

What 'Hard Times' Means: Mandated Curricula, Class-Privileged Assumptions, and the Lives of Poor Children

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In this article, I present a qualitative analysis of third graders' experiences with a unit from their district-mandated commercial reading curriculum in which the children made strong connections between a fictional account of a Depression-era farm family's economic hardships and their own 21st century lives in a city with one of the highest childhood poverty rates in the United States. The language of the curriculum revealed class-privileged assumptions and an instrumental, competency-based approach to literacy that provided no official space for resonance between reader and text around the issue of poverty. Employing depth hermeneutics, a form of critical discourse analysis, I discuss analyses of three texts: the literature selection, the children's written responses, and the teacher's edition for that unit. My findings reveal that (1) the curriculum portrays economic struggle as a temporary condition, located only in historical or national disaster contexts, even as the children's stories relate life within systemic, multigenerational poverty; (2) the teacher's edition includes language, images, and structures that disregard the possibility that children may respond with personal experiences of poverty; and (3) the children's responses engaged with the story thematically and aesthetically in ways that far surpassed the curriculum's expectation of surface-level, text-bound, inferential response. I also explore how the disconnection between the children's responses and the language of the curriculum was exacerbated by a high accountability policy context in which their teacher felt pressure to adhere to the pacing guides of the curriculum. Implications for research and practice include the importance of analyzing complex interactions between curriculum, policy, and the material realities of children's lives; the need to hold commercial curricula accountable for recognizing and engaging the experiences of children living in poverty; and the academic and moral imperative to include the lived knowledge of students and the emotional dimensions of response in what counts as successful literacy engagement.

Introduction

When nine-year-old Jade was asked to write in her journal in response to the prompt, "What are some signs of hard times?" she had plenty to say. From first line to last, Jade filled her paper with experiences that were, indeed, not easy:

Some signs of hard times are that my mom does not have a car and there is not anuff food at my house. Sometimes my mom never comes straight home from work when she get off work she just stays downtown and sit with her boss. My grandma got kicked out of her house. My grandpa died. Those were some very, very, very hard times for me. I didn't even get to see my cousin once in my life. When I got in trouble at my house and at school those are some hard signs. When people say that they are going to fight after school I don't beleav that. But when things were not going well with my sisters Alesha and Keshia they got taken away from my house and I could not see them again. Well my sister named keshia, she can't see her baby named Gail any more because she was not taking care of her baby and she left her baby at my other sisters' foster house. She ran away from her baby because she was not ready to take care of a baby right now any way.

Jade was not alone in the kinds of experiences she shared in her journal. On that day, difficult stories, many of which were rooted in economic struggles, poured from the pencils of her third-grade classmates.

The prompt asking children to recount some of the signs of hard times was part of the district's mandated literacy curriculum and was included in a unit on *Leah's Pony* by Elizabeth Friedrich, a story about a young farm girl's experiences during the dust bowl of the 1930's. I had been a participant-observer in Sharon's classroom for seven months when the children read *Leah's Pony* and we both knew very well that most of Sharon's students' families struggled economically—every child in the school qualified for the free breakfast and lunch program and they lived in a city neighborhood where poverty was endemic. Indeed, the children's writing demonstrates the strong connections they made between a fictional account of a Depression-era farm family's economic hardships and their 21st century lives in a city with one of the highest childhood poverty rates in the United States. The children wrote their responses to *Leah's Pony* within a policy context in which both the literacy curriculum and the pace with which the curricular materials would be taught was mandated by the district. The analysis I describe was an attempt to understand a convergence of curricular materials, policy, and children's use of their lived knowledge—in this case, their knowledge of economic struggle—to connect to a text with which they were required to engage. Toward this end, the research questions that guided this analysis were: How did children whose families face significant economic struggles respond to a writing prompt about “hard times” in the context of a story about the Great Depression? What views of poverty are embedded in the texts of the curriculum (the story and the teachers' guide for the unit) in relation to the stories of poverty shared by the children and the economic circumstances of their city and neighborhood? How does a high-accountability policy context mitigate the children's and teacher's experiences with this curricular unit? Because the children's stories are a crucial context for my explorations of these questions, I encourage readers to now turn to Appendix A to read the children's responses.

Perspectives

In this section, I discuss the theoretical perspectives and research that informed my analysis, including research on teachers' uses of commercial literacy curricula, critical approaches to discourse, research related to social class and literacy education, and the ways in which poverty is constructed by the middle class.

The Role of Commercial Curricula in Literacy Instruction

Research has long shown divisions between children's lives and the curricula they encounter (e.g., Banks, 2007). In the field of literacy, children's literature in particular has been the focus of research that argues for the need for materials that allow children to see themselves, access experiences that differ from their own, and foster talk about issues of equity and social justice (e.g., Enciso, 1994; Harris, 1997; Miller & McCaskill, 1993; Rogers & Christian, 2007). Such research has led to increased attention to racial diversity in literacy curricula, though this inclusion still remains at the level of tokenism in many cases (Willis, Garcia, Barrera, & Harris, 2003). Social class analyses of curriculum and classroom literacy practices are, however, rarer (I will discuss noted exceptions in a later section). As I will argue, social class analyses of curriculum materials and how they get taken up in classrooms bear increased attention because, as Luke (1995-1996) has demonstrated, commercial literacy curricula necessarily operate from assumptions about children and what they do, can, and should know. These curricula are, by definition, documents that purport to address the needs of any child, regardless of race, class, gender, or region, resulting in the construction of a "generic child." Further, in a policy context in which the stakes are very high for both children and their teachers in demonstrating success on the tests that the curriculum is assumed to address, it seems particularly crucial to consider whose interests are addressed and served by the language of such curricula.

Research points to the complex role of curricular materials in literacy instruction. Studies of teachers' uses of commercial curricula suggest that teachers respond in a variety of ways to these materials, even when they are mandated—some comply, while others adapt or even actively resist the texts' underlying perspectives (Datnow & Castellano, 2000; Smagorinsky, Lakly, & Johnson, 2002). Research also shows that many teachers, particularly those in their first years of teaching, rely heavily on commercial curricula, even if their preservice training emphasized an improvisational and creative adaptation stance toward those materials (Valencia, Place, Martin, & Grossman, 2006). In addition, the arguments against scripted literacy curricula are many, including their role in the "deskilling" of teachers and the narrow view of literacy that such programs can inscribe (e.g., Apple, 1986; McGillivray et al., 2004; Shannon, 1987).

Many factors, including policy constraints, learning curves, and the critical stances that teachers may or may not have had opportunities to develop, impinge

on teachers' abilities or willingness to detour from curricular materials. However, the materials themselves are significant. As Valencia et al. (2006) wrote in response to their review of the research on the role of curriculum materials, "teachers' interactions with these curriculum materials influence their sense of efficacy and identity as well as their vision of instruction" (p. 95). Along with other researchers (e.g., Jordan, 2005; Luke, 1988), I argue that the materials also impact students' literacy identities and senses of efficacy, as those curricula influence the kinds of opportunities children have to engage with literacy. As Luke (2004) argued, the valorization of commercial curriculum programs as the prescription for literacy achievement is far from benign, but rather "predicates the efficacy of educational policy, the practice of teaching, and particular versions of student outcomes on product use" (p. 1434). Thus, those products must be examined for the opportunities they support or foreclose for students who encounter them within widely varying social, cultural, and material circumstances. This is particularly crucial for children living in poverty, who are the most likely to be taught using mandated, scripted programs (McGillivray et al., 2004).

Discourse and the Implicit Assumptions of Curriculum

Given that my goal was to examine the opportunities and constraints embedded in the language of the curriculum in relation to the material contexts of children's lives, my analysis is grounded in poststructural and critical approaches to discourse that assume that language plays a central role in constructing and maintaining inequities. These perspectives, which inform an increasingly rich area of research in the field of literacy, work to expose the role of language in shaping, regulating, and controlling knowledge (e.g., Hinchman & Young, 2001; Moje, 1997; Nichols, 2002; Rogers, 2002; Rogers & Christian, 2007). A central concern of studies grounded in this theoretical terrain, including my work here, is to dig beneath the seemingly neutral, transparent language of curriculum, policy, and classrooms to both expose the implicated, interested nature of that language and explore the consequences of such language for the teachers, children, and youth at whom it is aimed. In this view, the language of curriculum, as just one example, constructs a particular view of the world and speaks from a particular perspective that necessarily disciplines the knowledge that it seeks to convey.

This idea of the disciplining nature of language derives from Foucault's theories of discourse (e.g., 1980, 1995) and the ways that discourses "enable and delimit fields of knowledge and inquiry, and they govern what can be said, thought and done within those fields" (Luke, 1997, p. 51). This disciplining role of language, according to Foucault, is a function of all discourse; it is inherent in language and, indeed, human subjects are constituted from and through language. How I define myself and understand my life cannot be separated from the language that is used to construct what it means to be a professor in a particular community, a middle class, white woman in the U.S., a mother, a daughter, a wife, or a sister.

Similarly, understandings of what it means to be a child living in poverty, a successful third-grade reader and writer, or an engaging and rigorous literacy curriculum are constructed through the array of discourses encountered and negotiated by individuals, groups, and institutions. A middle-class view of poverty will certainly be different from the perspectives of a person living with poverty every day; however, in a society in which those of economic means have control over institutions such as the media and government, it is the understandings of those in power that hold sway and enjoy the status of official discourse (Gee, 1996). Those official discourses have consequences for how material resources are distributed, how the efforts of individuals and groups are valued and evaluated, and whose perspectives are privileged in social institutions such as schools.

Although I will argue that Sharon's students' perspectives were subordinated in the literacy curriculum mandated by their district, I also view the children's writing as a form of resistance to that subordination. Agency and resistance are highly complex ideas within poststructural and critical approaches to the study of language and discourse and a detailed discussion of those issues are far beyond the scope of this paper. Given that, here I simply point to the view of power within discourse that I have found useful in my own thinking and analyses of children and how they position themselves and are positioned by language. Even as some discourses clearly exert more power than others in their ability to construct and maintain *structures* that benefit some more than others, the concept of power can be viewed as a force that is distributed and available to all, if in different ways and with varying consequences. Again following Foucault, it is important to examine both the disciplining nature of official discourses and the resistance to those discourses that occurs among those who are the targets of that discipline. As Foucault (1990) wrote,

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (p. 100-101)

Thus, resistant discourses are crucial in pointing to the constructed nature of official discourses and the power they generate as well as to the possibility of critique. In the case of this analysis, the children's responses to the curriculum and the knowledge that it privileges provides a visible fissure in the relationship between the assumptions embedded in the text and the assumptions embedded in its reception by its intended audience that creates an opportunity to critique the text's assumptions and their consequences. The children's response also represents, in and of itself, a "speaking back" to the curriculum's assumption about

their lives. With these theoretical perspectives in mind, I turn now to discussions of some of the research on poverty and literacy and on social class and literacy that are particularly relevant to my analysis.

Poverty in Class-Privileged Discourse

Here and throughout this article I refer to class-privileged or middle-class perspectives to mean those of people who do not face ongoing economic struggles in order to meet basic needs of shelter, food, clothing, transportation, and health care and are not directly reliant on government subsidies that were created with the intent to create safety nets for the poor such as welfare, the federal food stamp program, or Medicare. In addition, when I refer to families living in poverty, I refer to families who live on incomes below the federally-determined guidelines for poverty, which in 2005 was \$16,090 for a family of three and \$19,350 for a family of four (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). I employ the term “working poor” for those families who rely on minimum wage jobs or other low-wage employment, resulting in struggles to cover basic monthly costs of housing, utilities, transportation, food, clothing, and health care (Shipler, 2004). My conversations with students, parents, and Sharon about the government subsidy programs in which families participated and the economic circumstances they faced suggested that all but possibly three children in Sharon’s classroom either lived in poverty or were among the working poor.

The relationship between poverty and children’s school experiences is embedded in larger discourses surrounding poverty in the United States. As Shannon (1998) discussed, the language used in many discussions about people living in poverty constructs a “distinction of value among human beings” (p. 4), creating an “us” and “them” that casts the middle class as the subjects and the poor as objects in such accounts. In general, journalistic accounts of poverty and efforts to combat it are not written “for the poor; rather, they instruct middle-class readers how to think about poverty and the poor, and tell us what we and the government should do” (Shannon, 1998, p. 8). Similarly, in her ethnographic study of working-poor, fast food industry employees in Harlem, Newman (1999) demonstrated how the realities of the work ethic, family situations, and motivations of those working for low wages in the inner city explode the many myths about the poor that circulate among the class-privileged in America.

Researchers in education have found similar class assumptions in the discourses of classrooms and schooling more broadly (e.g., Anyon, 1980; Hicks, 2005; Van Galen, 2004; Van Galen & Noblit, 2007). In her work with working-poor white girls, Hicks (2005) demonstrated how the girls with whom she worked “were strongly voicing a working-class discourse within a school setting more typically defined by middle-class language and values” (p. 214). Similarly, Jones (2004, 2006) has shown how the life experiences and language of children living in poverty are often viewed as inappropriate for school and, thus, are rendered invisible or deviant.

If schools are typically infused with middle-class language, values, and perspectives, it is not without potentially grave consequences for children and youth, like those who worked with Hicks and Jones and like those in Sharon's classroom. Given that the lack of a high school diploma translates to documented material differences in ability to earn a living wage (Danziger & Haveman, 2002), the high dropout rates in poor neighborhoods represent a continuation of a cycle of poverty that persists through generations (Fine, 1991; Oakes, 2005). As Hicks (2005) described,

For the girls in my reading project, a practical consequence of such [class] fragmentation is that some, indeed many if dropout rates (currently 57.9 percent) are predictive of the future for these vulnerable youth, may choose the more familiar terrain of their neighborhood, nasty edges and all: For girls must perceive, even if subconsciously, that many teachers would want to hear neither their dramatic language nor their haunting stories. A critical question for educators becomes how we might responsibly answer these voices on the margins of a system of public schooling." (p. 224)

Although Hicks focused on the important role of pedagogy in the girls' experiences, I argue that it is not just that teachers may not *want* to hear the stories of poor children; it is that the language of the curriculum itself may be unable or unwilling to hear those stories, even when children attempt to assert their experiences. The issue extends beyond pedagogy, to the form and content of the materials through which pedagogy is enacted and, importantly, to the policies that impose the materials and regulate their use.

Thus, the frameworks that the middle class brings to discussions of poverty are built from stories that are, in turn, based on the class-privileged assumptions and experiences of those who are the arbiters of information. Given that many educators are caught in this vicious cycle of assumption-driven understandings, tools are necessary to dig into and beneath the language, uncovering some of the assumptions that too often remain hidden and are even more insidious in their invisibility. As Shannon (1998) emphasized in his discussion of journalistic accounts of poverty, middle class understandings and feelings about the poor

are always relational, shifting, and vulnerable. Editors and authors recognize this and assume a certain capacity among their readers to engage these visions of the past, present, and future as they attempt to make their visions seem natural, obvious, and commonsensible. (p. 9)

This role of language to construct worlds that appear neutral and natural applies to both policy documents and the curricula constructed to enact policy in classrooms. Although the motivations driving current policy are many—they represent values and ideologies that have long underlain debates about literacy instruction in the United States (Wixson, Dutro, & Athan, 2003)—policy rhetoric about high expectations for all students risks, in Sleeter's (2004) words, ignoring

“everyday practices in which the deficit ideology plays out” (p. 133). As she argued, focusing on racism embedded in policy, “the assumption seems to be that requiring teachers to teach everyone to the same standards will address racism. In this regard, the new federal policy encourages a colorblind and context-blind approach to education” (p. 133). Other education scholars have emphasized that policy can bring a similarly context-blind vision to the role of class differences in U.S. schools (Van Galen & Noblit, 2007). Hicks (2005) argued that an education system blind to class will be unable to meet the needs of many children because “the complex facts of young lives shaped, first, by the economic stress of poverty and, then, by the tentacles that extend outward from poverty’s center create a landscape of materiality, feeling, and conscious awareness unlike that of middle-class [children]” (Hicks, 2005, p. 224).

Policy documents are also motivated by the economic realities of schooling. In the case I discuss here, the state and district moved to mandate literacy instruction and curriculum with the goal of meeting federal demands in order to procure funding through No Child Left Behind. As federal restrictions on what counted as legitimate literacy instruction narrowed to adhere to a particular vision of “scientifically based” methods, states and districts increasingly chose to adopt one of a very short list of commercial literacy curricula known to meet the federal requirements (Allington, 2002; Manzo, 2004; Wixson, Dutro, & Athan, 2003). One of the results of this particular policy context was the inscription of an instrumental, competency-based view of literacy that pointed to acquisition of discrete skills as the unambiguous remedy for poor children’s failure to thrive in public schools (Stevens, 2003; Yatvin, Weaver, & Garan, 2003). This focus on instrumental literacy necessarily ignores the structural, material, and social bases and effects of poverty that are emphasized by poverty research across fields of sociology, anthropology, and economics (Danziger & Haveman, 2002; Iceland, 2006; Newman, 1999; Rank, 2005). Instead, viewing literacy as a set of discrete skills that can be transmitted through scripted curricula and demonstrated through high-stakes tests operationalizes the “boot strap” mentality that locates school struggles in individuals rather than in systemic issues such as poverty and institutionalized racism.

In addition, an instrumental view of literacy overlooks the emotional dimensions of literacy engagement that are so apparent in Sharon’s students’ writing. As I will show, the children engaged *Leah’s Pony* thematically and aesthetically in ways that paralleled the tone and content of the story. The story depicts wrenching circumstances for Leah and her family and the children responded by documenting their own difficult, deeply felt experiences. Although teachers, like Sharon, can individually and personally engage with children about their emotional engagement with text, excluding those dimensions of literacy from the official realm of policy and curriculum relegates the deeply felt response to the margins of what counts as relevant knowledge (e.g., Dutro, 2008a; Boler, 1997).

Method

The experience with *Leah's Pony* occurred in the first year of a larger two-year study investigating the relations between children's performances of social and academic identities, their uses of literacies in and out of the classroom, and their experiences with policy implementation in the wake of No Child Left Behind. Here, I briefly describe the data I collected to address those broader questions, as the methods of the larger study directly pertain to the relationships and contextualized understandings that informed the questions focused on the *Leah's Pony* unit. Throughout the two years of the larger study, I was a participant-observer in Sharon's classroom at least two days a week for approximately three hours per visit, with additional visits if children were engaged in special activities (such as musical performances, the talent show, the field trip, or field day) or if Sharon needed additional adult help for a special activity. My visits included observations and interactions with children—captured on a digital recorder or through fieldnotes—both in the classroom and on the playground, in the lunchroom, after school, and on the one field trip the class took to the city's Museum of Art. In May of the school year, I conducted formal interviews, lasting approximately an hour, with each of the 17 children about his or her perspectives on reading and writing, out-of-school activities, hobbies, friendships, descriptions of homes and neighborhoods, and life, residential, and school histories. I also asked questions about children's experiences with and perspectives on district and statewide standardized testing. I listened to all audio data, transcribed interviews in full, and selectively transcribed the recordings children made outside of the classroom.

I interacted with parents and family members after school and at school events and witnessed Sharon's conversations with parents in these settings. Through those conversations and multiple discussions with Sharon and the children throughout the year, I gleaned information about the economic circumstances of children's lives. For instance, in an after school conversation before Thanksgiving, Tara's mother mentioned to Sharon that she didn't know how they would manage a holiday meal as their electricity had been shut off and they had an electric stove (Sharon subsequently arranged to have dinner delivered to the family).

When Sharon was teaching lessons to the whole class, I sat at the side of the room and took fieldnotes on a laptop. At a few points during the school year, selected lessons were also digitally recorded in order to more closely examine classroom discourse and children's verbal participation. Although the *Leah's Pony* lessons were not recorded, I was present and took fieldnotes on two of the five days devoted to the story. I carried a digital recorder at all times to record interactions with children as I circulated during small group or independent work. In addition, I collected copies of all of the children's writing, as well as all assessment data, both informal and high-stakes district and state-level tests. I also gathered policy-focused documents that Sharon received from the district and school (e.g.,

notices about assessment dates, professional development, reminders to be following the guidelines set by the literacy coaches, and notices related to the high-stakes state tests and the school's push to improve its progress toward AYP), gathered district policies on literacy instruction and assessment from the district website, spoke informally about curriculum adoption and policy enactment with teachers and staff at the school and with Sharon's assigned literacy coach, and had many conversations and four more formal interviews with Sharon (between 5-60 minutes in length) about her perceptions of shifting policy and its impact on her teaching.

The children's experiences with *Leah's Pony* was highly relevant to the larger study and provided an opportunity to analyze an event in depth that both spoke to and was contextualized within the larger study. In addition to the interactions and interviews described above that offered understandings of children's lives and economic circumstances, as well as the policy context in which the unit was taught, the specific data sources for this analysis included the story *Leah's Pony* as anthologized in the basal reading curriculum, the teacher's edition for that unit, the children's written responses to the "hard times" prompt, district and school policy documents and memos that contextualized the accountability pressures that Sharon described in interviews, and media accounts of the city's economy generally and child poverty rates specifically.

Participants: The Children and Sharon

Sharon's classroom of 18 students reflected the racial diversity of the school and neighborhood with children who self-identified as African American (1 girl, 2 boys), Puerto Rican (1 girl, 1 boy), biracial Puerto Rican/white (1 boy) and African American/Puerto Rican (1 boy), White (7 girls, 1 boy), Trinidadian/Indian (1 girl), Guyanese/Indian (1 boy), and Lebanese (1 boy). Of the 18 children in Sharon's class who participated in the larger study, 13 were present on the day Sharon asked them to write to the prompt that elicited the stories that provoked this analysis. Of those 13, the 9 children who wrote about issues related to individual and familial experiences of poverty and whose stories I share in this analysis were: Jade, a 9-year-old African American girl; Julias, a 9-year-old biracial African American-Puerto Rican boy; Tara, an 8-year-old white girl; Randy, an 8-year-old white boy; Ricardo, an 8-year-old Puerto Rican boy; Tiffany, a 9-year-old white girl; Diante, a 9-year-old African American boy; Thomas, an 8-year-old white boy; and Jalal, a 9-year-old Lebanese American boy.

Far from a distanced observer, I built relationships with the children during my year with them. Within a few weeks of my arrival in their classroom, I was greeted with smiles and waves, invited to sit near children during independent work times, and often had a group of children around me when I visited the playground. In addition to my general sense of being a welcome presence in the classroom, my relationships with certain children were particularly, and reciprocally, close. For instance, a few of the children shared difficult experiences of loss with me, and I

with them, which also supported my sense of relationship and personal investment in the children (Dutro & Zenkov, 2008; Dutro, 2009). This included Jade, who chose me to be her bus partner for the field trip, talked about her life and family, and introduced me to her 12-year-old sister via a letter she urged her sister to write to me after the sister's newborn had been placed in foster care. Also, Julius and I shared an experience of losing a brother and, once this bond was discovered, he would seek me out for conversation in the classroom and walks between the classroom and the "main building," or on the playground.

Sharon, the classroom teacher, was white and had always lived in economic security. She provided me with complete access to her classroom for the two years of the larger study. She was interested in the questions guiding the larger study and facilitated my work generously and consistently. For instance, I was welcome in the classroom at any time of day, she facilitated my meetings with parents at the start of each of the two school years to explain the study and obtain consent, she included me as a member of the close-knit classroom community through inviting me to share experiences or responses to literature during discussions or by including me in her jokes and informal interactions with children (e.g., "What do you think, Elizabeth, should we let them have five extra minutes of recess for the wonderful work they did this morning?" (from fieldnotes 2/4/04). In this way, Sharon was a crucial collaborator in the research. She did not, however, have an interest in assuming a role of co-researcher; therefore, Sharon did not participate in the analysis of data or writing process. Sharon had worked in this urban district for 20 years, in three different schools and at a variety of grade levels K–6, but she explained that she was increasingly dispirited and discouraged by the policies in the district. As she explained to me several times in informal interviews, and as I discussed above, she would be the first to admit that she felt fearful and intimidated by the increased oversight and strict accountability that had begun the year before I met her as the district attempted to enact the requirements of NCLB. Her response, as she explained, was to "just want to close my door and enjoy the children" and "I dread those observations. I just can't win. I try to do what they want and then I'm not myself, you know?"

Sharon's classroom was located in a building near the main school building that was referred to as "the annex." This positioning within the school facilitated her desire to create a "cocoon" for herself and her students. As one of just six classrooms in the annex, the location did seem to foster a sense of apartness that was interpreted as positive by Sharon. It is not an overstatement to describe children's feelings about Sharon as "love." In interviews and informal conversations, children often used this word when describing their feelings for Sharon. As Tiffany said in an interview, "I love Ms. Blair. She's the best teacher." In turn, Sharon's interviews include several variations on the statement "I just love these kids." She referred to their class as a "family," and said that keeping the children "happy in school" and

“providing them with care and support” was her primary goal. She was consistently positive in her interactions with children; for instance, one of her primary management strategies was keeping a visible prize box in the classroom to which she would spontaneously direct several children each day, as illustrated consistently in my fieldnotes (e.g., “Molly is on fire today, isn’t she everybody?! Wow. You need to go straight to the prize box!”).

At the same time, as I have discussed elsewhere (Dutro, 2009), Sharon’s talk suggested that she was not immune to the subtle and insidious ways that deficit perspectives are visible in the assumptions that middle-class educators can bring to their work with families in high-poverty schools (Nieto, 2003). For instance, in informal conversations, she would sometimes preface a statement about a child’s family life with the words, “I don’t mean to be stereotypical, but. . .” and then employ language that worked to generalize characteristics based on class, race, or ethnicity (e.g., “. . . the Puerto Rican families just seem to be more family-oriented than the poor white families.”). Sharon’s periodic positioning of her students in this way speaks to the complexities of relationships between some middle-class teachers and their students in high-poverty urban schools. Even as her talk invoked essentialist views of students and families based on race or class, she also challenged some of the generalizations about urban students she heard in the talk of friends and colleagues or encountered in the media. For instance, she emphasized to me several times that her students’ families belied any stereotypes about lack of parent engagement in neighborhoods beset by urban poverty. Sharon viewed close contact with families as an important part of her job and provided all families and children with her home phone number. She consistently had high turnouts for conferences and special programs and performances.

Approaches to Analysis

Although the data collected for the larger study provided insights that were highly relevant to the event I describe here, the *Leah’s Pony* unit led to particular approaches to data analysis. The disconnection that I perceived in my reading of the children’s writing and my fieldnotes of the instruction that preceded and followed their writing compelled me to analyze the teacher’s edition of the literacy program to see what assumptions might be embedded in the program’s language. That analysis then prompted a consideration of the role of policy enactments in how this unit unfolded in this classroom. Because my primary goal was to dig beneath the surface of the language, content, and features of the curriculum, within a sociohistorical context that included both the policy context and the social and economic status of the city and this particular neighborhood, I turned to Thompson’s (1990) depth hermeneutics, which, consistent with other scholars’ approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), argued for analyses that situate the critical study of texts within the social and historical contexts in which language is received and used

by audiences. In concert with Thompson's framework, I drew on specific analytic questions suggested by Fairclough (2005) and Luke (1995-1996).

Thompson (1990) argued for the utility of a depth-hermeneutics approach in analyzing both the ideologies embedded in symbolic forms and how those forms are received and acted upon. Given that my analysis was prompted by children's interactions with a mass-produced curriculum, I specifically focused on Thompson's tools for using depth hermeneutics to interpret and critique ideology in texts that are constructed for "mass communication." Thompson's description of the principal characteristics of mass communication is useful for considering the mass production and distribution of commercial curricula. He characterized mass communication as holding the following features:

The institutions of mass communication produce symbolic forms for recipients who are generally not physically present at the place of production and transmission. Moreover, the mediation of symbolic forms by technical media of various kinds generally involves a one-way flow of messages from the producer to the recipient, in such a way that the capacity of the recipient to intervene in the communicative process is often very limited. The break between production and reception is a structured break in which the producers of symbolic forms, while dependent to some extent on recipients for the economic valorization of symbolic forms, are institutionally empowered and obliged to produce symbolic forms in the absence of direct response from recipients. (1990, p. 303)

Substituting "commercial literacy programs" for "symbolic forms" and "publishing companies" for "producers," I argue that this quotation captures the process by which commercial curricula are produced and distributed and is, therefore, one reason why I employed Thompson's depth hermeneutics as a lens on the curriculum experienced by Sharon's students. Importantly, the attention to reception in Thompson's framework provides an intervention in the "one way flow" of communication he ascribes to mass-produced texts. Although such texts wield much power to shape what is perceived as the norm, close attention to how such texts are taken up and used by audiences allows for insight into the complex circulations of power through which resistance to official discourses is possible (Foucault, 1990).

Thompson (1990) argued for three layers of analysis, each with goals that supported my understandings and interpretations of the data. First, a socio-historical analysis examines the relations of domination that are embedded in the spatio-temporal, institutional, structural, and media technologies that surround and inform the text. This meant that the economic and demographic understandings of the city and neighborhood functioned not just as context-setting for my analysis of the textual data, but also rather centrally informed my understandings of the children's writing (e.g., the economic hardships they recounted were not anomalies in this neighborhood; the children facing poverty represented all racial groups within the school), the intervening role of policy (e.g., a school struggling

to make AYP under NCLB and an emphasis on teacher accountability contributed to the teacher's lack of instructional response to her students' interactions with the curriculum), and the text of the teacher's guide (e.g., the children's responses were based on entrenched economic patterns in this city neighborhood, which contrasted sharply with the textual constructions of poverty as a temporary condition). Second, a formal analysis of the text itself attends to the structural features that facilitate the mobilization of meaning and the language employed by the text to assert particular positions and experiences as normative. In my analysis of the text of the teacher's edition (and the included student text), I attended to the text of the story of *Leah's Pony*, the language of the teacher's edition that directed teacher language and expectations, and the various textual features and content intended to support understanding of the story's themes. Third, Thompson (1990) explained that the resulting interpretation will seek "to explicate the connection between the meaning mobilized by symbolic forms and the relations of domination which that meaning serves to establish and sustain" (p. 293). My interpretations of the texts center on the complexity of the relations of language that assumes a particular relationship to poverty and asserts class-privilege as normative and children's resistance to those attempts through the interjection of their lived knowledge of poverty (see Appendix B for examples of how these levels played out in my analysis).

For the formal or discursive level of textual analysis within Thompson's framework, I employed questions from Fairclough (2005) and Luke (1995-1996) that focus on analysis of power and ideology within *written* text. As van Dijk (2000) emphasizes, CDA does not have one unitary framework or methodology because it is best viewed as a shared perspective encompassing a range of approaches. What characterizes CDA is its focus on digging beneath the surface of language to reveal its ideological nature. Therefore, in analyzing written text, it is important to examine the text's structure as well as its content. The questions that guided my analysis of the *Leah's Pony* unit revealed some of the ways that power was employed and assumptions codified through the curriculum's structure and language (see Appendix C). I posed each question to both the story *Leah's Pony* and the text of the teacher's edition that surrounded the story and kept notes that explicated my understandings of the relationship between each question and the text and described specific examples of these relationships within the text. As I will detail in the findings section, the analysis questions illuminated some of the ways that the language and structure of the curriculum constructed an "expected reader," which, in this case, was a class-privileged child.

In addition, I analyzed the children's written responses for content (what experiences did they recount in their writing?), how they situated their experiences within the concept of "hard times" that they had encountered in the *Leah's Pony* unit, and the themes, tone, and structure of their writing in relation to the story. For the first two levels of analysis, I pulled all references to personal experiences

and responses that were attached to the term “hard times” and placed them in a table that allowed me to closely examine them in relation to each other. I then examined each account for how it was related—for instance, as personal narrative or as a list-like chronicling of signs of hard times. For the third level of analysis, I conducted close readings of the children’s writing and the text of *Leah’s Pony*, including structure of sentences, reference to emotions, and use of the term “hard times,” noting similarities and differences. In addition to situating the children’s writing within the terms and narrative the children had encountered in this curricular unit, I examined their writing through understandings gleaned from a sociohistorical inquiry of the literacy policy context, as well as the historical and current economic and demographic characteristics of the city and neighborhood. I share specific examples of my analysis of the children’s writing in the results section to illustrate how children positioned themselves in relation to the portrayal of economic struggles in *Leah’s Pony*. In addition, it is the children’s stories that provided the impetus for the entirety of the analysis and I considered my familiarity with and understandings of the children’s stories, contextualized within the substantial corpus of data collected through the larger project, to be crucial grounding for the analysis of all other documents.

Findings

Below, I describe the larger context of the city and policy context of the district. Then I discuss what I found through the textual analyses of the three primary texts: *Leah’s Pony*, the children’s writing, and the teacher’s edition of this curricular unit. The first section discusses the relations between the text of *Leah’s Pony* and the children’s stories, followed by the analyses of both the language and structure of the teacher’s edition.

Contexts: A City’s Economy, Literacy Policy, and Children’s Encounter with Leah’s Pony

In this section, I discuss the community, policy, and instructional contexts in which children’s engagement with this curricular unit occurred. Although in no sense exhaustive, this discussion of the demographic and economic contexts of the neighborhood and larger community, the district literacy policies and Sharon’s response to those policies, and the instruction surrounding *Leah’s Pony* is important to understanding the tensions between children’s lived knowledge, the curriculum, and the policy that I found in my analysis.

A City’s Shifting Economy and the Economic Struggles of Families

Sharon’s and her students’ experiences with *Leah’s Pony* occurred in a city that had been recognized that year as having the second highest child poverty rate in the nation. Although African American children made up 100 percent of many

of the city's schools, Davis Elementary was located in one of the most racially diverse areas of the city. The neighborhood had long been a destination for poor whites leaving Appalachian regions of the U.S. in search of manufacturing jobs, included many African American families, and, in more recent decades, had become a popular neighborhood for Puerto Rican families resettling from the east coast or Puerto Rico. All of the children attending Davis Elementary lived in the surrounding neighborhood and many of Sharon's students had known each other for years and played together after school and on weekends. The friendship groups at the school mirrored the demographics of the neighborhood. This was a neighborhood that was racially integrated, even on a block-by-block basis, and so were the children's associations.

Soon after arriving at Davis Elementary, ready to begin my research study, I stopped by the school office to inquire about their free lunch percentages. Given my developing sense of the neighborhood, I expected those numbers to be higher than at the previous high poverty urban schools in which I had worked. I was only partially right. The school secretary met my inquiry with a puzzled look. "They all qualify," she replied, her tone indicating that such a question demonstrated a profound misunderstanding of the realities of the children's lives in her school. As in many urban centers in the industrial Midwest, the city's economy suffered a severe blow in the 1990s when traditional manufacturing was displaced by the "new economy" resulting in high unemployment and increased poverty. The streets surrounding Davis Elementary included signs of the city's hard times: many businesses were boarded up and those that appeared healthier were the check cashing stores, quick marts, and liquor stores that dotted each block, along with a large substance-abuse rehabilitation clinic that sat prominently on one corner. In addition, though, were small, thriving, family-run Puerto Rican restaurants, several store-front churches, and a baseball field and playground that served as community gathering places.

District Literacy Policy

The literacy curriculum mandated by the district was not as scripted as some of the most-widely adopted commercial literacy programs that have followed NCLB. Indeed, the story I was told by more than one teacher and administrator is that the state provided the district with two options that had been determined to meet the requirements of Reading First and that would allow the state to access the federal funding that was tied to their curricular choices: Harcourt Brace and Open Court. The district opted for Harcourt Brace because it was less prescriptive. Although it may indeed be a less dogmatic curriculum, teacher accountability was very high in the district and teachers were expected to closely follow it.

As in many districts in the wake of NCLB, this one hired literacy coaches whose task was to ensure that teachers were implementing the mandated curriculum. This was particularly the case for the schools that had not met Adequate Yearly Progress

under NCLB, of which Davis elementary was one. Although the administration described the literacy coaches as supports for teachers, Sharon explained in interviews that she did not perceive the coaching as sympathetic. Her talk about the district's response to NCLB suggested cynicism about the district's motives. For instance, in a conversation about the role of the literacy coach, she said, "they only want to be sure I'm on the right page on the right day" and that the district's goal was to ensure she was "toeing the line." Indeed, Sharon felt immense pressure to follow the curriculum to the letter and, in her words, believed that she would be "written up" if she failed to do so.

Sharon's perceptions of the emphasis on adherence to the curriculum appeared to be tied to the district's efforts to raise scores on the state assessment that was administered each spring. Sharon periodically received notices related to the districts' response to NCLB and requirements for meeting AYP or her school's stated academic goal of raising scores on the state proficiency test by 25%. One day, the principal put copies of the school's mission statement in teachers' boxes, printed in large font and with the "all" underlined in "It is the intent of Davis School to promote all students to middle school with the skills necessary to meet the challenges of the future." When discussing her worry about implementing the literacy curriculum, Sharon pointed to the first performance domain on which teachers were evaluated each year, "Teacher Planning and Preparation." The third bulleted indicator centered on instructional goals: "Planning reflects district-approved goals and objectives, content standards, course of study, and curriculum scope and sequence." Although Sharon received a few notes from her principal acknowledging that her students' scores on the widely used early literacy assessment DIBELS (Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills) and district-level assessments were stronger than those in some of the other classrooms, it was also the case that just 6 of her 18 students would go on to achieve at the proficient, advanced, or accelerated levels on the state reading test. In interviews, Sharon would sometimes use language that suggested resistance to the emphasis on achievement via the state assessment, but she also often expressed anxiety about her students' abilities to achieve at a level that would pass muster with the administration. For instance, in the course of one week, she said both, "I just can't let this stuff rule my teaching" and "It wakes me up at night. Some of them will do fine, but I know that no matter how much great progress Mohinder makes between now and then, he is not going to be above that magic line." It is certainly possible that a different teacher in the same district or school would feel less pressure and anxiety than Sharon. However, her perceptions of the mandates of her district seemed to impede the flexibility she felt to adapt her use of the literacy curriculum.

Children and Hard Times

Here, I briefly introduce the plot of *Leah's Pony* and draw on my fieldnotes and conversations with Sharon to provide a snapshot of what occurred on each day of

instruction. In the story, *Leah's Pony*, which was adapted from a published picture book, the Dust Bowl of the 1930s takes a harsh toll on the protagonists' family farm: crops shrivel and die and Leah's family goes without meat, makes clothes out of potato sacks and, unable to pay their debts, almost loses their farm to auction. Right before the auction, Leah sells her beloved pony and takes the money to the auction, where all of her family's belongings, their home, and their very livelihood are at stake. When Leah bids a dollar for her family's tractor, the neighbors follow her lead and the auction becomes a "penny auction" allowing the family to keep their farm and sustain it until the crops can again thrive.

I was present for days three and four of the five days that the curriculum pacing guide allotted to *Leah's Pony*. The following were the instructional goals for the week, as stated in the teacher's edition: to distinguish between facts and opinions; to read and understand a historical fiction selection; to use action verbs correctly; to brainstorm, research, and take notes on a topic. Sharon described the first day of instruction as including an introduction to the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl through specific historical information included in the teacher's edition. Sharon said she also told the children stories of how her grandmother never liked to throw anything away because she remembered what it was like to "not have enough" during the Depression. Sharon recalled that the children seemed engaged, but they did not share their own stories of poverty during that discussion. She also taught two minilessons designated for day one—on fact vs. opinion and self-questioning—using the overheads provided by the curriculum. On day two, she explained that she posed the optional "Question of the Day" as an oral discussion: Why is the weather important to a farmer? This was followed by minilessons on fact vs. opinion and compound words. Sharon then told the children that they would read the story together and that the purpose for this reading was to be informed and entertained. As she recalled, she then read the story aloud, pausing to pose the comprehension questions and model strategies as suggested in her guide. On day three, Sharon led minilessons on fact vs. opinion and on alliteration. The children were then asked to read the story in pairs, taking turns reading pages and helping each other remember strategies when they got stuck. Both Sharon and I circulated during their reading. After approximately 15 minutes of paired reading, she told the children they would be writing about the story. Sharon glanced periodically at her teacher's manual as she wrote the Question of the Day on the board: What are some signs of hard times? As I discovered in my analysis of the curricular materials, the question was posed just as the teacher's manual directed: Sharon asked a volunteer to read it aloud and explained to students that they should think about the question and then write their responses in their journals. The children sat at their desks, listened, thought, and wrote. Sharon told them to read independently if they finished before their classmates and, after everyone had placed their papers

in the purple tray at the side of the room, Sharon transitioned to a test-prep lesson on fact vs. opinion that was also included on day three of instruction for this unit.

When I arrived in the classroom the next morning, Sharon met me at the classroom door with a stack of the children's writing in her hand and said, "You won't believe what they wrote. I really opened a can of worms." She continued,

I bet the publishers never dreamed they'd get the responses that I got from these kids. These books were made with middle-class kids in mind. The kids whose families have enough money wrote about mundane things, but a lot of them wrote about difficult things. I just cried. These children know hard times.

I then sat in a child-sized yellow plastic chair underneath a red-papered "We Love Math" bulletin board and began to read. Of the 13 children who were at school that day and wrote to the "hard times" prompt, nine of them wrote about personal experiences with difficulties or loss, all but one of which were directly or indirectly related to living in poverty and, thus, are included in this analysis (grief was also a prevalent theme, something I discuss in more detail elsewhere; see Dutro, 2008b).

Although Sharon responded with immense sympathy and connected individually with children about their writing to this prompt, she did not alter the instructional schedule to engage and build on the children's writing as part of this unit. Thus, days four and five of the *Leah's Pony* unit were devoted to minilessons and guided practice on several topics, skills, and strategies, including narrative elements, taking notes for a research report, and action and vivid verbs. As Sharon explained in an interview,

I just hadn't encountered this so strikingly before. I didn't know what to do. Would it be good to talk about these things with them or better for them to keep it private, between them and me? Believe me, this stuff never came up in those district sessions they insist we all attend!

As I discussed above, her response was embedded in a complex array of factors, not the least of which was a mandated schedule for finishing the *Leah's Pony* unit. Even so, on day three of that unit, the children seized an opportunity to make their experiences relevant to their school literacies.

Leah's Pony and Children's Hard Times

My analysis revealed the complex relations between the text of *Leah's Pony* and the children's stories. As I discuss in this section, the portrayal of poverty within *Leah's Pony* is, in some regards, constructed quite differently than that lived by the children in Sharon's classroom. However, the children's writing demonstrates the resonance of the story with their own experiences with economic struggle.

The poverty in *Leah's Pony* is a temporary poverty born of a contained, if devastating, economic depression. It is clear at the end of the story that all will be well once again with Leah's family once the depression is over. As we discover on the final page of the story, the family will stay in their home, the crops will grow again, and, to make for a happy ending indeed, Leah gets her pony back:

The next morning Leah forced open the heavy barn doors to start her chores. A loud whinny greeted her. Leah ran and hugged the familiar furry neck and kissed the white snip of a nose. "You're back!" she cried. "How did you get here?"

Then Leah saw the note with her name written in big letters:

Dear Leah,

This is the finest pony in the county. But he's a little bit small for me and a little bit big for my grandson. He fits you much better.

Your friend,

Mr. B.

P.S. I heard how you saved your family's farm. These hard times won't last forever.

And they didn't. (Friedrich, 1999)

Leah's story ends with hope. In the story, the pony represents the ultimate cost of economic hard times; in selling her pony, Leah makes the ultimate sacrifice. The pony's return is symbolic of the temporary nature of the family's hardships and Mr. B's note and the final line of the book—"These hard times won't last forever. And they didn't"—work to make that message explicit.

This sense of Leah's family's economic struggles being new and temporary is conveyed through the primary classification scheme of the book: good times ("the year the corn grew tall and straight") and hard times ("the year the corn grew no taller than a man's thumb"). Leah's father buys her the pony in the year the corn grew tall and Leah is described as riding happily through the fields all summer. That life is contrasted to the "quiet" and "sad sounds" of her parents "hushed voices" in the year of the drought. The book sets up a very clear before and after, with economic struggle defining the "after" and a carefree existence defining the "before." As discussed above, the ending of the story makes clear that the good times will return for Leah, suggesting that poverty is something that will be overcome if one just has patience.

The mechanisms through which poverty is experienced and overcome are also important factors in the view of poverty that emerges in the story. Because the poverty experienced by Leah's family is tied to a natural disaster, the humans in the story demonstrate very little agency until Leah makes her decision to sell her pony and save the family's farm through the penny auction. As the dust storms blow, grasshoppers arrive to decimate the fields, and the family is forced to begin selling livestock, Leah's father responds: "These are hard times," he told Leah with a puzzled look. "That's what these days are, all right, hard times." Leah's father

expresses the confusion and disbelief of a farmer who had not experienced nor anticipated the hardship that has befallen him. Although many of us would argue that the economic hardships experienced by the children in Sharon's classroom also stem from circumstances outside of their families' control, very different ideological meanings are attached to a farmer's struggles during the dust bowl and the struggle of a young, single mother without a high school diploma to find secure employment in a depressed economy. Therefore, one of the key ideologically contested terms in the story, *Leah's Pony*, is "hard times."

Although my analysis of the story locates some of the ways that the story constructs a view of poverty that is very different from the systemic poverty experienced by Sharon's students, the children's stories suggest that Leah's struggles strongly resonated with their own. Indeed, my analyses revealed that the children's responses invoke the text aesthetically, thematically, and emotionally. One way in which the children's responses parallel the story is through the use of specific examples of how economic struggles impact daily life. The story includes details of what Leah's family experienced as their financial struggles increased. Leah's mother begins to make underwear out of flour sacks, she waters her Petunias with left over dishwater, and the family watches as their neighbors fill a truck with as many possessions as they can and leave for Oregon. The children also include specific examples of the ways in which economic struggles impact their families. For instance, Julius writes that "the gas bill shoots up to \$300 dollars. My dad was kicked out of work." Randy shares that "My mom did not have enough Monday money for us" and Tiffany writes that a sign of hard times is "when you get kicked out of your house."

In addition to the connections students made between *Leah's Pony* and specific instances of economic struggle in their own lives, the children also included emotion in their responses in ways similar to the story. The story also appeals to children's empathy, conveying the emotions attached to "hard times" through words and phrases such as sad, hard, puzzled, brave, worried, "Leah wanted to run away," "Leah swallowed hard," and "mama cried." On one page that focuses on the impact of the dust storms on the family, the word "hard" is repeated six times in a total of seven sentences to describe the wind, everyday tasks that were made more difficult by the blowing dust, and ending with the repeated use of "hard times" to describe the family's situation. The pictures also work to convey the emotions experienced by the characters, including several close-ups of Leah's face clouded with sadness and worry. The children's responses also describe the emotions attached to the signs of hard times that they relate; for instance, Tara writes "Everybody will be sad" and Tiffany says "When you have hard times it is sad" and "it is not fun at all."

Just as the story allowed the children to view one family's struggles during the Dust Bowl from a child's perspective, Sharon's students provide an account of urban economic struggle through their own child eyes. Julius makes this role

explicit when he writes, “It would not be a good thing to witness.” The story of *Leah’s Pony* includes very explicit examples of how Leah’s knowledge of her family’s hardships is built: she overhears her parents’ hushed conversations in the kitchen, she observes her mother crying, she sees changes in her family’s routines, her father tries to explain why the bank is going to auction off their possessions. Sharon’s students respond to the story by sharing similarly personal accounts of signs of hard times in their own lives. Some of the children’s accounts, like those in *Leah’s Pony*, create vivid and detailed images of intimate family interactions that invoke economic struggles. For instance, Randy writes a narrative of one particular family experience, complete with dialogue:

Once the family had a disagreement with my mom she said “I do this for our family honey!” My dad said “but honey I don’t want to go for a long time.” You are going to go to an apartment. This is starting to be hard times. For days he was gone. For five months he was gone. We got to go over on Sundays. My mom did not have enough Monday money for us. This is hard times for me. She started to get worried for us kids and started to cry. She got back together again with my dad.

Randy provides his child’s-eye view of his family’s experiences—clearly based on various interactions he witnessed between his parents and his observations during the time his father was not living at home—in much the same way that *Leah’s Pony* presents the emotions and actions of adults through a child’s point of view.

Similarly, Jade adopts a narrative style in the latter half of her response, writing:

But when things were not going well with my sisters Alesha and Keshia they got taken away from my house and I could not see them again. Well my sister named keshia, she can’t see her baby named Gail any more because she was not takeing care of her baby and she left her baby at my other sisters’ foster house. She ran away from her baby because she was not ready to take care of a baby right now any way.

She writes of her family’s experiences from the point of view of a witness to the events. The adult actors in this part of her response are not explicitly invoked, but are implicitly present throughout her story—someone took her sisters away, someone ensured that her sister could not see her baby. Jade also describes her sister’s motivation for leaving her baby in words an adult may have used to explain the situation to her: “she was not ready to take care of a baby right now anyway.”

Even when the children’s responses are not written in such a vivid narrative style, they chronicle circumstances that resonate with the illustrations through which the central theme of living with economic struggle is conveyed in *Leah’s Pony*. Leah’s family worries about the basic necessities of food, clothing, livelihood, keeping their home, and access to transportation. The children write of their families’ experiences with worries about food, such as in Diante’s and Jade’s responses, or

buying clothes, as in Tiffany's story. Several of the children write of their parents' job losses or difficulties accessing work, the high cost of utility bills, and the cost of maintaining reliable transportation. The children write of circumstances that both resonate with Leah's experiences and would not be accessible as a source of response for most class-privileged children. How many middle-class children are aware, as Julius so clearly is, of the high cost of heating a house in the winter or could relate to Tiffany's understanding that a new baby in the house presents a very real economic concern for the family? How many children in economically comfortable families would understand, as Randy does, that a lack of "Monday money" has consequences for what a mother is able to feed her children that week? Given the children's connections to the central themes of the story, it seems not simply possible, but *likely* that children living in poverty would respond to *Leah's Pony* with their own stories of economic struggle. Indeed, unless a curriculum was constructed through a myopically class-privileged vision of the world, it seems that their engagement with the content and form of this text would demand recognition and value in a curriculum that purports to support all children. As I argue below, my analyses suggest that it is just such a narrow view that Sharon's students were up against.

The Curricular Unit: A Class-Privileged Lens on Poverty

In this section, I discuss how the teacher's edition works to obscure the issue of poverty that is central to the story and assumes a historical distance from economic "hard times." As Luke (1988, 1995–1996) has shown, the genre of teacher's editions often include constructions such as a generic child, teacher as deskilled professional in need of guidance, learning as passive, and school knowledge as a set of discrete skills. Each of these constructions was present in the teacher's edition I analyzed and some of them were highly implicated when viewing the text through the lens of social class.

My analysis of the teacher's edition suggests that the "Question of the Day" that invited children to reflect on "what are some signs of hard times?" is the only opportunity presented in the *Leah's Pony* unit that would allow a discussion of economic hardship outside of the historical context of the Great Depression (which, as discussed above, is presented as a temporary condition that would leave hope and prosperity in its wake) or apart from additional temporary conditions such as natural disasters. Even that prompt, however, is situated within an assumption of text-bound, inferential response. To illustrate these issues, I share results from analysis of two aspects of the unit: a) the language used to predict student responses in the "possible responses" that are included following scripted questions teachers are directed to pose to students and, b) activities and discussions aimed at making connections between home and school and to other content areas.

Assuming Children's "Possible Responses"

As with most commercial reading programs, this series includes possible student responses in parentheses following the prompts or questions that teachers are to pose. For the question, "What are some signs of hard times?" the program lists the following possible responses: "Many people don't have enough money to buy things. Crops aren't growing well. Businesses are doing badly. Many people are out of work." Although the linguistic features of the "Question of the Day" prompt allow for open interpretation of the kind that occurred in Sharon's classroom, the reading program's "possible responses" do not anticipate such an interpretation. Rather, the responses "Crops aren't doing well" and "Businesses are doing badly" that the program directs teachers to expect are again located in the particular context of the story. In other words, the focus of the possible responses suggest that the authors of the curriculum viewed their prompt as eliciting text-bound inferences from students. Further, responses such as "Many people don't have enough money to buy things" and "Many people are out of work" that might appear to apply to economic hardship more broadly are located in the collective, rather than the particulars of individual lives. In contrast, the children's responses were much more specific and grounded in specific experiences of economic struggle. As I suggested earlier, the children's responses parallel the language and content of *Leah's Pony* and are, therefore, more in line with the story's language and perspective than the language of the "possible responses" in the teacher's guide. Although it would not be fair to argue that the authors of a commercial literacy program should somehow omnisciently anticipate any given child's response to any given question, the content of "possible responses" provides clues about the stances and assumptions brought to the task of constructing a vision of the ideal instruction of a reading selection. In this case, those responses presuppose class-privileged readers who do not have personal experience of economic hardship and are learning about it from the text. In addition, the focus on text-bound inferences embedded in the "possible responses" to the "hard times" writing prompt seems detached from the personal, emotional language of the story and the possibility of an empathetic response by readers. The children's writing was, in short, far more responsive to both the content and aesthetics of the story than the responses predicted by the teacher's edition.

The "possible responses" included in commercial programs are problematic for a number of reasons. As scholars in literacy argued long before the current reform context, the inclusion of these and other kinds of scripts in curriculum represent the "deskilling" of teachers (Shannon, 1987) and, in this case, the presence of "possible responses" underlines the assumption that teachers need help anticipating what counts as an appropriate response. In addition, the inclusion of responses that the teacher should anticipate receiving from children is particularly troubling in literacy policy contexts such as the one in which Sharon worked. As

I discussed earlier, Sharon seemed to feel constrained in her freedom to respond to children's writing in ways that might take her off script. If teachers are told, as Sharon was, that they are required to follow the mandated curriculum, it seems all the more important that the materials themselves provide support for the range of experiences that children might bring to those texts.

Taking the position that teachers need assistance in anticipating appropriate and relevant responses from their students requires the authors of a curriculum to make assumptions about how children will approach texts. As my analysis revealed, the "possible responses" in the *Leah's Pony* unit revealed the limited perspectives on the range of responses that might be elicited by the combination of this story and that particular writing prompt. If it is problematic for the "possible responses" to be present in the first place, it is certainly an issue if those directives are included, but fail to consider the very real and complicated responses that the curriculum invites from children.

Middle Class Assumptions in Connections to Home and Content Areas

The unit also includes "School-Home Connection" sheets that are intended to support family members in working with students on skills and themes that they have encountered in the classroom. The sheet for *Leah's Pony* includes lists of other books about the Dust Bowl and Great Depression, a vocabulary activity, and an interview activity labeled "Hard Times." The instructions for the interview activity state:

Your child can interview you or other family members about disasters such as floods, droughts, or blizzards. Help him or her to record answers to questions such as these: Did your community ever experience a natural disaster? What kind of disaster was it? What do you remember about that time? How did neighbors help one another? How did you and your neighbors rebuild the community? Your child may wish to share the interview with classmates after he or she finishes reading *Leah's Pony*.

The assumption in this interview activity is that "hard times" are confined, as in *Leah's Pony*, to natural disasters that exist in memory, rather than in poverty that is lived as a daily reality. Although natural disasters can certainly exacerbate existing economic disparities and have sustained impact on communities, the emphasis in this activity is on hard times that are experienced by entire communities and can be overcome through community efforts. The children in Sharon's classroom were living with economic struggles that were longstanding and extremely difficult to overcome in an economically depressed city with a long history of economic disparity and a more recent post-industrial history of underemployment and unemployment. In contrast, the interview instructions construct a "community" that can work to rebuild and reestablish the more comfortable, safe life that is assumed to have existed prior to the natural disaster.

Further, the assumption of both historical distance and positive outcomes in the content of a child's interview about hard times presupposes that sharing the interview with classmates should be an emotionally neutral, straightforward extension of the activity. This assumption is suggested through the use of language in interview questions such as "How did neighbors help one another? How did you and your neighbors rebuild the community?" that point toward a happy ending to the elicited stories. Only one question, "What do you remember about that time?" allows for an account of fear, sadness, loss, or pain. Therefore, not only is the context of contemporary experiences of economic hardship ignored in the activity, but so is the possibility that an interview with family members about hard times might include the emotional dimensions of experience that are so present in the written responses of Sharon's students.

Another example of how class-privileged assumptions are manifest in the curriculum involves a text box titled "Social Studies" that is intended to help teachers make connections between *Leah's Pony* and another content area. The text reads:

People and the Environment: Point out that conditions in the physical environment affect people's actions: Ask: How does the weather affect the corn crop? How does it affect Leah's family? Then ask students to tell how the weather affects families in your region. Ask: What do people do differently when it is unusually cold? How might conditions here have affected local Indian nations?

The picture that accompanies this text is of three white children, clothed in brightly colored ski jackets and stocking hats, smiling rosy-cheeked into the camera at the bottom a hill that they appear to have just sledded down.

Taken alone, the questions the teacher is directed to pose might leave open a discussion, building from some of the children's "hard times" responses, about the high cost of gas and how the severe Midwest winters can make it a struggle for families to afford heat for their homes. Or, one might imagine Sharon's children talking about how winter impacts their families' transportation issues—cars that are prone to breakdowns are more likely to pose problems during the winter months. And, surely, the children would discuss more mundane, even fun, aspects of winter as well. However, the picture that accompanies this discussion (included in the children's text as well as the teacher's edition) effectively forecloses discussions of some of the harder aspects of winter that might be experienced by the children. The picture suggests that what is expected is a discussion of winter as a season that requires different clothing and provides opportunities for different recreational activities. Further, the curriculum's attempt to provoke a discussion of the hardships that winter might pose is again offered as a historical artifact focused on the past experiences of Indian nations rather than the lived realities of the children reading this story.

Discussion

Given that the story they read included details of economic struggle that have connections to contemporary experiences of poverty—the threat of losing one’s home, the struggle to meet a family’s basic needs on a day-to-day basis, the stresses the economic struggle exacts on the adults in children’s lives—it does not seem surprising that the children connected to Leah’s story. What *is* striking is that the language of the curriculum—how it situates poverty and its embedded assumptions of what counts as successful literacy engagement—demonstrates a class-privileged orientation that does not provide official space for those connections. Further, the high-accountability policy context in which the teaching of this unit occurred complicated any expectation that a teacher would eschew the mandated instructional schedule and script in order to respond substantively to the children’s writing in the ways their responses demanded. This was particularly true for a teacher who felt intimidated by the policy mandates and, further, had not had opportunities to encounter the critical tools necessary to take a conscious, resistant stance toward those mandates.

The analysis I present here is necessarily limited—to one classroom, one curricular unit, one economic, community, and policy context. However, the story of the children’s encounter with *Leah’s Pony* illuminates areas of research and practice that demand consideration. In this final section, I discuss some of the implications of my analyses for research and practice.

Children’s Knowledge and the Official Discourse of Curriculum

The stakes in conceptualizing literacy in only instrumental terms are vividly conveyed by the assumptions of what counted as successful responses to the “hard times” prompt. The children’s writing engaged the story thematically, aesthetically, and emotionally, while the curriculum’s focus on straightforward, text-bound inferences privileged far less sophisticated responses. By virtue of their personal experiences with poverty, the children responded to this text from a position of epistemic privilege (e.g., Campano, 2007; Moya, 2002), bringing understandings of economic struggle to this text that would be beyond the purview of middle-class children. Thus, the children’s responses challenge the unit’s taken-for-granted ideas of poverty as a subject students will view from a distance and that children will respond with surface-level, text-dependent understandings of the impact of economic struggles on families.

The assumptions embedded in this particular unit are indicative of the ways in which the material struggles of children’s lives are too often rendered invisible in schools. As bell hooks (1994) has said, “nowhere is there a more intense silence about the reality of class differences than in educational settings” (p. 177). Even as the children asserted their lived knowledge and deep engagement with *Leah’s*

Pony, the language of the teacher's edition offered no *official* space for their perspectives. Such official discourses matter because they are indicative of the interested perspectives that masquerade as neutral. When the class-privileged perspective is the assumed norm, children living with economic security are afforded invitation and access that were denied to Sharon's students, even as the children's responses demonstrated the richness of their engagement with and connection to the text.

Importantly, the children's responses also demonstrate the importance of emotional engagement in conceptions of literacy. It is significant that the children responded to a story depicting difficult experiences wrought of poverty with accounts of their own challenges. Scholars within and outside of the field of literacy have emphasized the presence and impact of emotional engagement in and through literacy practices (e.g., DiPardo & Schnack, 2004; Greene, 1995). As I have argued elsewhere, if all children are to be effectively supported—granted equal access to constructions of what counts as successful engagement with school literacies—the potential of texts to call up children's difficult experiences and their accompanying emotions cannot be relegated to the margins of what counts as successful and effective engagement in school literacies (Dutro, 2008a). Given the disconnections between the children's depth of engagement and the teacher's edition's assumptions of more detached responses, the *Leah's Pony* unit risks becoming one of a potential accumulation of experiences in which students' lives are discounted and disdained by the official machinations of schooling and, as research has emphasized, those disconnections are implicated in the stark percentages of children in this and other high poverty districts who will not finish high school (e.g., Fine, 1991; MacLeod, 2004; Marquez-Zenkov, 2007; Oakes, 2005).

Literacy Policy, Teachers' Roles, and the Need for Critically Educative Curricula

Given the class-privileged perspectives and instrumental orientations of this unit, it would be ideal if a creative and brave teacher detoured from the official script offered in order to build appropriate and rich instruction that would engage the children's connections to the central text. However, although we should hope that teachers bring critical lenses to the curricula they use, curriculum materials themselves cannot be given a free pass. The notion of "high accountability," most often directed at teachers and the assessment scores of their students, should include the expectation that curricula will attempt to recognize the experiences of children living in poverty. Certainly the authors of curricula are fallible and cannot be expected to anticipate every response a child might bring. Indeed, it is just that fallibility that argues so strongly against scripted, mandated literacy instruction. It is not, though, too much to ask that class perspectives be critically examined in the language of commercial curricula before it is introduced as a supportive path to literacy engagement for all students. In my review of the research literature, I

found almost no recent studies of the curriculum development process in literacy. Increased attention to the development of the materials that act as the conduit between policy and classroom practice would reveal the role of class-based assumptions in the language of policy and the creation of curriculum and point to effective interventions in the process.

In addition to research on the process of curriculum development, we need more studies that combine analyses of mandated literacy materials with their enactment in high-poverty classrooms. As Thompson's (1990) depth hermeneutics emphasizes, analyses that examine texts in isolation are limited in the useful information they can provide. Rather, what is required, in this case, are studies of both the curricular texts themselves and how those texts are enacted, received, and resisted in classrooms. Whereas Thompson was writing in a humanities context in which he must advocate for research that moves beyond the text, in the field of literacy it might be more necessary to advocate for increased attention to analyses of curricular documents themselves as an important accompaniment to the rich classroom-based studies that have deepened knowledge of equity issues in classrooms. As Luke (2004) emphasized, "as teaching is necessarily text/discourse work, teachers become the handlers, recyclers and potential remediators of textual products" (p. 1434). My analysis follows others that have revealed insights into the interplay between the assumptions embedded in written texts and the opportunities afforded to children and youth in classrooms (e.g., Lee, 1996; Nespor, 1987), but we need to continue to enhance our understandings of the role of commercial curricula in classroom life and learning opportunities.

This need for the content of instructional materials to be inclusive of experiences of poverty is arguably always present, but it is even more striking in contexts in which teachers are not just *encouraged* but *required* to use these literacy curricula in their classrooms and, in many cases, are penalized for straying from it. Given this context, the *Leah's Pony* unit is an example of why a dichotomy of compliance-resistance in relation to mandated curriculum is unproductive. Sharon is a good example of a very well-meaning white, middle-class teacher who was not initially aware of the social class implications of a curriculum. Although critical educators appropriately call for resistant teaching (Bomer, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 1991), such teaching is both risky in high accountability policy contexts and requires critical lenses and tools for responding to the dominant discourses that surround literacy teaching and learning in schools. Ideally, as many researchers have argued, Sharon would have encountered analytic tools that would facilitate critique of the often implicit ways in which economic disparities are constructed, reflected, and sustained through language (e.g., Morrell, 2007; Nieto & Bode, 2007; Sleeter, 1996). Middle-class educators need opportunities to understand that poverty in the United States reflects, in the words of sociologist Iceland (2006), "structural factors, such as

the way we understand and define poverty, the inherent features of our economic system that produce income inequality, social inequities, and our policy responses to these problems shape current trends” (p. 2). In addition, critical approaches to language are crucial in understanding and intervening in the potential effects of the convergence of policy and particular narratives of poverty, for, as critical discourse theorist van Dijk (1991) emphasized, the words and sentences that appear in a text represent only the tip of the iceberg of the meaning the text conveys; “the rest is assumed to be supplied by the knowledge scripts and models of the media users, and therefore usually left unsaid” (p. 181). Thus, “the analysis of the implicit” is key if the underlying ideologies of a text such as commercial curriculum and its complicated relationship to policy contexts, middle class discourses on poverty, teacher autonomy, and children’s opportunities to use their lived knowledge to support their learning are to be adequately understood.

However, as important as it is for a teacher to take a critical stance toward issues of content and process in literacy instruction, the materials themselves can be constructed in more or less inclusive ways and serve a more or less educative role for teachers. Had this mandated curriculum included a critical, class-aware perspective, it could have served an educative, supportive function for Sharon and her students. Its failure to do so robbed Sharon of a key tool in her effort to support her students and deprived the children of any official recognition that their perspectives were valid and worthy of attention. Although most scholarship on curriculum as educative focuses on content knowledge in math and science (e.g., Ball & Cohen, 1996; Schneider & Krajcik 2002), curriculum has the potential to embed critical perspectives on class, as well as race and gender, that assist teachers in efforts to better support all children’s learning.

How might the *Leah’s Pony* unit have served that educative role? One example is that the teacher’s guide could have included notes to the teacher that acknowledged the different contexts in which the story would be taught. I can almost see it on the page, at the start of the unit, with a bright blue heading that reads “Important Information Prior to Teaching this Story”: “If you teach in a high-poverty area, you can expect that this story will prompt children to talk about their own experiences living without sufficient economic resources.” Following such an acknowledgement, the teacher’s guide could provide some ideas of how a teacher might support students who tell such stories. And, again, I can imagine it, in a discussion labeled “suggestions”: “allow children to write about the realities of their lives if a writing prompt elicits those stories; encourage children to discuss the connections they may make between their own circumstances and those depicted in the story; don’t be afraid to acknowledge poverty with your students and the connections between Leah’s experiences and contemporary economic struggles; if a child shares particularly difficult experiences, follow-up the discussion with

an individual conversation with the child,” etc. In addition, the activity in which children interview a family member about hard times would not include language that assumes a contained event, a natural disaster, but would leave open the possibility that families cope with hard times currently and on a daily basis. In order for the children in Sharon’s class to be supported adequately in their engagement with this curriculum, the *possibility* of lives lived in poverty and concrete suggestions for how a teacher might engage and support children’s connections would be embedded in both the language and content of literacy curricula.

My imagined revisions are, of course, just examples, spun from my analysis of this particular unit and its use in one high-poverty classroom; the specifics of these kinds of curricular supports would follow from thoughtful, purposeful conversation among educators involved in curriculum development. However, the enactment of these kinds of supports for teachers and children *require* the presence of a critical approach to language and literacy. Further, such critical approaches would necessarily be grounded in research into the material conditions in which many children and families live, providing both concrete challenges to the privileged assumptions that so easily become embedded in the texts that comprise curricula and a fundamentally different view of what “research-based” curricula might entail. The tools of analysis offered by critical and poststructuralist perspectives, such as those underlying depth hermeneutics, provide an important intervention in an educational system that is dominated at the top by class-privileged perspectives, even as it purports to serve the needs of children who do not share those economic privileges.

Conclusion

Supporting children’s sophisticated and deeply felt connections to text through the official realm of literacy curricula is both an educational and moral imperative. Literacy policy makers and those who develop the materials adopted to support such policy should be held accountable for ensuring that children’s experiences with economic hardship are not positioned as so far outside the assumed norm that they are rendered inconceivable within the responses teachers can expect to receive. *Leah’s Pony* is a good example of a story portraying economic adversity that could potentially support teachers in acknowledging the real-life stories of children who struggle with poverty. The problem is not with the story, per se, but with the convergence of class-privileged language, curricular assumptions of what counts as successful response, and policy contexts that, in subtle and insidious ways, ignore the ways that a child like Jade so movingly and effectively brings her “hard times” to her engagement with school literacy.

APPENDIX A

The Children's Responses to the "Hard Times" Writing Prompt

(Children's original spelling and punctuation have been retained)

Julias

Some signs of hard times are when the gas bill shoots up to \$300 dollars. My dad was kicked out of work. Now we can't get gas for the car when it runs out of gas.

The house bill could be a lot of money. My mom could not have enough money to pay the bills. She would have to borrow money from someone. It would not be a good thing to witness.

A car bill can be another problem. If that bill is not paid we will not have a car. Another hard time for me was losing my baby brother. Losing a brother is a very hard thing to get over. I was sad for a very, very long time.

Another hard time is when there is not that much food left. We could starve to death. It would be too bad for it to happen to anyone in the world.

Randy

Once the family had a disagreement with my mom she said "I do this for our family honey!" My dad said "but honey I don't want to go for a long time." You are going to go to an apartment. This is starting to be hard times. For days he was gone. For five months he was gone. We got to go over on Sundays. My mom did not have enough Monday money for us. This is hard times for me. She started to get worried for us kids and started to cry. She got back together again with my dad.

Tiffany

Some signs of hard times are. When one person's car breaks down. My mom's car broke down. So she used my grampas truck. One time we did not have enough money for food. So we had to get some food from my aunt Cindy.

When you have hard times it is sad. Like when you get kicked out of your house. Now that is sad. Or when you get stitches or when your stuff gets stolen.

Or when your mom get fired. Or when you move away from your dad or mom. Or when your mom has a baby. She might not have enough money for clothes. When there are hard times that is not fun at all.

Thomas

A hard time for my family is a car my mom doesn't have a car. It is hard without a car, because it is hard getting place to place without a car. Sometimes she takes a bus to work because my sister is not there. My sister takes her to work my sisters boyfriend or her friends take her. She works at a group home that is where mentally handicapped live. She gets paid good money the clients are nice, they have a dog named Trixy it is a nice dog, it is a guard dog. It is a good guard dog. It guards the house so nobody can steal things while they are sleeping to keep them safe.

Diante

Hard times is something that you have. Everybody has hard times. Sometimes I have hard times like when I'm down at my grandma's house. I have hard times. She doesn't have any food or I don't have any transportation, walking around my Aunt's house. Sometimes I have hard times and hard times keep on passing by sometimes. When my family and I were poor I had hard times. all of us have hard times. But when it is hard times you are sad your mother won't have any money to buy you what you want. Hard times will keep passing you by sometimes and hard times is a signal for you.

Tara

My mom has hard times with my family because my dad got laid off of work cause there was only a little bit of work left. Before they shut down the building with nobody to work with in the building. Everybody will be sad without a job to get money for the rent and to pay for food and cable bill.

Jalal

Hard times are when people can not buy gas because it costs too much. so that's one thing but the car's need fixing, like breaks motors and tires. Also in hard times it is hard to buy a car because they cost too much for people. Work is hard to find now but some people can. Also in hard times it's hard to buy food and the prices get higher and too high to buy food. Also houses cost too much to buy. Also when somebody dies that is hard times.

APPENDIX B

Depth Hermeneutical Analysis: Definitions and Examples

Level of Analysis	Data Sources	Examples of Focus and Results of Analysis
<p><i>Socio-historical Analysis:</i> the socio-historical analysis should heed the relations of domination that are embedded in the spatio-temporal, institutional, structural, and media technologies that surround and inform the text</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspaper articles on local economy, education policy, and poverty • Classroom/school observations of Reading First implementation • Interviews with teacher • District policy documents • School memos • District and city websites for demographics information and statistical information on high school drop out rates, unemployment levels • Website of the publisher of the commercial reading program in the context of other research on the structure and use of commercial programs 	<p>City and district:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City with the second highest child poverty rate in the nation; drop-out rates between 60-70 percent <p>School context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racially integrated neighborhood and friendship groups • School that struggled to meet Adequate Yearly Progress; high teacher accountability and oversight by district literacy coaches <p>Literacy curriculum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories of the process of adoption and teacher response to mandated curriculum • Commercial reading program that employed a familiar structure
<p><i>Textual Analysis:</i> the formal analysis of the text itself that attends to the language and structural features that facilitate the mobilization of meaning (and the resulting domination) and the language employed</p>	<p><i>Leah's Pony</i> by Elizabeth Friedrich</p> <p>Harcourt Brace, 3rd grade, theme 2, teacher's edition, pp. 146A-167N</p>	<p>See Appendix C</p>
<p><i>Interpretive Explication:</i> seeks "to explicate the connection between the meaning mobilized by symbolic forms and the relations of domination which that meaning serves to establish and sustain" (Thompson, 1990, p. 293)</p>	<p>Includes all interpretations made within the article about the implications and potential consequences of the analysis showing the disconnections between the class-privileged assumptions of the curriculum and the children's responses that reflected economic struggle, particularly in a specific policy context.</p>	
<p><i>Interpretation of doxa:</i> grounds analysis in an understanding of the practices of everyday life</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fieldnotes of participant observation: classroom, playground, lunchroom, field trips, school programs and events • Audiotape and video of classroom discussion/activities • Audiotaped and transcribed interviews with teacher and each child • Audiotaped "diaries" of individual children's experiences on field trips, reading experiences at home, and summer experiences • Achievement data • Written artifacts from classroom instruction/activities • Informal interactions with parents • Home/classroom correspondence and school memos 	<p>Ethnographic tools—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided understanding of the context surrounding <i>Leah's Pony</i> unit • Situated children's writing within their ongoing social and academic school experiences • Allowed for trusting, collaborative relationship with the teacher and children

APPENDIX C

Textual Analysis: Guiding Questions and Examples of Findings

Guiding Questions for Textual Analysis	Examples of Related Findings
What classification schemes are drawn upon?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrast between “good times” and “hard times” in <i>Leah’s Pony</i> • Children’s use of the recurring term “hard times” in their writing • “Hard times” are discussed in the past tense in teacher’s edition
What ideologically significant meaning relations are there between words?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptions of emotions, changes in family routine are tied to term “hard times” and the language of the teacher’s edition constructs distance between hardship and individual readers
What means are used for referring inside and outside the text?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher’s edition use of “possible responses” to anticipate children’s verbal or written responses to posed questions • The possible responses are contained to references specific to the story • Children’s writing reflects the story in both content and aesthetics
What textual structures does the text employ? How do these structures convey meaning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story selection followed by “think and respond” questions • Teachers’ edition directs all aspects of instruction, whether literally scripted or not
What larger scale structures does the text have?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genre of commercial literacy program—familiar structures, holds authority for both teachers and students • Curriculum has been deemed to meet NCLB requirements and thus facilitate state access to federal funds • Curriculum is mandated and teacher feels highly accountable to teach it as directed
Are there ways in which the text seeks to control the language of others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of “possible responses” of students defines and prescribes the kinds of responses expected and the approach to literacy that is embedded in curriculum • Instructions to teacher consistently use imperative mode • Images as well as written text work to place boundaries on responses
Is there grammatical agency? If so, with whom is it located?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammatical agency lies with the teacher • Student agency is absent in grammatical structures

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