

## “We were slow; it was challenging” and “It was hard not to make knots”: Crocheting as a Literacy Event in a Second Grade Classroom Community

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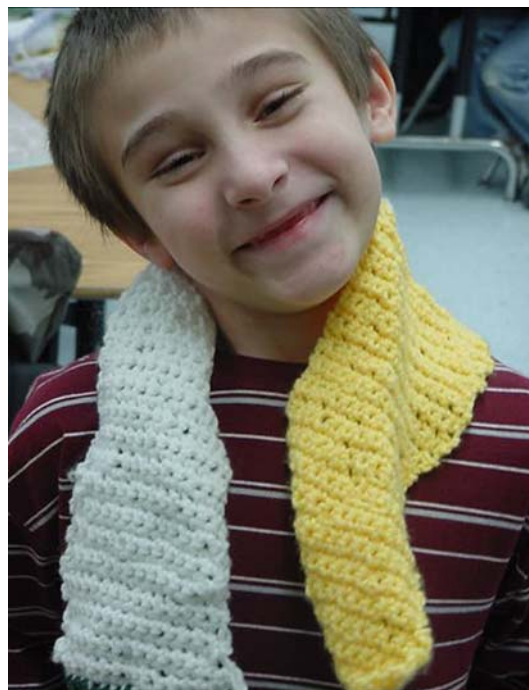
**Abstract** This paper describes a “crazy about crocheting class” and shows how crocheting became a literacy event that promoted student empowerment and classroom community while engaging second grade students in authentic literacy practices. We document how crocheting evolved from a classroom management activity that also encouraged fine motor skills to a stimulus that drove individual and shared reading and writing. We show how this teacher planned instruction by building on student interest and enthusiasm and how these students experienced literacy as an every day social practice.

**Keywords** Crocheting · Literacy as social practice · Student empowerment · Classroom community

It is a hot day and students cheer as they assemble for opening ceremonies on this school field day organized to celebrate the end of the year. The school is divided into four teams and a class from each grade is represented on each team. Red, blue, white, and green masses swarm under a pavilion to commence the day’s festivities. Each class is assigned a color: matching colored t-shirts, visors, or necklaces. On June 15, 2007 a solitary green flag is swung above the heads of the green team. The creator is Tom, a second grade student who is proudly swinging it in

the air. It is a two-tone granny square flag he crocheted. His cheering class rallies around Tom wearing their crocheted headbands, necklaces, and wristbands. They are Sarah (Macchiano) Kneller’s second graders: the crocheting class (see picture 18).

The summer before her second year of teaching Sarah read *Starting from Scratch*, an autobiographical ethnography of Levy’s (1996) classroom. One activity Levy described was teaching his fourth grade students to knit. The muscle control needed to hold a needle seemed like an exciting way to have students develop their fine motor



**Picture 1** A boy modeling the scarf he crocheted p. 4

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skills. Such an activity seemed suitable for second grade. Sarah wanted to promote fine motor development while engaging her second graders in a read aloud at the end of the day as students waited for their buses to be called. She also wanted to ground student learning in concrete experiences, and this seemed a starting point.

Sarah had never knitted but she had crocheted. Concluding that the two were similar enough, she arranged for hooks and yarn and wove “learning to crochet” lessons into her planning. As the year progressed, crocheting evolved from an end of the day classroom management activity to crocheting and related activities that occurred throughout the day. These activities provided opportunities to apply literacy skills while problem solving resource and design issues.

This paper details the relationship these second graders developed with crocheting. “It’s my 2ed [sic] best hobbie. I LOVE CROCHETING.” and “I didn’t like crocheting. I hated it, now I love it.”

#### Literature Review

“We teach people to crochet!!!” (Rebecca, shared writing, March 21, 2007)

The notion that literacy can empower students is not a new one (Freire 1970). To function in society today you need to be able to read. But it is not the ability to read that empowers, it is what we do with that ability (Finn 1999; Smith 2004). To understand what we do with the ability to read and write, we must examine reading and writing within the social structures in which they are embedded. Viewing literacy as a social practice highlights the situated nature of literacy and recognizes that people do different things with literacy in different social and cultural contexts (see edited volumes, Barton et al. 1999; Maybin 1994). Connecting school reading and writing to literacy practices—what people do with literacy—can show students how their literacy practices impact their community and their place within it, and thus motivate and empower students. When students read “the world and the word” (Freire 1994) they experience critical (McLaughlin and DeVoogd 2004) or powerful literacy (Finn 1999).

Literacy events are regular, repeated activities where literacy has a role (Barton et al. 1999). When we think of literacy events where world and word intersect we are likely to think of technology (see Luke 1997) or popular culture (see Alverman and Hong Xu 2003). Certainly crocheting does not spring immediately to mind. But student-initiated activities associated with their crocheting needs were the force driving how and when the second grade classroom curriculum was taught, and through crocheting the students were empowered.

Meaningful learning occurs when it is connected to what we need and are interested in exploring. For this reason,

educational theorists, researchers and practitioners advocate literacy practices that are embedded in real life activities and connected with content. Project based learning (Levy 1996) is centered around thematic based concrete activities that the children experience and know. Like unit instruction (see, for example, literacy across content: Alvermann 2006; thematic instruction: Manning and Manning 1994; Learning by design and differentiated instruction: Tomlinson and McTighe 2006) it seeks to avoid fragmentation of subject matter and to integrate learning across the curriculum. Instead of reliance on prepared textbooks and learning kits and the expectation that teachers will cover vast areas of content, the focus is on “drawing out” (p. 13) from the students what literacy activities are relevant and thus to engender internally motivated experiences that students understand, remember and will continue to apply in real life situations.

Not all instructional decisions, however, are made with awareness of the big picture of pedagogical practice. Elementary teachers routinely plan particular activities to foster particular academic and/or physical development. Becoming proficient with handwriting is a basic developmental objective for second graders. Including crocheting in the second grade curriculum promotes the fine motor development needed for the pincer grip used to hold the pencil to write (Rule and Stewart 2002). Since research suggests a relationship between poor handwriting and a negative orientation to literacy in general (Graham and Harris 2006; Dunsmuir and Blatchford 2004), it is good teaching practice to provide students with engaging opportunities to further develop appropriate motor skills. However, when an activity is owned by students and extends throughout the curriculum, more than the basic developmental objective is addressed. Such was the case



**Picture 2** Mrs. Kneller helping a student learn to crochet on the first day pp. 4, 6

with crocheting in this second grade classroom; they “learned different things” (Sammy, shared writing, March 21, 2007) in the process.

Research site: “The Crazy about Crocheting class” (Allen, class discussion, March 28, 2007)

Sarah’s classroom is in a rural district in Central New York State. The public school houses 417 students, grades Pre-K—5, and the average class size is 20 students. Ninety-nine per cent of the students enrolled are white and 32% of students receive free or reduced lunches (New York state school report card report 2006).

This research was conducted during the 2006–2007 school year, Sarah’s second year of teaching. For both years she taught the same grade. There were 20 second graders in Sarah’s class; most were from lower middle class white backgrounds. There were nine boys and eight girls. There was some movement throughout the year, three students left and one joined the classroom.

Data Collection: “Bobby taught me to make necklaces, bracelets and rings. Bobby changed my mind [about crocheting].” (Cody, class discussion, March 28, 2007)

The rich data bank for this study includes student classroom artifacts such as shared group writing (see, for example, picture 19 things we have learned by crocheting), individual student writing (see, for example, picture 4 student business letter, pictures 5, 6 sample journals, picture 17 thank you card, and pictures 7–9 Hook responsibility letters), class publications (pictures 10 and 11 crochet letter book) and photographs (pictures 1–3, 12–16 students crocheting and students with completed projects). Our data bank also includes teaching artifacts such as lesson plans, a list of instructional materials including



**Picture 3** Students practice chaining on the first day of crocheting pp. 4, 6

read alouds (chapter books were at the end of the day, figure books were integrated into instructional time throughout the day: see Appendix A for each list of books) and independent reading book bin materials, and Sarah’s journal. Sarah also kept a file of anything related to the afghan-crocheting project (for example, web-site print outs, her monthly calendars sheets). Parent surveys were also conducted to capture the degree to which students were involved in crocheting at home.

Data Analysis: “We’ve learned how to make presents with yarn.” (Charlie, shared writing, March 21, 2007)

We constructed a timetable of events to trace the sequence and extent to which crocheting became a part of this second grade classroom activities (see Table 1 below). For example, read alouds and independent reading book bin materials selections evolved not only to extend crocheting knowledge (particular informational texts were specifically selected) but also to provide models of literacy practices such as letter writing (the students wrote business letters to local stores and thank you letters to volunteers). We also documented ways in which crocheting directly led to literacy practices. This included recording, for example, the frequency and context for student writing about crocheting (both unsolicited references in student journals and teacher directed activities such as shared writing about how to solve the problem of broken hooks). We noted to what extent these literacy practices were examples of critical literacy, that is, related to life skills and reading the world.

Findings: “As soon as I lerend I thoght it might be relaxng. I was right...” (Rosie, journal writing, March 29, 2007)

Crocheting activities supported classroom learning and classroom management. The roles that crocheting played are described below as separate phases but at times they intertwined.

### Crocheting Project Timeline

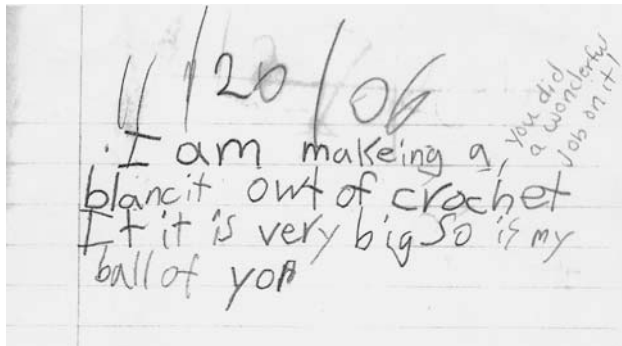
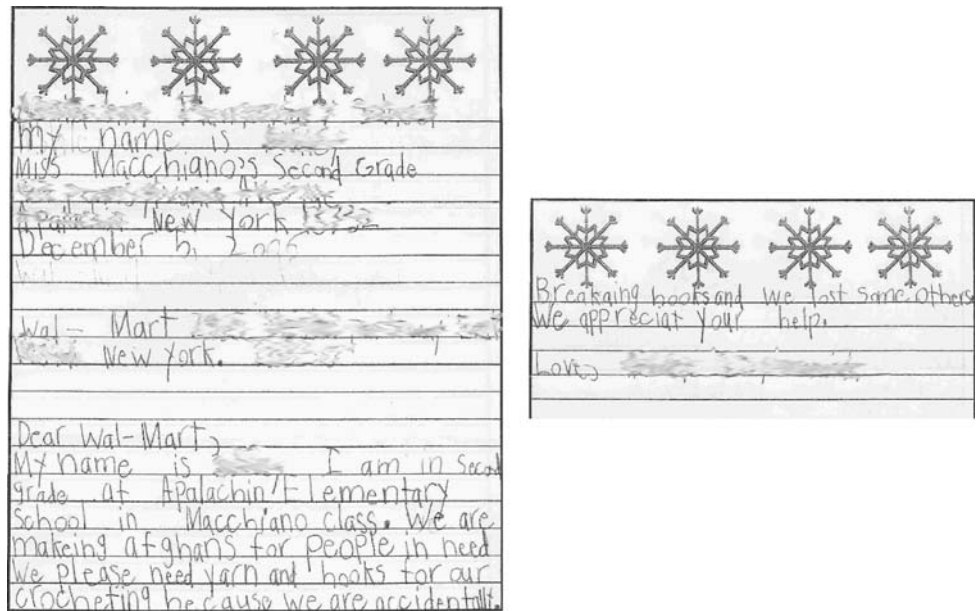
This timeline provides a sense of how these second graders embraced crocheting and generated crocheting-related literacy practices to address classroom community needs. Crocheting evolved from an add-on activity to a central literacy event.

Phase One: Learning to Crochet “It was hard not to make knots” (Emma, class discussion, March 28, 2007)

Crocheting became the focus of the last 30 min of class time for the month of September. For the first week, Mrs.



**Picture 4** Donation letter, front and back p. 4



**Picture 5** Student journal entry from 11/20/06 pp. 4, 6, 9

Gardner the school secretary and avid crocheter, Mrs. Gardner (a pseudonym as are all the names in this paper), traveled the last half hour of the day to Sarah's classroom to crochet with the 17 second grade students. They worked together; she taught and modeled as Sarah provided individual help with the mechanics of crocheting. Soon news spread that Mrs. Kneller's second grade class was crocheting and neighboring teachers and grandmothers volunteered to help. Eleven community volunteers participated at various times in the yearlong crocheting project (pictures 2, 3). The students were excited to show what they were working on.

After "chaining" a small ball of yarn, the students unraveled their work and, "We learned the second row." By October, Sarah reduced crocheting time to the last 15 min of the day, but added it as an optional center and as an activity to be selected when class work was completed, for example after math or Buddy Study (Fountas and Pinnell 2006). Students also chose to crochet during indoor recess time. "It is addicting." In fact, it was so popular that

when Sarah shared a journal clipping about "Warm up America" (American Educator 2006, p. 4) where people could donate patches or afghans to make a difference, the students decided to make a class afghan to donate. Crocheting started to show up in journals. A total of 29 journal entries between December and March included crocheting. During journal writing, the students can write about whatever they choose. They are given a topic idea to help get started if they are stuck. The 29 journal entries are a reflection of the growing importance of crocheting within the students lives. One such entry read, "I am making a blancit owt of crochet" (see picture 5).

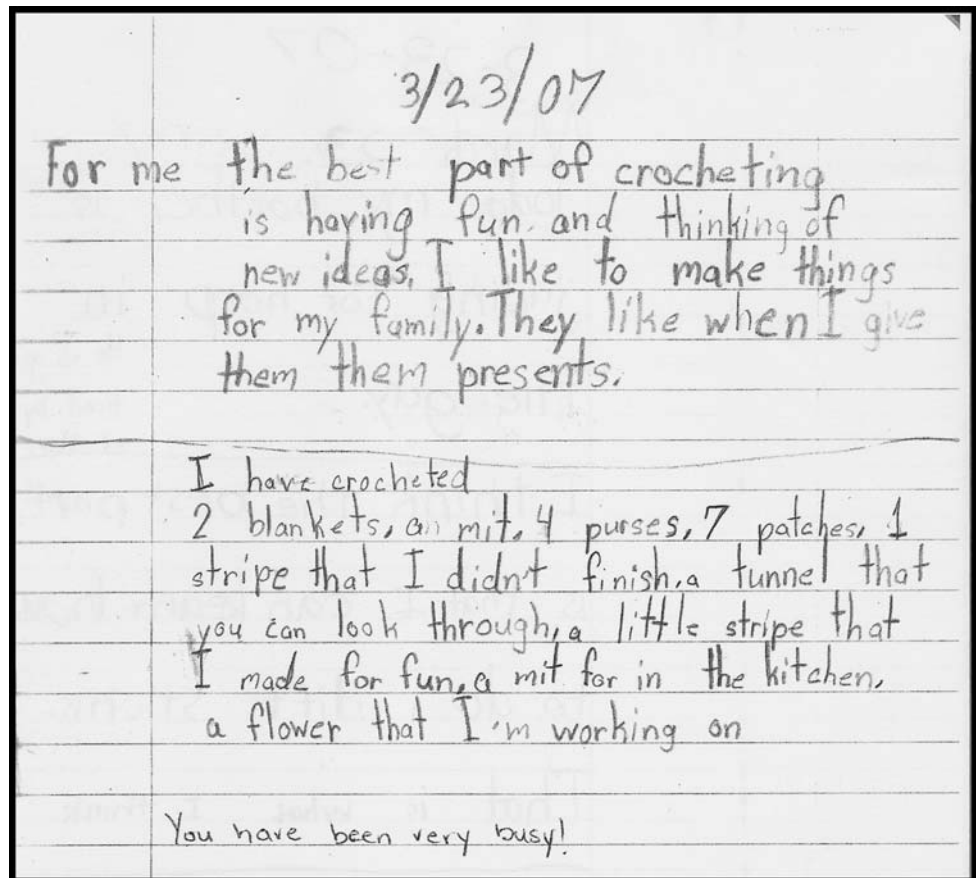
Sarah's students chatted as they crocheted, "I talk about crocheting when I crochet because I like to crochet" (Charlie's journal, March 28, 2007) and Sarah and her volunteers supported individual students as needed. Students helped each other; there was a huge range in student proficiency, and those students who practiced at home progressed more quickly.

Phase Two: Parallel activity during read aloud: "I'd teach my sister to crochet but she'd rather play on the computer or wath T.V."

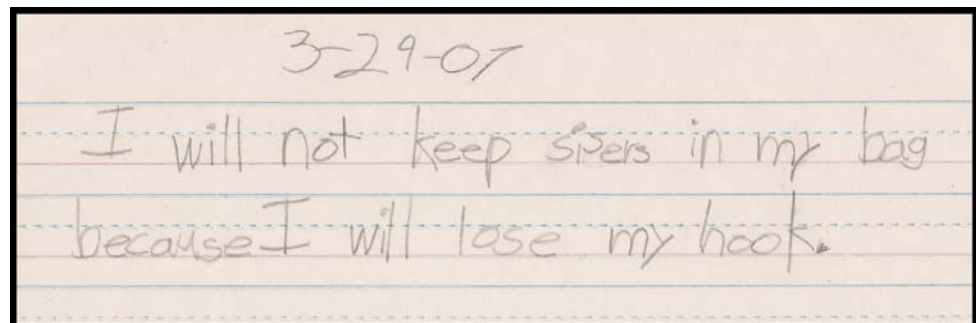
Rosie, journal writing, March 29, 2007)

By late December, these second graders were sufficiently independent for Sarah to read aloud to them while they crocheted. For 15 min at the end of the day, Sarah read chapter books such as *The Tale of Desperaux* (DiCamillo 2003) and *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis 1950). These chapter books were selected to entertain, not chosen with crocheting in mind. By this time crocheting was becoming a part of the classroom culture and the students needed

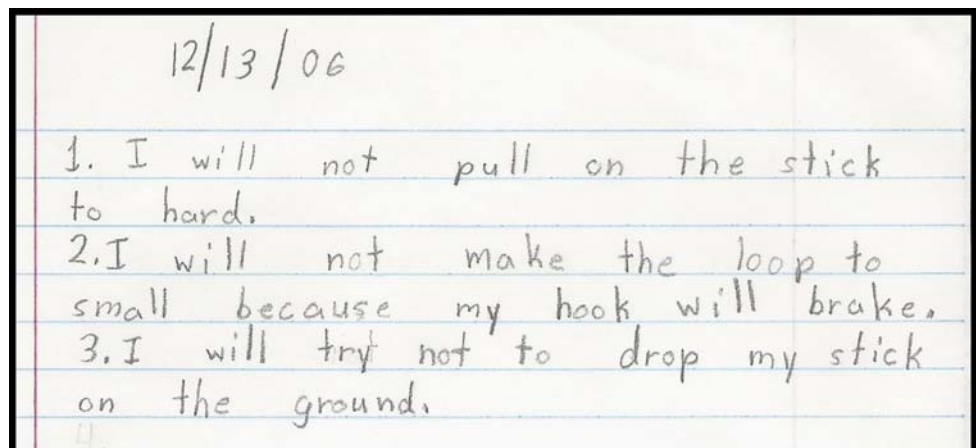
**Picture 6** Student journal entry from March 23, 2007 pp. 4, 9, 10



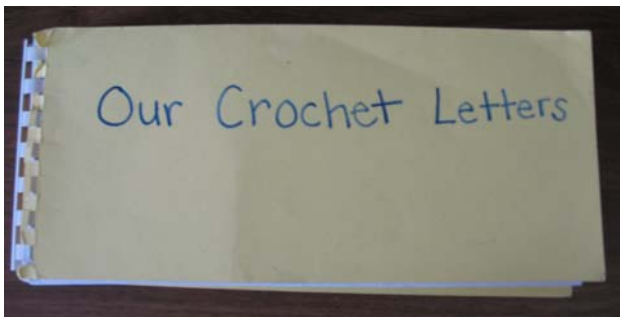
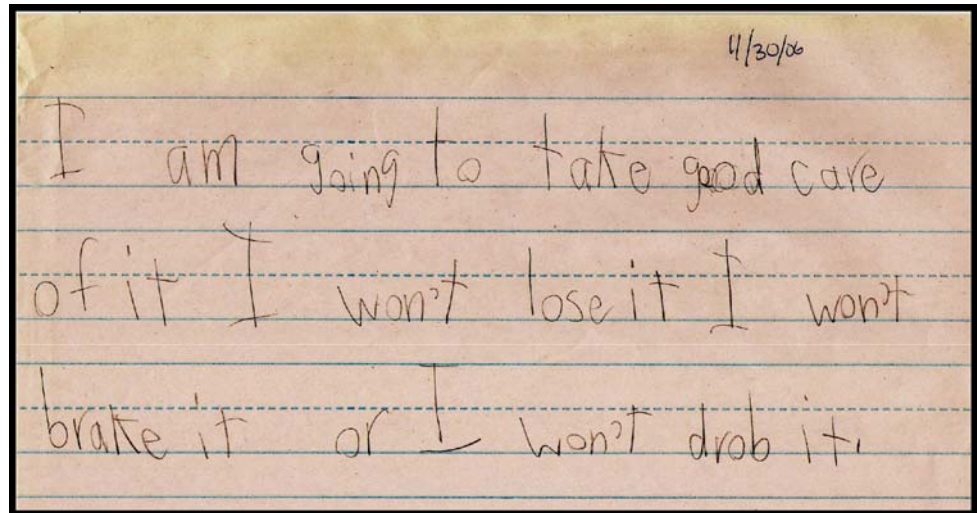
**Picture 7** Hook responsibility letter, March 29, 2007 pp. 4, 7, 10



**Picture 8** Hook responsibility letter, December 13, 2006 pp. 4, 10

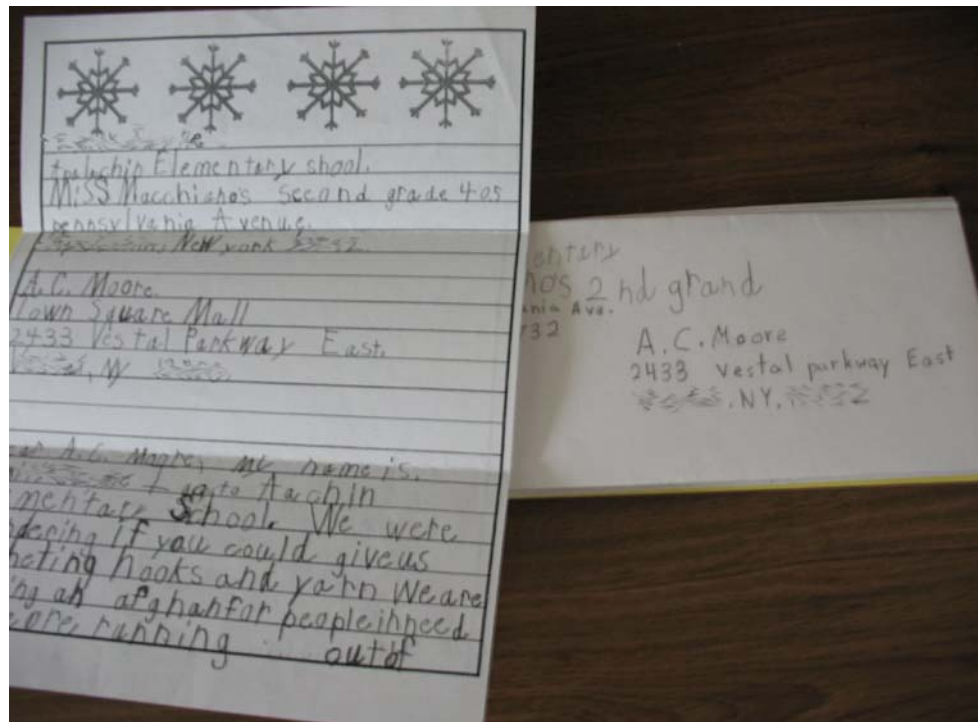


**Picture 9** Hook responsibility letter, November 30, 2006 pp. 4, 10



**Picture 10** Our crochet letters class book made of business letters to craft stores looking for donations. This was inspired by The Jolly Christmas Postman (Ahlberg 1991) p. 4

**Picture 11** An excerpt from our crochet letters class books. p. 4



particular crocheting supplies. So Sarah wove in picture book read alouds that stimulated thinking about how to fund the new crocheting needs. For example, when the students were running out of yarn and needed to replace broken hooks, Sarah offered the message in, *I Wanna Iguana* (Kaufman Orloff 2004) as one solution to the shortage of hooks. Just as Alex wrote letters to his mother for an iguana, so each student in this second grade wrote business letters to local craft stores asking for donations towards their afghan project. Furthermore, as a class, they brainstormed ways they could solve the problem of dwindling supplies. Sarah's December classroom newsletter



**Picture 12** Mrs. Kneller's second grade class with their completed afghan p. 4



summarizes, “The ideas ranged from writing letters to selling their toys for yarn.”

A second book, *The Jolly Christmas Postman* (Ahlberg 1991) was read aloud because of the season but it too inspired student-suggested literacy connections. With support from Sarah, these second graders created a class book from the donation letters to craft stores that they had written (see picture 4). They patterned this class book after the style of *The Jolly Christmas Postman* with each letter tucked into an addressed envelope. This class book was frequently chosen as a book during silent reading time and a buddy read book with kindergarten buddies.

The extent to which crocheting was becoming part of the popular culture of this classroom is captured when one girl sang the following to a well-known tune, “All I want for Christmas is crocheting stuff” and a few classmates took this up as a crocheting song!

Phase three: Crocheting drives literacy activities  
 “Crocheting is basically my life.” (Barb, journal writing, March 19, 2007)

By March, crocheting needs and activities permeated classroom talk and motivated class shared writing experiences such as *things we learned by crocheting* (see picture 19). Similarly, individual student writing, both free writing and writing for a purpose, was often prompted by student discussions while crocheting. Chapter book read alouds continued at the end of the day, and the students crocheted as Sarah read.

Clearly, Sarah supported student interest in crocheting-related literacy activities. When appropriate, she created space in her curriculum and schedule not only for these activities to occur, but also for time and context during which students could suggest and negotiate crocheting-related activities.

Student talk: “Do you think this is big enough for an infant?” (Barb, student discussion, April 20, 2007)

Crocheting was both the topic of talk and a forum for communal chat. Daily opportunities to converse while crocheting not only made this a relaxed and social event, it provided each member of the classroom a chance to get to know one another, to talk about what was important to them.

Large group discussions emanated from these informal student conversations as they crocheted. Student directed large group discussions arose from issues related to crocheting supplies and organization. These second graders identified problems such as the mess when students don't return the balls of yarn neatly. After yarn was purchased, the students would wind the yarn skeins into balls. The balls were then placed in a community basket. The students were free to choose from the assortment in the basket as they worked. They turned to the class for solutions. In the case of this yarn basket management crisis, Sarah called the class to the carpet and mediated an oral sharing and recording of ideas. Teacher-directed discussion included the example of how to spend the money these second graders received in donation from a local business. In this



**Picture 13** A boy crocheting as he waits for the bus p. 4

instance, Sarah initiated and moderated the discussion while one student recorded other students' contributions on the white board and Sarah then put them on post-it notes to take shopping.



**Picture 15** A boy crocheting as he waits for the bus p. 4

Such engaged discussions provided Sarah with the instructional opportunity to model and facilitate the practice of turn taking, build on student ideas, encourage student problem solving and scaffold “coming to a consensus.” Further, the recording of student ideas validated each of them as a member of the classroom activity. Students were motivated to openly express their ideas because each opinion mattered.

Indeed, the practice of crocheting while listening to read alouds seemed to help these second graders settle down from the events of the day. Crocheting appeared to focus their attention. In fact, as crocheting moved to a center



**Picture 14** A girl working on a patch for the class afghan p. 4



**Picture 16** A girl working on a patch for the class afghan p. 4



**Table 1** Timeline of events

<i>Crocheting Project Timeline</i>		
<b>Month</b>	<b>Activity</b>	
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Seek district approval</li> <li>● Purchase supplies (G or H size hooks)</li> </ul>	
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teach students to chain using a crochet hook</li> <li>● Provide time for practice (last ½ hour of day)</li> <li>● Some students will be ready to start a second row by the end of the month</li> <li>● Have volunteers help in the classroom.</li> </ul>	Phase 1
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teach second row to all students</li> <li>● Begin making patches for afghan</li> <li>● Reduce class crocheting time to last 15 minutes of day</li> <li>● Include as an activity for when work is completed</li> <li>● Make crocheting a center</li> </ul>	
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Keep practicing making a rows that are even and uniform</li> </ul>	
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Write letters for yarn and hook donations from craft stores</li> <li>● Begin to read-aloud as students work on crocheting</li> </ul>	Phase 2
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continue to work on crocheting projects</li> <li>● Read aloud as the students work on crocheting</li> </ul>	
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students create shopping list from donated money</li> <li>● Students learn to make yarn balls from the purchased supplies</li> <li>● Through shared writing class, the class writes a thank you letter to donor.</li> <li>● Local News Channel records class working and interviews students</li> </ul>	
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students problem solve to keep their yarn basket free of knots.</li> <li>● Sent home parent surveys about crocheting</li> <li>● Students journaled about crocheting experiences</li> <li>● Read blanket read-aloud books</li> <li>● Shared writing on what we have learned by crocheting.</li> <li>● Continue working on projects</li> </ul>	
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students crochet with their grandparents for school Grandparents’ Day</li> </ul>	
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complete afghan</li> <li>● Class decides where to donate the afghan</li> <li>● Present afghan to recipient.</li> <li>● Through shared writing, the class writes an update letter to supply donor.</li> </ul>	Phase 3

activity, students who chose crocheting also found themselves talking to each other about literature read in class, what they were crocheting, different stitches, their friends, why they were crocheting and who it was for—in short, building and deepening relationships in their classroom community.

Student writing: “I will not keep sisers in my bag because I will lose my hook. [*The scissors punctured the students’ Ziploc bags making small holes that their hooks would fall through.*]” (Ricky, hook responsibility letter, March 29, 2007)

Sarah facilitated several shared writing experiences throughout the year. Many of these emerged from crocheting. As a class, students brainstormed ideas to solve problems or reflect on activities. During the brainstorming either Sarah then recorded student suggestions on a whiteboard easel (note *the ways to solve the problem of dwindling supplies* referenced earlier), or the students recorded their contributions on large print paper (such as *things we have learned by crocheting* see picture 19).

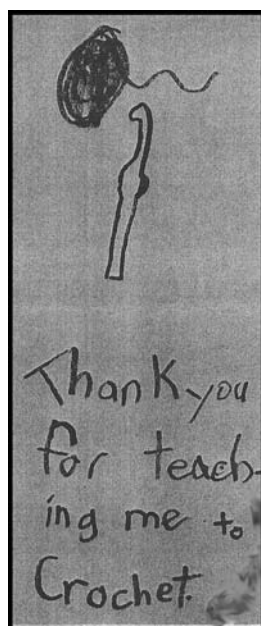
Crocheting was the focus of private as well as public shared writing. Crocheting references began appearing in personal journals as early as November but by March they became a regular content focus (see pictures 5, 6). Moreover, crocheting provided a sustained focus for writing-for-a-purpose activities. A year long writing center activity in Sarah’s classroom was called *Thank you Thursday*. The students made thank you cards and delivered them on Thursdays. Many second graders chose to write “thank you” for the donated supplies and to the volunteers who had helped to teach them to crochet (see picture 17). Sarah

embedded another writing-for-a-purpose activity with crocheting. The original class set of crocheting hooks were plastic. As the students began learning to crochet, they would pull the hook with great force, causing the top to break off. Also, they would be so engrossed in their work that after a few days the plastic handle would be warped into an arch. Sarah required each student who lost or broke a crocheting hook to write a letter explaining how he or she would take responsibility for the new hook she was providing them (see pictures 7–9). Through these hook responsibility letter students identified problems and wrote how they could be solved. Students took this writing task very seriously because they could not crochet until their letter explaining why they lost or broke their crocheting hook was done. One student even tried to use a pencil instead of a hook to crochet because he did not want to write his letter; however, by the end of the day his letter was written and he had his new hook!

Student reading: Crocheting as social action: “I could do something good and it became addicting.” (Emma, class discussion, March, 28, 2007)

Right from the start, nearly all of the crochet products were for other people. These second graders made scarves, blankets, purses, headbands, coin bags, crowns, rings, pot holders, and crocheted flowers for cousins, siblings, and for their stuffed animals. One student wrote in her journal, “I have crocheted two blankets, an mit, four purses, seven patches, one stripe that I didn’t finish, a tunnel that you can look through, a little stripe that I made for fun, a mit for in the

**Picture 17** Thank you note p. 4, 10



**Picture 18** Student with flag on field day p. 1

kitchen.” (Barb, journal writing, March 23, 2007, picture 6). Sarah took project idea books out of the school library and placed them in the read aloud bin and students flipped through and read about new stitches they could learn. These crocheters rarely kept their creations for themselves. In fact, one student reported that his mother said he needed to make something for himself now. With their two hands these students produced what they needed independently and creatively. Crocheted necklaces, bracelets and headbands were worn daily not only by students in Sarah’s class but by friends and family. An identity was crafted through crocheting, it was something this class did, it set them apart. “I will keep crocheting because it is my favorite thing in the world.” (Alexandra, journal writing, March 27, 2007). Students even began to invent new stitches. One student, Barb, became known for her innovative “42nd crochet” a take on the stitch *double crochet* with a lot of loops on her hook.

Sarah’s role throughout was to listen, support and tailor her learning objectives to student-directed activities. Through contingent questioning that gave students back their own ideas and scaffolded them into more elaborated responses (Boyd and Rubin 2006), Sarah publicly explored student ideas for solutions to organizing the yarn and generating funds. Through contingent practices such

as selecting informational and narrative books to read aloud that built on student interests about crocheting, Sarah extended student knowledge and modeled literacy as social practice. Reading and writing instruction mirrored the increasing interest of these second graders in crocheting.

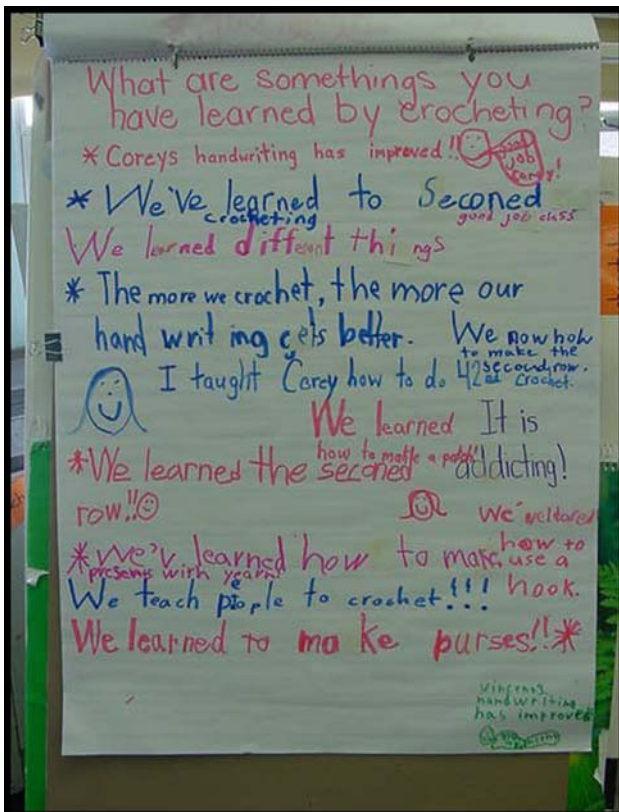
Discussion: “My grandma is going to get crocheting for me. I hope it is a big ball of yarn! I am going to make a now Blankit (new blanket)! (Tom, journal writing, December 6, 2006)

Sarah elected to introduce crocheting to her second graders to help develop fine motor skills with the hope of improving handwriting. While one student did in fact comment during shared writing that “Chad’s handwriting has improved!,” no such measure was conducted. Certainly, some students showed improvements in handwriting but it is unknown if this improvement results from crocheting or maturity. Because of this, handwriting is not the focus of this article. Safe to say, though, the fine motor skills associated with crocheting did not hurt handwriting.

But why should a teacher go to the trouble to teach crocheting to children? The answer to this question extends well beyond any possible support for handwriting. Sarah selected a low cost (initial start of \$21, total cost of \$71, including a \$50 donation), novel activity that inspired community connections, student engagement and authentic literacy practices. The impact of crocheting thus extended far beyond this basic developmental objective of improving handwriting.

### Crocheting as Authentic Literacy Practice

Crocheting provided compelling occasions to practice integrated reading, writing, speaking and listening activities that were student driven and teacher supported. Students applied the word to the world (Freire 1970, 1994) as they wrote letters to raise money to replenish their yarn supply and solved organizational problems themselves. Their business donation letters became a class book, which they read and reread to their kindergarten buddies. Their letters brought money contributions so they could buy hooks and yarn. They wrote thank yous to volunteers to their classroom and to the one business who donated money. In these ways these second graders understood the impact of reading and writing in their world. They understood literacy as social practice (Maybin 1994). They experienced empowering education (Barton et al. 1999). Crocheting became a literacy event—a regular, repeated activity from which literacy practices sprung. In these ways they understood the impact of reading and writing in their world.



**Picture 19** Things we have learned by crocheting, Shared writing pp. 4, 7, 9



### Crocheting as Community Connection

If popular culture celebrates the every day (Alvermann and Hong Xu 2003) crocheting became popular culture in this classroom. Crocheting provided a communal time at school and home for bonding over every day concerns. Students chatted as they crocheted; they discussed issues that were important to them. They talked about what they were making and why, their friends, television shows, books, and their interests. Through these intimate discussions Sarah learned about them and they got to really know each other. Students bonded by sharing skills and knowledge, and by teaching each other.

Crocheting also deepened connections with community. Parents and grandparents and even a great grandmother became expert resources. Students reported more one-on-one time with a family member and family members noted that crocheting was a topic they could count on as a vehicle for parent–child commune about school in general. In addition, these second graders learned a greater understanding and appreciation of the work that goes into making something. They looked at stitched handcraft with new eyes. When a visiting third grade teacher came with her class to watch a play in the school auditorium these crocheting second graders bombarded Sarah with questions about her crocheted purse: they noticed the fine stitching and wondered, “Wow! How long did that take to make?”

### Crocheting as Empowerment

Crocheting not only bound this classroom community together, it empowered them. This second grade class became known as the crocheting class; even the local news channel showcased their skill with a hook and yarn. Crocheting allowed the students to give back, whether through gifts to family or friends, or an afghan to someone in need.

Crocheting was the means by which these students came to understand the power of literacy. By taking responsibility for funding and organizing supplies for crocheting and completing the afghan project, these second graders learned how to vocalize ideas and disagree constructively. They solved problems as a group; they realized their voice. What they learned transferred to other arenas. For example, after a fire drill exercise, these second grade students gathered on the carpet to resume calendar activities. One student, Barb, asked Sarah if the group could address “their ineffectiveness.” She was upset that students were arguing instead of lining up to leave and so wanted to problem solve by introducing the idea of a fire drill captain. Crocheting as a curriculum activity had provided tangible, “real world” learning experience.

The empowering impact of crocheting was also seen as students took responsibility for their own and each other’s learning: they looked up patterns, taught each other stitches, created new stitches and patterns. Through crocheting they learned to apply a set of basic skills to creating something new and useful. If critical (McLaughlin and DeVoogd 2004) or powerful literacy (Finn 1999) is defined by what is done with literacy, then these students practiced critical and powerful literacy.

Conclusion: “The best part of crocheting is when it is all done” (Charlie, journal writing, March 23, 2007)

Ultimately, the impact of crocheting in this second grade class was student determined. It was not crocheting, per se, that shaped these students’ attitude to literacy and learning. It was the power of a student-owned activity. What these students crocheted was valued throughout the school and local community: it connected them to parents and grandparents and was celebrated in the local media. Crocheting also made manifest the connections between literacy and the students’ world: through thank you letters, and business letters these students experienced the power of literacy. Their writing produced financing for this activity. This teacher built on student enthusiasm and adjusted the second grade curriculum using crocheting as an instructional resource.

A teacher cannot proscribe the degree to which her students will identify with and own an activity or predict the extent to which she will incorporate it across the curriculum. For Sarah, offering crocheting to her second graders engendered social literacy practices that were negotiated by her second graders as they bonded over double crochet and granny squares. This was the “crazy about crocheting class.”

### Appendix A

#### Book lists

#### Read Alouds

- Ahlberg, A. (1991). *The Jolly Christmas Postman*. Great Britain: L, B Kids
- Flournoy, V. (1985). *The patchwork quilt*. New York: Putnam
- Johnston, T. (1985). *The Quilt story*. New York: Putnam
- Kaufman Orloff, K (2004). *I Wanna Iguana*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons
- Polacco, P. (2002). *The Christmas Tapestry*. New York: Philomel
- Woodson, J. (2005). *Show way*. New York: Putnam

#### Chapter Book Read Alouds

- Dahl, R. (1982). *The BFG*. New York: Puffin

DiCamillo, K. (2003). *The Tale of Despereaux*. Boston: Candlewick Press

Lewis, C. (1950). *The lion, The witch, and the wardrobe*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers

Lowry, L. (2002). *Gooney Bird Greene*. New York: Houghton Mifflin

Winthrop, E. (1985). *The Castle in the Attic*. New York: Bantam Books

### Instructional Texts

Rubenstein, J. (1974). *Crochet for beginners*. Philadelphia: Lippincott

Needlework, Macramé & Knitting. (1972). New York: Watts

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- Maybin J. (Ed.). (1994). *Language and literacy in social practice*. Clevedon, UK: The Open University.
- McLaughlin, M., & DeVogd, G. (2004). *Critical literacy: Enhancing students' comprehension of text*. New York: Scholastic.
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- Smith, V. (2004) Empowering teachers: Empowering children? How can researches initiate and research empowerment? *Journal of Research in Reading*, 27(4), 413–424.
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