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## Writing and Painting Our Lives into Being: School, Home, and the Larger Community as Transformative Spaces for Learning

*Second- and third-graders and their teachers write and paint across the cultural landscapes of school and the larger community to create new spaces for learning.*

*Have you ever asked  
Why painters paint Landscapes?  
Is it possibly because  
It is a process of Reaching?  
Reaching for the sun,  
Light on the Sand, Grass, Trees  
And substance,  
The Nature of Rocks, Mountains, Clouds?  
Or is it simply for Self-Realization  
In Relation  
To Life Itself?*

—Ray Strong, 1971

“Have you ever asked yourself why writers write? Why readers read?” My second- and third-graders and I discussed this question in September 2004 as we created the rationale for painting, reading, and writing together that year. I had become acquainted with California landscape painter Ray Strong’s (1905–2006) poem some years earlier and was so touched by it that, years later, I sought it once again. This time, I used it to help my students and me navigate the recursive parallel processes of becoming artists by studying ourselves as readers and writers.

### LOOKING BACK FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE LEARNING

Let me offer a bit of background by saying that I had spent the latter part of the previous spring painting with accomplished local plein air (landscape) painters, and during this time, I became familiar with another aspect of Mr. Strong’s work—his painting. Throughout that year, I also further examined the relationship—both in and out of school—among the epistemologies of practice in the language arts, visual arts, and natural sciences. I found myself exploring, struggling, and coming to know in new and powerful ways how our learning can be conceived as expansive phenomena (Gutiérrez, Larson, Enciso, & Ryan,

2007), bridging the often disconnected and discrete social worlds inside and outside the classroom. This new awareness drove me to critically examine my conceptions of what constituted a school and schooling (Lemke, 2007). My intent was to rationalize in a formal way why it was in the best interest of my students and me to see the learning inside and outside the classroom as potentially supporting and transforming spaces.

Now, three years later, I address the data records of that year with the following questions and related explorations:

1. How can literacy practices developed in the classroom allow students to interact with and learn from adult members of their larger communities, and, what are the consequences? Related to this question, I explore a model of literacy practices that makes transparent the permeability of the overlapping borders between classrooms and larger communities.
2. Whose knowledge counts, how, when, where, and why? Related to this question, I reveal how my students and I conceived of the curriculum and classroom walls as permeable spaces, and how we moved within and across them.

In the following section, I refer to the *Roots and Routes* of my own development as a teacher-researcher. Upon this canvas, I sketch the conceptual underpinnings guiding my principles of practice, my analysis of the data, and the experiences presented. I develop a conceptual model showing how multiple literacy practices interact with multiple community spaces for learning.

Later, in a section I call *Strong Beginnings*, I employ telling cases (Mitchell, 1984) that reveal this model’s theoretical underpinnings in action. At La Patera, our South Coastal California school, my second- and third-grade students and I jointly

constructed ourselves as discipline-based explorers and our communities as multiple *texts to be read*. We became plein air artists, scientists, and social scientists, learning from each other and from California landscape painter, Ray Strong, who was at that time approaching the age of 100.

The data come from a year-long corpus of ethnographic records (video footage, student samples, and field notes). These data were collected by me, my teaching partner Judy Hug, and our 18 culturally and linguistically diverse students. Ten were boys, 8 girls; 9 were primary speakers of Spanish and bilingual in Spanish-English. Judy and I had been “job-sharing” since 1997; she works four days per week and I work one. In this article, I focus my analysis on the days when I was teaching—a thumbnail sketch of the larger study. That larger study documented the ways I supported students’ literacy development (and how they supported mine) across multiple community landscapes. As well as painting with artists, they collected oral histories from ranchers and three generations of Mexican groundskeepers at the Austin Val Verde Foundation ([www.austinvalverdefoundation.com](http://www.austinvalverdefoundation.com)). Grounded in an interactional ethnographic perspective (Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1995), this study reveals how drawing on theories from anthropology (Frake, 1977; Gumperz, 1986; Spradley, 1980), critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics (Fairclough, 1992; Ivanič, 1994), and literary theory (Bakhtin, 1986/1935) contributes to how we come to conceive of multiple communities as cultural landscapes and expansive spaces (Engeström, 1987; Gutiérrez, Larson, Enciso, & Ryan, 2007) for learning.

## ROOTS AND ROUTES OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Although as a child I voraciously devoured any and all available art experiences—in and out of school—as an adult, I had never viewed myself as an artist. But as I sat with the artists, looking closely, asking, mimicking, creating, trying, mixing, seeing, re-seeing, sharing, celebrating and protecting nature, I began to wonder about a parallel between those plein air painters and the writers and readers in my classroom. As I learned

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to paint alongside artist Whitney Abbott, she told me, “*Painting is learning*.” In that fleeting moment, what counted for her as a way of being in her art community began to open up for me. I conceptualized a parallel between the recursive relationship of writing and reading to learn and Whitney’s *painting is learning*.

She taught me something about landscape painting that I had already known to be true in my world of literacy development with my own students. As readers and writers, we interact with and learn from multiple texts (Bloome & Bailey, 1992; Fairclough, 1992; Ivanič, 1994) and media (Luke & Freebody, 2003; Kress, 2003), all the while being *with texts* (Floriani, 1993) and drawing on them as we formulate and reformulate new texts (Vygotsky, 1978). My deeply rooted and hidden passion for the visual arts finally emerged on the theoretical shoulders of my conceptions of literacy learning. I recognized something I had known, but left unexamined as a teacher-researcher.

At the same time, it frightened me to realize I had not been integrating my own passions for the visual arts developed outside of the school to inform my classroom practice. In earlier years, when I had engaged my students in developing themselves as artists, it had been from an in-school academic perspective. Why was it that, although I knew becoming an artist was much more than what happens in school, I had not made it part of my scholarly focus as a teacher-researcher? I was no longer satisfied with the obvious answer—that my district’s standardized expectations were ceilings or obstacles. Although a reality for us as teachers, it is not the *only* reality. As I struggled to harmonize my own artistic passions for writing and the visual arts, I came to believe it was my responsibility to act upon this understanding with my second- and third-grade students.

I wanted to afford my students opportunities to view their own out-of-school home lives and the work of everyday people as funds of knowledge and potentially academic ways of knowing (Moll, 1994; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Likewise, I wanted to guide students in how to draw upon these funds in order to develop and craft a grounded theory of



and for community-based learning. I wanted my students to see how they simultaneously exist in multiple social worlds, and to place these multiple worlds side-by-side in order to facilitate learning among them (Bateson, 1994). This process would, I hoped, help us talk into being (SBCDG, 1992a & 1992b; Castanheira, Green, Dixon, & Yeager, 2007) a pedagogy and curriculum for being and becoming inside and outside the classroom.

Before going on, I need to offer a caveat. I fear that the potential contribution of this article to school and university researchers may be masked by the linear approach in which it is written. This is not a “how-to” approach explaining how to create the same experience. Instead, it is a “how-to” for thinking about learning from our own disjunctures and struggles; a “how-to” for integrating our own passions to inform and scaffold for youngsters the sorts of professionals they might become. I ask you to imagine two narratives, one that navigates that year’s experiences and the other that weaves together my understandings of them. I will pause along the way to reflect on how we (the teacher-researcher and his students) were transformed together during our journey to discover who we were, what we knew, and who we could become.

### Navigating Communities, Developing Literacies

My theoretical and pedagogical perspective has its *roots* and *routes* in my history with two professional communities: The Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (SBCDG, 1992a & 1992b) and the National Writing Project (Lieberman & Wood, 2003; NWP & Nagin, 2006). As a member of the SBCDG, I grew up teaching (Schoonmaker, 2002) and inquiring into my classroom practices. I learned to *see* learning (Yeager, Floriani, & Green, 1998), recognizing the roles teachers’ and students’ discourses play in shaping the kinds of cultures our classrooms could become. Given that we jointly construct particular classroom lives and cultural practices, I learned to ask myself what sort of classroom life and culture we, as teachers, want to create with our students. I learned to argue why we as teachers must enable ourselves and our students to interact with and learn from the multiple discourse communities of school, home, and the cities in which we live. From a writing perspec-

tive, I also learned that we must see these communities as spaces for literacy learning and resources for academic and social action.

As a teacher-researcher that year, I found myself straddling various worlds, among them two whose philosophical stances had grown apart (Goodlad, 1994; Lemke, 2007). One of them was the privileged world of graduate school, where eventually I became a director of research at a local university. The other was the beleaguered, pre-scripted world of the public school, where I taught one day a week in a combined second- and third-grade classroom. Despite tensions in expectations between the university’s knowledge-generating stance and the school’s high-stakes testing demands, Judy and I decided that engaging our students to develop academic identities as members of art and

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science communities was necessary if we were to nurture their intellectual lives. By drawing upon various communities, we hoped to avoid the disjuncture and separation that youngsters experience between school and home life. As Comber (1998) reminded us:

*“The separation of home, school, and life literacies signals a major problem for schooling in general and literacy education in particular. We continue to see those worlds as discrete and unfortunately some young people experience them as having nothing to do with each other.”* (Comber, 1998)

Although we can view ourselves as natives to those worlds whose borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987; Franquíz, 1999) we discursively navigate (Frake, 1977), we may oftentimes experience one world as having nothing to do with the other. But what if we could see these borders that separate the worlds (this nexus) as an expansive and transformative space for expanded notions of literacy learning?

Franquíz (1999) drew on Anzaldúa’s (1987, 1993) conceptualization of *Nepántla*, a Náhuatl word meaning a non-physical state of in-betweenness. People create *Nepántla* as they navigate between and across borders. *Nepántla* describes the transformative nature of what happens for individuals as they simultaneously shape and are shaped by their environments. Across

the overlapping spaces where students and community-based members live and work, they struggle with complex ideas, experiences, and issues. For example, in the context of a fifth-grade classroom learning about the Holocaust, Franquíz (1999) showed how students assisted each other in navigating the complex terrain of these social issues and how they applied understandings of inequity and racism to their everyday lives.

Scholarly work, focused on examining the mismatches and clashes in cultural expectations between home and school (Delpit, 1996; Dyson, 1993; Dyson et al., 1995; Lin, 2005; Luke & Freebody, 2003; Moll, 1994; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), shows us ways to understand, explain, and mitigate the mismatches we experience firsthand in our everyday work with youngsters and their families. We become aware of the interrelated and influencing forces of communities of practice as resources. However, accounting for and drawing upon these resources for our practices is a daunting task in our climate of high-stakes testing and “one size fits all” approaches for children, families, teachers, and communities that are not all one size. Judy and I decided that what counted as school for our students needed to expand to accommodate a view that schooling and learning take place within and across our multiple communities (Lemke, 2007). We wanted to break

open the notion that school is a fixed place where all learning takes place. We shared our developing perspective with our principal and our students’ parents, arguing its importance, and they supported us.

### Cultural Landscapes for Learning

Figure 1 illustrates cultural landscapes and their overlapping borders; within those overlaps, students’ literate practices inside the classroom enable them to interact with and learn from the multiple literacies and practices of members outside the classroom. For example, classroom members learn to become artists by unpacking what counts as visual art (Lin, 2005), in particular plein air painting, as they paint and see their school playground in new ways. Students then interact with and learn from professional artists, drawing on interdisciplinary approaches within visual arts, social science, and the natural sciences. As they interview and learn from these more experienced members of the disciplines, they further define, refine, and expand their mediating practices of inquiring, writing, painting, and so on by coming to understand their own practices in relationship to those of others—in this case, professional landscape painters.

Further, because students’ practices are situated within their classrooms, homes, and communities, they are both learning to *be with texts* in particular ways within and across these particular landscapes (Floriani, 1993) and consequentially using these contextual literacy experiences as potential texts and resources for future learning. So, when students embark on their explorations outside of their school settings, and when they interact with painters, museum curators, groundskeepers, and parents, they are interacting with others’ particular ways of being with the texts of their respective cultural landscapes.

### STRONG BEGINNINGS: IMAGES THAT REFLECT TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEYS

In early September, as the new academic year approached, I struggled to find a rationale for bringing the visual arts into the classroom. One sleepless

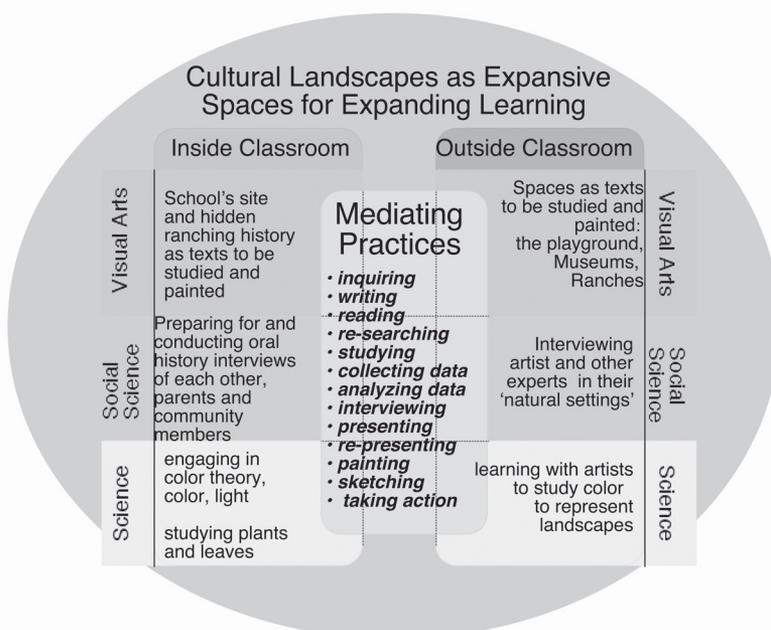


Figure 1. Bridging home & in-class cultural landscapes to navigate learning outside the physical classroom boundaries

Sunday night at 2 a.m., my argument took form: I would have the students revisit their inquiry journals where they listed their actions as readers and writers. I would ask them to explore the parallels between how readers read and writers write and how landscape painters see, compose, and paint. We would then create a complementary list of what artists do: *paint, think, look, re-look, mess up, color, use materials*. I brought into the classroom six of Ray Strong's landscape paintings owned by family friends. As we assumed the role of readers of the paintings, I asked the students to think of the paintings as a story a writer might tell, using the medium of color à la plein air. I demonstrated to the students how to render sketches of the paintings by looking closely at content, composition, and color. I even brought paintings of my kitchen that I had been working on. Students and I lay on our bellies, studying and examining Ray Strong's works (see Photo 1). After about five minutes, some students began to grow restless. Suddenly, an amazing "rich point" (Agar, 1995) for learning emerged:

**Jessica:** *This is hard, I can't draw this.*

**Mr. Córdoba:** *Yes, remember that good work is sometimes hard to do. We have to work hard.*

**Kaylie:** *Mr. C., how long did it take Ray Strong to do those [paintings]?*

**Mr. Córdoba:** *He took hours, sometimes even days to complete paintings. Some of his paintings are still not done.*

**Campbell:** *How long did it take you to do your painting?*



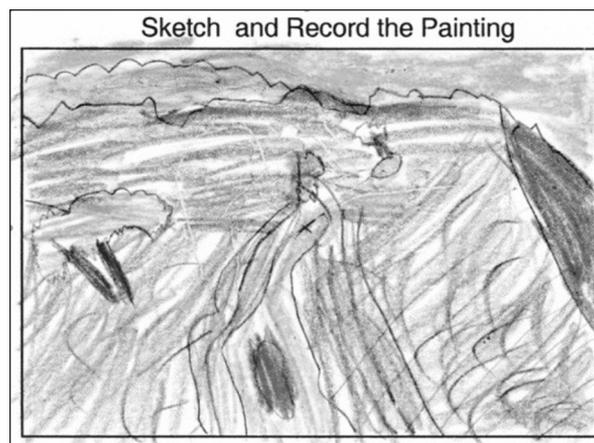
**Photo 1.** Second- and third-grade students study the landscape paintings as "mentor texts" of the artist's craft.

**Mr. Córdoba:** *I've been working on that painting since July, and I am still not done. I can only paint for about a two-hour period, but the light changes and then I have to stop. I'm still working on it.*

**Sergio:** *Wow! We have to get working!*

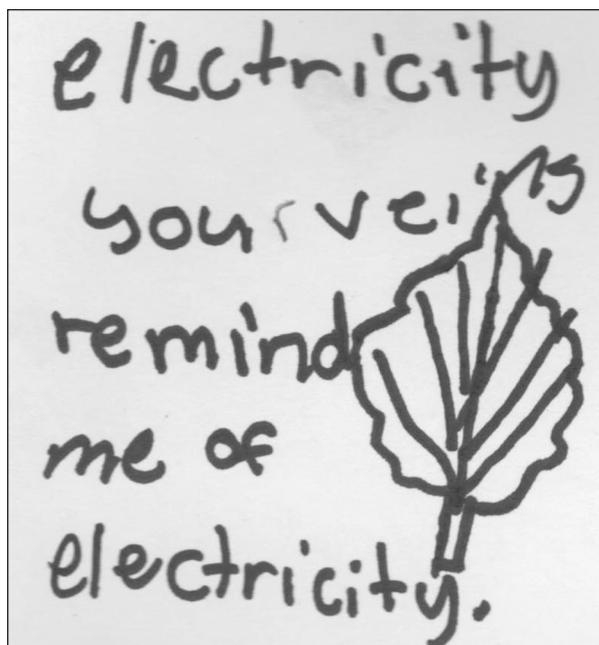
After that short interchange, there was only the hum of students talking to each other about the Ray Strong paintings before them. The students worked with each other while simultaneously interacting with the paintings as texts to be read.

About an hour later, students began to finish. They shared the similes they had written based on the paintings. Weaving texts together and reformulating new texts as they noticed, sketched, talked, and struggled to understand, they interpreted the paintings through writing. I was stunned to see how some used metaphor or simile to describe the paintings (see Photo 2).



**Photo 2.** Saville writes, "The painting is like a road. I can see that cars have been there."

Meanwhile, in life science studies, we were learning to become scientists who engaged in artistic practices through observing scientific goings-on in our everyday lives. In October, as we prepared to enter our landscape to paint it, I wanted students to look at the everyday objects found on an ordinary walk in our park. As students walked, they discussed what they saw, choosing an object whose contours they would then study more closely in class. We learned a variety of contour-sketching techniques by examining our found objects and writing about them (see Photo 3).



**Photo 3.** Making ordinary things extraordinary using inquiry about the particulars of a leaf

When Arturo used the electricity metaphor to describe a leaf, he used a resource from our classroom history—Saville’s earlier “the painting is like a road” simile. As teachers and students, we are shaped by and embedded in our textualized histories (Bloome & Bailey, 1992). By stopping and noticing, we began to see the often taken-for-granted, ordinary places of our lives as potential sites and metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) for extraordinary learning. Writing and reading literacy practices became mediating tools for learning as we navigated the cultural landscapes outside of the classroom and saw our park and leaves with the eyes of artists and scientists.

The following week, we began to explore our playground overlooking La Patera Ranch. Most of my students did not know that our school was actually part of the historic California land grant Rancho La Goleta, of which La Patera Ranch was a part. Our ordinary 1960s school within an ordinary 1960s subdivision of homes had a hidden history. Could we create a cultural landscape for learning by considering an ordinary place extraordinary? We used our medium (ordinary wax crayons) and learned how to make new colors.

While the students were combining wax primary color pigments in order to create secondary and tertiary colors, one student, Jonathan, made visible a powerful insight:

*Ah,  
that’s why  
my kindergarten teachers  
made us mix those colors  
we were supposed  
to learn about the color wheel*

Jonathan’s use of language to unfold his understanding is powerful. He embodied the idea of making the ordinary extraordinary through the everyday language of the classroom. This new context had tapped into Jonathan’s previous experience as a kindergarten and helped him to understand it in a new way. His intertextual (Floriani, 1993) reference to his kindergarten experiences brought together the experiences of the past by textualizing (Bloome & Bailey, 1992), in the moment, experiences of the present. In doing so, he was also making an inter-contextual (Floriani, 1993) link by using the previously unexamined making of color wheels in his past as a source for new learning. In the context of creating and theorizing the interacting roles of colors, he made spaces for learning for self and others.

This close-up study of language and the work that language-in-use accomplishes gives us insights into student learning. As teachers, we can learn from paying attention to the particular moments that constitute our classroom histories. We can facilitate the use of a metadiscursive language to help students engage firsthand in the social practices of making connections among and between experiences. By doing so, we see the powerful role that discourses and contexts play as students co-construct new meanings using language as a resource for learning.

In Figure 2, we see the literacy practices and repertoires that were formulated, situated, and jointly constructed in each setting. These experiences then enabled members to reformulate, recontextualize, and expand practices as mediating tools so they could subsequently enter progressively unfolding spaces and experiences. Years earlier, a former third-grade student, Graham, taught me to think about the initial actions constructed in the classroom like a stone dropped into a pool of water, whose ever-expanding reach informs, shapes, and is shaped by subsequent experiences.

As represented in Figure 2, the consequentially progressing (Wink & Putney, 2002) actions of students and teachers are shown across overlapping and expanding communities.

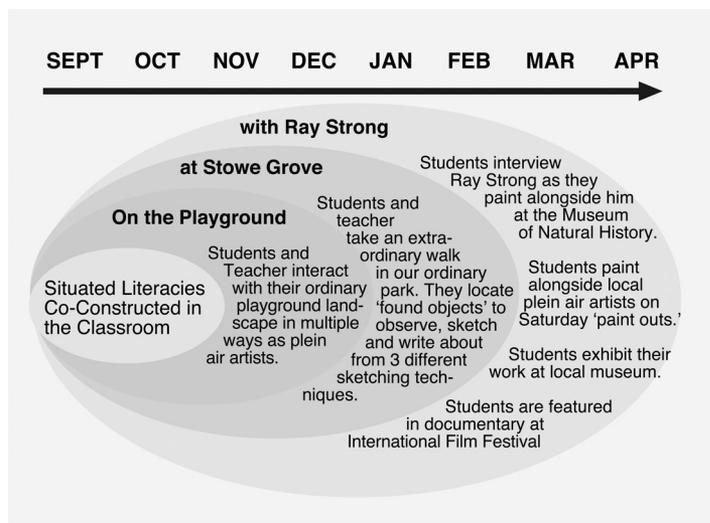


Figure 2. Interacting cultural landscapes as expanding texts to be read



We entered our playground with new eyes and found places to sit and study the hills of La Patera Ranch. Our ordinary school materials in hand (white construction paper taped onto slates, pencils, and wax crayons), we chatted about what we were seeing and then got busy creating representations as plein air artists. Students would later draw on these initial representations as they explored a new medium—acrylic paints. I explained to them that moving between media was like moving between pencils and pens in our writing. Later, using the acrylic paints, they took their time to find that just-right scene to paint, preparing their canvases, sketching contours, and then beginning the process of capturing images with pigments and brushstrokes (see Photo 4). We



Photo 4. Miguel is filling in the details of his landscape in the way a writer develops details in a story.

knew these were preliminary studies for us. We were making just one stop on this year-long journey toward becoming artists.

## Navigating from Our Classroom and School into the Broader Community

In the weeks that followed, students learned more about Ray Strong’s life. In particular, they were inspired when they learned that he, too, was 8 years old when he first began to paint. He had been ill and stayed home from school. To keep him occupied, his mother encouraged him to copy his grandmother’s paintings, which hung on the walls. I pointed out to them that, much as Ray Strong had done, they, too, were beginning their work as artists at an early age by studying paintings. Then a local conservancy group, Vanishing Landscapes ([www.calhum.org/programs/story\\_homeland.htm](http://www.calhum.org/programs/story_homeland.htm)), invited us to participate in the film documentary they were making about Ray Strong’s life and how to become stewards of the land. We would have the opportunity to paint with him at the Museum of Natural History in December. As we prepared for the events, students generated questions using the factual nuances they had been learning in class, like: “*What medium did you first use? Have you always been a plein air painter? What do you think of kids painting? What is your favorite place to paint?*” Composing their questions, drawing on the oral history genre they used to learn about someone’s lived experiences, helped us prepare for our meeting with him later.

On December 7, 2004, students arrived at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. We were originally to paint en plain air at the creek nearby, but the rain, much like Ray’s illness at age 8, kept us indoors. We spent some time having lunch with Ray, his friends, and the students’ families. Soon after, the students entered the Bird Hall and took seats in front of the beautiful bird dioramas that he had painted in the 1960s. As artists, students were to study, engage with, and then begin to represent the dioramas in acrylics on their own canvases. Although I was struck by the students’ ease as they quickly sat down and began to use the materials (brushes, canvases, pencils, acrylics, and water), I was not completely surprised when they demonstrated competence and comfort with the instruments and media. Later, while meeting with Ray Strong and receiving his critique of their work, each student asked the

artist questions in order to collect his oral history (see Photo 5).

Perhaps the most striking impression for me was how these young artists were able to paint alongside a Master Artist on the eve of his Centennial. A parent asked me about this event's significance later, and I told her it was as if I were an elementary school teacher in the early 1900s in Giverny, France, and my students were painting with French Impressionist Claude Monet (1840–1926) who recognized their potential as artists. As ordinary as we are as people, when we take up the opportunities we are afforded, we can create extraordinary beauty and emerge transformed.

On the drive back to school, Kaycie and other students in the car were playing the game “*I spy with my little eye, something that looks like . . .*,” so I joined in the fun. Kaycie said, “Mr. Córdova, I spy with my little eye something that looks blue and purple but is really green.” I was stumped. She finally told me it was the mountains in the far distance. I asked her to tell me more and she replied that I should have guessed easily “because the mountains look like that when we paint them but up close they are really brown and green.” Bakhtin (1986) argues:

*Sooner or later what is heard and actively understood will find its response in the subsequent speech or behavior of the listener. In most cases, genres of complex cultural communication are intended precisely for this kind of actively responsive understanding with delayed action.*



**Photo 5.** Young painters interact with and learn from a Master Artist and ask him questions about his life.

*Everything that we have said here also pertains to written and read speech, with the appropriate adjustments and additions.* (p. 60)

Viewed in this way, Kaycie's discourse signaled her understanding of how painters represent the atmospheric gases, something we had been learning to do. Our eyes interpret far away green and brown mountains as purple and blue. Her conceptual and applied knowledge about painting had made its way into an everyday children's guessing game. She demonstrated expertise in using knowledge developed in one setting to construct her riddle in another.

The opportunities to paint with and learn from Ray Strong made public our developing abilities. It also gave us the courage to approach other landscape painters. We asked my artist friends, Whitney Abbott and colleagues, to join us, and they invited my students to come paint with them. Later in the year, our work was featured in the 2005 Santa Barbara International Film Festival as *Vanishing Landscapes: Students Study Strong*. This film highlighted their work as young painters, learning from 100-year-old Ray Strong to see their local landscapes in new ways and to preserve nature. The culmination of our plein air work and field studies was an exhibit of student work, mounted with Ray's, at Casa de La Guerra, a local historic state museum. Later, the students would be invited to a preview of an exhibit about Ray's life works at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. When I asked the students why on earth a museum of natural history would showcase a man's visual art, Anthony said: “I know, I know! Ray Strong is old and he has made a lot of paintings of nature and people want to see them.”

The museum's desire to celebrate Ray's centennial by showcasing a historical record of his works seemed obvious to me. What was not, of course, was Anthony's deep insight into how we could see Ray's works as constituting an artifactual representation of an artist's life and accomplishments, as well as a piece of natural history. Much, much later, Anthony and another student, Campbell, would co-present with me at that very museum, addressing museum collections curators from across the United States. We presented our model for how students and museums can develop partnerships beyond the standard docent tours and how our schools and museums could be viewed as cultural landscapes for learning. Students were now acting as professionals, disseminating their

scholarly investigations as co-experts with older scholars in the field.

### Taking Another Look at Our Learning

As teachers, we must realize that professionals are not people our students will one day become when they grow up. On the contrary, we are always *becoming*, and every experience afforded them in and out of our classrooms contributes to the professionals they have the potential to become. In our company, they develop views of professionals. They begin to see possibilities, to assess which disciplines they might join and which are not accessible to them. We must see that discipline-based knowledge and discourses are not solely relegated to the outside world, perceived by students as spaces where only adult professionals and members of disciplines do their work. Rather, we can actively engage our students in developing particular discipline-based discourses and knowledge in the everyday, situated, and face-to-face life of our classrooms. Learning to see learning expand within and across our multiple communities as cultural landscapes is a powerful awakening, but it is not enough. By making the ordinary extraordinary and studying the tell-

tale signs in our discourse that signal changes in understandings, we can learn to see classrooms and community resources as spaces whose overlapping borders can be navigated in purposeful ways, ways that mutually support learning within and across boundaries. When we travel back and forth across these spaces of in-betweenness, we can all emerge transformed. Second-grader Saville's end-of-the-year essay on becoming an artist in a community of artists (see Figure 3) confirms the importance of affording students opportunities to engage in and struggle with complex ideas. They are learning how to talk and write about what they have learned so as never to forget who it is they are becoming.

So, have you ever asked yourself why painters paint, writers and readers write and read? Why teachers teach? We do it because we are reaching. We reach across spaces for substance and sustenance. We understand our self-realization only in realizing the lived experiences of others. As members of multiple communities, we can learn to reach across spaces and peoples like we reach across familiar and unfamiliar books, navigating complex terrains and emerging transformed. It is possible that my second- and third-graders and I showed each other how this is accomplished.

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In class as artists we did lots of fun artwork like our color weeks, drawing/writing what we did as artists. We got to do artwork outside too. We got to paint at La Poloma Ranch, the Natural History museum, and other places. We got to learn about and see a lot of other artists including Ray Strong. Becoming an artist means you have to practice a lot to get good at it. You have to practice with colors and practice with brushstrokes and more than that. I like doing art and watching other people do art. I have learned a lot about art like colors, sketching, observing and coloring. Now maybe I'll will do more art. I think it is important that people do art. Because when you do art you are painting what it looks then. Then when it changes you can see what it looked like before and never forget.

Figure 3. Inscribing ourselves as artists in community essays

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