

Preface

The case studies in this book are still as vivid and interesting to me as the days when I first visited each of the classrooms and began taking notes. It has been an incredibly long journey. Yet, as I describe the students and teachers it seems as though it were yesterday. It is because of their openness in allowing me into their classrooms that I was able to explore in depth a small part of how learners construct their knowledge based on what they already know. In the grand scheme of learning and instruction, this focus only gets at the tip of how we can support learners as they bring their own experiences, whatever those may be, into the classroom as a potential foundation for further learning.

When all is said and done, this book is ultimately a book that has my research at its core. It could only have been conceived of and developed as a result of the studies I have undertaken. That said, as I consider what the book has developed into, it seems more than a documentation of findings from a research agenda. It is a compilation of case studies of upper-elementary classrooms. It is the documentation of how a theoretical lens allows for particular interpretations. It is the annotation of a research process. Because of those different aspects, this book may serve different purposes for different groups of people.

For those interested in theoretical descriptions of how knowledge may be constructed and meaning made, this book noted primarily a semiotic (although naïve) lens, drawing on the mind as rhizome metaphor, but also includes comparisons to more cognitive lenses of how learning takes place. For those individuals who are interested in the applied nature of the studies, omitting the sections that are more theoretically laden (e.g., sections of Chaps. 1, 2, and 8) should not inhibit usefulness of the book and understanding of the cases.

For teaching practitioners and those who train teachers, this book provides rich cases about classrooms that are diverse in instructional methods. While I have analyzed the cases using an emergent qualitative process, drawing on a semiotics lens and focusing primarily on the initial moments when students and their teachers brought in other elements to weave with the content, the cases could be discussed through a variety of lenses about teaching and learning. In this book, the excerpts from the cases are often longer examples than likely necessary to make my point.

Yet, it is these descriptions that will allow readers to apply various lenses of their own. To aid this process, the index references all excerpts by classroom so that one could revisit just one classroom.

For those interested in research methods, the appendix provides a detailed description of the methods used as the various studies that comprise this book were conducted. As a monograph, this book is perhaps best described as presenting a grounded theory which draws on six case studies of classrooms that include late-elementary children's knowledge linking processes and how those may, or may not, have been fostered in their learning environments.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-94-024-0991-8>

Making Meaning by Making Connections

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2017, XII, 207 p. 6 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-94-024-0991-8