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## ABSTRACT

A case study examined assumptions of current written language pedagogies, particularly the links between oral performance, literacy pedagogy, and the use of the explicit, analytic language valued in school. The subject, a young African-American child enrolled in an urban K/1 classroom, used school writing activities and the music of language to "perform," while other class members aimed more straightforwardly to communicate. Data collection took place weekly over a 10-month period and included hand-written field notes and audiotape recordings of the children's spontaneous talk during literacy activities. Data analysis consisted of the development of a set of categories to describe how the subject participated in the social and language life of the classroom. Results showed that, although the child's language resources contributed to his success with written language, they did not always fit comfortably into the "writing workshop" used in his classroom; in fact, his assumptions about written language and texts conflicted in revealing ways with those undergirding a workshop approach. As the year ended, the child, his teacher, and his peers had negotiated "stages" for his oral performances, which led to articulation of a distinction between text and performance. For the child, the most comfortable social structure for reflection involved privacy or interaction with collaborators who were not simultaneously his audience. Results highlight the subject's negotiations for social stages, not his control of literacy mechanics. (Three tables of data are included; 95 references are attached.) (RS)

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# CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WRITING

Technical Report No. 53

## THE CASE OF THE SINGING SCIENTIST: A PERFORMANCE PERSPECTIVE ON THE "STAGES" OF SCHOOL LITERACY

Anne Haas Dyson

September, 1991

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## Abstract

This article, based on a year-long project in an urban K/1 classroom, offers a case study of a young child who used school writing activities to *perform*, rather than simply to *communicate*. A performer differs from a mere communicator in both the nature of language produced and in the kind of stance taken toward an audience. Although the child's language resources contributed to his success with written language, they did not always fit comfortably into the "writing workshop" used in his classroom; in fact, his assumptions about written language and texts conflicted in revealing ways with those undergirding a workshop approach. Thus, the study helps make explicit many unexamined assumptions of current written language pedagogies, particularly those involving the nature of literary sense, the relationship between writers' "audience" and their "helpers," and most importantly, the links between oral performance, literacy pedagogy, and the use of the explicit, analytic language valued in school.

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# THE CASE OF THE SINGING SCIENTIST: A PERFORMANCE PERSPECTIVE ON THE "STAGES" OF SCHOOL LITERACY

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Sat on Cat Sat on Hat.  
Hat Sat on CAT  
CAt GoN 911 for CAt

Jameel has just read his story about Cat and Hat to his classmates. One of them, Edward G., says appreciatively, "It's like a poem." But another, Mollie, objects with the key line of primary grade literacy pedagogy: "It doesn't make any sense." After a spirited attempt to explain his story about the fatally wounded cat to the exasperated Mollie, Jameel explodes, "BUT IT'S MY DECISION," and then laments, "I don't get it. She *don't* get it. I don't got no more friends."

In enacting this event, Jameel, an African-American, and Mollie, a European-American, drew upon their evolving understandings of story-making and of literacy, understandings shaped by a constellation of experiences in and out of school. As I will illustrate in this article, Jameel used school story-writing events to *perform*, often exploiting the music—the rhythm and rhyme—of language while other class members, like Mollie, aimed more straightforwardly to *communicate*. For Jameel, a "story writer," to use his term, controlled and enticed an audience into an imagined world. A member of the audience had no business seeking to teach him about his own story. If anyone should teach the sense of his story, it should be him, and he would use explicit, analytic language to do so.

In this article, I present a case study of Jameel, showing how he negotiated school "stages"—social places—for his own performances. This study, based on a year of ethnographic observation in an urban, public school classroom, is undergirded by a vision of the multivoiced landscape of discourse described by Bakhtin (1981, 1986), a philosopher interested in the social nature of language and literature. He envisioned texts, particularly stories, as situated within the multiplicity of social and power relationships in which human beings continually participate. In his view, when people speak or write, they participate in a kind of social dialogue, and they do so with a sense of the social and power relationships implicit in those dialogues. From this perspective, Jameel and Mollie were participating in different dialogues, and they had different notions of their rights and responsibilities.

A Bakhtinian approach to texts allows Jameel's case study to be liberated from monolithic views of language and culture. Jameel is not presented herein as a child with an "oral" or nonexplicit style of language use, in contrast to Mollie's "literate" or explicit style. Rather, he is presented as a child who participated in social dialogues involving different styles of language use and who interpreted school story-writing events in particular as occasions for performance. This close study of Jameel's perspective on classroom writing activities should help make explicit the implicit assumptions of current literacy pedagogies about the rights and responsibilities of story composers, their audience, and their helpers. Further, the analysis should lead to reflection on the degree to which researchers and teachers value the performative—the musical—as well as the literal sense of children's



language. Finally, and most importantly, the study should reveal new social complexities in the links between storytelling, literacy development, and the use of the analytic, explicit language valued in school (Heath, 1983; Michaels & Collins, 1984; Wells, 1985).

In the next section, I discuss the concepts of dialogue and performance and thereby provide a theoretical backdrop for Jameel, a child performer, a player with words, a lover of jokes, who, among many ambitions, hoped to be a "singing scientist" when he grew up.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Literacy as Social Dialogue**

All symbol systems, including the written medium, allow their users to give the experienced world a concrete shape, that is, to use the resources at their disposal—sound, line, gesture—to mark their membership in, make a comment on, and take action within a shared world (Geertz, 1983). Children's ways of taking action through language are shaped by their participation in the speech and literacy events of their homes and communities. Children, then, bring to school ways of dialoguing with the world—a repertoire of "genres" or familiar ways of using language. As Morson (1986, p. 89), discussing Bakhtin, explains, each genre:

temporarily crystallize[s] a network of relations between or among interlocutors—[1] their respective power and status, [2] their presumed purposes in communicating, [3] their characterization of the subject of discourse, and [4] their relation to other conversations. Children learn genres from their earliest experiences with language.

A child's use of any genre, then, involves more than simply producing a kind of text. It involves assuming a certain stance toward other people and toward the world. Indeed, Bakhtin (1981) explained that individuals could use language as a kind of mask; in using language in certain ways speakers are also putting on a certain face, conveying a certain attitude, positioning themselves, as it were, in a certain social place.

Children's repertoires of genres become the resources they draw upon in school literacy tasks. Because there is sociocultural variation in family and community uses of language, there is also such variation in children's repertoires. For example, researchers have documented cultural differences in young children's ways of using and constructing stories, and, moreover, they have demonstrated how non-mainstream children's ways may conflict with school ways (e.g., Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981; Miller, Potts, & Fung, 1989). These cultural differences may include variation in the assumptions language users make about the power and status of storyteller and audience, of the interlocutors in the ongoing social dialogue.

Learning to write in school involves figuring out—and gaining entry into—the range of social dialogues enacted through literacy, including the assumed relationships among writers and their audiences (Dyson, 1989, 1991). A critical research question then is, what is the nature of the social dialogues through which children must learn to write in school? What kinds of language masks must they wear? Upon what kind of social "stages" or places must they act, as their efforts are critiqued? In this article, the nature of such social stages for school literacy is revealed by a child, Jameel, who quite literally sought to use those stages to perform.

## The Performance of Texts

From a Bakhtinian (1986) perspective, texts, including stories, are constructed from and embedded in oral and social dialogue. To compose fictional worlds, authors use everyday voices as their raw material, interweaving them to create complex social worlds. Thus, a story is composed of voices, and, at the same time, it is itself a voiced response—a turn—in the continuing sociocultural conversation.

This duality is vividly demonstrated by speech events involving the oral performance of stories, in which speakers may literally appropriate the utterances of others (their “characters”) in order to express their own attitudes about the world (Bauman, 1986). Certainly all speech events involve performance, the use of the symbolic potential of language in ways judged by a community of speakers to be socially appropriate (Hymes, 1972). However, one sense of “performance” refers to spoken acts in which speakers are evaluated for their ability to exploit the expressive qualities of the medium; that is, speakers’ use of the poetic function of speech, of verbal artistry, assumes dominance over referential functions (Bauman, 1977, 1986; Hymes, 1974, 1975). It is this more restricted sense of performance that is central to this essay. (For a similar differentiation of the meanings of *performance*, see Goffman, 1974).

Within a particular culture, oral performance is associated with certain kinds of texts, like stories or jokes. But these associations are not absolute. A story, for example, may simply be reported, or it may be performed artistically. To create a performance, narrators use varied techniques to infuse their feelings into a story (Labov, 1972). These techniques vary across different sociocultural communities and, within the African-American tradition, include such musical phenomena as the rhythmic use of language, patterns of repetition and variation (including rhyme), expressive sounds, and phenomena encouraging participative sensemaking, like dialogue, tropes, hyperbole, and call and response (Abrahams, 1972, 1976; Bauman, 1977; Foster, 1989; Heath, 1983; Kochman, 1972; Labov, 1972; Mitchell-Kernan, 1971; Smitherman, 1986). The discourse features associated with oral performance may be, in fact, contained within written texts themselves. The performance strategies of oral storytellers—the exploitation of the musical possibilities of language and the dialogic nature of human interaction—are used by highly skilled story writers (Tannen, 1982, 1988, 1989). Still, the music of even the most powerful written language seems best revealed through the spoken voice (Gates, 1989; Rosen, 1988).

Bauman (1986), acknowledging his theoretical connection to Bakhtin, stresses that performed texts “are merely the thin and partial record of *deeply situated human behavior*” (p. 2; emphasis added). In performing a text, an individual makes use of cultural resources (i.e., performance conventions) to take action in her or his social world. As Bauman explains,

Through his [sic] performance, the performer elicits the participative attention and energy of his audience, and to the extent that they value his performance, they will allow themselves to be caught up in it. When this happens, the performer gains a measure of prestige and control over the audience. (1977, pp. 43-44)

A performance, then, has the potential for allowing the performer to transform the existent social structure, to change her or his social position (Abrahams, 1972; Simons, 1990; Smitherman, 1986).



Jameel was, I will illustrate, a child who sought to transform and control his world, particularly through the artful, often humorous use of language. Jameel's humor was quite sophisticated. Unlike many children his age (Honig, 1988), he understood and even made jokes that played on the double meanings of words. Further, he could engage in playful manipulations of others' language, producing rhythmic variations of their surface structures that turned their language against them in clever and sometimes outrageous ways, a skill that has been much discussed in reference to older preadolescent and adolescent African-American children, particularly males (Abrahams, 1972; Labov, 1972; Simons, 1990; Smitherman, 1986).

Jameel did not direct his verbal skill against the official school world (cf. D'Amato, 1988). Indeed, he seemed to be trying to complete the observed language arts activities in the best possible way, assuming that one of their major purposes was to create written stories for oral performance. As will be seen, there was ample reason for him to feel this way, not only in his own background of experiences, but within the school world as well.

### **Vision of Teaching and Learning Literacy**

A dialogic perspective on literacy, with its emphasis on the situatedness of texts within a network of power relationships, and a consideration of Jameel's performances in particular should allow a critical examination of current writing pedagogies for young school children and, more broadly, a reconsideration of the "oral" and "literate" language of children considered non-mainstream.

First, process or "workshop" pedagogy for elementary school children has been based in large part on having children do what "real" authors do, and what real authors do has been enacted in classrooms by having teachers and children adopt social roles as audiences and editors for each other. Indeed, key images of that pedagogy have been those of a child presenting a "draft" to an "audience" and an "audience" responding with appreciation and questions about missing or unclear information (Graves, 1983). Such instructional strategies are potentially powerful, and many educators have written of their capacity to give voice to children's ideas (e.g., Giroux, 1987). But workshop pedagogy also has yet to be examined extensively and *critically* in schools serving culturally diverse working-class and low-income children, particularly in the first years of school (Delpit, 1986, 1988). The current essay offers a close analysis of an African-American child's interpretation of process pedagogy and, particularly, of the social relationships expected between author, editor, and audience. As Jameel will suggest, the expected relationships are not necessarily appropriate for all kinds of texts, and, in fact, their routine focus on clarifying information may mitigate against tapping the full range of children's language power.

Second, non-mainstream children's use of oral performance strategies for story-composing events has been contrasted with the more explicit and analytic—*expository*—language of mainstream children's stories, patterns often labeled "literate" language (e.g., Gee, 1989b; Michaels & Collins, 1984; Olson, 1977). While some of this research has made important contributions to our appreciation of the linguistic and cultural value of non-mainstream children's stories (e.g., Gee, 1989b; Michaels & Cook-Gumperz, 1979), a general implication (or perhaps a truism) of the research is that young children can be described as having an "oral" style of discourse use or a "literate" style. And yet, as discussed previously, literary language makes use of many of the discourse features of oral performance. Indeed, currently popular reading programs for young children do not assume an opposition between oral performance and literate behavior. Most recommended are rhythmic books, full of repetition and rhyme, which children can easily learn to perform and which are the substance of many extended class discussions (see, for example,

Holdaway, 1979). Moreover, a dialogic view of oral performance suggests that children's ways of using language—their texts—cannot be discussed separately from children's interpretations of the social situations that gave rise to their language. The current essay offers an analysis of a child's interpretation of the social situations for language use available in his classroom. As Jameel will illustrate, a broad vision of the discourse landscape of young "oral" storytellers—of the range of social dialogues they engage in—may reveal unexpected texts.

These issues—the social relationships enacted by child story-composers, their audience, and their helpers as well as children's use of the performative as well as the communicative power of language, particularly literary language—informed the construction of this case study of Jameel. Most specifically, I consider:

1. What was the nature of the focal child's participation in classroom story-composing activities, including:
  - his guiding intentions?
  - his relationship to teachers and peers?
  - his product topics and discourse features?
  - the interrelationship between the above and Jameel's ways of participating in other language activities?
2. How did participation in these activities change over time?
3. In which kinds of language activities or events did the focal child evidence close attention to the literal sense of language? in which ones did he attend to its performative expression?

## **METHOD**

### **Site and Participants**

Jameel was a student in an urban primary (K-3) school in the East San Francisco Bay Area. The school served both an African-American community of low-income and working-class households, on the southwest side of its attendance area, and an ethnically diverse but primarily European-American community of working- to middle-income households on its northeast side. Approximately 35% of the children's families were supported by AFDC. The grade, sex, and ethnicity of Jameel's K/1 class are given in Table 1. Table 2 presents the grade, sex, and ethnicity of children who figure significantly in the current essay.

Genevive, the classroom teacher, was a European-American woman in her forties. She was an experienced and highly skilled teacher, knowledgeable about recent pedagogical innovations and sensitive to the social issues important to her children. Within her classroom, a variety of opportunities for story telling and writing or other potentially performative language occurred. Most relevant to the current report are the class performances of rhythmic or repetitive (pattern) books, the independent composing period, and children's opportunities to interact in ways both informal (e.g., quiet talking among children during work periods) and formal (e.g., daily sharing of compositions during whole class meetings on rug).

**Table 1: Grade, Sex, and Ethnicity of Observed Children**

	K	1st	Total
<b>Sex</b>			
Female (F)	3	8	11
Male (M)	9	7	16
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
Af. Am	6 (0F, 5M)	6 (4F, 2M)	12
Eur. Am.	3 (1F, 2M)	8 (4F, 4M)	11
Latino	2 (2F, 0M)	1 (0F, 1M)	3
Other	1 (0F, 1M)	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>27</b>

**Table 2: Grade, Sex, and Ethnicity of Key Children**

Child's Name	Grade	Sex	Ethnicity
Jameel (focal)	1st	Male	African American
Berto	1st	Male	Latino
Brett	1st	Male	European American
Daisy	1st	Female	European American
Edward G.	1st	Male	European American
Edward J.	1st	Male	African American
Eugenie	1st	Female	African American
Mollie	1st	Female	European American
Monique	1st	Female	African American

In the larger project from which this report is drawn, Jameel was one of four case-study children selected for intensive study, all African-American children from low-income backgrounds (as determined by qualification for federal school lunch program). His case is particularly revealing because he was very articulate about his perception of the "fairness" of varied classroom occurrences and, also, about his intentions and procedures as a story maker.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection took place from September 1989 through mid-June 1990. During the opening four months of school, I observed in the classroom weekly; during the last six months, I observed a minimum of twice weekly, and, in addition, I had a research assistant, Paula Crivello, who also observed twice weekly. We collected data during the three-hour morning period, when many language arts activities occurred. In addition, we

observed the children on the playground, and, periodically, in the lunchroom and during the afternoon period.

Our stance in the room was that of friendly, minimally reactive adults (Corsaro, 1981). We did not attempt to guide or help the children with their work, because we were "busy" with our own work (as we told them). Further, I selected focal children, like Jameel, who seemed involved with their own activity and/or with their peers and thus did not seek involvement with me. (However, Jameel came to view my rather ignorant but attentive stance as a valuable one.)

During the ten months of the study, I made handwritten observation notes, audiorecorded the children's spontaneous talk during literacy activities, and photocopied their drawn and written products. Jameel was a focal child for these observations approximately weekly throughout the ten months of the study.

The basic data-gathering unit was the literacy and/or story-making event. A literacy event is an activity engaged in by at least one person (the focal child) involving the use of writing and/or reading for some purpose. A story-making event centers on the use of symbolic media for the purpose of constructing a story. The focal child's event was ended when the child changed the topic or purpose of the activity. If an event occurred over several days (e.g., the child wrote a long story), observing the entire event was not always possible.

### Data Analysis

Through inductive analysis, I developed a set of categories—a vocabulary of sorts—with which to describe how the focal child participated in the social and language life of his classroom. I first described the kinds of literacy and story-making events occurring in this room, categorizing them according to their official intended purpose (e.g., story-composing events, free-writing events [children choose topic and form]).

Second, I focused on events that (a) captured the focal child's characteristic ways of participation and (b) revealed significant changes in ways of participation across the school year. Here, "participation" means the child's guiding purposes, his ways of relating to others involved in the activity, the mood of the event, topics or subjects he chose to focus on, his ways of organizing the symbolic product, and particular discourse features of those products (Hymes, 1972). The most dramatic changes in way of participation were revealed by the child's stances or ways of relating to his teacher and peers, the moods that emotionally colored those stances, and the kinds of oral or written products mediating the relationships. ("Product" refers to a deliberately shaped oral or written text; a joke, for example, could be told and/or written during a composing activity.)

Third, I developed a set of categories that characterized these stances, moods, and products (see Table 3); for reasons of brevity and clarity, they will be illustrated through the case itself. These categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, telling a joke suggests a playful mood and a presentational stance. However, a joke can be told seriously (in order to analyze its workings) as well as playfully. Further, the categories can be combined: a joke can be both presentational and collaborative if jointly told.

Fourth, I examined all events for the presence of a performative style of language use. In this report, an artful performance, or the use of a "performative style," is by definition presentational, and the performed text is characterized by the discourse features earlier described (particularly dialogue and exploitation of the musical possibilities of



**Table 3: Data Analysis Categories for Event Components**

**COMPONENT**

*Category: Category Description*

**STANCE TOWARD OTHERS** (characterized primarily by interactional control; quotations are intended to characterize the substance of the stance, but they are not exact quotes)

*presentational*: "Let me tell you about this"; Jameel is clearly seeking attention and interactional control

*appreciative*: "I like that." Jameel expresses his admiration of another's presentation; Jameel is participating as an audience member for another

*cooperative/collegial*: "I'll go along with that," deemed "cooperative" with teacher, "collegial" with peers; Jameel is participating in the give and take necessary for interaction to proceed peacefully and is thus sharing control

*collaborative*: "We'll do this together"; Jameel is working with others on a shared product. He is sharing control during the activity although Jameel himself or the group as a whole may assume control (i.e., present their product) at another time

*protestant*: "You've got no right"; Jameel feels others have overstepped their social bounds and are seeking control in inappropriate ways

*oppositional*: "I won't"; Jameel is refusing to cooperate and thereby not allowing others control

*helpful*: "I can help"; Jameel is offering his services to someone perceived as needing help; he is offering to take control in some way

*directive*: "Do this"; Jameel is seeking to control another in ways the other has not solicited

*needy*: "I need you"; Jameel is soliciting another's help so that he can accomplish some task and thereby asking her or him to take some control

*inquisitive*: "I want you to tell me"; Jameel is seeking information about how the world works from another (information that he does not have); while he is acknowledging that the other has information he desires, the information is not necessary for his own ongoing composing task (i.e., he is in no way asking others to assume some control of his task)

*coexistent*: "I am into my own business"; Jameel is not interacting with others and is completely involved with controlling his own business, as it were

**MOOD** (includes only categories most relevant to analysis)

*serious*: "This is the way it is"; Jameel is not exaggerating or in any way manipulating the referential truth value of his messages

*playful*: "I can transform the way it is"; Jameel is in some way manipulating the referential truth value of his own or another's message



Table 3 (continued from previous page)

**COMPONENT**

*Category: Category Description*

*angry*: "This is not the way it is supposed to be"; Jameel's talk and behavior are emotionally charged, and he is reacting to the stance or truth value of another's (verbal or nonverbal) message

**PRODUCTS** (quotation marks indicate label used by Jameel)

*"cartoons"*: texts composed primarily of dialogue based on television cartoon shows

*chants*: texts composed of repeated words or phrases

*expositions*: texts (usually oral) composed of statements about the way the world works; may be interspersed with questions to elicit audience involvement

*expressives*: texts composed of statements expressing personal feelings

*"jokes"*: texts, typically composed of question-and-answer pairs, intended to be funny

*"joke stories"*: texts composed of ludicrous statements about cartoon figures

*"love stories"*: texts composed of questions and statements about classmates' special friends of the opposite sex

*pattern books*: variants of shared published books composed of repeated interactional rounds (e.g., "Brown Bear Brown Bear what do you see? I see a giraffe looking at me.")

*"songs"*: words set to or meant to be set to tunes

*"stories"*: texts composed of fictional events

language). In contrast, "communicative style" refers here to more straightforward language use; the text is relatively unmarked by the discourse features associated with oral performance.

Finally, I identified events in which the focal child's language was characterized by the use of analytic or "literate" discourse features (e.g., labeling objects, asking substantive questions, using previous statements as basis for present statement, putting forth hypothetical situations [if x, then y], requesting clarification or elaboration, linking ideas explicitly, talking about form and style [based on Chafe, 1982; Michaels & Collins, 1984; and Heath & Mangiola, 1991]).

In the following section, I present the results of this analysis, the case of Jameel, the singing scientist. As a single case, Jameel is not presented as a representative of a cultural group but as a distinctive individual who was a member of many groups—among them, student, peer, classroom, age, gender, social class, ethnic group. Moreover, Jameel

was an unusually verbally skillful child, and his social situation particularly hard, as he was homeless. While his story highlights potentially unexploited child language resources, particularly of African-American children, it also illustrates the social dynamics through which young language lives are fashioned and suggests the complex teacher and peer negotiations about written language that are necessary in socioculturally diverse classrooms.

Jameel's case study is presented in three "acts" or sections. In each act, I examine how Jameel participated in the social dialogues for literacy in his classroom, that is, how he interpreted the social situations for composing, particularly how he viewed the rights and responsibilities of composers, their helpers, and their audience. While Jameel's written language did become more sophisticated over time (i.e., his spelling became more conventional, his written texts lengthier), the three acts, taken as a narrative whole, highlight, not his control of literacy mechanics, but his negotiations for social stages—for social places in which his performances would allow him due respect from others.

### **JAMEEL: THE CASE OF THE SINGING SCIENTIST**

Jameel bumps his head hard on the table as he comes up from picking a pencil off the floor. He is momentarily stunned and then remarks:

Guess what? It's not hurted. Cause my head is hard as metal. That's what I always tell people. If they ever break me in a challenge fight, breaking a table at a time with metal on top of it, I can break right through it. Cause my daddy can do that. And he raised me like that, like breaking through that.

This comment suggests significant themes in Jameel's school life. Having banged his head on the table, Jameel transformed this jarring event into an occasion of competence and control, and he did so by means of language that was at once sensitive to human dramas and performative in its expression (e.g., use of hyperbole, analogy, and rhythmic delivery). Indeed, Jameel had not seen his father in what he viewed as a very long time; a number of his jokes were about his father ("My mama ... can't find my daddy. He's somewhere in Los Angeles. No wonder they call it *Los Angeles*" [heartily laugh at his own pun; Jameel's pronunciation of *lost* was homophonous with *Los*].)

Although Jameel often began the day quiet, thumb in mouth, by the time the morning opening of songs and stories was over, he found it difficult to sit still. In his words, "I'm not used to sitting down ... I just gotta jump up. I end up popping up." That "popping up" was particularly noticeable in the beginning of the year, when Jameel sought attention from his favored audience, Genevive, his teacher.

#### **Act 1 (September through December): The Performance Begins**

During the opening four months of school (Phase or "Act" 1), Jameel's mood during class composing periods was often playful, his stance presentational, his style performative. As a performer, his major audience was Genevive; indeed, while he wrote, he seemed merely to co-exist with his peers. Jameel asked neither Genevive nor his peers for help during composing (although he did during other tasks). He wrote standing up, and when he thought of a particularly funny idea, he would "pop up" and run off to find Genevive.

To compose his texts, Jameel used known written words, words copied from the board or from a book, and, in some cases, words whose spelling he could "sound" out to

create a variety of constructions—wordless picture books, jokes, rhythmic chants, and stories composed largely of dialogue. His own writing reflected his enormous enjoyment of pattern books and other kinds of literature with rhythm and rhyme, like the Dr. Seuss books, the poems of Shel Silverstein (1974)—even linguistic readers (textbooks that gradually introduce phonic patterns), which he labeled “joke books” and considered enormously funny.

Jameel’s way of participating in these early composing periods seems captured by Bakhtin’s own comments on the Renaissance carnival (and Rabelais). A carnival was a time when people wore language like a mask, freely using the words of monks and poets, scholars and knights. In this way, wrote Bakhtin, people enter into “the free laughing aspect of the world, with its unfinished and open character, with the joy of change and renewal” (in Clark & Holoquist, 1984, p. 301). Jameel too took delight in language as mask, in changing identity and juxtaposing the unexpected. “Free writing” events seemed to be just that for him, as illustrated in the “Circle Man” event.

**Circle Man.** For several days, Jameel had been writing chants, like “cats man cats man cats man,” and jokes, like “What do you get when you get cat? You get the bat with the cat” (and, indeed, linguistic readers, Jameel’s “joke books,” contain sentences in which, for the sake of phonogram practice, cats do have bats). Genevive laughed with Jameel when he performed his texts for her, early in the year, she was an unfailingly appreciative audience. But, on this day, she also made a request, issued a directive, as it were. She asked Jameel if he might write a story rather than a joke, and Jameel happily complied. Inspired by a math bulletin board on shapes, Jameel decided to write a story about shape aliens in outer space. Table 4 illustrates how, becoming quite playful, he broke into performance as he wrote this story.<sup>1</sup>

During the next composing period, Jameel continued in this performative style. He transformed the monologue “I can. Can you?” pattern of the pattern books and linguistic readers into a dialogue among the shape people (*I can see circle man. So CAN I. HP HP [Help Help]*). He even transformed his own dramatic story into a joke, claiming that the giant “didn’t really eat Circle Man. It was a joke. And Circle Man wasn’t even a man. He was a girl (laughs).” In the last part of the story, Jameel has Circle Man yell out “Mama Mama Mama,” explaining, “Circle ... he love to talk. He run his mouth real good.”

Thus, Jameel created a carnival of voices, transforming math bulletin boards into space aliens, men into girls, stories to jokes, and patterns from beginning reading books into the dialogue of space aliens. The world became unglued and then glued back together in interesting ways by a child who himself “run[s] his mouth real good.” Further, his use of chants and repetitive phrases allowed for a fluent performance in which he was in control.

<sup>1</sup>Conventions used in the presentation of transcripts: () — parentheses enclosing text contain notes, usually about contextual and nonverbal information; [] — brackets contain explanatory information inserted into quotations by me, rather than by the speaker; in the “Jameel’s Product” column, they also contain the intended meaning of the symbols Jameel wrote; [ — a single large bracket is used to indicate overlapping speech; N-O — capitalized letters separated by hyphens indicate that letters were spoken; NO — a capitalized word or phrase indicates increased volume; *no* — an italicized word indicates a stressed word; /n/ — parallel slashed lines indicate that the speaker made the sound of the enclosed letter or letters; /n:/ — a colon inserted into a word or sentence indicates that the sound of the previous letter was elongated; ... — ellipsis points inserted in the middle of a blank line indicate omitted material. Conventional punctuation marks are used to indicate ends of utterances or sentences, usually indicated by slight pauses on the audiotape. Commas refer to pauses within words or word phrases. Dashes [—] indicate interrupted utterances.

Table 4: Jameel's "Circle Man" Event

Jameel's Product	Jameel's Interaction <sup>a</sup>	Comment
WS circle [Once circle] LAPT ON MUA [landed on Mars]	G: Now tell me what happened when the space ship landed.	Jameel writes <i>ws</i> , copies <i>circle</i> from the math bulletin board, and, with Genevive's help, sounds out "landed on Mars."
	J: It was a sma:ll world. It was a sma:ll world that they landed in. It was a sma:ll world they was in. It was <i>small</i> . Belie:ve me. Cause you can see little trees.	After Genevive leaves, Jameel draws a square, a triangle, and a circle with faces ("shape aliens") and two small trees.  Jameel now adopts a performative style in presenting his world (e.g., note the repetition and vowel elongation). <sup>2</sup>
circle	J: He yelling out "CIRCLE" cause he picked circle up. He yelling, "CIRCLE, CIRCLE, CIRCLE." (voice change) "OH GOD! He ate Circle! ... Yes he's eaten Circle Man. OH NO! He ate circle man. OH GOD! O::H!"	Jameel draws a giant and then rushes off to tell Genevive that a giant will soon eat Circle Man. When he returns, he draws a conversational bubble next to the giant and writes <i>circle</i> .  Jameel begins talking excitedly, taking the role of the giant.  Jameel now takes the role of a space alien who has witnessed the eating of Circle Man.

<sup>2</sup>Like many young children, Jameel talked to himself as he wrote, engaging in a kind of dramatic play (Dyson, 1989); such talk occurred whether or not anyone, including me, was sitting beside him. During "Act 1," he was his own audience, until he popped up to present his piece to Genevive or until he read his work to the class during sharing time.



**Table 4 (continued from previous page)**

<b>Jameel's Product</b>	<b>Jameel's Interaction<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Comment</b>
He ut circle		Jameel begins to write:  As if he can't quite contain himself, he rushes off to tell Genevive that Circle Man has been eaten! She responds with suitable amazement and encourages him to return to his seat to finish the sentence, which he does.
man	"EEEEOW! He ate Circle Man." (laughs) "He ate Circle Man. So he ate Circle Man."	Jameel begins dancing around the table, continuing the performance.
ho nos [Who knows] so ho nos		Jameel now writes again. He sounds out "Who knows, so who knows," and then rereads the repetitive text in a suspenseful voice. Next comes a chant:
circle man circle man circle man		He rereads his text in a rhythmic way.

<sup>a</sup>G: Genevive's speech; J: Jameel's speech.

Jameel's use of texts as centers of elaborate performances and of his teacher as his favorite audience differs from the uses of written language assumed by process pedagogy or, more broadly, by school as an institution. In process pedagogy, the major purpose of young children's writing is to communicate information effectively; moreover, in schooling generally, the teacher is an "audience" of student performance in the unmarked sense (i.e., of student displays of competent, socially appropriate behavior). Jameel, however, was engaged in a social dialogue that demanded attention to the music, not just the literal sense, of language. And, in that dialogue, he was a performer in the marked sense, a manipulator of words who sought the active appreciation and participation of his audience, including his teacher. These differences in assumptions became more explicit near the end of the first four months of school, emerging most dramatically in the "911 for cat" event.

*911 for cat.* Jameel wrote the 911 story on a day in which an accident had happened on the street in front of Genevive's classroom just as the children were arriving at school. Apparently, a car had rammed into the playground fence, injuring a pedestrian. This accident and the arrival of the fire engine (summoned with a 911 call) were discussed by Genevive and the children as the school day began.

During the morning free-composing event, Jameel drew and quietly dramatized a story about Cat, who was sat on by and in turn sat on his pal Hat, and some "speeding



guys" who crashed into Cat. He then wrote, using familiar patterns: *Sat on Cat Sat on Hat. Hat Sat on Cat Cat GON*. Jameel repeated the last phrase rapidly in chant-like fashion, "Catgone, catgone, catgone," and then wrote: *911 for cat*.

This is the story that led to Edward G.'s declaration that it was like a poem and Mollie's that it didn't make any sense. Both Jameel's performative style and his presentative stance led to the conflict with Mollie presented earlier. Further, when Mollie voiced her objections, Jameel maintained his style, although, rather than presenting his story, he presented an oral exposition—he tried to teach her the literal sense of his story. Like a skilled preacher (Davis, 1986) or teacher (Foster, 1989), he worked to draw Mollie into accepting the logic of his point of view. In addition to exact repetition and parallel structures, he used questions to place Mollie interactionally in the needy student stance and then interpreted her own directives as requests for help.

Jameel: What part of it doesn't make sense?

Peer: (unidentified) It makes sense to me. You can tell with his picture [of the cat on hat, the hat on cat, the "speeding guys," and the crying faces].

Mollie: It doesn't make sense.

Jameel: If your mother got hit wouldn't you call 911? Wouldn't you call 911? Would you call 911? Would you call 911?

Mollie: That's where it doesn't—

Edward G: It makes sense!

Peer: Yeah!

Jameel: If a car was passing by—and then you were by the house and then a car was going past and then you got hit—I'm talking about the hat and the cat got hit.

Edward G: It sounds like a poem.

Mollie: It doesn't make sense.

Genevive asks Mollie and Jameel to talk the problem over by themselves at a side table. As they talk, Mollie adopts a directive stance, but Jameel resists, playfully manipulating her language and intent to try to maintain control.

Mollie: Read that story.

Jameel: What don't make sense?

Mollie: Read it to me again.

Jameel: OK. You can read all these words.

Mollie: No I can not. They're smashed together.

Jameel: (laughs) Don't you know [how to read]!?! (asked with mock amazement)

But Mollie does not laugh. Jameel tries to explain his story to Mollie, but she is indeed having difficulty, in part because she assumes that his phrase *cat gone* is *cat goes* and that *911 for cat* is the last part of the phrase.

Mollie: The cat goes 911?

Jameel: The *hat* goes 911. Now the telephone right here. (adds a telephone to his picture)

Mollie: Jameel, now look.

Jameel: I don't get it. She *don't* get it. I don't got no more friends. I don't got no more friends.

...  
Mollie leaves, and Jameel laments:

Jameel: Why she tell me—I did it the way I wanted it. And now they want me to do it how they want it. But it's my decision.

Jameel was unable to involve Mollie in his story. He turned from performer to protester because he felt his rights as "story writer" had been violated. Indeed, he seemed to see his unsuccessful performance with Mollie as indication of a lack of friends.

*On the importance of sense.* Jameel's response to Mollie suggests that he could adopt a presentational stance that was serious, not playful, and that he could present an exposition or explanation rather than a story of some type. His focus was clearly on the literal sense of what was being communicated, even though his text was "like a poem."

This way of participating in activities seemed to occur whenever Jameel was speaking as an expert to a relatively ignorant audience. His presentations were at times performative and, at other times, straightforwardly communicative. The first evidence of Jameel's abilities to produce lecture-like discourse came when Jameel began explaining classroom stories to me during the morning recess. These sessions were initiated when I asked Genevive about Jameel's reading progress, and she, in turn, asked Jameel if he would like to spend his recess that day reading to me. Jameel did so with great pleasure. From his point of view, I did not know the books in the room. He adopted a presentational, playful stance as he performed the books for me; he chose books with "jokes" in them or those based on songs (e.g., *Old MacDonald*, *A Huntin' We Will Go*, and *Abiyoyo* [Seeger, 1986]; Jameel commented about the latter, "I hope you will like it. It's got a rhythm. That's why I choose it a lot.").

However, Jameel not only performed the books, but he also explained them, much as Genevive did during class choral readings of favorite books. For example, he commented on character variation in folk tales after reading *The Little Red Hen*:

You know *The Little Red Hen* that we just read? They got the dog in it sometime. They got another book of it. They got the dog, the cat, and the, the, um, the mouse. They got different characters than this book. They got different kind of people in different kinds of books. But sometime they don't.

It was clear, then, that Jameel was not unaware of the demands of communication, nor was he unwilling to explain his point of view in certain contexts. During "story writing," however, he was uncomfortable sharing control of that text in explicit ways with his audience.

This discomfort, displayed in the 911 event, led to classroom tensions. Although Genevive discussed with the class the author's ultimate right to determine her or his own story, she was also trying to establish a writing workshop in her classroom. To implement such a workshop, Jameel's written stories would have to become "drafts," and his audiences—his teachers and his peers—would have to become "editors" of those drafts, editors who (however subtly) critiqued his sense and offered help (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983). Act Two of Jameel's case explores what happened when Genevive began to redefine his classroom stages for performance, that is, when she began to change her own role as interlocutor in his social dialogues.

### Act Two (January through March): Tensions in the Theater

Although she remained appreciative, during the early winter months, Genevive gradually increased her demands, adopting a more inquisitive, helpful, and, at times, directive stance toward Jameel. This change led to complex negotiations, as Jameel and Genevive worked to define their rights and responsibilities as author, audience, and helper, as illustrated by the "rich dog" event.

*Negotiating stance: Revisions as new performances.* After the experience with "the cat goes 911," Genevive introduced the concept of a "draft," that is, a text as first effort to be edited for sense and for spelling with an adult "editor" or helper. On this day, the children were to write drafts of dog stories. As soon as Jameel sat down at a work table, he became engrossed in writing his "Rich Dog" story. Indeed, when two peers, Eugenie and Edward J., intervened as playful colleagues, he assumed an oppositional and then protestant stance. In response to their chants of "Richy Rich Dog," Jameel demanded, "Leave me alone," and then protested to Genevive that they had "no right to talk about my story."

After Genevive restored peace, Jameel quickly wrote:

#### The Rich Dogs

mun Da Thir YuS  
Rich Dog Lot up  
mun Da Tha Sad

[One day there was  
rich dog locked up.  
One day they said]

He then ran to perform his story for Genevive.

Genevive was appreciative, but she also began to inquire about his text, asking what would come next. Jameel continued in a presentative stance, explaining his story first in a playful and then in a serious mood:

Jameel: One day there-there—they said um "O:h. I got some money.  
I can buy something from the grocery store." And so he  
bought himself!<sup>3</sup> (laughs)

<sup>3</sup>The point of Jameel's story is *not* that the rich dog went to the grocery store. Jameel's rich dog was playing with words. Locked in jail, the rich dog said: "I can buy *myself*. I can buy *something from the*

Genevive: OK. (becoming directive) That part needs to come now. You've got your rich dogs. "One day there was"—that's where I got stuck—"a dog. They were locked up. One day they said"—that's the part where I got stuck.

Genevive explains to Jameel that quotation marks would help clarify his text:

Genevive: That'll be my cue that the dogs are talking.

Jameel: There's only dogs there. This is a world where dogs live, where no people are. See?

Eventually, both Genevive's inquisitive and directive stance toward Jameel as author, and the implication of that stance—that he was in need of help—became an object of his own play. As he worked, he periodically slapped his forehead, announced dramatically that he was "stuck," having forgotten his story, and then rushed over to Genevive to report his problem. He would recite his story when he "remembered it":

Jameel: One dog says, "Hey, I got some money. I can buy myself from out of this roughy store. And I can get rich and rich and rich and rich." And the jail start rocking and started tumbling over. He go wooh BOOM! Wooh BOOM! And he got upside down. (pause) Oh. I just forgot again. (laughs) [Note the metaphoric connection between jail and store; see footnote 3 for discussion.]

Jameel's loss of control was *just* play, however. At one point, Jameel ran out of writing space and began to staple a small piece of construction paper to the bottom of his writing paper. I asked if he thought he would then have enough room. Jameel responded in a performative style, explaining his competence with repetitive structures and questioning:

Jameel: Uh huh. I'm positive. If a man doesn't know what he was doing he wouldn't do it. See if he wouldn't know what he was doing—see if you didn't know what you was doing you would have to think. And see I thought—I thinked it and then I got it. Cause see, don't you see all that room right there?

As his last comments suggest, being "a man who knows what he's doing" was important to Jameel. Loss of control itself could be transformed through playful performance into control. And this use of playful performance is how Jameel ultimately dealt with the need to treat his "dog" story as a draft.

The next writing period, Genevive asked Jameel to revise his draft to make clear who was talking: one dog or many. (Jameel had written "they said," but, as in the oral

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*grocery store.*" (Note the parallel structure of the dog's dialogue, which accents the metaphorical language.) For the rich dog, the jail is just a grocery store, and he is a commodity. When the rich dog buys himself, he will be "his own master," as Jameel later commented to me. Jameel often used such metaphorical language play, a kind of play Smitherman (1986, p. 121), in her discussion of Black verbal art, describes as "metaphorical-imagistic ... [with] images rooted in the everyday, real world."

version of his story, only one dog was talking.) Jameel at first attempted to present an oral exposition of his story. He, however, became quite protestant when Genevive remained understanding but firm in her revision request:

Jameel: But I wanted to say it like this.

...  
But I wanted to make it funny.

Genevive: Making it funny's OK but people have to be able to understand it.

...  
Who bought himself?

Jameel: The dog.

...  
But see I'm working with only one dog. Thousands of dogs in this town are rich.

Eventually Jameel "revised" his text. Without looking at his old text, he wrote a new one that eliminated the reference to the town of rich dogs but also eliminated the *they/he* confusion ("One day the rich dog was locked up and the dog said ..."). Genevive was pleased. Jameel proclaimed his love of story writing and happily began recopying his paper to make a "neat" copy for display. However, in doing so, he copied a word wrong and, then, began to play with the whole notion of "making sense," turning the "final copy" of the story into a playful performance—and a funny text:

Jameel has just copied *in* instead of *and*, at which point the performance begins:

Jameel: But it doesn't make sense to me no more. OK, you want it to make sense. You got it. You *got* it. Now. There's your *and*. Let's see. It's silly. She told me to make it funny. This is funny.

In erasing the *in*, Jameel rips his paper and begins on another sheet. He decides to write yet another piece, this one beginning, "The dog he like to be rich"; moreover, he starts writing on the bottom line of the page and works up:

Jameel: Yeah. He he he. This is funny. If they turn it up like this, it's upside down.  
...  
She wanted it funny. She said I can make it funny. So it is funny. (laughs)

Jameel unintentionally makes a squiggly *m*, and he incorporates it into the play:

Jameel: Let's make more squiggles. Mm mm mm mm m. She said make it squiggly. She said make it a little squiggly. And I made it squiggly. And funny.

Laughing very hard, Jameel goes and puts the revised version of the story and his "final copy" in the "in" box. (Later, Jameel's revised version is



displayed on a classroom wall; the "final copy" is filed in his writing folder.)

The "rich dog" event exemplifies Genevive's and Jameel's changing relationship during class composing periods. Given Genevive's concern with having a strong writing workshop program, her adoption of a more active stance as "editor" seems very reasonable to me. The literature on process pedagogy does not discuss a contradiction between the roles of audience and editor/helper—or audience and teacher, for that matter. The teacher is to convey her understanding of the child's message and ask questions about the information in the child's piece. If the child is able to spell and print with some ease (which was the case with Jameel by this point in the school year) and if the child's personal investment in the piece is high (which also was the case for Jameel in almost all story-writing events), then the child should want to revise when the teacher (or peer) "audience" reveals that a discrepancy exists between the child's intention and what the audience understands (Graves, 1983). This was not the case with Jameel. As Genevive became more inquisitive and helpful, he became more protestant.

Jameel and Genevive's difficulty in these exchanges over his stories was not the result of any simple unwillingness of Jameel to receive help from others. Genevive, in fact, helped Jameel throughout the school day, checking his math work, helping him figure out words during reading, answering his questions during science. Taking explicit help from his "teacher" was not problematic. But taking explicit help from his story "audience" was problematic.

Moreover, a lack of "academic" or "literate" language on the part of Jameel also was not, in any simple way, at the root of Jameel's and Genevive's difficulty. As previously discussed, Jameel's writing reflected the performative features of African-American oral art forms. As also discussed, the assumption might be made by some scholars that Jameel did not control a more explicit discourse style.<sup>4</sup> But Jameel's explanations of his own stories were elaborate. Further, while Jameel participated only minimally in "expository" writing activities during study units (e.g., writing "I liked the aquarium."), he continued to present extended lectures to me during recess. The lectures expanded to include study unit topics. Jameel's expositions on these topics were often straightforward, his language syntactically complex, his concern for clarity and precision clear. The following excerpts from Jameel's lectures on birds and barnacles are illustrative:

*On birds:*

We got lots of bird books. Would you like to read one of 'em?

...

(Jameel gets a bird alphabet book; he skips the pages Genevive read that morning because "these are the things you already know about because you was here.")

This bird is very interesting. It eats little kinds of beans.

...

Let's see. This one is a dentist. [The dentist metaphor is Jameel's, not Genevive's.] This is a crocodile bird that cleans out the little stuff stuck up in his teeth. [This assertion is accurate.] The crocodiles will never eat him. They will never eat their dentist.

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<sup>4</sup>Although much recent research on young children's stories is sensitive to the cultural value of diverse narrative styles, there is a substantial body of psychological research that is less culturally sensitive; it is focused generally on so-called "disadvantaged" children raised in poverty. This research has examined low-income children's lack of explicit or decontextualized language in school-like situations. (For discussions of such research, see Feagans & Farran, 1982).

...  
Now this, is a duck.

...  
It's a member of the duck family.

*On barnacles:*

See, you see them little shell things? (Jameel points to a barnacle.) See um when the tide is low um first the tide is high and then it opens the shells and these little webby things—them web feet catches the food. And then when um when um when it's low tide it covers its shells real tight so the water won't get out unless it will die.

Jameel was capable of being sensitive to his audience and of using the syntactically "integrated" language (e.g., the nominal complements, the subordinated clauses) associated by some with the academically "literate" (Chafe, 1982). But "story writing" was not for him the occasion for such language.

*Negotiating "sense": "Toons" as extended performances.* Indeed, as he began to write cartoon stories, Jameel's written stories became increasingly performative. The cartoon stories were composed of dialogue spoken by cartoon characters. For example:

Vis" is" My" Book" vat Jis  
Can't Be JorS DoKro clKoy  
and Mad Cat

[This is my book.

That just can't be yours.

Doctor Claw and Mad Cat] (In the accompanying picture, "Doctor Claw," a television cartoon character, is sitting on a stage in a place Jameel labeled a cartoon "studio." Mad Cat, another cartoon character, is entering stage right, and Inspector Gadget, yet another character, is entering stage left. Mainly their feet are visible. Inspector Gadget is objecting to Dr. Claw, his agent Mad Cat, and their "mad book," which Doctor Claw hopes will help him "take all the money in the world.")

Jameel explained to me that some people considered cartoon stories "nonsense ... That's the problem with cartoons." He presented an elaborate oral exposition about the sense of these stories. In explaining their sense, he referred both to classroom literature and to the popular movie *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* The latter is a sophisticated blending of cartoon and human characters in which cartoon performers, "toons," are exploited members of a segregated community. As Jameel explained, "Cartoon characters ... they call 'em toons if they not inside a TV. They call 'em cartoons if they inside a TV."

In cartoon stories, the toons function, not in a television studio, but in a *drawn* studio, just as do characters in picture books. Jameel explained:

Jameel: OK. Look. See the whole point is. OK. Just like you were in school. (Jameel gets a book from the classroom library.)

...  
I just want to show you this little picture [in the picture book]. Don't worry about that [his cartoon story]. Look.

Don't you see the thing? The picture gotta go with the words and the words gotta go with the pictures.

...  
For instance, OK, I put, *A Chair for My Mother* [title of picture book]. Do the pictures go with the words? (I agree that they do, and Jameel now points to his own cartoon story.) Now do the pictures go with the words here? (Again, I agree.)

Cartoon stories, Jameel argued, were not so hard to "get." I, as reader/audience, needed to use the pictures and the words, just as I would use the pictures and the words if I "were in school" and had to read picture books by professional authors. Indeed, I might add, many of those picture books are composed heavily of humorous, sometimes rhythmic dialogue; in fact, some books consist only of pictures and quoted speech, with no framing devices (e.g., "she/he said"). Moreover, there are many picture books that are illustrated in a cartoon style, like those of Dr. Seuss.

Perhaps because I was listening so attentively—I had not yet seen *Roger Rabbit* nor heard the term "toons"—Jameel talked about the special quality of toons, the featured characters in cartoon stories. As earlier noted, Jameel viewed toons, who are considered "fake," as actors with "real" existences. In fact, he drew his "toons" on a stage. He seemed intrigued with the idea, presented so vividly in *Roger Rabbit*, that characters and objects have real existences, even though within certain frames—on certain stages—they are "fake." He pointed out that a toon was like other objects in the classroom:

Cause see, it's just like a feather. (Jameel points to a fake feather among the displayed real bird feathers the children have been studying.) See this one is fake. [Amidst the real feathers in the display, this one is "fake" but it is still real—it exists.]

...  
Fake is really real. Now you get it? Just like a toon in a cartoon. If you ever forget that, and the other—another kid try to tell you, you just play your tape and you'll know what he means or *she* means.

Jameel's cartoon stories might well be deemed nonsense by readers unfamiliar with the cartoon genre and, also, by those who evaluate children's written texts by examining the clarity and completeness of the information given. But undergirding the "nonsense" was much child wondering about fictional sense and about the use of multiple media (pictures and words) to create that sense. (Later in the year, Jameel began referring to characters in books who did ludicrous things as "toons.")

One of Jameel's own cartoon stories was so unusual that it captured the attention and admiration of the peers at his work table. He drew a large clock, a crying face, and two smaller figures running that he labeled "toons." He then wrote:

"I love My Friend. So Do I" But I Don't Hav Tim "Stop Tim is Runen ut"  
[Quotation marks are Jameel's]

Jameel performed this piece with a desperate, expressive voice as he reread while writing. He elaborated on his meaning in a similar style:

**Jameel:** The time is running out. We've [the two toons] only got 'til nothing hits there. Nothing hits there. It's [the clock's] moving. (in soft, suspenseful voice, with a deliberate cadence) It's moving forward. It's moving. It's moving forward. It's moving slowly. (then in a desperate voice) Time is running out!

**Sonya:** I like your clock.

**Jameel:** HELP! (writes I.eep on picture)

When Jameel finishes his piece, he turns to Brett, who is interested in Jameel's ideas. Jameel adopts a playful, presentational stance and performs a magic trick for Brett.

**Jameel:** See the pencil trapped in there (a piece of rolled up paper). And I can magically make it come out. Da daaaa. I put the pencil in here. And then I rolled it up. And now! (Brett laughs)

Notable in the above discussion of "toons" is the absence of the continual "jumping up" to perform his texts for Genevive, which no longer occurred with such frequency by the winter months. Indeed, as the playful performance for Brett suggests, Jameel had gradually begun to move into the peer network, and his performative powers had a clear role in this move. Jameel's products and performances were noticed by his peers.

Jameel's negotiation of a place in the peer group was not easy, however. He found it difficult to blend into the group. He often worried that others were not following classroom rules, not allowing him his turn, his place, his privacy. And he continued to be sensitive about others' responses to his products.

By April of his first grade year, Jameel's talent with words was clear; equally clear was his need to exercise those verbal skills for his own sense of control over his world. Moreover, his classroom reading program seemed well-suited for his strengths, given the program's emphasis on literature with rhythm, rhyme, and dialogic patterns, its abundance of humorous, playful books, and Genevive herself, who was a superb reader of children's books (in my judgment and the nonverbal judgment of her attentive audience, who smiled, laughed, and read along with her). Indeed, Jameel was gaining control over the written system. At the same time, however, the writing program allowed an "audience" to emphasize the clarity of Jameel's information rather than its music or its humor. During the last few months of school, resolutions of these tensions began to emerge.

### **Act Three (April to June): The Negotiation of New Stages**

During this last phase of the school year, Jameel's collegiality with his peers continued to grow, particularly during playful, informal talk. Both fueling and benefitting from this growth was the emergence of kinds of genres—new social stages beyond cartoon productions and joke stories. Among these new stages were a game, a play, and, most significantly, songs.

These stages allowed for both Jameel's performative style and his concerns for social acceptance and respect. Moreover, they afforded common dialogic ground among both his old audience, Genevive, and his emerging audience, his peers. For on these



stages, oral presentation of text was expected, as was an appreciative, participative audience.

**Presenting an invented game.** The first such stage involved a homemade game, which Jameel brought to school after the Spring holiday. To make this game, Jameel had used—transformed—a cardboard box pulled from a garbage can. “People at my house thought it was ugly,” he explained. “When I first made it they said, ‘That ain’t nothing but a piece of junk,’ cause I made it out of garbage.” The game, stored in a shoe box, was composed of cards on which Jameel had written either *yes* or *no* or drawn a happy or sad face.

Jameel’s game was enthusiastically appreciated by the entire class. Further, it allowed him to take a presentative stance with his teacher and classmates, because he alone was the only expert on the game. For example, he needed to explain that:

If you get a card with a picture on it, you keep that card. If you get a card that’s got a *no* on it, you gotta put a card back. If you don’t got one, when it’s your next turn, you can’t get a turn because you lost one of the games.  
... Whoever get the most cards [wins].

Genevive suggested Jameel enter the game in the school science fair because it was, after all, his invention. So, Jameel made a poster to display with his invention in the school auditorium. Although his explanation of the game’s directions had been straightforward, his poster—meant for public display—had features of performative speech, particularly rhythm and rhyme:

I made a  
vichin [invention]  
for You and me  
so we can see it.

3 kids [can play it]

**Presenting new kinds of “tunes.”** Throughout the year, Jameel had accompanied his stories with expressive, dramatically performed language. He enjoyed singing, and sometimes he sang as he worked. Further, Genevive had a beautiful voice and, accompanied by the guitar, often sang with the children. It seems sensible, then, that Jameel would turn to writing songs, a genre in which dramatic, expressive language is in fact expected, oral performance the whole point, and an appreciative, responsive audience part of everyone’s expectations.

Jameel’s first song evolved from earlier performances. The most immediate prior performance had taken place a week before the song, when Jameel wrote a joke story based on a playful and rhythmic children’s book, *Did You Ever See?* (Einsel, 1980). For this story, Jameel wrote, *Did you ever see a shark bark?* and then drew a shark with the word *bark* strategically placed in his open mouth. Below the shark, Jameel wrote *My my my*, saying the words as an amazed observer of a barking shark. (Jameel’s table-mates—Daisy, Monique, and Berto—were so impressed with this joke story that they wrote similar ones.)

The other relevant prior performance began during a class reading of *Little Fish*, a book with a recurring language pattern that was part of their “oceans” unit. As the class read “Little Fish, Little Fish, what do you see? I see a whale looking at me,” Jameel would quietly echo “Me me me,” to appreciative giggles from his peers. The “me me me’s” evolved into cartoon-like opera singing that eventually accompanied (surreptitiously) the routine morning singing of “This Land is Your Land.”



The oral, written, and drawn performances described above foreshadowed his greatest performance, a song sung, not by a barking shark, but by a singing fish. The song itself was actually one part of a two-section piece. Each part had a distinctive voice, unlike his written dialogues. The first voice was that of the fish, which was pictured on the top part of Jameel's paper. The fish had four large bubbles coming out of his mouth. Within these bubbles were the "tunes": repetitive, partially rhyming lines composed in part from the "My my my's" of the barking shark event and the "me me me's" of his performative chants. On the bottom of the paper was the second voice, that of an "announcer," who gave a brief expository but performative comment on the fish.

Sitting on the rug during sharing time, Jameel presented his piece in a poised manner. He was performing—using stylized language with an emphasis on presentation—but he was not being ostensibly playful:

Jameel: The first time I'm going to say it. I'll say it two times. The second time I'm going to sing it to you. (Jameel reads the piece.)

Austin: Now sing it to us. (The entire class—with no exception—is focused on Jameel. Most children are grinning, wide-eyed.)

Jameel: (He sings in a crooning voice, like Bing Crosby or Nat King Cole. His singing is presented below in phrase groups.)

M-Y-M-Y: (sings each letter in a smooth, rising tune, elongating the last Y; he has written periods after each letter [e.g., M.Y.M.Y.] to indicate that each is to be sung separately.)

M-Y-M-Y: (sings similarly)

M:-M: (continues on the high pitch with elongated M's)

me me me: (even pitch)

you you you: (even but higher pitch)

my my my: (even but higher pitch)

M-Y-M-Y: (as before)

I: lo::ve (elongated and with a rhythmic drop and then rise in pitch)

you, to, boop boo bee do (syncopated)

M-Y-M-Y: (as before)

That fish isn't any ordinary fish. It's a singing fish. (reads in an announcer's voice; note the repetition and variation in sentence structure)

Jameel had combined his interest in rhythmic, poetic, humorous prose with his interest in exposition, and he had brought together his enjoyment of cartoons and jokes with his fascination with the ocean study unit. In his words,

[I wrote it] 'cause I love singing. Then I started loving animals. And then I thought, "I'll make 'em singing a song. A singing fish."

The result was an oral performance of enormous appeal to his classmates. Indeed, Jameel professed to have even larger audiences in mind for his singing fish. He had folded up the bottom of his text to create a pocket. The pocket was for the money donations that would surely follow when he allowed his singing fish to perform in his neighborhood:

[People will] pay money for it, the fish. But it's gonna be me [taking the money]. And I'm only give the fish a itsy bitsy piece of candy. And I'm gonna keep the money.

Within his classroom "neighborhood," Jameel's peers were not only overwhelmingly appreciative, they themselves wrote songs filled with "me me me's" and "you you you's." Moreover, the children, including Mollie, all clamored for a copy of Jameel's song. (Mollie apparently found rhythmic, repetitive words more appropriate in a "song" than in a "story.") At Jameel's request, his song was photocopied for distribution among his classmates.

The singing fish event illustrated most dramatically the kind of audience appreciation and involvement Jameel seemed to work toward with his rhythmic, humorous texts. Indeed, it seemed to be a "turning point for Jameel," to use Genevive's words, that is, one that solidified his performative role and gave him widespread recognition and admiration from his peers.

Jameel went on to write many more songs, including the one excerpted below, which is also inspired by a science study unit—the study of space and, particularly, gravity:

I love rockets and ships, too.  
I love space  
Do you, too?  
I love space  
because it's fun  
I love space cause you bounce around  
It's just like in Chucky Cheese  
I just love, to, bounce around,  
Bah bah bah bah bah bounce around. [transcribed]

*From presenting to reflecting on tune and sense.* Not only did the production of songs lead to appreciative, participative social response, but it also led to Jameel's critical reflection on his own text, reflection that had proved problematic in teacher and peer writing conferences.

Although Jameel's popularity as a songwriter pleased him, it also brought about increased pressure to perform. Jameel began to consider how his songs would sound when performed and how others might respond. He tried his songs out and changed words if he did not like the rhythmic or rhyming effect. That is, he treated his text as a draft, even though, as Genevive discussed with him, his tunes could not actually be

recorded without special music-writing skills. The following event excerpt illustrates Jameel's concerns:

Jameel has been writing a new song at a table filled with other "song writers." As the children work, many positive compliments are given about Jameel's fish song. Monique, for example, declares, "I like Jameel's. Jameel is good." Jameel himself has written "Me me my we see we see we got a bee." Genevive is curious about his song, but he won't sing it to her yet.

Jameel: I can't sing it. I don't know if it's the right tune yet.  
...  
I don't know if it's gonna work. When I write songs I gotta check it first. [That is, he wants to sing it first to himself, which he then does.]

While Jameel's "checking out" of his song drafts was a private act, there was evidence of Jameel's engagement with collaborative reflection on text and on performance *when the audience was not identical to the helper/collaborator*. The clearest illustration of this engagement came late in the spring, when small groups of Genevive's children produced puppet shows based on *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963). Each group performed their shows for the others and for another classroom.

In his group, Jameel played the lead character, the naughty child Max. In doing so, he elaborated on the basic text, aiming to be funny. For example, he adopted a cartoon-like voice, and he added humorous "jokes" to the text. One of Jameel's favorite added jokes was an ad lib to the book's closing, when Max smells good food from back home and decides to leave the land of the Wild Things. In a performance of his group's play for a kindergarten class, Genevive, the group's narrator, read that Max smelled good food, and Jameel ad libbed, "Chicken?" in a perky voice, a delighted expression on his face.

In this puppet performance event, appreciative audience was clearly separated from collaborative peers and helpful teacher. Further, written text was marked as distinctive from oral performance, just as in the song events. Jameel manipulated these diverse concepts in class discussions before and after the kindergarten performance. Before that performance, Jameel had asked explicitly if "we can do it funny"—if the group could elaborate on the basic text. Genevive responded that they should stick closely to the written text, because the kindergartners would be less familiar with the story and thus might not "get" the jokes.

Jameel, however, could not resist being "funny." After the performance, he engaged with pleasure in an extended class discussion of the performance. He felt that the kindergartners were able to "get" his funny acts, since they laughed at his cartoon voice (which they did) and his "chicken" remark (which fewer children "got"). He was also able to appreciate the aspects of his peers' performances that generated applause, laughter, or expressive "oohs" and "ahhs."

As the year ended, then, Jameel, Genevive, and his peers had negotiated stages on which oral performance was lauded by the general classroom community. Further, these stages led to articulation of a distinction between text and performance and, thus, to an emergent perspective on the complex relationships between written and oral language as interrelated communicative and artistic—sensible and musical—tools. When Jameel's audience could choose to participate responsively (by singing along, by laughing) but did not seek to control his text (as he perceived Mollie doing), he reflected on the seemingly

more familiar, more comfortable social dynamics of text production and performance. For Jameel, the most comfortable social structure for reflection involved privacy or interaction with collaborators who were not simultaneously his audience.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS: DIALOGIC CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

While the particulars of Jameel's classroom experiences cannot be generalized, the close examination of his experiences raises questions about school literacy pedagogies in our socioculturally diverse society and, more broadly, about the links between storytelling, literacy learning, and the use of the analytic, explicit language valued in school. The presented study situated Jameel's texts—oral and written—within the social dialogues he was seeking with his teacher and his peers. The analysis of the social stage which Jameel initially *assumed* was available to young authors (and then *actively sought* to establish) highlights the restricted nature of such stages as discussed in current pedagogical literature. At the same time, the analytic emphasis on the social stage for story performing as *only a stage*—only one social place for language use—highlights the narrow vision of non-mainstream children's language in much of the research on the interrelationships between oral performance and written language.

In the following sections, I turn first to the latter research issue and then to the writing pedagogy issues. I close with a return to Jameel and his teacher Genevive, a teacher who, in my view, negotiated with Jameel and, in the process, worked toward a classroom of many social stages for literacy and for children.

### Links between Oral Performance, Written Fiction, and Expository Prose

Jameel's case illustrated how the assumed nature of the social relationship—the ongoing dialogue—between composer and audience governs both their actions. As a story composer, Jameel sought to perform for others. To this end, he *consciously* manipulated the musical possibilities and interactive nature of language, at least to some extent; for example, he explained that he "tried to make [some texts] rhyme." He thereby "deliberately structured the web of meaning," to use Vygotsky's (1962) description of the writing act. Jameel focused on aspects of language that figure into both oral performance and written literature. "Meaning"—particularly emotional meaning—comes from language's musical and dialogic properties as well as from its literal sense (Tannen, 1989).

Although Jameel, like all young children, must come to control many additional means for involving readers in written prose, he had made a beginning. Indeed, relative to the typical forms of first grade writing reported in the professional literature—the labels, captions, and brief statements about a topic (see Newkirk & Atwell, 1988), Jameel's texts seemed, in my judgment, much more literary, much more artistic. Perhaps because those who analyze young children's stories are academics, not poets, they have valued features of children's oral or written stories that are found also in expository written prose while deemphasizing literary features. We thus risk undervaluing children's (particularly non-mainstream children's) language skills and their literary and literate potential. In Scott's (1988, p. 28) words, while there is much attention to the *mismatch* between non-mainstream children's language use and that of school, "there is no mention of the value of certain forms of language ... in facilitating the development of school literacy" (see also Heath, 1983; Bishop, 1988; and Smitherman, 1986).

For example, Michaels and Collins (1984), in one of a number of articles on non-mainstream children's narrative use, discuss the mismatch between an African-American child's oral discourse style and that of her teacher. The authors' work is important in that it



highlights the linguistic skill and cultural value of the child's storytelling style and how that skill may be unappreciated in the classroom. From their point of view, however, one major implication of their work is that children with non-mainstream styles will "not get the necessary guidance and synchronized collaboration [with the teacher during story sharing] that would lead to the acquisition of an expanded and more 'literate' discourse style" (p. 220). The assumption is that young children's stories must be treated as "preparation" for, in Gee's (1989b, p. 104) words, "expository sorts of writing, speaking, and thinking."

This does not seem to me a logical assumption. Not only is the performative use of language central to current reading pedagogies, not to mention the value of many African-American children's experiences with metaphor for reading comprehension (Delain, Pearson, & Anderson, 1985; Scott, 1990; Smitherman, 1986), it seems sensible that children with oral storytelling skills would use storytelling "stages" to perform. We might better use research on children's narratives to help teachers appreciate and, as a result, foster their children's own appreciation of the skills inherent in many ways of telling and writing stories (for related discussions of classroom pedagogies, see Heath, 1983, and Scott, 1990).

Moreover, researchers and teachers might work to identify social situations in which young children *do* produce a more expanded style of discourse use. In Jameel's case, attention to literal sense occurred when he was quite literally engaged in exposition, when he was presenting information to a familiar, needy other. Jameel's "oral" foreshadowing of the explicit, analytic prose considered by some as "literate" did not occur when he viewed himself as a story maker, but when he viewed himself as a teacher. His case thus provides evidence of the importance of looking across social situations—of understanding the dialogue the child is engaged in—before making judgments about a child's language repertoire (Cazden & Mehan, 1989; Labov, 1969; for examples of teacher/researcher collaborations to develop social situations for expository language with older children, see Heath & Mangiola, 1991, and Moll & Greenberg, 1990).

In sum, Jameel's case supports ongoing efforts to reconceive the relationship between oral and written language (Basso, 1989; Bauman, 1986; Gates, 1989; Heath, 1982; Tannen, 1989; Walters, in press). The features of Jameel's texts were not evidence of an all-pervasive oral style but of his "situated" interpretation of the story-composing event and of the kinds of discourse strategies it demanded (Trueba, 1987). That interpretation was based on his sociocultural world, a complex world that reflected not only the sociocultural past—the oral traditions of his community—but also his sociocultural present, including cartoons, jokes, pop songs, and the rhythmic prose and poetry of the most socially valued children's literature.

Jameel's case reminds us that, as Clifford noted, from a Bakhtinian perspective, "there are no integrated cultural worlds or languages. All attempts to posit such abstract unities are constructs of monological power" (1988, p. 46). A child, like a language and a culture, cannot be put in any neatly labeled box. For a child is a member of many groups—an age, a gender, a class, an ethnicity, a race, a neighborhood, a family, a disciplinary group, and so on. The child steps into an ongoing conversation with a history of past ones and, anticipating a response, puts forward her or his own words in an act of self-articulation and social communion. Those words say who the child thinks she or he is relative to particular others in particular historical moments. The language mask Jameel wore when performing was not the mask he wore when he was teaching. We would not be doing justice to Jameel, to his sociocultural heritage, nor to language itself if, ignorant of his scholarly discussions of barnacles and birds, we evaluated his artful "911 story" with the criteria of so-called "literate" language, dismissing the story's stylistic connections to most of the literature in his classroom library.



## **Literacy Pedagogy: The Rights of Children, Peers, and Teachers**

Jameel's use of the sense and music of language shaped his participation in the teaching and learning life of the classroom. For example, his sensitivity to language's music seemed to contribute to his enjoyment of and progress within the classroom reading program. Further, engagement with the music of language seems near universal in childhood (Opie & Opie, 1988), and Jameel's performances were, at least in certain contexts, a way of establishing common ground with many of his classmates.

Yet, Jameel's "sense" was not always understood. His perceived lack of literal sense could lead to teacher requests for complex revisions, beyond the simple additions of words or punctuation that young children tend to make (Calkins, 1980). Further, Jameel resisted the assumption, implicit in current writing pedagogy (e.g., Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983), that one's audience can also be one's official helper. He often felt that peer and teacher conferences violated his rights as author/performer. But, given other kinds of social relationships, especially those that did not confound audience and official helper roles, Jameel more readily reflected, not only on written text, but also on oral performance and audience response. Jameel's case thus illustrates the danger of generic descriptions of language arts pedagogy, as opposed to critical reflection on the goals of that pedagogy (e.g., reflection on text) and the range of ways that goal might be reached for individual children (Dyson, 1986).

To elaborate, the literature on process pedagogy seems to assume that if children's texts are valued and responded to, children, whatever their cultural background, will be "free" to express themselves. Indeed, certain genres, like personal narrative, are particularly valued because they are thought both to allow such self-expression and to further the writing process (i.e., when writing personal narratives, children should have adequate information for drafting, for responding to others' questions about their texts, and, ultimately, for revising). But individuals do not just express themselves; informed by their personal and sociocultural histories, they engage in social dialogues with other people, using certain genres to enact certain relationships. Given an "audience" (a term stressed in writing pedagogy), Jameel assumed that his role was to perform and that the appropriate dialogic response, given an effective text, was respect for his expressive powers, not feedback focused on his literal sense.

Jameel's interpretation is a sociolinguistically legitimate one. What is not sociolinguistically legitimate is to assume that one kind of social arrangement—the teacher and peer conferences described in the pedagogical literature—will be interpreted in the same way by all children. Nor is it legitimate to assume that those arrangements will support children's "self-expression" through a range of genres. As children progress through school, the social stages they are provided will further some "performances" (in the broad, unmarked sense of the word) and discourage others. Teachers must be sensitive, therefore, to children's perspectives on interesting genres, appropriate helpers, and valued audiences.

If a curriculum is to be truly responsive to diversity, truly child-centered, it must be permeable enough to allow for children's ways of participating in school literacy events. For example, Jameel's jokes, cartoons, and other performative genres were important for his involvement in school, for his success as a peer group member, and, most importantly, for his sense of himself as a competent, valued person. Indeed, a child's way of participating in an event like "story"-composing may not matter so much as that the child participates and, over time, comes to understand how ways of using language situate him or her in the social world (Gee, 1989a; Heath, 1983).

In Jameel's classroom, Genevive patiently negotiated with Jameel, never denying him his own feelings as she worked toward new kinds of dialogues within and through texts, and she provided him space for his own "inventions." Moreover, she provided all children's literacy genres with the dignity of a name (e.g., true stories, descriptions, plays, songs, poems, jokes), and she worked to establish connections between their efforts and that of the wider world of discourse: "That sounds like a Shel Silverstein poem ... Your story has a pattern, just like *Brown Bear*, doesn't it?" Thus, her children too, including Jameel, began to name their own work (e.g., "cartoon stories") and to find these connections. Such talk seems critical to the growth of reflection and to the gradual expansion of discourse power (Gee, 1989a).

The further development of such child-permeable literacy curricula may allow children to experience the artistically rich and diverse discourse of our society. It may even lead to an appreciation of, and for some children, participation in the kind of world-making done by authors like Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston, who expand traditional notions of literary genres. They interweave a myriad voices to create prose that resonates with human diversity even as it reveals universal human chords. On the other hand, it may lead to science-making like that done by Stephen Gould and Lewis Thomas, whose "expositions" also have such resonance, contain such chords.

It is not surprising that Jameel, a child who loved science, story, and song, should put these interests together in Genevive's classroom, where story, song, and science were all important. On the day Jameel wrote his singing fish song, he told me, "'You're gonna be a scientist.' That's what my mom said. (pause) I'm gonna be a *singing* scientist." Surely, there should be space in the classroom dialogue for singing scientists.

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