

Literacy Research and Rhetorical Space: Reflections and Interpretive Possibilities

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## Abstract

This research examines how the rhetorical and interpretive conventions of literacy research communities shape conceptualizing, conducting and reporting of research. Selected scholarship in anthropology, critical theory and rhetoric of traditional science was reviewed and an analytic frame developed. Using this frame, two articles with divergent paradigmatic allegiances were chosen from a leading journal in literacy research, analyzed, and the authors interviewed. Diagrams were developed to explore tensions around shifts of persona or voice within the research articles, and the authors interviewed about the processes they engaged in the course of their research. The transcripts of these interviews were analyzed interactively to link the interviews, diagrams, and articles in terms of the types of compromises made in the process of publishing these two reports of research. This research suggests that these compromises diminish the complexity of research processes, submerge multiple voiced participants within a singular detached voice, limit the ways findings are reported, and reinforce traditional views of epistemology.

## Literacy Research and Rhetorical Space: Reflections and Interpretive Possibilities

**Introduction**

How do communities of literary researchers draw on interpretive and rhetorical conventions as they conceptualize, conduct, and report research? These conventions are part of the discourses of communities of literacy researchers, yet how they are related to ways knowledge is represented is not completely clear. For example, are researchers who adopt an emergent social constructivist frame towards inquiry better able to demonstrate a progressive refinement in their work as opposed to those working from a more hypothesis-testing frame? Also, are researchers whose approach is more experimental better able to focus their inquiry so that results are more “truthful” as opposed to those working from a social constructivist approach? Overall, we believe that researchers, whatever their paradigmatic orientation, compromise. It may be that such compromises reflect processes of revision as research is conducted, reviewed, and published.

However, we questioned the nature of these compromises and asked if other processes were at work as well. We wondered if such compromises may also diminish representations of the complexity of the processes of research, submerge the multi-voiced role of participants within a singular detached voice, limit the ways findings are reported, and maintain a skewed epistemological orientation toward a positivist tradition. We pursued these questions by analyzing two research articles in a leading journal of literacy research, and interviewing the authors to explore these and other questions about how researchers negotiate rhetorical and interpretive conventions within research communities. The framework described by Kinneavy (1971) informs our definition of rhetoric. In this view, rhetoric is part of discourse and is shaped by situational contexts such as communities of researchers (Kinneavy 1971; 1990). Within these communities, particular types of arguments, interpretive conventions, and narrative voices define how research is conceptualized, conducted, and reported.

As we analyzed these two articles and interviews with the authors, we were also compelled to confront how our own backgrounds, beliefs, and approaches impacted our research ideas, analysis of the texts and interviews and composition of the manuscript. This approach allowed us to suggest ways certain conventions of reporting and publishing research compelled authors to compromise representations of

research process, authorial voice, presentation of findings, and knowledge claims. In this next section we survey some of the scholarship that informed our thinking and provide a background to the analysis.

### **Theoretical Background**

In an important essay chronicling the rhetoric of research and inquiry Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey (1987) sketched how a “rhetoric of inquiry” evolved from the sophists in ancient Greece, through Descartes and the philosophers of the Enlightenment, to critiques on the nature of “Truth” by Heidegger, and Nietzsche, to finally be challenged and reconstituted by the work of critical theorists such as Gadamer, Rorty, Habermas, Toulmin, and Foucault. From this tradition, these writers surveyed how work in the humanities (Kenneth Burke, Wayne Booth, Northrup Frye, et. al.) shifts away from seeking universal “Truth” towards studying communities of inquiry. How these communities or disciplines approach what Toulmin (1958) calls “the warrants and backings” of particular reasoning has implications for what counts as knowledge in specific disciplines. Near the conclusion of their essay, Nelson, Megil, & McCloskey (1987) claimed:

The role of rhetoric has been played down in the humanities, but it has been downright ignored in the social sciences. In consequence, the social sciences float on a warm sea of unexamined rhetoric (16).

Since this challenge, social science as a field has begun to explore how its own “sea” is constituted by its own practices, and how those practices become regulative and prohibitive.

To foreground our project we selected scholarship from anthropology, critical theory, and rhetoric of traditional science that reflected on relationships among processes, language, and outcomes of research. This multidisciplinary review helped ground our thinking in recent shifts taking place in related yet diverse fields, and provided insights into how questions about the complexities of research have been asked. Further, this approach aligned with our notion of how rhetorical structures embedded within the discourses of each of these fields shape research agendas and knowledge claims.

Throughout this project, we have conceived of research as social practices. These practices are situated within specific communities and rely on certain discourses to describe, explain and justify findings

and epistemological orientations (Gilbert 1976). The work of Lemke (1995) in which he explored how particular communities constitute themselves through interlocking webs of discourses that connect by a “systematic articulation of differences” (p. 151) has been useful. It suggests that what keeps a community together is not common, uniform practices, or “homogeneity” but “organized heterogeneity” (p 151). For research communities, practices exist within social networks, are dynamic, and continue to shift as a community evolves. Examining rhetorical conventions of literacy research as social practices provides a way to problematize relationships among researchers and their goals, participants and their roles, and the publication of that research. Based on this examination, we argue for a need to shift research practices in the field of literacy to a more inclusive orientation that honors the multi-voiced nature of inquiry.

The purposes and conventions of reviews of scholarship as an organizing structure within research studies have recently been critiqued and problematized (Eisenhart 1998; Schwandt 1998; Lather 1999). These critiques argue that linking and synthesizing bodies of scholarship to frame reports of research does more than situate authors theoretically; they can also be a “way of knowing” (Lather 1999, p. 4). With this purpose in mind, our review of selected scholarship is organized around four relationships we believe have shifted in recent reports of research:

- The relationships between an author and their text
- The relationships of the researcher to the participants
- The relationships among discourse conventions and researcher practices
- The relationships among the researchers’ frames and claims about knowledge and truth.

We use these shifting relationships as a way to consider research in three areas, Anthropology, Critical Theory, and rhetoric of traditional science. This approach allows us to develop an analytical frame to analyze the data in this research project. We selected these three areas as disciplines in which ongoing discussions about the nature of research and how to report research findings have been taking place. Based on this analysis, we move beyond pointing out how the rhetoric of research limits interpretive possibilities and representation to argue for new ways to compose research texts that provide spaces for voices and views that have traditionally been submerged.

*Anthropology and Lenses of Interpretation*

Important work in the field of anthropology has explored relationships of research and representation in texts, including author to text relationships. Stocking (1992) for example provided a historical analysis of the cultural and epistemological tensions that have shifted anthropological research and ethnographic texts from the middle 1800's up until the recent 1990's. He offered a cautionary conclusion questioning whether this new "decentering" (p. 371) will lead to meaningful work. From an ethnographic frame, Van Maanen (1988) explored how three different "tales" (realist, confessional, and impressionistic) textualize the dynamic complexities of culture. In a similar fashion, Wolf (1992) looked at three different texts generated from the same data. She presented a short story, her fieldnotes, and a scholarly article about a Taiwanese village in which she conducted research. Informing her re-examination of these texts are issues raised by feminism and post modernism. These lenses restoried her own research processes, and she pursued how each of these three texts simultaneously limits and frees the other. From these two ethnographers, critical questions about how any single text can purport to capture the "Truth" of social interaction emerged. Research tends to be reported as a seamless story which evolved from theoretical conception through methodology into findings. Van Maanen and Wolf challenged such accounts as a way to encourage researchers to look more carefully at the recursive nature of their work.

Other researchers in anthropology (Geertz 1983; Clifford & Marcus 1986) have turned an interpretive lens back on their own work and revealed the arbitrariness with which field notes become published facts without sufficient regard for how the ethnographer/researcher negotiated within and between the worlds of the participants and the academic or scholarly community. In other words they question how discourse conventions in anthropology may mask the processes by which "data" is interpreted. Clifford (1986) for example, commented on the difficulty in composing ethnographic texts that "translate experience into text" (p. 115). He argued that various narrative strategies (e.g., writing up results of individual experience, creating ethnography composed of dialogues, articulating a narrative of discovery, etc.) all have "significant and ethical consequences" (p.115). Clifford suggests that these consequences rarely inform the research text. Marcus (1986) noted the shifting nature of ethnographic research and writing when he observed that the most satisfying ethnographic research pushed beyond the conventions of academic training to "explore lessons gained from that experience, which requires different

forms and styles of exposition” (p. 266). The dynamic energy of ethnographic research depends on researchers not remaining satisfied with traditional conventions and practices to represent their findings, but seeking “other forms and styles” emerging from the data.

The selected scholarship cited above suggests that recognizing problematic relationships among analytic frames, knowledge and truth claims have troubled some researchers in anthropology. As a result, some have called for a “remaking” of cultural analysis in ways that account for its multi-layered qualities (Clifford 1988; Rosaldo 1980). This notion of remaking informed our thinking as we seek to consider how literacy researchers might begin to re-imagine their own inquiry practices. The multi-layered features of literacy research practices, such as representing voices of stakeholders, variety of data sources, and others may be more richly accounted for in texts that seek to keep these features visible rather than submerge them into a more traditional frame.

#### *Critical Theory and Reading Research*

In the area of critical theory much has been written about how research is read and interpreted without acknowledging how larger cultural and rhetorical forces may inform these processes. We organized this review around the same four problematic relationships outlined above (See page 5). This approach aided in considering how scholars probed the ways we read research from a critical theorist perspective and problematized relationships between researchers, the texts they produce, and how others read those texts (Cherryholmes 1993; Lather 1991).

In a critique of “the silence of research literature on the textuality of research findings” (p.1) Cherryholmes (1993), drawing on Scholes’ theoretical work on reading, distinguished between a “fundamentalist approach” versus a “pragmatic approach to reading research” (p.2-3). In the former, readers of research view meaning as fixed, stable, and direct, so that no interpretation is required; in the latter, readers of research look to “clarify meanings. . . even though meanings may turn out to be exceedingly elusive” (p. 3). In order to explore further this distinction, Cheryholmes offered three different readings (feminist, critical pedagogy, and deconstructionist) of Palincars’s & Browns (1984) study on reciprocal teaching and comprehension. He argued that each critical stance provides for different interpretations of the study, and “each offers insight” (p. 24). Cherryholmes’ points were salient for our thinking: reading research, like all reading is a choice that involves interpretation and a willingness to

entertain alternative views in an attempt to clarify meaning; and, those who oppose such alternatives and insist upon privileging only one way of reading research risk venturing into “dictatorship” (p. 25).

Similarly, Lather (1991) problematized the writing and representing of research in light of recent work in critical theory. She enacted multiple possibilities by telling “four different ‘stories’” (123) about data she had collected from women’s studies courses over three years. Sequentially, she constructed a realist, critical, deconstructive, and self-reflexive tale to blur the boundaries of the knower and the known, and explore how the organizing and textualizing of empirical data involves both political and epistemological choices. Among her larger goals was to interrogate “the gulf between the totality of possible statements and the finitude of what is actually written or spoken” (p. 123) to examine research as “science”. From such examinations, Lather sought to “write science differently” (p. 123) as a way to unmask the tentative nature of “Truth” in empirical research.

In a more specific study, Marshall and Barritt (1990) investigate how language and research function in a particular scholarly publication, the *American Educational Research Journal*. They considered how the rhetoric of educational research constituted the activity of researching, and found that a number of articles relied on traditional definitions of science. Voices of authors, as makers of decisions, were notably absent. In their view, this elevated the mask of the depersonalized researcher and served to legitimize existing knowledge beliefs rather than explore new epistemological vistas.

Scholars in other related fields such as economics and human sciences have explored how the rhetorical and interpretive conventions of peer review function within larger discourses of research communities (e.g., Gans & Shepard 1994; Gross 1990; Hammermesh 1994). Their conclusions have also indicated that rhetorical conventions as represented by leading journals in the field shape processes and products of research. This selected review of research in critical theory suggests that the four relationships identified earlier in this text provide a way to consider shifts in this field of study as well. The focus of Cherryholmes on potentially multiple readings of research texts and Lather’s arguments for writing up research differently dovetail with our concepts of researcher’s frames and practices, as well as author and text and researcher to participants. Noting this relationship spurred ask as to whether scholars in the rhetoric of traditional science might exploring these four relationships.



*Rhetoric, Interpretation and Traditional Views of Science*

Scholarship that examines how rhetorical and interpretive structures have shaped scientific research has an established tradition (e.g., Kuhn 1962; Gilbert 1976; Latour & Wolgar 1979; Meyers 1985). This seminal work noted how paradigmatic shifts, social processes, laboratory practices, and processes of review and revision were culturally situated and socially constructed. More recently, other scholars have refined these investigations by considering science as a way of knowing, the research of specific scientists, genres within the larger discourse of scientific research, and language and literacy issues in scientific research and science classrooms (Rorty 1987; Campbell 1987; Bazerman 1988; Halliday & Martin 1993). These trends align with the four research relationships outlined in the previous sections and inform this review of the rhetoric of science as well.

For example Rorty critiqued how the natural sciences tend to place scientists in the role of priest who broker facts and have become the keepers of rational knowledge (1987, p. 38). As a result, Rorty argued, our culture has set up tenuous and arbitrary distinctions between the work of scholars in the humanities and the more “rational” objective work of scientists. These binary constructs and others like them (e.g., questions of ideas and questions of fact) force researchers to act as if *Truth* were something they are responsible to or a place where if science is rigorous enough, it will eventually arrive. Rorty would rather have scientists cease looking for a final version of objective reality and recognize alternative possibilities and competing schools of thought are part of the richness that makes inquiry valuable (p. 44). One feature of inquiry that Rorty has advocated for recognizing that language shapes the knowledge and truth claims of the communities in which it is used. In other words all research is a form of rhetoric or discourse and uses certain narratives to represent epistemological beliefs and justify particular methodological practices.

Another instance of how narrative, rhetoric, and interpretive practices have informed views of science is Campbell’s analysis of the rhetoric of Charles Darwin (1987). Campbell’s thesis is that Darwin purposely avoided scientific jargon of his time and crafted *Origin of the Species* for non-scientists as a way to gain support for his theories larger in broader communities. Further, Darwin capitalized on public acceptance of his ideas as they pressured a more specialized community of scientists to accept his work on natural selection (p. 69). Campbell examines the relationship among Darwin’s Notebooks, *The Origin of*

*the Species*, and Darwin's *Autobiography* in terms of how he consciously chose to use particular rhetorical turns and interpretive strategies to portray his theory of natural selection and position himself within the scientific community of his time. While he applauds Darwin's brilliance as a scientific thinker, Campbell simultaneously makes visible how Darwin selectively constructed and compromised the outcomes of his research to fit within the conventions of a research community (p. 83-84).

The conventions of a research community are also realized in the methodological practices used to conduct inquiry and the ways in which that inquiry is reported. Bazerman examines how the experimental article can be construed as a genre in scientific writing and how the language used shapes knowledge claims (1988). Further, he situates argumentative forms of scientific writing within an evolving historical framework to show how shifts in rhetorical style link to changes in research practices. Bazerman argues that as language is a semiotic system and the work of science cannot be separated from the language of science, scientific writing cannot be trusted as a means to gain *Truth*. Instead, the work of science and writing about science is to maintain an elaborate self-perpetuating sign system (p. 294). The way out of this rhetorical dilemma, Bazerman claims, is to recast the work of scientific writing within a Vygotskian conception of language. Briefly, he argues that we must recognize that the language of science is a culturally-situated tool that "helps carry on cooperative activities" (p. 302). Reconceptualizing the language of science in this way shifts the goal of doing and writing research from a model in which individual researchers work methodically toward uncovering truth, to one in which researchers understand that their efforts are situated within networks of relationships and social practices. These networks and practices are realized through culturally-situated meaning systems which are dynamic and intersubjective. Bazerman suggests an aspect of *writing science* is to come to understand this discourse community and one's place and role within it.

Finally, recent scholarship by Halliday & Martin (1993) also considers the relationship between the language of science and its epistemological claims. Like Bazerman, they also view this relationship from a semiotic frame. They pose what they see as a central problem this way:

The prototype of a semiotic system is, as we have said, a natural language; and this leads us into the paradox. In adapting natural languages to the construction of experimental science, the creators of scientific

discourse developed powerful new forms of wording; and these have construed a reality of a particular kind—one that is fixed and determinate, in which objects predominate and processes serve merely to define and classify them (p. 20).

Halliday and Martin further note that in their view, the language of science “has become increasingly anti-democratic” (p. 21). They see this tendency as particularly problematic for how science is brought into the curriculum of schooling as it seems to promote a type of elitism towards scientific literacy. If the language and rhetoric of science shapes how science is portrayed in school curriculum, it seems possible that it may privilege some ways of knowing and conducting inquiry over others.

In this review, we have attempted to show how some scholars and researchers in anthropology, critical theory and the rhetoric of traditional views of science have examined and contested research practices in their respective fields. We have focused this review around four problematic relationships: relationships of authors to their texts, researchers to their subjects, discourse conventions to research practices, and stances of researchers and their claims about knowledge and truth. Based on our review, we began to question the nature of rhetorical and interpretive conventions in literacy research. What are the relationships among rhetorical and interpretive conventions in the community of literacy research? Do these conventions promote and constrain researcher’ abilities to represent and interpret data in the reporting of research and are some discourse styles privileged over others? How might we examine the discursive practices that both define and perpetuate the epistemological boundaries of the community of literacy researchers? Questioning how interpretive and rhetorical conventions shape and perhaps constrain the reporting of research and systematic inquiry becomes salient as we seek to explore and report research which more richly represents the multiple relationships among knowledge and dynamics power.

In this next section we develop an analytical frame used to examine the research articles, the interviews with the authors, and the diagrams developed in response to our own reading of the two research texts. Using this frame, we pursue the questions outlined above and then suggest how research might be re-conceptualized and written up to represent the process in more richly multi-voiced ways.

*Developing an Analytic Frame*

We agree with Lather who suggested that reviews of scholarship should move beyond rehearsal of what is already known and become a way of seeing (Lather 1999). For us, this review suggested a way to conduct an interlaced and interactive analysis of the data. To achieve this type of analysis, we move back and forth among the text, interview, and diagrams that we developed to represent our own readings of the research articles. Our review of the three areas of research cited above allowed for the development of four key aspects to this frame:

1. Research and inquiry, regardless of paradigmatic allegiance involves multiple stakeholders whose voices and agendas may or may not be visible in research processes and products.
2. Research and inquiry practices are situated within discourse communities; these discourses shape how research is conceptualized, what practice are valued, and how reports of research are composed.
3. These practices align with certain rhetorical and interpretive conventions that may constrain literacy research and inquiry and force compromises as to how data is analyzed, interpreted, and reported as well as how reports of research are reviewed.
4. To pursue and report research differently literacy researchers can conceptualize different relationships within research and inquiry projects and develop texts that are multi-voiced, pursue more interactive data analysis, make more visible the recursive nature research practices, and critique how a researcher's agendas and ideologies inform their work.

By questioning our own motives as well as engaging in conversations with other researchers, we hoped to learn more about the nature of rhetorical and interpretive conventions within communities of literacy research. To achieve our goals, we examined two articles from a premiere research journal in

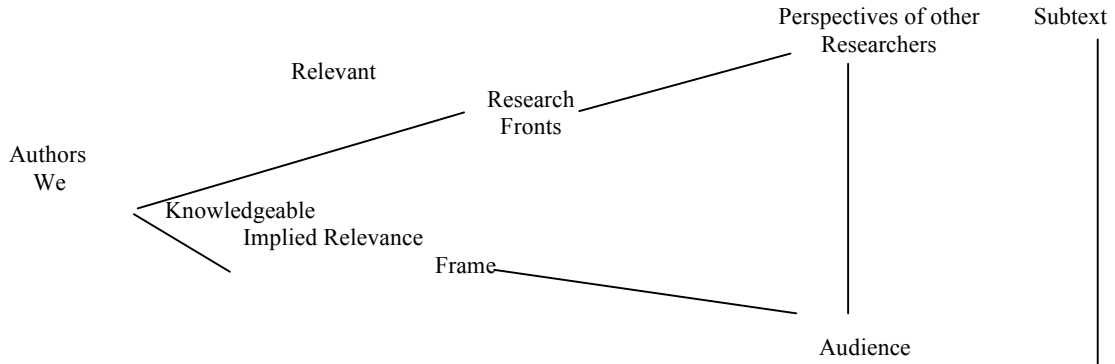
reading and literacy research (hereafter referred to as *Literacy Research Forum*) to explore these and other issues. In the next section, describe the methodology of this study.

### Methodology

For this study, we selected two articles from *Literacy Research Forum* that would offer some variation in paradigmatic allegiances, as well as authors we had a working relationship with and who were willing to be interviewed. Both the name of the journal and the names of the authors have been disguised to preserve confidentiality. We chose this publication as one that is preeminent in the field of literacy research and publishes research from divergent paradigms. The first “*Diverse Paths to Literacy in a Preschool Classroom: A Sociocultural Perspective*” (1992) written by Donald Franklin et.al. appeared to be more emergent and draw upon a social constructivist frame. The second, “*Disabled Readers’ Erroneous Responses to Inferential Comprehension Questions: Description and Analysis*”(1992) written by Sally Matthews, appeared to be situated in a more hypothesis-testing frame. However, neither article could be characterized as strictly located in one paradigm or the other, nor each seemed to use multiple ways of knowing. For example, Matthews’s article (1992) included elements that could be labeled emergent categories, and Franklin et. al. (1992) seemed to include elements of a more positivist approach.

We analyzed each article by developing diagrams to uncover relationships among investigators/collaborators, subjects, participants, and the analysis/ interpretations of results. We were particularly interested in how shifts in the persona or voice of the author (Gibson 1969) influenced the various knowledge claims of the text.. This procedure enabled us to begin to see how the genre of reported research kept invisible the ongoing meaning making and allowed us to tease out how particular rhetorical and interpretive conventions shaped the nature of the research, ways of constituting literacy, ways of constituting audience, and representations of the findings. Specifically, diagrams were developed to portray relationships within the review of literature, methodology, results, and discussion sections of each text. Each of us initially developed diagrams separately to delineate our own readings of the articles. Then, we met to discuss our interpretations and explore what insights this approach provided about our own stances as readers of research. Eventually, we agreed upon one diagram for each section. For example, Figure 1. presents the diagram developed to represent the relationships among author, subject, and audience for the introduction to the article by Franklin.

Figure 1. Introduction--Franklin



In this figure, we attempt to show salient relationships among features of the introduction. The authors, “we” draw on a particular frame, ethnography, to situate their research within a particular tradition of inquiry. They use a review of literature to demonstrate their understanding of previous work related to their project and let the audience, other researchers, know that they have surveyed relevant research in the field. The subtext, which is the rhetorical and interpretive conventions of the discourse of research, informs the ways the authors shape their introduction. This subtext, characterized by specific expectations that introductions need to legitimize (Marshall & Barritt 1990) the research authors will present, also has tacit epistemological assumptions. By linking their research study to previous work, the authors suggest an additive view of knowledge, whereby new understandings of literacy are added to previous ones in an encyclopedia-like fashion (Bazerman 1987). Also, filtering the introduction through a selected body of scholarship distances the audience from the persona of the plural “we” and suggests a type of objectivity in the authors’ research. This diagram help us better understand how these relationships were submerged in the text and informed interviews that were later conducted with the researchers. In those interviews, we sought to explore how what the authors were trying to achieve was influenced, compromised, and constrained by conventions and practices of research.

Diagrams were also developed for methodology, findings, and discussion/conclusions of each article. These are presented and discussed more fully in the next section. Over the course of the study, we became increasingly more aware of own complicity in the preservation of traditional research discourses

and the power of genres and conventions within literacy research to shape attempts at critique. The diagrams provided valuable insights into the subtle ways the rhetorical conventions of research preserve the depersonalized mask of the researcher and legitimize existing knowledge beliefs rather than encourage exploration of new epistemological vistas.

Finally, we interviewed Donald Franklin, one of the authors of the first article, and Sally Matthews, the author of the second article, to ascertain the nature and intent of their research. The interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed. The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that we asked each author the same basic question about the intent of the sections (introduction, methodology, findings and discussion) of their articles: what were they striving to do? From this initial question the interviewer followed the lead of the participant and ask questions which emerged from their interactions. This format allowed the interviewer to pursue issues as they developed rather than rely on a pre-scripted list. Our approach is closer to what one researcher (Kavale 1996) has metaphorically labeled “interviewer as traveler” (p. 4) in an attempt to capture a post-positivist view in interview research. This characterization insists on a more interactive model, whereby the interviewer and interviewed negotiate meaning as the conversation unfolds. One of the researchers in this study was a colleague of both of the authors at the time of the interviews, and they were aware that the interview was part of a research project. This allowed the interviewer to shape the interview so that it became more of a professional conversation than might be expected in traditional interview. Rather than detracting from the value of the interview, this approach allowed for more personal, and in some instances in-depth responses to questions. Within this interactive way of interviewing, common themes and issues were explored and the rapport between the interviewer and the authors facilitated the process. As we pursue different ways to conceptualize literacy research and collect data, we see merit in recognizing that a variety of approaches to conducting interviews is desirable.

As we analyzed the interview transcripts, we began looking for patterns to describe what we viewed as interpretive space in the context of pursuing and publishing research. Two broad issues emerged: (1) How do authors navigate multilayered yet interconnected space within which research is conceived, developed, negotiated, pursued, reported, read, and rethought; (2) How are positions within these spaces achieved? In the next section, we summarize the articles, display our diagram analyses of the articles, and present selected portions of the author interviews. We use the analytic frame developed above

to critically examine some of the textual conventions and practices used in the community of literacy research. In our analysis, rather than examine each portion of the data separately, we move among the summaries of the articles, diagrams, and interviews as a way to conduct an interlaced analysis. In this way, we demonstrate how specific rhetorical and interpretive conventions circulate within features of a discourse of literacy research, and we argue that these conventions and practices that are part of the discourse of research shape the way authors are able to characterize and report their work.

### **Presentation and Analysis of the Data**

The first research article, “Diverse Paths to Literacy in a Preschool: A Sociocultural Perspective” (1992) reports what the authors term part of “a wholistic ethnography” (p. 188) which attempted to make sense of a preschool classroom. The research was conducted in a laboratory classroom at a large mid-western university, and the children attended this preschool for 2/12 hours each day, four afternoons a week. The authors state that the focus of analysis was “the everyday uses of literacy” and that they conceptualized literacy “not only as something to be learned in school but also as a vehicle to learn about school culture and peer culture” (p. 188).

The data collected followed ethnographic methods and included video recordings, fieldnotes, interviews with children and their parents, retrospective journals, and notes from meetings of the research team. These data were collected over three quarters of a university schedule. The authors reported using a two-phase analysis. In the first, they attempted to “locate literacy across the preschool day in its many forms and within its many contexts” (p. 189). In the second, the authors explained that they build upon findings from the first phase by focusing on “four daily occurring contexts, shown in the first phase to have much literacy within them” (p. 189). They identified these as “two school culture events and two peer culture events” (p. 189). In the final or “Discussion” section of the text the authors conclude with claims that their research suggests literacy is a complex, multifaceted process bound up with social actions and potentially transformative.

The second article, “Disabled Readers’ Erroneous Responses to Inferential Comprehension Questions: Description and Analysis” (1992) attempted to “determine the incidence, distribution, and relationship of various error types when disabled readers responded to inference questions based on narrative and expository questions” (57). The author generated four hypotheses to frame the study:



- Correct literal responses would exceed correct inferential responses;
- Various reasons exist for low readers errors in terms of inference responses;
- Particular types of error would occur with greater frequency than others;
- Variations would be apparent in incidences of specific error types when inference questions based on narration were compared to questions on exposition.

The data was collected from 80 students ages 10 and 11 in Chapter I classes from six elementary schools. The sample included 37 girls and 43 boys who were Caucasian and African-American. The author reported that all of the children read “significantly below grade placement” (57). The subjects in this study read 20 narrative (complete stories) or expository (fully developed macrostructures) texts and answered questions immediately after discussion during class period. These texts had not been read previously by the students. For analysis of these data, the responses to the literal question were coded either right or wrong, while for the inferential responses, a scoring system was devised to consider a range of answers (p. 59). A loglinear analysis was used and the author explains how this particular method is preferential to ANOVA for “discrete data” (p. 67).

Theoretically, the author concluded this study with two propositions that the analysis supports:

1. Instructionally, students need to be informed that correct inferences from a text demand accessing both text information and prior knowledge;
2. Current views on the interconnectedness of writing and reading provide ways to more carefully consider how these two processes might inform one another.

Finally, the author brought the article to a close by evoking the work of Thorndike (1917), connecting her agenda to his research on error analysis, and situating her work within a tradition of scholarship.

### **Interviews with the Researchers**

This next section presents selections from the texts of the interviews with the authors. First, we present a portion of the interview with Donald Franklin, one of the authors of the first article. We recognize that interviewing one author from an article that had three limits our ability to explore the negotiations among the group as they planned, implemented, analyzed and reported their research. However, our focus was on the text and how the text itself reflected certain compromises and tensions within communities of literacy research. The negotiations of the group in bringing this article to press are beyond the scope of this

analysis. At the time of this interview, Dr. Donald Franklin was an associate professor in the area of early childhood education

**Selected portion of the interview (I-Interviewer) & (F-Franklin)**

- I... What was your view or what were you striving for relative to the significance of this piece?
- F... I think what we wanted to show and what we found really interesting is that if you regard literacy as a way of life within a classroom, it becomes something different than a subject matter to put a narrow curriculum niche. And it becomes something that's embedded in the fabric of everyday life. So we wanted to show the diversity of that—to show the power, I think, of literacy to be used in many different ways as a tool and as a way of accomplishing daily life.
- I... In the **introduction** of the article... what were you striving to do...?
- F... One is I think we wanted to be literate within the framework of understanding literacy. So we needed, I think from our standpoint, to legitimize, in a sense a position for us as knowledgeable about trends in literacy because of where we were publishing and who would read it and because in many ways, our names are not at the forefront of social groups that define themselves around literacy.... Then I think what we were trying to build toward in the introduction was the worth of taking a socio-cultural perspective as a kind of relatively newer and unique purview on how literacy can be examined and interpreted. So we were...you know, in a sense we were trying to do that funnel that says here's a process of investigation that goes on that's more broad and then move down to both why and how we were approaching literacy so that people would sort of see the point of view and to some extent to have the ability to take the lens and as the question, well what of value can be gained from looking at literacy this way?
- I... What about in the **methodology**, Donald? What do you strive for—what do you exclude—and so on?
- F... Well, ethnography in particular, and qualitative work, in general, has such a kind of broad diversity of ways in which people are approaching things right now, that I feel its particularly important for you to lay out that trail from—that shows how you went from approaching the problem to collecting the data—to interpreting and analyzing the data—to presenting your conclusions and interpretations, because our view of our own work is that we do what we might call systematic ethnography, which is that—to us—in our data—that might be a sort of typical....so what's real important to ethnography is that one be elucidating patterns. In other words, without those conventionalized sort of guideposts that makes a shorthand interpretation of how a person did something and how legitimate it was to do that, there has to be an explicit trail for me about going from—you know—going all the way from your problem to your interpretation. We used Spradley, and that's one sort of convention, so we say we used Spradley's semantic relations to do this—and here's a couple of examples of how that happens and here's what it looked like thing to say—so that we're trying to use as much common knowledge as there is out there—to shorthand.
- I... This gets us into **the findings**. What do you strive for—what were you striving for with the presentation of the findings?

- F... At one level, we were trying to elucidate pattern—to make that pattern we saw there visible to other folks, and to, in the way we present the data, provide enough context, texture, examples, that it becomes more than a set of occurrences or numbers that we found, but that you really do get a feeling by recontextualizing that notion of there's a pattern around this or that—what it kind of looked like and how it was used more—really within that group life. . . . When you have those kinds of clarities in your goals, then I don't feel too apologetic for saying here was the sort of clarity we found in the relationship between those goals and the doing of them and the kinds of literacies we I think in our discussion here, we return to what's unique about a socio-cultural perspective and sort of highlight that across the four areas where we had sort of sub-findings and then go back to that general definition of literacy that we were talking about—about it being multiple literacies and how it serves group life and those kinds of things—it's almost a demonstration of the value of the perspective and what's unique and how literacy's thought oriented kind of thing. found.
- I... What about the **final discussion**, Donald? What do you strive for in the final discussion?
- F... We've already, in our findings, given a kind of level, I think, of interpretation, which is the meaning of the data from a kind of—you know—certainly not a numbers literacy generally....On the other hand, sometimes it looks like what the field needs to do is sort of synthesize when people are approaching things in different ways and find some things that you can talk about as having some convergence meaningfully and things like that. I mean we've tried to recontextualize it even in our findings, so that there's some local meaning to it. So now here we're trying to put it back in—number one a whole classroom context. What was going on in of within that perspective.

From this interview with Donald Franklin, interesting tensions emerge. First, if we conceptualize research as social practices, and recognize those practices as embedded within a discourse that both constitutes and reaffirms them, Franklin's comments suggest frustrations and compromises. These involve attempts (along with his co-authors) to report and represent the complex of relationships among views of truth-value of research, the approach to the research, and the role of the participants. Note these statements from the introduction:

So we were...you know, in a sense we were trying to do that funnel that says here's a process of investigation that goes on that's more broad and then move down to both why and how we were approaching literacy so that people would sort of see the point of view and to some extent to have the ability to take the lens and as the question, well what of value can be gained from looking at literacy this way?

Additional complexities surround attempts to characterize the relationships that were pursued or emerged among participants, the generalizability of findings, and the nature of implications that might be

offered. In the findings section, Franklin comments on the need to “recontextualize” their work to match the nature of the field:

I mean we’ve tried to recontextualize it {their interpretation} even in our findings, so that there’s some local meaning to it. So now here we’re trying to put it back in—number one a whole classroom context. What was going on in literacy generally....On the other hand, sometimes it looks like what the field needs to do is sort of synthesize when people are approaching things in different ways and find some things that you can talk about as having some convergence meaningfully and things like that.

In other words, such complexities are not apparent in the text and it seems clear that the authors made compromises to publish the piece. Perhaps most notable, the report of the research tends to misrepresent and diminish the emergent nature of the research, the collaborative shaping of the work, and the situation specific nature of the findings.

From an analysis of this interview, we note an attempt to objectify findings via a shift in voice—the findings were written in third person versus other sections written in first person. Our probes of this researcher’s intent, against the diagrammatic depiction of research, bring to the fore the extent to which our discourse remains shaped by conventions which diminish, if not dismiss, the differences in the nature and role of research to which many of us currently doing research aspire.

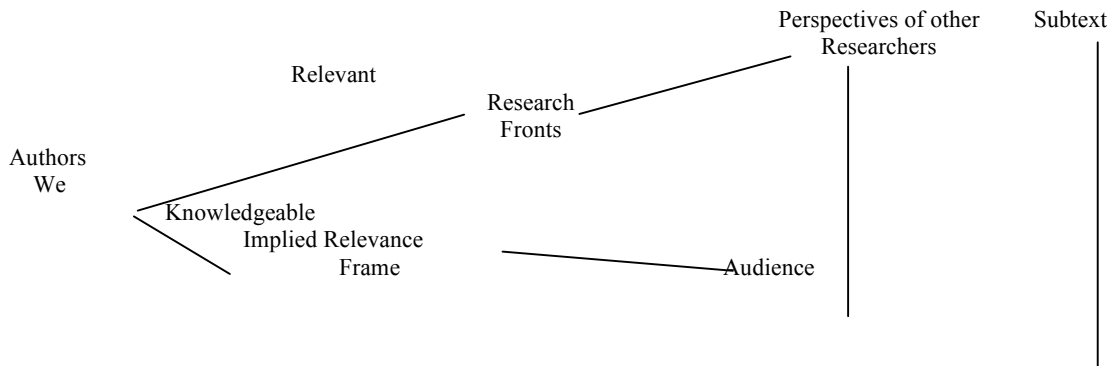
### **Linkages Among the Interview, Text, and Diagrams**

Rhetorically, we wanted to analyze these articles in terms of how authorial voice shapes the knowledge claims made within the research text. To pursue this process, we drew upon the work of Gibson (1969) who suggested diagramming as a way to explore how writers’ voices are embedded within expository texts. This enabled us to probe the relationships among voice, perspective, knowledge claims, research fronts, and perceived audience within subsections of each article. These diagrams helped us more closely look at the four levels of relationships (author and text; researcher to participants; discourse conventions and researcher practices; and researchers’ frames and knowledge and truth claims) outlined in the beginning of this section.

Also, we want to use link the interviews with the text of the articles. The diagrams function as a method for demonstrating this linkage. In this section, we present the diagrams for the Franklin text, Figures 1, 2, 3 & 4. Each diagram suggests what we view as tensions within the research text. These same tensions emerge in the analysis of the interviews. Moving between the research text and interviews via the diagrams makes compromises and processes more visible that have been submerged within the text due to the nature of the conventions of literacy research we have been unpacking in this study. Based on our frame we saw possibilities where a multi-vocal text would have captured the research and meaning making processes Franklin and his colleagues were trying to represent

What follows are four diagrams developed for each section of the Franklin article. Juxtaposed with each diagram are selections of the interview that illustrate textually what the diagrams represent visually.

Figure 1. Introduction--Franklin



As previously stated (see p. 9), in this figure we attempt to show salient relationships among features of the introduction. Briefly, we see the voices of the authors filtered through what we term “relative research fronts” that is a convention through which authors rehearse previous knowledge (perspectives of other researchers) in order to legitimize their project rather than see literacy practices in new ways. This relationship is further problematized by the authors need to appease a particular audience and adopt a particular discourse. This diagram helped us better understand how these relationships were submerged in the research text. The interview also suggests how what the authors were trying to achieve was influenced, compromised, and constrained by conventions and practices of research.

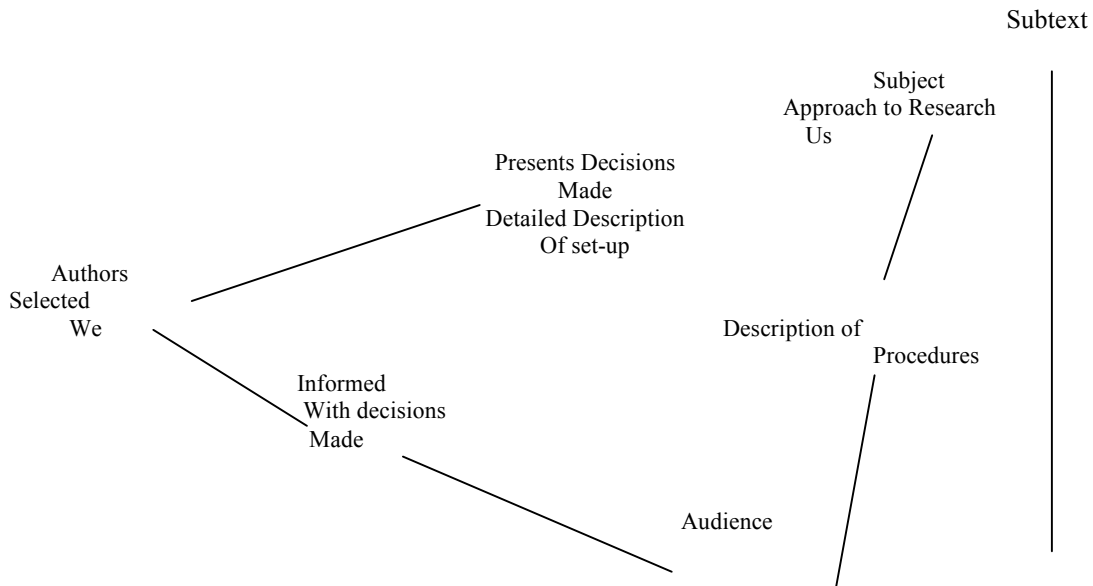
Revisiting the interview with Franklin, note the following:

I think from our standpoint, to legitimize, in a sense a position for us as knowledgeable about trends in literacy because of where we were publishing and who would read it and because in many ways, our names are not at the forefront of social groups that define themselves around literacy.... Then I think what we were trying to build toward in the introduction was the worth of taking a socio-cultural perspective as a kind of relatively newer and unique purview on how literacy can be examined and interpreted.

The use of the word “worth” indicates an assumption that some might find the socio-cultural perspective not worthy. Therefore Franklin explains the need to “legitimize and position us as knowledgeable about trends in literacy.” The expectation to “legitimize” as a convention of the rhetorical and interpretive practices of a research community seems to crowd out other possibilities for introductions research reports. We are not advocating for abandoning reviews of scholarship as a feature of research reports. The frame developed for this study shows this is not the case. However, we do what to suggest that reviews of research position authors in ways that have not been critiqued, but taken for granted in research communities

In this second figure, we explored the relationships among how the authors detailed the context, procedures and other aspects of the data collection portion of the study. The authors, “we” describe decisions made in terms of setting up the study. These include descriptions of procedures and methods used to conduct the study. This diagram helped us conceptualize the rhetorical nature of the methodology on this article. The authors describe their procedures and decision and construct an argument for their approach to inquiry. As a subtext, the discourses of literacy research shape this section of the text so that the authors present their methodological choices as informed and purposeful, and make subtle audience shifts within subheadings of research texts. Here, the audience is distanced by the procedural description of the methods as the authors build a case for the appropriateness of their mode of inquiry.

Figure 2. Franklin—Methodology



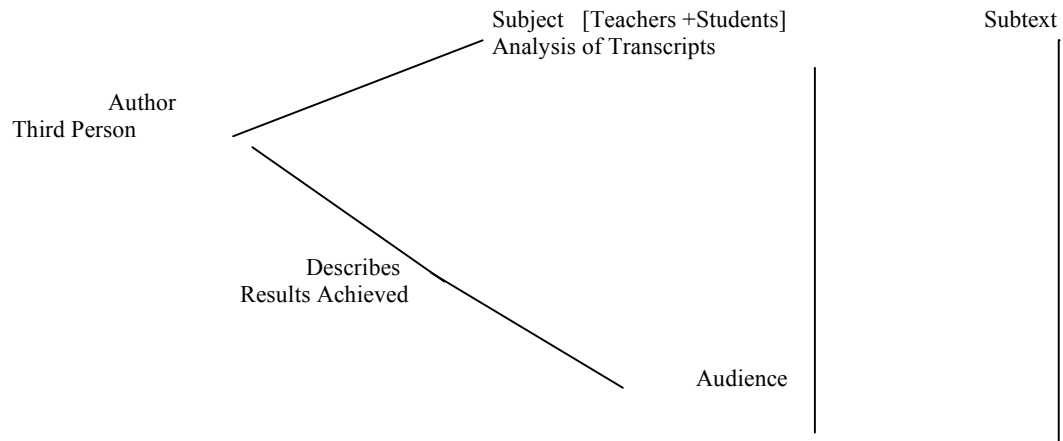
Again, the comments in the interview illuminated the diagram:

...So what's real important to ethnography is that one be elucidating patterns. In other words, without those conventionalized sort of guideposts that makes a short hand interpretation of how a person did something and how legitimate it was to do that, there has to be a explicit trail for me about going from—you know—going all the way from your problem to your interpretation. We used Spradley, and that's one sort of convention. . . .

Significant is Franklin's phrase "conventionalized sort of guideposts that makes a short hand interpretation of how a person did something". Our diagram shows how the plural authors shape and condense the methodological procedures in order to meet audience expectations. Franklin commented on how they used conventionalized guideposts to condense ("short hand") methodological processes, and again used the word "legitimate" to mark his perception of the need to show these procedures had merit. Given that Franklin and his colleagues were working within an ethnographic orientation, the short hand reduction of their procedures appears to be a compromise necessitated by either conventions of the discourse of literacy research, the reviewers on the manuscript, or perhaps both.

The third figure indicates what we saw as a shift from the authors as “we” to an implicit third person.

Figure 3. Franklin Findings



The subject has also shifted as the authors present the analysis of their transcripts and the subject becomes the teachers and the students. On one level, this is not unusual, as this was the source of the data. However, from the frame we have articulated, this suggests pressure from the subtext (conventions of research) as the teachers and students become objects of analysis rather than participants in that analysis. We do not wish to propose that the authors purposely excluded them; rather we suggest that this may be a type of compromise necessitated by conventions and expectations of the field, and that such a compromise may limit possibilities of characterizing richer accounts of processes of analysis.

A reconsideration of the section of the interview pertaining to the findings reveals this statement:

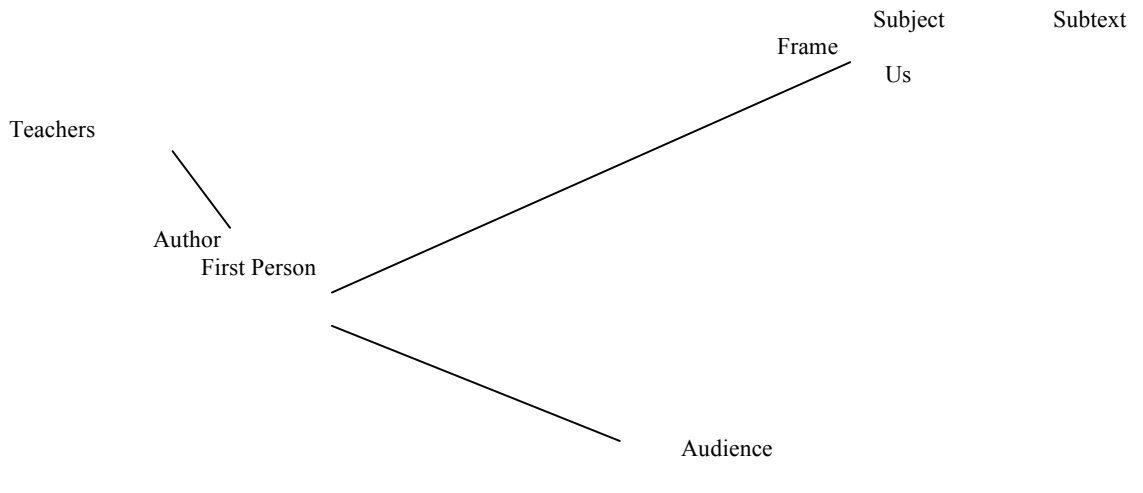
At one level, we were trying to elucidate pattern—to make that pattern we saw there visible to other folks, and to, in the way we present the data, provide enough context, texture, examples, that it becomes more than a set of occurrences or numbers that we found, but that you really do get a feeling by recontextualizing that notion of there’s a pattern around this or that—what it kind of looked like and how it was used more—really within that group life.



A salient tension here is that Donald talking about this section of the text spoke in the first person plural, “we were trying to elucidate a pattern...” which in our reading of the research text we represent diagrammatically as having shifted to the third person. Further the “we” is the authors without the voices of the teachers (either agreeing or providing a different perspective) about the findings of the research project as written up in the text. If Franklin and his authors had included interpretations of the teachers who are described in the beginning of the article the text could have begun to become a more multi-vocal type of research report that more richly depicted the multi-layered nature of the research itself.

In this final figure, used to explore rhetorical and interpretive relationships in the discussion section of the first article, we noted a shift back to the first person plural as the authors summarize the significance and suggest implications for research in the future.

Figure 4. Franklin--Discussion



We see the shifts and changes within this first article as suggesting tensions among the multiple voices within this text, the conventions shaping writing up research, and interpretive conventions. These tensions suggest that forums which open space for reporting multiple-voiced research projects need to be fostered if we seek to get more complete pictures of what really goes on in literacy research. Looking one more time at the interview note these statements:

On the other hand, sometimes it looks like what the field needs to do is sort of synthesize when people are approaching things in different ways and find some things that you can talk about as having some convergence meaningfully and things like that. I mean we've tried to recontextualize it even in our findings, so that there's some local meaning to it. So now here we're trying to put it back in—number one, a whole classroom context. What was going on in of within that perspective.

It seems that Franklin was aware of “the field” as a discourse of research that was shaping how the discussion was written up. His use of the terms “convergence” and “recontextualize” suggests a pressure to move beyond what he calls “local meaning” to more generalizable findings. If a richly textured local phenomenon is portrayed in the text, why isn't that a satisfactory outcome? Again, we are not arguing that generalizing research findings is something undesirable. However, we wondered if notions of generalizability could also function as rhetorical convention of communities of literacy research and serve to pressure authors to compromise in terms of how they are characterized the significance of their work.

Together, these diagrams and selections of interview data reveal some significant shifts in subject and voice as the authors describe and present the results of their research. A re-examination of some of the language of the research report itself affirms several key shifts. First, the subject shifts from perspectives of other researchers in the introduction to the researchers as us in the methodology. This is followed by a shift from the teachers and students as subject in the findings, to the sociocultural frame, as articulated by the researchers/authors, as subject in the discussion. Paralleling this is a shift in the author's voice from a collaborative “our” in the introduction and methodology to the third person in the findings section to the first person in the discussion section. Near the end of the introduction, the authors write:

Overall, our global conceptualization of this classroom as having complex, interrelated realms of school culture and peer culture activity guided us to look for literacy across both realms and alerted us to the possibility that literacy intersections between these realms would be constructed. (p. 188)

Note this section of the findings where the use of literacy are being discussed:

The functional semantic relationship revealed that literacy was used to control or direct the play (e.g., signs and lists), initiate play (e.g., writing notes to give each other), and to enhance children's play themes (p. 198)

Finally, this example from the discussion section indicates another shift in voice:

We began this study with the general expectation that literacy would be a way of life in the classroom, but without the knowledge of how literacy would specifically relate to the group's way of living (p. 199)

The shift from the inclusive “our” in the introduction to “literacy” in the findings to the first person plural “we” in the discussion suggest the authors responding the tensions surrounding crafting an article for publication in a research journal and the desire to represent a more collaborative, negotiated research process. Also, permeating each section is a subtext that we perceive as the discourse conventions and practices of the research community as exemplified by the *Literacy Research Forum*. These conventions (as described in the introduction) link shifts in voice to perspectives in the article and subsequently impact epistemological truth-value of the research. For example, the descriptions of teachers and students in the methodology and discussion sections of the text reflect the voice of the researchers, not the voices of the participants. It seems that that the conventions of research, which tend to favor a singular voice, shape the reporting of the research away from a multi-vocal text toward a more traditional one, thereby reinforcing a type of status quo of inquiry.

In the second interview, we saw how similar compromises had been made. At the time of this interview Dr. Sally Matthews was a professor in the area of Reading, Language and Literacy. Next, we present selected portions of the Matthews interview.

**Selected Portion of the Interview { (I-Interviewer) & (M-Matthews) }**

I... What was your feeling about the things that were included—that you included in the **introduction**? Were there things that you didn't include relative to your thinking about the rationale for the study?

M... I guess I generally don't feel that I had to exclude anything that was really important to—I mean, one advantage in publishing in the Literacy Forum is that you don't have the page constraints that you do in other journals—that you can elaborate—you can develop ideas—you can submit something that's as long as you feel it needs to be. You know,

when you get responses from the reviewer, sometimes they want you to add things. Most often, even though it makes you want to gnash your teeth at the time, most often, I will have to say, once I've done it, I've thought they're right. But, I feel the literature review—I guess that's what you mean by introduction—I feel comfortable about it.

I... When you write up your **methodology**, what do you strive for?

M... Well, clarity for one thing. I think it's different to—oh now are we talking about the statistical analysis? Well, I guess you strive for it being clear so that it can be replicable—that people can not only understand your message, but people can use the same procedures themselves. I guess you are—you have enough emotional investment in what you're doing that it's an important thing to do that you hope other people will want to look at it and say, yeah, this is something I ought to do.

I... What about in terms of **methodology**—the development of the study. . . What were the things—from your point of view—were key for you?

M... It was very time-consuming—I mean that's the sort of decision to have done that right? The editors and reviewers, I guess I should say, sort of went back and forth—I don't know how familiar you are really with the article, but on how much detail I included in tables and categories and examples—it was frustrating a little in that first I included a lot—then the reviewers wanted me to include not so much and then. After the revisions, they wanted me to include some stuff again. So I don't feel uncomfortable about that. Now if your including methodology, the research methodology (*analysis/findings*) I can say some different things about that.

I... Okay.

M... Originally, when I decided what I needed to do to analyze that data—because what I was going to do was different from what I had done before. It just didn't fit the assumptions for ANOVA, but when I got reviews back, everybody said, "we've never heard of this" (log linear analysis). So that meant I had to rethink all of that and went back and met with some of the professors in the department who said "Yes, this looks like you're exactly on the right track," and so on. So I—in other words what it—I guess it was—that maybe the most frustrating to me that all of those people who really knew what they were doing told me that what I needed to do was one thing, but I had reviewers who were not informed—part—maybe that's you know, I guess what I'm saying then, I'm thinking his has happened to me in other cases where the reviewers aren't informed.

I... Are there things that you think **researchers**, including yourself, might have included but tend not to include?

M... Hmm. Well, I guess maybe you get so hooked into sort of that frame—I'm really glad to see that so many of our studies follow-up quantitative data with qualitative now. I think that's really a good trend. I'm not sure that any of us were doing that a few years ago as much as we should.

The analysis of the second interview suggests the extent to which Matthews had to defend her methodological choices to those who were unfamiliar with her design. Interestingly, implicit in Matthews's comments is a charge that some reviewers tend to want to reproduce their own research methodologies rather than evaluate other possibilities. These practices reinforces status quo, rather than

push the field of literacy research in new directions, and brings questions about the politics of knowledge to the forefront of our work. Matthews's comments about her decisions and subsequent methodological frustrations:

Originally, when I decided what I needed to do to analyze that data—because what I was going to do was different from what I had done before. It just didn't fit the assumptions for ANOVA, but when I got reviews back, everybody said, "we've never heard of this" (log linear analysis). So that meant I had to rethink all of that and went back and met with some of the professors in the department who said "Yes, this looks like you're exactly on the right track," and so on. So I—in other words what it—I guess it was—that maybe the most frustrating to me that all of those people who really knew what they were doing told me that what I needed to do was one thing, but I had reviewers who were not informed

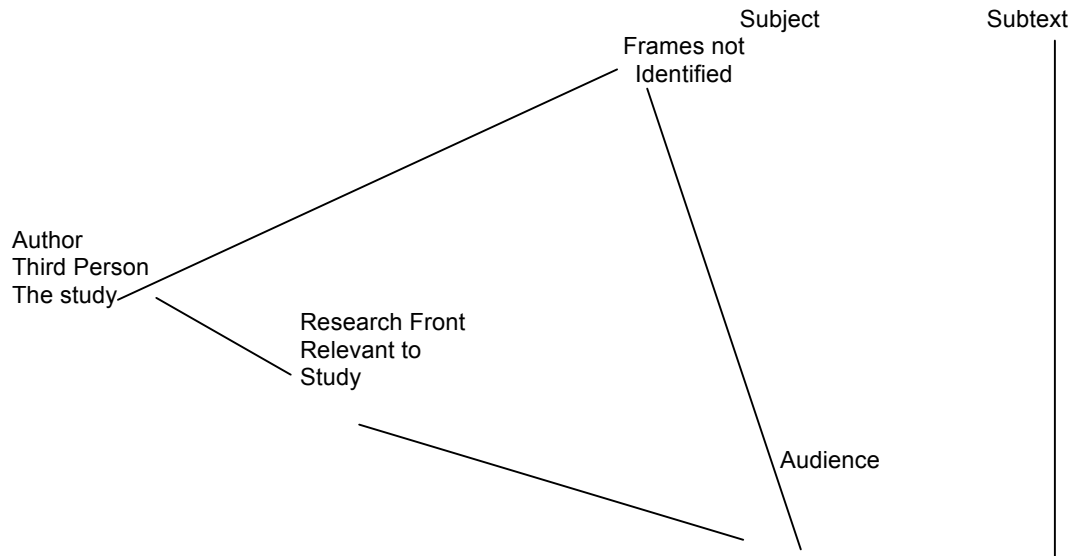
Having reviewers that "were not informed" could lead to a misunderstanding of a researcher's work and possibly a misreading of it in the sense that if it is not an accepted practice by those who hold some power within a discourse community, inquiry that pursues questions in different ways or analyzes data through different approaches could be disregarded.

Matthews indicates the problems that may accompany getting "hooked into sort of a frame" which may limit how we conceptualize, implement, and report research. Note her final comment in the interview about the nature of research frames:

Well, I guess maybe you get so hooked into sort of that frame—I'm really glad to see that so many of our studies follow-up quantitative data with qualitative now. I think that's really a good trend. I'm not sure that any of us were doing that a few years ago as much as we should.

In the second article, we pursued the same process. The diagrams we developed for the Matthews Text, Figures 5,6,7, & 8, were used to help us mediate our understanding and analysis of the text. As with the interview with Franklin, we display the diagrams and then revisit sections of the interview data to explore issues uncovered in analysis.

Figure 5. Matthews—Introduction



In this first diagram, we were trying to explore the concept of authorship at the onset of this second article. The author's voice is submerged in "the study" and remains distanced from the audience. The frame is not explicitly identified, but as readers we expected research aligned with more of a hypothesis testing approach to inquiry. The subtext is the conventions of experimental research, which call for a tone and stance of *objectivity* or disinterestedness from the subjects of the research.

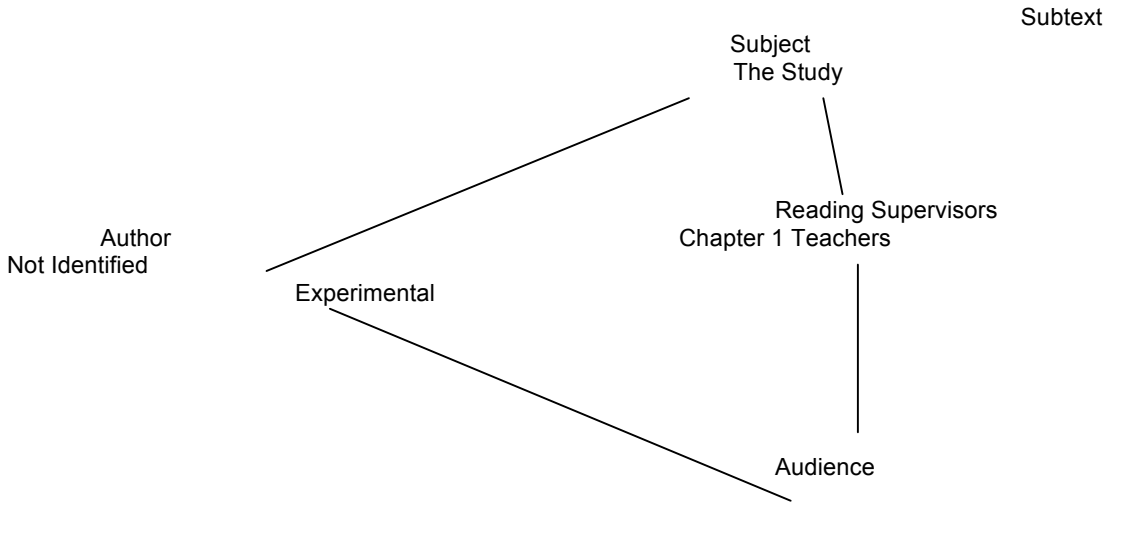
Note these comments Mathews makes about the introduction:

Most often, even though it makes you want to gnash your teeth at the time, most often, I will have to say, once I've done it, I've thought they're right. But, I feel the literature review—I guess that's what you mean by introduction—I feel comfortable about it.

In this next figure, we tried to think about and characterize how the introduction of the

Reading Supervisors, Chapter 1 Teachers, and students moves the audience closer to the implicit author “I” in the methodology section. The study has shifted to the subject of this section and the subtext (research conventions) continues to pressure the author to writer to ascribe to a distant objective tone.

Figure 6. Matthews—Methodology

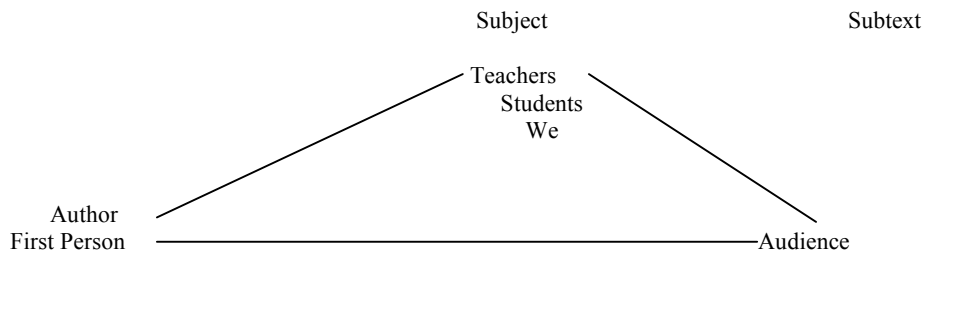


Here’s what Matthews had to say about the methodology section:

The editors and reviewers, I guess I should say, sort of went back and forth—I don’t know how familiar you are really with the article, but on how much detail I included in tables and categories and examples—it was frustrating a little in that first I included a lot—then the reviewers wanted me to include not so much and then. After the revisions, they wanted me to include some stuff again.

This seventh diagram was important for us as we saw a presentation of the analysis/findings using the first person.

Figure 7. Matthews—Analysis/Findings



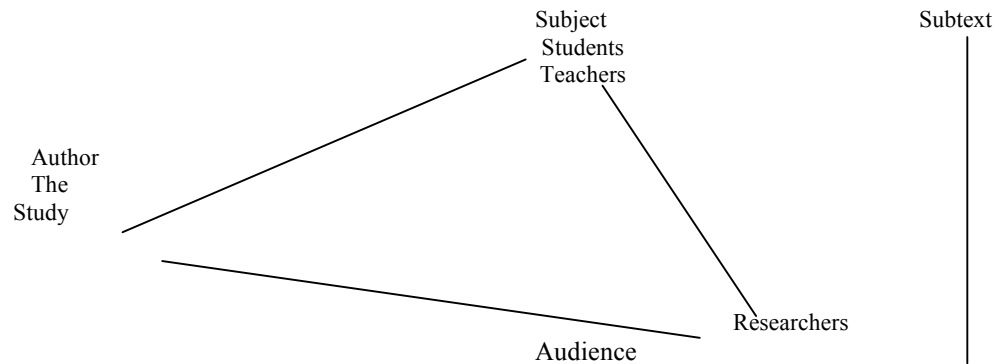
The teachers and students have shifted to a subject position and this suggested to us an almost triangular relationship among author, audience and subject. The subtext, the conventions of literacy research, that have pressured Matthews' text in the previous two sections seems to be resisted here in that the author recognizes implicitly a need to balance the voices of stakeholders in her text.

Matthews makes these comments about the findings/analysis:

It just didn't fit the assumptions for ANOVA, but when I got reviews back, everybody said, "we've never heard of this" (log linear analysis). So that meant I had to rethink all of that and went back and met with some of the professors in the department who said "Yes, this looks like you're exactly on the right track," and so on. So I—in other words what it—I guess it was—that maybe the most frustrating to me that all of those people who really knew what they were doing told me that what I needed to do was one thing, but I had reviewers who were not informed—part—maybe that's you know, I guess what I'm saying then, I'm thinking his has happened to me in other cases where the reviewers aren't informed.

In the last diagram for the second text we tried to show how the writer shifts back to "the study" as the author of the discussion.

Figure 8. Matthews—Discussion





Paralleling this is the shift of audience to a more specified group, “researchers” as the writer of this research report suggests future directions and needed work. Also, the disinterested stance allows the writer to return to a more “objective” tone as a way to increase the validity of the work.

These comments by Matthews are relevant:

Well, I guess maybe you get so hooked into sort of that frame—I’m really glad to see that so many of our studies follow-up quantitative data with qualitative now. I think that’s really a good trend. I’m not sure that any of us were doing that a few years ago as much as we should.

As a group, these diagrams indicate Matthews’s submerging the voice of the author as the third person, “the study,” in the introduction, to “the experimenter” in the methodology, to “I” in the analysis/findings section. These shifts in voice suggest representational tensions as the author of the research attempted to align herself with discourse expectations of an experimental article which cloaks the article within the conventions of APA style (Bazerman 1987) yet sought to find a way to report her findings more inclusively.

For example, this is a section of the concluding paragraph of the introduction:

The major purpose of the present study was to determine the incidence, distribution, and relationships of various error types when disabled readers responded to inference questions based on narrative and expository selections (p. 57).

In the methods sections the voice is “the experimenter”:

Before initiating data collection, the experimenter developed four written test questions (two literal and two inferential) for each section. Questions for narratives were based on events (actions and causes) reactions, motivations, and themes (Meyer & Rice 1984) (p. 58).

In a subsection of the analysis section, in which the author is describing “dependent variable reliability” she explains:

In addition, the independent rater and I examined together examples

responses that would be attributed to each error source and discussed definitions and decision rules (p. 65)

In the discussion section, there is a shift back to “the study”. These shifts in voice from the “study” to “the experimenter” to “I” and back to “the study” are interesting in that Matthews seems to move closer to her audience when she characterized the analysis and further away toward a more objective stance when she reported the “truth value” of the research in the discussion section of the article.

It seems that to move the social practices of research and the discourses within which those practices are described and reported towards new vistas, we need to adopt approaches which provide spaces for multiple perspectives, multiple methodologies, multiple voices, and multiple ways of constructing research texts (Green 1992). These research texts will enable us to see more clearly how research is a multi-voiced process realized through transactions with students, colleagues, reviewers, audiences, and recognize the value of questioning and examining the images which are constituted through those transactions.

#### **Research Reflections and Possibilities: Towards a Conception of Multi-vocal Research Texts**

During his 1993 AERA presidential address, Eliot Eisner urged researchers to consider “what it is that different forms of representation employed within the context of educational research might help us grasp?” (p. 8). These articles were published in 1992 and the research that forms the basis of their arguments was conducted somewhat earlier. Given the time it takes to bring a manuscript through the process of publication, one might argue that shifts in research practices have occurred which allow for new ways of conducting and representing research which make our thesis about compromise moot. Clearly, educational researchers constitute a community that is expanding changing its ways of knowing and seeking knowledge. Yet have things really changed? Consider two recent examples that suggest that the issues of form and convention remain salient. First Contsas (1998), in an article which critiques how postmodernist agendas have impacted educational research, concludes by noting that “education is about the possibility of growth and potential’ (32) a call to “question the value of emergent paradigms” (32). If we fail to do this research will have importance “for those who are more interested in abstract

theorizing than in promoting the value of practical change”(32). In a way, Conostas seems to be creating a another type of dichotomy with this view and asking questions about who decides what “practical change” is and how research which ascribes to that particular view might be privileged over that which does not seem pertinent.

Second, consider a recent exchange between Knapp and Eisner (1999) regarding alternative ways to represent data in research reports. Knapp, responding to an earlier article by Eisner (1997) in which Eisner traced some of the ways ethnographic approaches had shaped qualitative research in education, concludes by asking “shouldn’t the predominant paradigm for educational research in 1997 be the true experiment, just as it was in the sixties” (p 19). In his rejoinder (Eisner 1999) Eisner suggests that the problem of designing the “true experiment” has been partly responsible for the increase of interest in qualitative research. Knapp couches his comments in what he terms “the spirit of friendly criticism” (18). Even though he uses this rhetorical move to inform his arguments with civility, the notion that would call for a return to a previous era when one paradigm was predominant, suggests that perhaps the field still struggles to accept and grasp multiple ways of doing and reporting research.

Additionally, our discourse or ways of talking, and especially writing about research are still bound by traditions that privilege writers, procedures, and measures which add incrementally to what is “known.” The discourse of writers who are more tentative about their interpretations and whose approach to research involves progressive refinement of procedures and attempts to represent human behavior in all its complexity may be less privileged.

If discourse is inherently ideological (Fairclough & Wodak 1997), then discourses of literacy research represents various ideological stances. One implication for Eisner’s question then is to consider how controlling the types of texts (discourse) which find their ways into research journals could become tantamount to controlling a field of research or scholarship. Such control could privilege some types of research over others not necessarily because they lack intellectual rigor and validity, but because they conceptualize these terms differently. If research which challenges particular social practices and conventions of communities of literacy research gets reshaped by the conventions of that community in ways that diminish the complex, textured quality of that research in order to be published, something is lost. What may be lost is a

healthy sense of plurality (Smith 1997). This “plurality” could provide a way to open up discourses of research to the type of conversations and critique that, as Smith notes, might be “intellectually invigorating” if research communities are willing to retain a sense of “we” (p. 10). This is a difficult challenge, yet one of the primary purposes of our article is to suggest the possibilities of examining and analyzing the “seas of rhetoric and discourse” in which research frames and textual practices float.

Certainly, size and our own choices of stance and frames through which we viewed the articles and interview data limit our study. We do not claim that the frame we developed in this study presents a definitive way of analyzing and interpreting the rhetoric and interpretive conventions of literacy research. Rather, our goal is increasing conversations about the nature of literacy research, while recognizing the expanding possibilities for developing and refining ways research is conceptualized, conducted, represented, and reported. To this purpose, we acknowledge that other ways of viewing this same data could provide equally interesting results.

For example, had we conducted our analysis by focusing more specifically on feminist work, (e.g., Harding 1987; Lather 1988; Stone 1995; Richardson 1998) we would have looked more carefully at how issues of gender influenced epistemological and methodological relationships in the research text and in the authors’ perceptions and comments on those texts in the interviews. Further, we could have examined more carefully how truth claims and validity of research are linked to intersections of gender and power (Lather 1991) and embedded within texts which are “sociohistorical constructions” (Richardson 1998, p. 232). Each approach opens different doors and initiates varying conversations.

Our own explorations not only indicate that acknowledging and unpacking the rhetoric of research is important but also suggest that researchers compromise in significant ways to publish their research. We suggest that these compromises may diminish representations of the complexity of the processes of research, submerge the multivoiced role of participants within a singular, detached voice, limit the ways findings are reported, and maintain a skewed epistemological orientation toward a positivist tradition. Both Franklin and Matthews detailed how someone else’s conventions of research and reviewers shaped their work in terms of warrants or arguments they were trying to make, in terms of how they represented what

they were examining, the voices they were able to use, and the cases they were making. What if how researchers wanted to function in the inquiry they were pursuing suggested the types of texts they constructed? What if form followed function rather than controlled it? How might this shift research practices and relationships of power among stakeholders in literacy research? Problematizing the interpretive conventions upon which literacy researchers rely to get their work done helps us understand ourselves as researchers and how we may need to change in accordance with who we are and might want to be. And, in turn, it might help us make the turns and negotiate the adjustments and alternatives that afford access to differences, including the voices, values, claims, and understandings about literacy.

One way to make these turns is to begin to conceptualize multi-vocal research texts that make more visible the voices and roles multiple stakeholders play in within the processes of bringing research findings to publications. Some scholars have referred to these processes as an “iceberg” of which only a small portion—the finished report—tends to be visible, while richly textured “activities” related to the work remain hidden below (Gaskins, Kinzer, Mosenthal, Watts, Reinking, Hynd, & Oldfather 1998). However recently some interesting efforts have been made to shift this tendency (Alverman 2000; Denzin 2000). In our own thinking, we seek to develop research texts that bring the voices of all stakeholders into the report and representation of the work. We imagine that these texts will be poly-vocal, and perhaps more like a dialogue than seamless narratives that cloak contributions of all of those involved. Among the characteristics of these texts, we foresee space for multiple voices, awareness of positionality within texts, an ongoing critique of conventions as discourse practices to push boundaries of research, and self-critique in terms of epistemological and ethical agendas. These rhetorical/interpretive moves could help researchers explore multiple ways of characterizing processes of inquiry, and foster diverse approaches to developing articles that strive to more completely capture the complexities of literacy research.

#### **Postscript: Considering our Own Complicity**

Crafting this article pushed us up against conventions and tensions involved in developing and writing a research text that draws on some of the forms we critique. We originally presented these arguments at two conferences as readers’ theater pieces (Authors names removed 1995, 1996). As we revised this text, we found that the readers’ theater form did not fit our purposes, and we chose to present this in a more traditional article format. To argue that the conventions and practices of literacy research

constrain researchers and necessitate compromise while using some of those same conventions and practices is problematic. It makes us complicit in preserving what we claim to be a form of subordination or dismissal of alternative paradigms. However, by confronting this complicity we hope to spur further examinations and reflective analysis as to how the systems of meaning we align ourselves with shape and limit the work we are able complete as well as the research agendas we may be able to envision.

Finally, research work examining relationships between paradigmatic approaches and political agendas has suggested that while progress has been made in the acceptance and development of qualitative research and other approaches, the current context for educational research particular is once again contested terrain (Dressman 1999; Putney et al. 1999). In our view, the arguments made by these authors resonates with passage of The Reading Excellence Act (HR2614,1998), as this legislation privileges some forms of research over others.<sup>1</sup> This narrows the types of possibilities that may push our field forward. This present research might suggest that an understanding and respect for alternative research traditions may be lacking in the academy which sets the standards for conventions of research that define the scholarly record of our field as well as members acceptable to the community or tenurable within tertiary institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Reading Excellence Act (1998) may produce a privileging of a particular view of evidence-based practices, limit who receives funding in terms of generating what is deemed as acceptable results, and subordinate an open spirit of inquiry to development at the hands of particular legislative bodies.

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