objective	We will analyze how many pages per minute we read using a discussion, post it note and reading record.	We will examine our understanding of drama and clarify areas we need to pay attention to using a pretest, peer critique and discussion.	We will interpret the physical and personality traits of a character in our text and produce an illustration with text evidence.	We will examine the structure of dramatic writing and produce a chart.	LIBRARY DAY
Working Vocabulary	Reading record Fluency stamina	Drama Dialogue Act Scene Cast Stage directions Set Set description Costumes Props	Character Cast	Drama Dialogue Act Scene Cast Stage directions Set Set description Costumes Props	Scene Setting
Agenda / Criteria for Success	Warm-Up: -What did you read over thanksgiving? -How many times did you read? -Go over calendar -Review work time expectations -Work time	Warm-Up: What is drama? How -Talk about drama on the STAAR test -Go over testing expectations -Have students take a drama pretest -Peer critique the test in	Warm-Up: Characters—7thgrade stalking--	Warm-Up: Examine your pretest and answer the following questions: What types of questions did you get right? Which types of questions did you get wrong? -Have students read	

Page 1 of PLC planning guide from the week of 11/28/2011.

PLC Planning Guide – Core Classes: Weekly

2011-2012

	-Have students figure out how many pages per minute they read	class and have discussion over specific questions		specific examples of plays and make a list in their readers notebooks about "What I'm noticing about drama" -Confer with students and ask them "What are you noticing about drama"	
Essential Question	What is your reading fluency level for this book?	What specific structures make drama different than the nonfiction and poetry units we examined?	Why is it important to pay attention to the characters in your book?	What are the elements of drama—that aren't elements of a different genre we have studied?	
Reflection Question	Write answer to EQ on a post it and turn in as exit slip.	Exit Slip: Make a chart of the elements of drama are you KNOW/UNSURE of.	Draw a picture of a character in your book. Add one piece of text evidence.		
STAAR	On STAAR in 8 th grade, students will need reading stamina, fluency, and comprehension skills for the passages.	On STAAR in 8 th grade, students will have to read, analyze and answer questions about drama.	On STAAR in 8 th grade, students will have to read, analyze and answer questions about characters.	On STAAR in 8 th grade, students will have to read, analyze and answer questions about drama.	

PLC Reflection Questions:

1. What adjustments to our curriculum and instruction are necessary?
2. How can the rigor be elevated for students?

Appendix D

Observer _____ Name of Teacher _____	Date _____ Time In _____ Time Out _____
Model Classroom Project Walk-through Form B M E	
MCP Instructional Strategies	MCP Front of Class Set Up
Content <input type="checkbox"/> Three-part objective visible and discussed. <input type="checkbox"/> Content vocabulary visible and discussed. <input type="checkbox"/> Content matches TEKS/scope and sequence. <input type="checkbox"/> Students discuss prior knowledge. <input type="checkbox"/> Activity relates to objective. <input type="checkbox"/> Content delivery/acquisition engaging.	Three part Objective: Working Vocabulary:
Thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Visual display of levels of thinking. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher/students discuss levels of thinking. <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitive verbs used in questioning. <input type="checkbox"/> Random questioning vs. Volunteers <input type="checkbox"/> Quick, simultaneous responses precede individual responses. <input type="checkbox"/> Wait time and prompting used. <input type="checkbox"/> Levels, definitions and/or cognitive verbs used in number of praise statements.	Essential Questions: Questioning Strategies:
Product <input type="checkbox"/> Products engaging and/or approached in engaging fashion. <input type="checkbox"/> Current products posted. <input type="checkbox"/> Posted products contain depth of content. <input type="checkbox"/> Use multiple modalities in class/lesson. <input type="checkbox"/> Product modeling/explanation prior to student work time is clear and engaging <input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient time for student application in lesson.	Products:
Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Written criteria posted or handed out. <input type="checkbox"/> Use of self-critique with written criteria <input type="checkbox"/> Use of peer-critique with written criteria	Evidence of Learning/Effectiveness: STAAR:
Facilitation <input type="checkbox"/> Explicit, step-by-step directions are provided prior to students work time. <input type="checkbox"/> Quantity and quality of work is rigorous. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher moving throughout class with equal proximity to all students. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher examines student work carefully and provides 1:1 instruction. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher addresses students by name, with eye contact, in pleasant manner. <input type="checkbox"/> "I know you can do it!" attitude.	Agenda / Criteria for Success:
Reflection <input type="checkbox"/> Every student reflects on content and skills at end of lesson <input type="checkbox"/> Learner Centered <input type="checkbox"/> Real World Applicable	Reflection:

MCP Model Lesson Rubric

Content

- Spends a minute or two with the TPO
- Stands near the TPO when discussing it
- Reads TPO verbatim or has it read verbatim
- May repeat the reading of the TPO several times
- Uses simultaneity techniques when questioning students about the TPO
- Uses randomness when questioning students about the TPO
- Asks several questions about the thinking section of the TPO
- Asks several questions about the content section of the TPO
- Asks several questions about the product section of the TPO

Thinking

- Uses high questioning frequency throughout instructional segments of lesson
- Incorporates cognitive verbs in 75% of questions
- Uses 3 - 5 simultaneity techniques 12 or more times per lesson
- Uses name strips, class roster, etc. to call on each student one or more times
- Asks question first, provides simultaneity technique second and calls on student randomly third
- Uses wait time and coaching with reluctant responders
- Incorporates cognitive terms while praising 10 or more responses per lesson
- Essential Questions are asked and answered in a way that provides the teacher with evidence of learning/mastery, and feedback based on the data gathered guides relearning and/or clarification

Product

- Has students produce for a reasonable percentage of the class period
- Alternates between short bursts of direct instruction and short bursts of student production
- Fosters pride in student work through sharing, posting, etc.

Assessment

- Provides students with written criteria for tasks and/ or products
- Has students discuss criteria before and during production
- Has students self and/ or peer critique prior to handing in work
- A clear connection is established between the TPO, Essential Questions and how the objective will be assessed on a test and on STAAR

Facilitation

- Moves among all students relatively equally throughout the lesson
- Moves among the students, even during direct instruction
- Makes use of clear front to back and left to right aisles throughout the lesson
- Carefully looks over the work of all students while work is in progress
- Refrains from interrupting the group's train of thought while they are working
- Intervenes with individual work frequently to assist or enrich
- Maintains student awareness of pacing through visual timers and auditory reminders

Reflection

- Saves a minute or two at the end of the lesson for reflection
- Uses reflective questions that check for and reinforce mastery of the lesson objective
- Has each student demonstrate understanding of the main concept or skills at the end of the lesson
- Conducts reflection while all students are focused

Appendix E

Non-negotiable Writing Guidelines

1. Avoid all texting language, slang, abbreviations, stylized lettering.
2. Unless instructed otherwise, write in complete sentences at all times. This includes proper capitalization and punctuation.
3. Third person voice is the most appropriate for academic writing, unless you are instructed otherwise. That means you should avoid using "I" "me" "we" and "you" pronouns.
4. Misspellings should be minimal. Words in a prompt or on the document(s) you reference should never be misspelled, and typed essays/reports should have no spelling errors.
5. Writing products should follow guidelines and format prescribed by that particular writing's purpose.
6. General and non-specific vocabulary should be avoided. Ex. "thing" "stuff" "it" "they"
7. Handwriting should be legible and standard. Lower case letters do not take up an entire line space. Capital letters should be distinct from lower case letters.
8. Paragraphing is always important in longer writing assignments as is clarity, organization, revising and editing.
9. Plagiarism should be avoided at all costs. MLA, APA, or Chicago documentation guidelines (including parenthetical citations) should be followed for research and quoted and/or paraphrased material.

*Implementing these non-negotiable writing traits means that students should adhere to them at all times with all assignments. If a student fails to follow the traits, it is means for an immediate "Incomplete" and the paper is given back to the student for revision, and they have an "N" until problem areas or fixed and turned in again.

Value of Writing across the Curriculum Initiatives

"Students writing in a discipline reflect thinking in that discipline."

- Charles Bazerman in "Discourse Paths of Different Disciplines"

"The challenge of expressing ideas in writing, rather than copying or filling in the blanks, places students at the center of their own learning, enabling them to master content and to improve their skill at expressing ideas. Writing activities help students discover connections, discern processes, raise questions and discover solutions. The means of write to learn is invaluable, the effects far-reaching."

- Richmond Education, Writing Across the Curriculum Resource Binder

"Teaching skills and developing habits for life-long learning is the goal. Language is the most powerful learning tool we have. All students have the right to discover the joy of learning and writing-to-learn is one of the best means to achieve this. Developing student ability to learn through writing will increase confidence, enjoyment in the process and the results. This should be one of the highest educational priorities."

- Summarized John Mayher

"breaking rules"

"the admin. who like it a lot"

TEXTS
2014

whom?

exposure
in 8th to
MLA

Appendix F

ORTEGA MIDDLE SCHOOL

Philosophy and Approach on the Teaching of Reading and Writing

ELAR teachers provide students with the opportunities and the curriculum and instruction to enable them to become avid and effective readers, writers, and inquirers.

Guiding Principles

- In order to grow as readers and writers, students must spend the majority of their time in the classroom engaged in the acts of reading and writing.
- Teachers model and demonstrate useful strategies that proficient and powerful readers and writers employ.
- Reading is an act of constructing meaning (comprehending, fluency, relating, interpreting) while being accountable to a text.
- Young readers develop reading identities and lifelong habits when they are given the freedom and choice to engage in a reading life that honors their interests and needs.
- Writing is an act of negotiation and a tool for thinking.
- Writers use a variety of strategies and processes, and they develop processes that work for them and their intentions and purposes.
- The craft, structures, and conventions of language (grammar, usage) are acquired both through explicit instruction and immersion in language. Writers make purposeful, informed grammatical choices when they have an understanding of the power of language.
- Curriculum is site-based, co-authored by teachers, and aligned to district and state standards.

Essential Characteristics of the Reading/Writing Workshop Classroom

- Students have time each day to read books they can and want to read.
- Students learn to choose books at their independent reading level in order to engage in the rigorous work of the classroom.
- There is a common structure to the workshop classroom: mini-lesson, work time, and reflection/share--The bulk of the time is spent with students working (reading, writing, collaborating) while teacher confers with individual students or small groups.
- Teacher/student conferences allow for individualized, differentiated, responsive instruction for all learners.
- There is time for students to gather together around a shared text read to them by the teacher in order to model fluent reading, and provide a shared experience during which the group can work on a variety of qualities of good reading and writing.

- There is time for students to read and talk about books together. Students might read in short or long term partnerships, books clubs or small instructional groups.
- Students have time each day to write about topics and issues that interest and concern them.
- Teacher and students use mentor writers and texts in order to immerse themselves in various studies of genre, craft, or structure in writing.
- Students use Writer's Notebooks as recursive tools for thinking, learning, and growing as writers.

Research, Resources, and Professional Development

ELAR teachers at _____ engage in the study, inquiry, and practices of their discipline. The following is a list of professional texts, study groups, professional organizations, and research that guide, define, and support our work.

- National Writing Project
- Heart of Texas Writing Project
- Columbia Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
- National Council of Teachers of English
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- Bomer, Katherine (2010) *Hidden Gems: Naming and Teaching from the Brilliance in Every Student's Writing*. Portsmouth, N.H: Heinemann
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