Classroom and intervention contexts: Constructing spaces to be a reader

Author
Rossow, Deborah

Published
2005

Conference Title
AARE 2004: Doing the public good

Rights statement
© The Author(s) 2005 Griffith University. The attached file is posted here with permission of the copyright owner for your personal use only. No further distribution permitted.

Downloaded from
http://hdl.handle.net/10072/2492

Link to published version
https://www.aare.edu.au/

Griffith Research Online
https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au
Classroom and Intervention Contexts:
Constructing Spaces to be a Reader

Deborah Rossow
Centre for Applied Language & Communication Studies
Griffith University
D.Rossow@griffith.edu.au

Part of Symposium REN 041005
Third space, outer space and white space:
Critical perspectives on spaces for learning

Paper presented at the AARE Conference
Doing the public good
Melbourne, Australia
28 November – 2 December 2004

Abstract
This paper examines the extent that the classroom and Reading Recovery contexts and associated teaching-learning activities formulated spaces that facilitated the recognition and enactment of one student's strategic reading abilities and the construction of his reader identity. The findings from a single-subject case study of Karl, a child who was receiving literacy support through Reading Recovery in conjunction with accessing the classroom literacy programme are examined. This single-subject case study was conducted as part of a larger study of Reading Recovery students’ reading within both the classroom and Reading Recovery contexts. The original study arose in response to Reading Recovery and classroom teachers' expressed concerns that some children, who received additional literacy instruction in the one-to-one context of Reading Recovery, demonstrated disparate reading performance in the classroom compared with Reading Recovery. While these children appeared to be able to use reading strategies independently in the Reading Recovery context, they did not deploy them effectively within the classroom one. This study draws attention to the importance of analysis of social contexts, not just as a physical location but also as a space that constructs learning through interactions. This analysis of social spaces (classroom and Reading Recovery contexts) enables more comprehensive insights to be gained about the construction of reader identity and readers' strategic abilities.
Introduction

Simplistically, space can be defined as an enclosed place that facilitates the development of context bound, stable identities (Usher, 2002). The assumptions underpinning this viewpoint assert that identity is restricted to the demands and boundaries of the localised context. By assumption, this viewpoint postulates that reader identity would be context bound.

Usher (2002, p.51) however argued that identity construction is complex and thus should be thought of as the development of “unstable, multiple, and diffuse” identities. Such complexity arises, according to Norton (2000), because identity is shaped through engagement in social structures and associated interactions. This view of identity construction is in accordance with Lefebvre’s (1991) social space theory: social space is produced by the relationships that occur between objects and people. At the same time as social space is produced, the people involved are shaped in accordance with the space (Lefebvre, 1991).

The idea that people are shaped by social spaces was acknowledged by Stanovich (1986) in his analysis of the Matthew Effect in reading. While high performing readers are shaped by their environments in ways that enable them to become better readers, conversely low performing readers are shaped by their environments in ways that inhibit them and thus sustain their position as poor readers (Stanovich, 1986). Oakes (1985) found that once a teacher established the identity of a child, the cultural and social nature of school spaces created limited potential for identity movement and thus worked to maintain the status quo. Similarly, Rex (2001, p.310) identified reader identity to be a “local social and cultural phenomenon” whereby to be identified as a reader requires membership within the local community (social space) and opportunities to practice such membership. Moreover teaching-learning structures and interactions shape the notion of reader membership within the local community’s space by establishing what it means to be a capable reader whilst also mediating the position that each member can play (Rex, 2001). Nonetheless Gee (1996) maintained reader identity and membership incorporate both the way in which the reader acts and how he/she is viewed as a reader within each community’s social space.

Reading environments, in classrooms and intervention areas, are community spaces primarily constructed in accordance with teachers’ theoretical beliefs and understandings and their perceptions of children’s reading abilities. Furthermore, teachers use a range of assessment measures to ascertain each child’s capabilities as a reader (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). These understandings are subsequently utilised to inform a number of literacy program components including discerning appropriate program content, matching texts to children, and grouping of children.

Clay (1987) identified that the demands of literacy programs can shape learners and their strategic behaviours in different ways. Teacher’s perception of each child as a reader informs decisions in regard to each child’s allocation of a ‘space’ as a learner. Assigning children to reading groups can result in children being placed in either restrictive or dynamic spaces. Restrictive spaces are evident when students are assigned to and remain in the same group for the whole year (Juel, 1988; Shannon, 1985). Reading groups utilising a fixed-ability approach establish a space whereby the lowest performing readers remain so. Moreover, Allington (1983) identified that in such group situations, instructional practices are matched to children in a manner which perpetuates their identity and status. Conversely, dynamic spaces allow and enable students to move and be moved according to their developing abilities. Dynamic grouping is based on the Vygotskian assumption that development is continuous but occurs in different ways, rates and times (Vygotsky, 1986). Reading groups thus should be flexible and changed regularly in accordance with children’s development; likewise reading instruction should be adjusted to the group needs at the time (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Although the active, independent processing of high achieving readers enables them to overcome program bias, low achieving readers become “not only victims of the conceptual bias of the programme but also of the quality of delivery and of the events in their personal life histories” (Clay, 1987, pp. 164-5). Social and cultural spaces such as teacher-student interactions, assessment measures, reading tasks and literacy programs all interact to result in the “deprivation of learning opportunities, and learned differences (and)... lead to poor reading” (Clay, 1987, p.164).
For decades, support personnel have grappled with how to develop literacy intervention programs to enhance the strategic capabilities of the lowest achieving readers. These intervention programs have provided spaces in which the lowest achievers may interact with a more expert other (a teacher, parent or peer) and selected reading tasks in order to attain the strategic reading abilities and identity of good readers. Walmsley and Allington (1995), however, found that most literacy interventions fail to enable the lowest achieving readers to catch up with their ‘average’ peers. It is now agreed generally, that in order to reduce the gap between the lowest performing readers and their more competent peers, literacy intervention must begin early (Clay, 1991; Pikulski, 1994; Spiegel, 1995; Stanovich, 1986). As Stanovich (1986) observed, if the gap between the lowest and highest performing readers is not reduced early, it is likely to widen as children move through the school system.

While early literacy intervention is generally accepted as a requirement, other aspects of literacy intervention continue to be debated. Educators continue to puzzle over how to shape learning environments and associated activities to achieve the best results. Among the options, one-to-one literacy interventions have been identified as being more effective spaces than small group ones (Center, Freeman, & Robertson, 1999; Juel, 1996; Pikulski, 1994; Wasik & Slavin, 1993). Reading Recovery, an early literacy intervention involving one-to-one instruction, shows promising results in bridging the gap between the lowest and highest literacy achievers. Research has shown consistently that this program enables most children involved to catch up with their peers in both reading and writing (Clay, 1990; Juel, 1996; Ohio State University, 1995; Pinnell, Lyons, DeFord, Bryk, & Seltzer, 1991; Shanahan & Barr, 1995; Wasik & Slavin, 1993; Wheldall, Center, & Freeman, 1993; Wright, 1992).

Despite Reading Recovery’s demonstrated effectiveness, classroom teachers have expressed concerns that some children who receive Reading Recovery support do not use reading strategies independently within the classroom context. Unfortunately, the Reading Recovery guidebook (Clay, 1993) provides limited insight into either the reasons for this situation or ways to minimise its occurrence. This single-subject case study proposes to identify and compare the manner in which spatial variables influence the development of strategic reading abilities and reader identity within both the classroom and Reading Recovery intervention contexts. The existence of similar and disparate reading performances and identity will be investigated.

**Background Information**

This single-subject case study was conducted as part of a larger study (Rossow, 2001) of Reading Recovery students’ reading within both the classroom and Reading Recovery contexts. The original study arose in response to Reading Recovery and classroom teachers’ expressed concerns that some children, who received additional literacy instruction in the one-to-one context of Reading Recovery, demonstrated disparate reading performance in the classroom compared with Reading Recovery. While these children appeared to be able to use reading strategies independently in the Reading Recovery context, they did not deploy them effectively within the classroom one. This paper concentrates on Karl who was one of the children involved in the study and his learning journey within the Reading Recovery and classroom spaces.

**Study design**

The site for this single-subject case study was a primary school in a coastal urban area of Queensland. The school operated within the Queensland State educational system. The study commenced when Karl, a Year 2 student, was identified to be the lowest literacy achiever at that point in time and therefore he was selected to receive Reading Recovery support. Karl, a young boy, came from a middle class, white Australian, English speaking background. The study was conducted over a 15-week period.

The approach used in this study is described broadly as naturalistic methodology. Data gathered through observation, conversation (focused discussions) and extant artefacts were primarily qualitative enabling comprehensive descriptions of real life reading environments and child behaviours to be compiled. A single-subject case study combination design (Bisesi
Aims of the case study

This case study aimed (a) to ascertain how Karl’s identity as a reader and the development of his strategic reading abilities were shaped by spatial aspects of the classroom and Reading Recovery contexts, and (b) to identify how the Reading Recovery and classroom contexts and associated practices formulated spaces that facilitated either similarities or disparities in Karl’s reader identity and strategic reading abilities in each space.

Data collection and analysis

Karl was observed receiving additional literacy support in the Reading Recovery context as well as when he was engaged in classroom literacy events. In addition focused discussions were conducted with each teacher and extant artefacts including work samples, running records, and lesson plans were collected during each observation. Photographs and drawings of the learning environments were also collated. Subsequently data were analysed to identify and compare the extent of Karl’s strategic reading abilities and the construction of his reader identity within each learning space: classroom and Reading Recovery.

Classroom teacher’s perceptions

Throughout the course of the study, Karl’s classroom teacher maintained that Karl fitted into the ‘space’ of being one of the classroom’s lowest literacy achievers. Whilst some development in his strategic reading abilities was acknowledged, she continued to maintain his position within the lowest reading group.

The following extracts from focused discussions at weeks 5 and 12 in the study illustrate the classroom teacher’s perceptions of Karl as a reader and his delegated position (space) within the classroom.

Week 5

The class teacher stated that when Karl first came to her class, he relied heavily on letter-by-letter sounding out of words and seemed to be “afraid of making a mistake”. The classroom teacher reported that she used the Burt Word Reading test (Gilmore, Croft, & Reid, 1981) to ascertain Karl’s strategic reading abilities. Liaison with the Reading Recovery teacher had helped her to identify his reading level. At this point in time, she had placed Karl within the lowest achieving reading group on Reading Recovery level 5 texts. When queried to elaborate on the extent of Karl’s strategic reading abilities, the classroom teacher appeared to find it difficult to define his reading strategies, beyond ‘sounding out’. She maintained that Karl was now “very alert, very involved, … (and) paying so much more attention” and that this had partially been due to the improvements made in his reading and writing abilities since starting Reading Recovery. Moreover, he was reported to be more confident and willing to “give it a go even if he (was) unsure … (and that) he (would) really agonise over it for a long time trying to work it out”. Upon more focused questioning, she identified that Karl could now recognise “strings of letters … and (was) starting to use the pictures a lot more to help him out”. In addition she noted that he was using “initial sounds a lot”. She also thought that he might notice some mistakes and re-read sometimes. In conclusion, she maintained that she perceived that he attended to “a word individually ...(and was) not necessarily reading to make meaning”. Moreover, Karl was identified as being reliant upon dependent upon teacher support.

Week 12

The classroom teacher reported that Karl was now able to use “initial sounds all the time to help with words … (and to use) familiar letter patterns in words”. In addition, she noted, “he is reading for meaning and understanding … all the time”. Moreover she identified Karl to be “a
perfectionist” as he was “always trying to make sure he (was) ... right”. When queried further about Karl’s strategic reading abilities, the class teacher commented that his reading was “still quite stilted” and his inquisitiveness and willingness to have a go indicated that he “almost was a self motivated learner”. She acknowledged that Karl had made a lot of progress; nevertheless she still placed him in the lowest reading group, now on Reading Recovery level 9 texts. She maintained that he would require the rest of the year (three months) on Reading Recovery support before he could operate effectively as an ‘average’ student within the classroom.

Reading Recovery teacher’s perceptions
Karl’s Reading Recovery teacher consistently maintained a positive stance that Karl would reach ‘average’ literacy levels within the course of his Reading Recovery program. She positioned Karl within the ‘space’ of having a high potential of becoming one of the students who would successfully reach ‘average’ literacy achievement levels.

Throughout the course of this study, the Reading Recovery teacher reflected upon her teaching decisions and actions and their influences, positively and negatively, on Karl’s development. Her proactive approach lead to Karl attaining, within the Reading context, a level of performance that was comparable with ‘average’ literacy achievers within his classroom. Nevertheless, she was cognisant that a significant disparity existed between his reading performances in each context. Despite concerns about his potential to sustain the gains made and his future development in the existing classroom reading program, Karl was subsequently discontinued from Reading Recovery in the 14th week of his program.

The following extracts from focused discussions at weeks 5 and 12 in the study demonstrate the Reading Recovery teacher’s perceptions of Karl as a reader and provide some insights into the extent of the disparities.

Week 5
The Reading Recovery teacher reported that when Karl started Reading Recovery, he was on Reading Recovery book level 1 and was one of the lowest literacy achievers in his year level. She stated that Karl lacked confidence, read slowly and relied heavily on using letter-by-letter sounding out to problem solve unknown text. She went on to state that he was now reading at Reading Recovery book level 5 and was beginning to read more fluently and to phrase his reading independently, using re-reading to aid him with phrasing. Occasionally, he needed teacher demonstration and prompting to enable him to sustain his phrasing across texts. Karl read all texts with a high level of accuracy. The Reading Recovery teacher reported, “everything he is reading is easy”. She perceived that there had been “a big move in his confidence” and that Karl had “moved from using just visual (information) to looking at meaning and structure”. She identified that he was now “[just using meaning and structure, … (and) not (yet) using the three of them (sources of information)]”. Furthermore she recognised that Karl was using re-reading to assist him with self-correcting errors.

As the Reading Recovery teacher discussed Karl’s strategic reading abilities, she referred to running records of Karl’s reading. As the discussion progressed, she noticed and commented upon errors in her analyses of Karl’s reading behaviours. She pointed out that there was evidence that Karl was using three sources of information (meaning, structure, and visual information) at some points of error and that he could re-read to assist searching for additional information to aid his self-correction of these errors. Occasionally, Karl was noted to baulk when confronted with an unknown word.

Week 12
The Reading Recovery teacher reported that Karl was now reading at Reading Recovery book level 15. She maintained that he would only be on Reading Recovery for one or two more weeks as he was operating above the reading performance level for ‘average’ students. Karl had successfully reached the text level and strategic reading abilities (spaces) of an ‘average’ reader. She went on to elaborate about his strategic reading abilities. She reported that Karl was primarily using three sources of information at points of error, maintaining a high
level of self-correction, and the sound of his reading had “improved a lot … (but) there (was) room for improvement”. Running record analyses substantiated these perceptions of Karl’s abilities as a reader.

Karl’s Reading Recovery teacher expressed some concern that Karl was “doing a lot of processing” to try and problem-solve new texts which then inhibited his ability to sustain phrased, fluent reading. Unfortunately Karl’s Reading Recovery teacher never recorded his reading of these texts, so she was unable to ascertain what the issue might be. However, she inferred that the reduction in illustrations and the increasing complexity of sentence structures at this text level were creating the difficulties. She failed to notice that Karl was relying heavily on letter-by-letter sounding out when confronted with difficulties in new texts.

Since Karl was approaching the end of his time in Reading Recovery, the Reading Recovery teacher was beginning to monitor Karl’s transition back into the classroom. She expressed concerns about Karl’s ability to sustain his reading gains and continue to develop when he only had access to the existing classroom reading program. She clarified her main concern to be the lack of reading opportunities and effective scaffolding. She reported that the teacher was “not teaching them to read, just listening to them read” and that this only occurred about once a fortnight. She perceived that she would need to “offer once or twice a week to take (children) as a reading group”. Since the Reading Recovery teacher seemed to consider that Karl’s reading instruction was her ongoing responsibility, discussion was entered into about methods to facilitate the transition of responsibility to the classroom teacher rather than have it sited perpetually with the Reading Recovery teacher.

**Karl’s perception**

At any point during this case study, Karl readily located familiar texts to read within the Reading Recovery room. His book box contained texts that he had read one or more times and he willingly selected and read these texts. Karl appeared happy and confident as he read these books with a high degree of accuracy and a smile. He sought actively to problem-solve unknown words in texts and to make his reading more phrased and fluent. It was obvious from these behaviours and Karl’s comments that he perceived himself to be a reader within this context.

Within the classroom, however, Karl remained reliant upon the teacher to select books for him to read. He was unable to locate any book independently that he believed that he could read. In week 12, he stated emphatically that he couldn’t read anything in the classroom. When I pointed out the location of books in the classroom, Karl explained that the thematic and other reading texts in the room belonged to the teacher and could only be read by her. Furthermore, Karl insisted that he could only read Reading Recovery books and requested permission either to go to the Reading Recovery room to get his book box or to get his Reading Recovery home reading book from his bag. It became evident that Karl did not perceive himself to be a reader within the classroom environment.

**Observations**

On a number of occasions, I observed Karl engaged in reading activities within his classroom and Reading Recovery room. My observations illustrated that Karl’s strategic reading abilities were reflective of both the classroom and Reading Recovery teachers’ reports. While some similarities in reading performance were discernable in both contexts, there were notable disparities across contexts in his text reading levels and strategic reading abilities. He was in fact a quite different reader in each context.

**Classroom reading spaces**

In 2000, the school had instigated a policy where by every classroom was expected to implement a daily literacy hour. Both reading and writing were to be incorporated within this daily-allotted time space in all classroom literacy programs.
Upon first observations, Karl’s classroom appeared to be ‘full’ of literacy artefacts. A themed reading table had been constructed near the classroom’s entry. Teacher made word lists and samples of students’ writing lined the front walls and edges of the blackboard. Thematic content words on thematic shaped cards, alphabet-word cards, and word family cards were suspended from the ceiling. Additional reading texts were placed on bookshelves at the back of the room. Shelving was organised at the front and side of the room for storage of students’ books. In the far back corner of the room, two computers were arranged to form a quiet work area. Students’ desks (6 to 8) were arranged in groups around the room. Extra desks were organised to the side of the room to accommodate group work situations. At the back of the room, a large floor area fronted by a teacher’s chair, small table and an easel had been established.

Karl’s classroom teacher reported that she implemented the literacy hour daily. This literacy space was purported to consist of daily reading to and with students, word study activities and writing. However, guided reading groups were only conducted once a week. Most reading and writing tasks were planned to correlate with the current class theme. Some days were established so that word study activities were conducted in conjunction with the adjoining classroom (teacher and students).

At the start of this case study, Karl’s classroom teacher explained that there were a couple of issues that limited her in providing a more effective literacy programme. Firstly, she stated that there were no parent helpers and minimal teacher aide time available which limited the potential for students to receive individual attention. Secondly, she shared about her management problems when conducting guided reading. She identified that this resulted in a lot of stress for both herself and students. Nevertheless, she indicated that she had begun to take steps to improve students’ group work skills, to provide tasks and texts at an appropriate difficulty level, and to provide reading within an attainable time frame. Previously, she noted that the tasks and texts were too difficult and that she had assigned too long a time for the completion of such tasks.

Unfortunately, during the time (fifteen weeks) that this case study was conducted, literacy programming was often interrupted or not conducted due to other school demands and interruptions. In addition, the classroom teacher reported that she experienced difficulties managing guided reading on her own and thus she had to cancel guided reading whenever the teacher aide’s support was not available. These events led to guided reading only being conducted twice within the course of this case study. Furthermore, the literacy hour was noted to primarily focus on word study and writing activities.

Throughout the teaching-learning focus appeared to be on enabling children to achieve accurate reading and writing. Reading activities consisted primarily of word activities and some cloze reading-writing activities. When guided reading was conducted, the teaching-learning emphasis and associated scaffolding concentrated solely on getting all children to sound out words letter-by-letter when they were confronted with an unknown word. This approach to problem-solving text further inhibited their potential to become strategic readers.

Within this teaching-learning space, Karl was noted to be passive and largely unsuccessful in his attempts to problem-solve words solely using a phonetic approach. After some attempt to read the provided text, Karl gave up and started to fiddle with his fingers and the book. Subsequently, the teacher and/or teacher-aide told him the words.

Karl’s classroom teacher stated that she had observed that Karl did not access available literacy artefacts of his own volition. Karl was dependent upon teacher prompting to enable him to utilise the available literacy resources. Furthermore, she reported that Karl never sought teacher support. My observations of Karl participating within various classroom literacy activities verified the classroom teacher’s reports. I found that Karl worked independently with varying levels of success. When confronted with a difficulty, he took no action to seek support from his teacher, peers or the available literacy artefacts. Instead Karl sat and fiddled with his fingers and/or pencil.
Reading Recovery reading spaces

The Reading Recovery context provided Karl and his Reading Recovery teacher with a one-to-one teaching-learning space where his reading needs could be addressed. Within this context, the lesson structure, according to Reading Recovery guidelines, comprised of daily reading of familiar books, re-reading of yesterday's new book (running record taken), letter and/or word work, reading of writing, writing a story, reconstructing the cutup story, and the introduction and reading of a new book (Clay, 1993). This structure provided Karl with numerous opportunities each day to engage in reading both familiar and new texts.

These spaces for reading enabled Karl’s Reading Recovery teacher to praise his strengths and emerging strategic abilities and to design and implement a program that built upon these. In addition, the teaching-learning emphasis and related interactions changed over time in accordance with Karl’s development as a reader. Lesson records and running records illustrated the shifts in Karl’s strategic reading abilities. Over time, Karl developed the capacity to independently select familiar books to read from his book box in the Reading Recovery room and to problem-solve most new texts effectively. He learnt how to search for and use three sources of information, self-monitor, self-correct and use phrased, fluent reading. Despite these gains, when confronted with hard text, Karl reverted to letter-by-letter phonetic analysis to assist him with problem solving. In addition, Karl exhibited an interest and enjoyment in reading. His behaviours illustrated that over time Karl came to perceive himself to be a capable reader.

Conclusions

This study identified that Karl was quite a different reader in each context: classroom and Reading Recovery. Over time, Karl developed significant differences in his reading text level and strategic reading abilities within each social space. Despite having made some reading advances within the classroom, Karl continued to operate within the lowest reading achievers’ space. Meanwhile within the Reading Recovery context, Karl moved from being one of the lowest literacy achievers to demonstrating the strategic reading abilities of an ‘average’ reader. Furthermore, although Karl attained the impression that he was a good reader within the Reading Recovery context, he gained a clear perception of himself as a poor reader within the classroom context. By week 12 in this study, Karl was cognisant of the disparities between his strategic reading abilities and his identity as a reader in each social space.

The source of these disparities could be traced to the manner in which the various social spaces shaped Karl’s strategic reading abilities and his reader identity. This study found that while the social spaces within Karl’s classroom appeared to be literacy rich, they provided little opportunity for him to participate in the reading of texts. Furthermore, the same-ability reading group structure exacerbated the situation because it acted like a static force sustaining the status quo (Oakes, 1985). This group structure ensured that Karl remained positioned as a poor reader. In addition, Karl appeared to resist participating in the available literacy spaces. Moreover, the classroom teacher’s awareness of Karl’s strategic reading abilities appeared to be inhibited by her limited understanding of strategic reading behaviours and the lack of observational records. Her focus seemed to be on enabling children to achieve accurate reading and thus the literacy program primarily focused on word level activities and the use of a word reading test to identify children’s reading abilities. These understandings were reflected in the scaffolding provided for Karl and the other members of his reading group. The teaching-learning focus was solely on getting children to sound out words letter-by-letter when they were confronted with an unknown word. This approach to problem-solving text further inhibited Karl’s potential to become a strategic reader. This study, substantiates Oakes (1985) and Stanovich (1986) viewpoints, as it found that once Karl’s classroom teacher had positioned him as a poor reader, she shaped the social spaces in a manner that not only inhibited his reading development but also maintained his position as a poor reader. Concurrently, Karl’s resistance to participate within the available literacy spaces inhibited his capacity to take up membership as a ‘good’ reader within the classroom space.

Meanwhile, in the Reading Recovery context, the set-up of the learning environment, the structure of the lessons and teaching-learning interactions were set up for ‘apprenticeship’ style learning with the Reading Recovery teacher as the expert and the child, Karl, as the...
novice. The reading practices conducted within this social space were replicated in detail in accordance with Reading Recovery guidelines (Clay, 1993). Reading Recovery spaces in other schools and countries would be arranged and managed likewise.

The Reading Recovery context provided Karl with daily social spaces to read a number of familiar and new books. In addition, at any point in time, the teaching-learning interactions were social spaces shaped according to Karl’s current strategic reading abilities, which were identified through anecdotal records on lesson records as well as the taking and analysis of daily running records. While some gaps in these observational recordings were noticed, overall the changing nature of Karl’s strategic abilities was accurate. The one-to-one structure of Reading Recovery provided a highly regulated teaching-learning space that enabled the Reading Recovery teacher to develop a detailed understanding of Karl’s strategic reading abilities, a sensitiveness to the changes as they occurred, and the capacity to design a teaching-learning space that accommodated his reading strengths and needs. The teacher-child interactions formulated a social space where the teacher focused on praising Karl’s existing and emerging strengths and building upon these in one or two select areas in order to build a stronger strategic reading approach. From engagement in the social spaces within Reading Recovery, Karl knew precisely what was required to be deemed a ‘good’ reader in this social space. He participated and aligned his reading capabilities to the explicitly espoused variables and, subsequently, was ascertained to have attained the strategic reading capabilities of an ‘average’ reader. Karl gained membership as a successful reader in the Reading Recovery context (Rex, 2001). Moreover, Karl identified himself to be a ‘good’ reader in the Reading Recovery context and when using Reading Recovery texts.

This analysis of the social spaces of a classroom and Reading Recovery room enabled the development of some insights into the complexities involved in the construction of reader identities and strategic reading abilities. Within the classroom, Karl appeared to have developed the context bound, stable identity of a poor reader, which fits with the simplistic notion of identity construction (Usher, 2002). In the Reading Recovery room, however, Karl’s identity was being affirmed, challenged and reshaped. Towards the end of his time in Reading Recovery, Karl demonstrated the characteristics of a context bound identity of a competent reader. Unfortunately, the context bound nature of Karl’s reading abilities raised concerns about his capacity to discontinue from Reading Recovery and perform as a ‘good’ reader within the classroom or other social spaces.

Like Norton (2000) and Usher (2002), I ascertain that the development of reader identity is a process involving complex interactions between the reader and various social spaces including reading environment, reading opportunities, group allocation, teacher-reader interactions. This construction process appears to be variable in stability and boundaries and as such may not be consistent with identity construction in other contexts. Nonetheless this study illuminates that both strategic reading abilities and reader identities are shaped by the relationships within the social space, while the social space is shaping the readers involved (Lefebvre, 1991).

References


