ISSN 2577-0551

WOW STORIES

OPENING THE WORLD THROUGH LITERATURE

Volume I, Issue 2
November, 2008

Worlds of WORDS

ARIZONA College of Education

wowlit.org

Volume I, Issue 2

Opening the World through Literature

WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom *is a regular on-line publication of WOW containing vignettes written by classroom educators about children's experiences reading and responding to literature in the classroom setting.*

Contents

Introduction: Opening the World through Literature, by Kathy G. Short, The University of Arizona

Part 1: Creating a Context for Professional Learning

Creating a Vision of Possibility as Professional Learners, by Lisa Thomas, Instructional Coach

Practice Makes Perfect in Our Community of Practice, by Amy Edwards, fifth grade teacher

Exploring a Curriculum that is International, by Kathy G. Short, Professor, University of Arizona

Part 2: Developing Conceptual Thinking

Conceptualization as a Way of Thinking in Schools, by Lisa Thomas, Instructional Coach

Thinking Conceptually about Journeys through an Author Study, by Jennifer Griffith, first grade teacher

Mapping Our Understandings of Literature, by Jaquetta Alexander, second grade teacher

"Life is a Journey and an Iceberg": Creating a Context for Conceptual Thinking, by Amy Edwards, fifth grade teacher

Encouraging Symbolic Thinking through Literature, by Kathryn Bolasky, third grade teacher

Writing as a Tool for Synthesizing Our Learning, by Kathryn Bolasky, third grade teacher

Part 3: Considering Multiple Perspectives

Moving Across the Arts to Consider New Perspectives, by Kathryn Tompkins, fourth grade teacher

Making Connections through Text Sets with Young Children, by Jennifer Griffith, first grade teacher

Encouraging Intertextual Thinking in the Classroom, by Kathryn Bolasky, third grade teacher

Re-Visioning the World through Multiple Perspectives, by Amy Edwards, fifth grade teacher

Taking Action with Young Children, by Jaquetta Alexander, second grade teacher

Exploring Action and Responsibility through Literature, by Jennifer Griffith, first grade teacher

Part 4: Exploring Taking Action

Young Children's Explorations of Multiple Perspectives, by Jaquetta Alexander, second grade teacher

Taking Action through Emotional Connections, by Kathryn Tompkins, fourth grade teacher

Exploring Voice and Responsibility through Literature, by Kathryn Tompkins, fourth grade teacher

An Inquiry on Taking Action: Exploring Human Rights, by Jennifer Griffith, first grade teacher, and Derek R. Griffith, Filmmaker. (Direct to video)

Exploring Culture and Connection through the Fine Arts, by Jenny Cain, Arts Integration Specialist

Editor

Kathy G. Short, The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

Production Editor

Rebecca K. Ballenger, Worlds of Words

Introduction: Opening the World through Literature

Building bridges across cultures through global inquiry and the arts is the school-wide focus of Van Horne Elementary School in the Tucson Unified School District, Arizona. Teachers, students, administrators, and university collaborators are working together to explore the challenge of developing intercultural understanding and global perspectives through inquiries in which international literature plays an integral role. Research at the school for the past two years has been supported by a grant from the National Council of Teachers of English. One component of this grant supports teacher participation in a summer writing workshop to examine field notes and student artifacts to determine and write about significant themes in their data.

This special issue of WOW Stories contains vignettes in which teachers reflect on the ideas and

issues that they identified as most significant during the 2007-2008 school year. These vignettes focus on four areas of professional growth and learning. The first section includes several vignettes on the different components in the school that have worked together to create a powerful context for professional learning. The second section highlights the significance of conceptual thinking and includes vignettes that reflect on the ways in which this focus influenced children's understandings and the instructional strategies that were most effective in encouraging the development of conceptual thinking. The third section focuses on vignettes about the role of the arts and text sets in challenging children to consider multiple perspectives on social issues. The final section of vignettes emphasizes the instructional strategies involved in thoughtfully engaging children in taking action for social justice, including a vignette in the form of a video documentary about a school-wide inquiry on human rights.

Children's engagements with literature have the potential to transform their world views as they come to understand their current lives and imagine worlds beyond themselves. Students do need to find their lives reflected in books, but if what they read in school only mirrors their own views of the world, they cannot envision alternative ways of thinking and being. These experiences need to be embedded within a curriculum that is international or their potential to challenge students to critically confront issues of culture is diminished or lost. A curriculum and literature that are international offer educators and students the potential for enriching and transforming their lives and views of the world.

As you read through these vignettes, consider sharing your own experiences of using literature with K-12 students to build bridges across cultures. See our call for manuscripts for more information on how to submit your vignette to WOW Stories.

Kathy G. Short, Editor

Creating a Vision of Possibility as Professional Learners

by Lisa Thomas, Instructional Coach, Van Horne Elementary School

The district states that my responsibility as an instructional coach is to facilitate the implementation of state and district initiates and to build teacher capacity for effective instruction by establishing professional learning communities within our school. While the district has trained instructional coaches in a range of prescribed professional development protocols, the ways in which we each go about our work has largely been left up to us and our principals, and so the job looks a little different at each school. Our monthly meetings provide much needed chances to talk together about our developing roles within our schools and to share the ways that we are going

about our work.

Month after month, I struggle to describe the work that we are doing at Van Horne. If I say that we meet to reflect and plan after school, they assume we've created Critical Friends Groups (Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000). If I tell them that I teach children while teachers observe, they envision Demonstration Lessons (Sweeney, 2003). When I share that we meet to analyze student work, they label it Data Drive Dialogue (Wellman & Lipton, 2004). Some wonder how I hold teachers accountable for the implementation of new ideas if I don't schedule classroom observations followed by Learning Focused Conversations (Lipton & Wellman, 2003). I struggle with helping others understand that, while our work connects in structure and purpose to these professional development protocols, it is very different. And yet I know that our work has been responsible for significant changes in what we all understand and do in classrooms and in the way we view ourselves as professionals.

It became clear that I needed to invest some time and thought in conceptualizing our work so that I could effectively talk with others. My conversations with Kathy Short, a professor at the University of Arizona, and fellow teachers from Van Horne Elementary, led me to the realization that it's not the individual contexts of our engagements, but the complex interdependence between these contexts that makes our experience unique and, for us, more meaningful. This complexity also makes our work together difficult to define.

As a starting point, our project can be described as action research within a community of practice where learning is viewed as "a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind" (Lave & Wenger, 1990, p. 13). Lave and Wenger propose that learning is facilitated by membership in communities of practice who work and collaborate around a shared goal and set of practices. They believe that those who are new to a profession (or to a practice within that profession) need to be viewed, and to view themselves, as essential and functioning members of the community, even though they may initially engage in a more limited way until they are ready to fully engage in the work.

The participation framework that supports our investigations into teaching and learning is organized around three contexts: the Learning Lab, the study group, and the classroom. Our Learning Lab is a classroom setting that I established where each teacher and class of students visit once a week. Our after-work study group is an opportunity for us as educators to reflect on and plan for Learning Lab experiences and to study professional literature related to these experiences. Teachers explore the ideas that are introduced in the lab and discussed in the study group within their own classrooms in a variety of ways depending on each teacher's instructional goals. Permeating all three contexts is our stance as action researchers engaged in intentional, systematic inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990).

The regular participants in our project include classroom teachers and students from all grade levels, an interested teacher from another school, our principal, our school counselor, our arts integration specialist, Kathy, and me. Participation in our project is voluntary, but teachers who want to bring their kids to the lab must also be willing to come to the study group, which takes place after contract time. Our teachers are very busy people with demanding personal responsibilities, but every year nearly every teacher chooses to be involved.

The Learning Lab

Our Learning Lab is a setting where genuine teaching and learning take place through the engagements that I facilitate while teachers take field notes about their students' responses. We see this as a significant distinction from more typical demonstration lessons. Rather than being an occasional experience taught by a visiting teacher, the lab is a unit of inquiry taught by someone who has come to know and understand the students and their learning. It is a connected curricular experience; kids know that their work in the lab will build from and go beyond the experiences from previous weeks. They see it as part of the way school is done at Van Horne. The commitment and involvement of teachers in the lab reinforces its legitimacy for students.

This authentic experience of observing their students engaged in connected learning is necessary for teachers to reach in-depth understandings about their students' learning. Observing a demonstration lesson may give teachers steps to follow in delivering a lesson and expose them to strategies for managing the classroom, but a genuine relationship between the guest teacher and the student is rarely established with connected lessons over time, making the overall situation artificial. Teachers gain more meaningful insights from participating with their students in our professional inquiry into genuine instructional practice and into how this instruction might develop over time in response to students' emerging understandings.

When teachers were asked to share their impressions of the Learning Lab, many talked about how much they valued the opportunity to watch their kids. They appreciated the insights that came from the freedom to study their students as they were engaged in learning over time. Teachers are often too busy when they are teaching to take field notes and focus in-depth on particular students.

My role in the lab is as a co-learner. Because the lessons grow out of our study group, they are new to all of us. I don't possess the expertise to be a model for others, even if I believed that modeling was an effective form of professional development. I'm just willing to jump in and try things out first. I make a lot of mistakes, but teachers don't expect perfection and I believe that my willingness to take this chance helps to foster a school wide culture that encourages the kind of risk taking critical to meaningful professional growth.

Another distinction between demonstration lessons and the work done in the Learning Lab is the expectation for classroom implementation. Typically demonstration lessons are modeled with the intent of showing teachers how they should or must do something. The expectation is that the observer will replicate the practice. Our demonstrations are extended as invitations and intended as possibilities. They serve to create a vision of what is possible. We assume teachers will transform the ideas to make them work within their own classroom settings. Teachers are free to reject or ignore particular practices from the lab lessons, but without a vision of what's possible, it's hard for anyone to get started. Our expectation is that teachers consider the possibilities and think critically about the work. We want them to develop new insights into teaching and learning from the lab experiences and we trust that these insights will ultimately impact their instructional decisions.

What we've witnessed isn't replication but innovation. The resources that teachers borrow, the questions they ask, the student work they display in the hallways, their conversations in study group, and their writing about our experiences are all evidence that their instruction is shifting because of the work we are doing together. Teachers are using resources, strategies, and theories that have been explored in the lab in new ways within their classrooms. This innovation requires a much deeper level of understanding than replication and is the type of reflective and thoughtful capacity that will support them in professional growth throughout their careers.

Our Learning Lab provides a connected learning experience within a particular inquiry that goes across classes and grade levels throughout the school. The weekly content and response engagements are similar for all students, but we make modifications so they make sense for

learners of different ages. We initially planned these common experiences to support shared dialogue about the work during study group. What has been unexpected, however, is the way that this common lab curriculum has created a strong sense of community and connectedness within the school. The shared language, literature, and learning across classrooms bring us together as a school community. Teachers love knowing that their new groups of students each year have participated in these experiences. This shared history connects teachers to one another and to all of the children in the school.

The Study Group

The most significant distinction between our Thursday meetings and other teacher study groups is that we study the work that everyone has been a part of in the Learning Lab. While we use professional books and articles, they are chosen to explore real questions that emerge from genuine practice. We don't use a professional book to guide our study group focus; we use a range of professional publications as resources to resolve our instructional challenges.

Teachers value the opportunity that the study group provides to think across grade levels. Their understanding of their practice deepens as they listen to how the work plays out with kids of all ages. Teachers also believe that they have gained a deeper respect for their colleagues and their work because of these conversations. During the study group, the teachers share how their students responded to the engagements. The student work that we examine is similar enough for us to analyze learning as a group and see the growth of understanding across age levels. The common lab focus provides an important point of connection to our discussion.

Within each study group session we engage in reflection of recent lab experiences, analyze student work, examine the issues that have emerged, and plan for the next lab session. We plan based on what students' work indicates that they understand and that they are on the edge of knowing. Our discussions are an authentic example of assessment guiding instruction.

The Classroom

The ways in which teachers connect their classroom instruction to our Learning Lab work is their decision as professionals. Occasionally we ask, for a variety of reasons, if they would be willing to read a novel or finish a response that was introduced in the lab. But I never go into their rooms to observe their implementation or "hold them accountable" in the traditional sense. I believe that if we engage in important and interesting work, teachers' practice will shift as their understandings of the work deepen. And that is exactly what is happening. Teachers have adapted a range of ideas from the lab to their classrooms. Some have been drawn to management or organizational approaches, while others have adapted particular instructional strategies or kinds of reading materials to their classroom studies. A couple of teachers have focused on one area of the curriculum model that guides our work or have connected explicitly to the broad concept from the lab. Many teachers have used specific pieces of literature in new ways, or have assimilated the language from the lab into their own practice.

Action Research

The interplay between the lab, the study group, and individual classrooms provides a rich context for action research. Action research is a reflective process of progressive problem solving--a cyclical alternation between action and critical reflection. It is not research about other people, but research that people do within their own work to improve what they do (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). We engage in action research to continuously grow professionally in our understandings as educators and to more effectively engage our students in learning.

We use field notes and student artifacts to support our rigorous reflection. We have come to recognize that our memories are both selective and fuzzy. So, we save everything that is generated both in the lab and in related experiences in each classroom. We take notes about the experiences and interactions with the kids. We rely on all of this data for reflection during our study groups and to support our thinking during the school year.

In addition to continuous reflection, we engaged in reflexivity at the end of each school year. Short

and Burke (1991) use this term to describe taking a long distance stance in regard to our knowing. While reflection allows us to "attempt to explain ourselves to ourselves or to others on the basis of a specific experience," reflexivity allows us to "step back even more and seek generalized understanding and knowledge" (p. 29). Reflexivity encourages deep synthesis of the data we collect throughout the year.

We take this reflexive stance each summer when we engage as a community in a writer's workshop. We sit together in a room, surrounded by the children's books that we've used throughout the year, piles of student work, and binders filled with notes. We rely heavily on this data, rather than our memories, to identify the central ideas or themes within the work that are personally significant. We write about these themes to make sense of what is most pivotal for us as learners. Our writing takes the form of classroom stories, rather than reports of research findings. While these vignettes are intended to share our experiences and learning with others, the process of writing helps us clarify our own understanding of our work. I am doing this kind of writing right now to step back for a bigger "So what?"

Conclusion

Each learning context supports a different type of professional learning. The lab creates vision, the study group invites reflection, the classroom setting promotes independent action, and the writing workshop encourages reflexivity. Each would support professional learning on its own. I believe that the connection between these contexts at Van Horne creates an interdependence that makes the work unique and significant for our learning. Our project has also created interdependence between everyone involved. We are more reliable and thoughtful in preparing, attending, and engaging in these professional learning contexts because of the sense of respect and responsibility that we feel to one another and to the work. This responsibility has fueled the momentum that continues to move us forward in exploring teaching and learning together with our students. All of

us--teachers, administrator, university researcher, curriculum specialist, and students--recognize the important roles that we play in creating an increasingly effective and generative community of practice within our school.

References

- Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S.L. (1990). Research on teaching and teacher research: The issues that divide. *Educational Researcher*, *19*(2), 2-11.
- Dunne, F., Nave, B., & Lewis, A. (2000). Critical friends groups: Teachers helping teachers to improve student learning. *Phi Delta Kappa Center for Evaluation, Development, and Research Bulletin*, No. 28.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lipton,L. & Wellman, B. (2003). *Mentoring matters*. Sherman, CT: Mira Via.
- Sweeney, D. (2003). *Learning along the way*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Wellman, B. & Lipton, L. (2004). *Data-driven dialogue*. Sherman, CT: Mira Via.

Practice Makes Perfect in Our Community of Practice

by Amy Edwards, Fifth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary

The beginning of a new school year found us gathering as teachers in a retreat to think about possible themes to frame our work. Three new teachers were joining our study group of eight returning teachers along with our principal, instructional coach, counselor, and a university researcher. As we webbed ideas that would take us to our central theme for the fall, it became clear by the looks on the newcomers' faces that they thought we were speaking some sort of unknown language. We were quickly brainstorming ideas and responding to each other's suggestions with ease. They, on the other hand, were staring straight ahead, mouths slightly open, trying to figure out what we were doing. They did not have a context for our talk and thinking and sat at the edge of our community trying to figure out our practice.

I love teaching at Van Horne. We are lucky to have a working environment where teachers continue to learn together as they teach. It is an environment of focus, risk taking, support, trust, and respect. What we have created together is a unique professional learning community because our collective efforts are related to the practice of how we do school, with teachers and students alike. Our work is not just theory, but a reality of our everyday lives.

Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to these relationships and interactions as a community of practice. Communities of practice are based in the belief that knowledge is situated in experience and that

experience is understood through critical reflection with others who share this experience (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003). We are using this framework successfully because of the participation of teachers and students. Lave and Wenger (1991) state that learning is not in individual heads, but in the process of co-participation; participation is a way of learning. Their description of communities of practice in the working world are more closely aligned with what we do at Van Horne than what educators routinely call a professional learning community or PLC.

The term PLC is used loosely in many schools and has become a buzzword thrown around to mean different things. On one end of the spectrum there are faculties that think teaching in the same building or sharing the same group of students makes them a professional learning community. Many schools use this term to describe grade level meetings where teachers look at test scores, student work, or the sequence of curriculum.

Teachers at Van Horne understand that their learning as professionals needs to directly involve learning with their students. Our professional learning is social, contextual, and personal. The relationship between teaching and learning is interdependent because what comes next in our learning depends on the understandings of everyone involved, students and faculty. It is a symbiotic relationship in that the teachers need the thinking of the students and students need the thinking of teachers for learning to move forward as we "practice" together. This participation framework works well because we are moving forward in our understandings through situational learning, instead of just covering the mandated curriculum. The learning that takes place for teachers becomes part of student experiences and provides a context for future learning. Stein (1998) states that situational learning is associated with three major premises:

1. Learning is grounded in daily activities and cannot be separated from the complex environments in which knowledge must be applied.

2. Knowledge is acquired through experience and transfers only to similar situations.

3. Learning is the result of social processes that require negotiation and problem solving with others.

Situated learning shifts the analytic focus from "the individual as learner to learning as participation in the social world" (Quay, 2003, p. 105). Situated learning accounts for the complex role that context plays in learning. Instead of learning about a particular type of curriculum, we are engaging in practice about the learning. What we know is directly related to our actions and on our reflections about those actions. Learning is a way of being in the social world, not a way of coming to know about it (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

A central defining characteristic of situated learning is a process called legitimate peripheral

participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of the community. This allows for communication between newcomers and old-timers about activities and knowledge within that community. Learners enter the community at the periphery and over time move closer to full, legitimate participation as they gain knowledge and learn the community's customs and rituals (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003, p. 265). As new teachers joined our group this year, the natural tendency was for them to remain on the edges of learning about our inquiries. As they participated with the old-timers, they gained new knowledge and insights to grow as learners and to eventually fully participate in our community. A community of practice is comparable to the old system of apprenticeship. We witnessed this same growth with children as well in their learning. For them, life is their apprenticeship.

I have previously been part of a professional development program that included a fabulous year of training outside the classroom run by gifted presenters. While they used wonderful examples of how to implement these ideas in our classrooms, there was one problem. I was expected to bring this information back to my staff using the Trainer of Trainers method. It was a disaster. There was not enough time for me to feel proficient enough to present this new information to my colleagues without having time to first try it out with students. Even with a couple of demonstrations with students, I didn't feel proficient enough to explain the instructional strategies in depth. The presenters went to great lengths to have us outline when and where we were going to present this information to our staff in professional development settings. My learning was decontextualized and not part of a community of practice. It was not based on experiential learning or legitimate peripheral participation that would have allowed me to get comfortable with the methods or materials being taught. I was supposed to watch the presenters and then do it back at my school, nevermind thinking critically about it or trying to put it into a context. The Trainer of Trainers method left me feeling frustrated and like I just didn't get it.

One of the biggest benefits of working within Van Horne's community of practice is the support we receive from one another. Not only are we supported by our administration, but also by other teachers, our facilitator, Lisa Thomas, and Kathy Short, a researcher from the University of Arizona. We have a certain amount of accountability and responsibility to each other due to the learning we and our students are experiencing, but also our sense of contributing to the field through our research. No one wants to be absent or have a schedule conflict on Thursdays because that's the day Kathy is in the lab and study group.

Because of the respect we have for our peers, there is a strong sense of not wanting to let each other down. Our work encourages accountability and responsibility to each other in our community of practice. There is also an understanding of the strong underlying work ethic that is necessary for this important project. Participation in this venture is voluntary as an invitation to learn. We are members by choice, not because we have to be participants.

Another reason for the success of our community of practice is the structures that are in place to keep us working and thinking together. We are invited to take part in a participation framework involving a combination of settings. This community of practice takes place in our individual classrooms, the Learning Lab, OMA classroom, and teacher study group. Lisa facilitates the Learning Lab and study group. OMA (Opening Minds through the Arts) incorporates the arts into what we do in our classrooms and the lab. Taught by Jenny Cain, our Arts Integration Specialist, their work in OMA is integrated, connected, and relevant to the ideas that students are pursuing throughout the rest of their school day.

Students go to the Learning Lab once a week for instructional engagements and daily participate in related activities that support learning in our classrooms. We decide on the focus for our professional learning as a school and the lab sessions are instructional engagements around our inquiry that are taught by Lisa. As teachers, we are able to observe our students, take field notes, and interact with individuals and small groups, providing us with insights into our students that are difficult within the busy life of classrooms. We are also able to observe the ways in which Lisa

interacts with our students and their responses to particular books and response strategies in order to consider how we might use these in our own teaching.

We meet every two weeks in an after school study group to analyze the patterns and big ideas in the student work from the lab. Based on our analysis of student work, we develop ideas for focused lessons to address the big ideas across grade levels in the next week's lab. Our work is based in inquiry and in our students. I believe it is important to let the students drive the curriculum for it to be authentic and meaningful. They are involved both through our careful analysis of their learning to make teaching decisions and by directly involving them in making decisions about their learning. They are encouraged to think critically and conceptually and are involved in decisions on taking action.

Because we share this work across all grade levels, students share the experiences in the lab and, in some cases, in the OMA classroom, creating a sense of community and shared history as a school. As students move up to the next grade level, they bring these common experiences and strategies with them. This past year, our focus was on exploring and deepening our conceptual understandings of journeys, so when I talk about journeys next year, children will be familiar with the concepts, big ideas, and issues. Students are also familiar with using strategies for thinking, such as text sets, categorizing, and webbing. As teachers, we know that these shared experiences have prepared children to build upon their thinking and to be ready to tackle whatever comes next. These connections would not be available to teachers who do not have this kind of community of learners. I value working in this type of learning environment because our kids are getting an educational experience that is unique, thoughtful, and expands their ability to think.

Each member of our faculty strives to connect curriculum that is being explored or discussed in the lab to their classrooms. It could be as simple as reading aloud a related book in the classroom or as complicated as rearranging reading groups to facilitate concurrent discussions. Teachers may develop their own engagements to explore conceptual thinking in ways that go beyond the work in

the lab. Always students are encouraged to construct their own meaning by synthesizing, analyzing, or evaluating while working in small or large groups in co-participation with each other. Students as well as teachers belong to a democratic community of practice. They are learning by being immersed in the situation or experience in their classrooms, the lab, or their OMA classes.

One other piece of our community is the practice of meeting in a writer's workshop during the summer to write vignettes about our work. The time to reflect on the past year's work is a luxury most teachers never get. For two weeks soon after the close of the school year, teachers are invited to write about their experiences. We meet with our laptops and look through piles of lit logs, webs, artwork, and other materials collected throughout the year from our students. We read through our field notes from the lab sessions, wishing we had taken more complete notes, and attempt to synthesize the ideas, themes, or issues that seem most significant to us about our students' learning into vignettes. Kathy acts as editor, which is intimidating because of her authorship of books and articles and editorship of several journals, but she uses these experiences to respond to our writing through conferencing and is invaluable in finding articles to support the theory behind our practice. The writing process provides us time to reflect on our practice and to learn more about the theory behind that practice. I have to admit that I am not as current as I should be in my professional reading. Through writing and trying to explain why particular engagements are effective with students, I have learned so much about the academic theory and terminology for the kid friendly terms we use everyday in schools. It is difficult to carve out time to do this writing when most teachers are at the pool or already on vacation, but the benefits are huge.

Rosenblatt (1938) argues that classrooms should be based in democratic relationships where students support one another as they test ideas and learn from one another. The teacher joins this democratic conversation as a member of the community, instead of dictatorially dominating it. It is democratic, because everyone has a voice and everyone is listened to. Pradl (1996) argues that there is no way to arrive at critical reflection without social exchange to challenge students and teachers to transform their thinking and ideas. Teachers at Van Horne are lucky to work in an

environment that is a democratic community. We each have a voice in the process of our learning and the growth of our students.

Working in education can be lonely. Teachers spend a great deal of time behind closed doors with students and have little or no interaction with colleagues. In many schools, engagement with other adults and their students is not logistically possible due to time or space constraints, or is not encouraged. At Van Horne, the collaboration of teachers, facilitators, students, and administrators has provided me with the support of a community of practice. I feel fortunate to belong to such a thoughtful, committed, and gifted group of educators. They say that practice makes perfect. I believe this community of practice makes perfect for me as a professional learner.

References

- Buysse, V., Sparkman K.L. & Wesley, P. (2003). Communities of practice: Connecting what we know to what we do. *Exceptional Children*, *69*(3), 263-277.
- Lave J. & Wenger E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Pradl, G.M. (1996). Reading and democracy: The enduring influence of Louise Rosenblatt. *New Advocate Journal*, *9*(1), 9-22.
- Quay, J. (2003). Experience and participation: Relating theories of learning. *The Journal of Experiential Education*, *26*(2), 105-116.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1938). *Literature as exploration*. New York: Modern Language Association.
- Stein, D. (1998). *Situated learning in adult education*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 418 250).

Exploring a Curriculum that is International

by Kathy G. Short, Professor, University of Arizona

Books can build bridges of understanding across global cultures. Through literature, children have the opportunity to go beyond a tourist perspective of gaining surface-level information about another culture. They are invited to immerse themselves in story worlds, gaining insights into how people feel, live, and think around the world. They come to recognize their common humanity as well as to value cultural differences.

This vision of opening the world through literature remains an elusive goal in many classrooms. Even though international books are increasingly available in the United States, many educators are not familiar with the books and are uncertain about their cultural authenticity. They are often unsure about how to use the books since many contain unfamiliar stylistic devices and terminology

and are about experiences and settings that, at first glance, seem removed from their students' lives. They struggle with how to help students make significant connections to move their responses beyond viewing other cultures as exotic or strange. Many unwittingly adopt strategies that are tangential, or even in opposition, to the goals of global education, through, for example, focusing on "we-they" dualisms or superficial features of cultural lifestyles that reinforce stereotypical perceptions. Simply reading more about the world can actually negatively influence the development of intercultural understanding.

Our research at Van Horne Elementary School, a small public elementary school in Tucson, Arizona, focuses on the challenge of effectively engaging children with international literature to build intercultural understanding. We are examining the pedagogical issues and strategies involved in integrating international literature into the curriculum and the influence of literature on children's understandings of culture and the world. Our work has been guided by our beliefs about intercultural understanding and our use of a particular framework that focuses on a curriculum that is international.

Teaching for Intercultural Understanding

Teaching for intercultural understanding involves far more than lessons on human relations and sensitivity training or adding a book or unit about a country into the existing curriculum. These approaches typically lead to superficial appreciations of cultural differences that reinforce stereotypes, instead of creating new understandings about cultural perspectives and global issues. Interculturalism is an attitude of mind, an orientation that pervades thinking and permeates the curriculum. It is based on a broad understanding of culture as ways of living and being in the world that are designs for acting, believing, and valuing. Geertz (1973) defines culture as "the shared patterns that set the tone, character and quality of people's lives" (p. 216). These patterns include language, religion, gender, relationships, class, ethnicity, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, family structures, nationality, and rural/suburban/urban communities, as well as the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives held by a group of people.

Fleck (1935), a Polish scientist and philosopher, argues that cultures consist of thought collectives that form whenever groups of people learn to think in similar ways because they share a common interest, exchange ideas, maintain interaction over time, and create a history that affects how they think and live. Since most individuals think and act within several thought collectives at a time, this view captures the dynamic, evolving nature of culture as each person interacts with, and is changed through, transactions with other cultures. These understandings highlight the diverse ways in which culture is reflected in children's lives.

Key scholars in intercultural education (Allan, 2003; Fennes & Hapgood, 1997; Hofstede, 1991) as

well as global education (Begler, 1996; Case, 1991) inform our definition of intercultural understanding as an orientation in which learners:

• Explore their cultural identities and develop conceptual understandings of culture.

• Develop an awareness and respect for different cultural perspectives as well as the commonality of human experience.

• Examine issues that have personal, local and global relevance and significance.

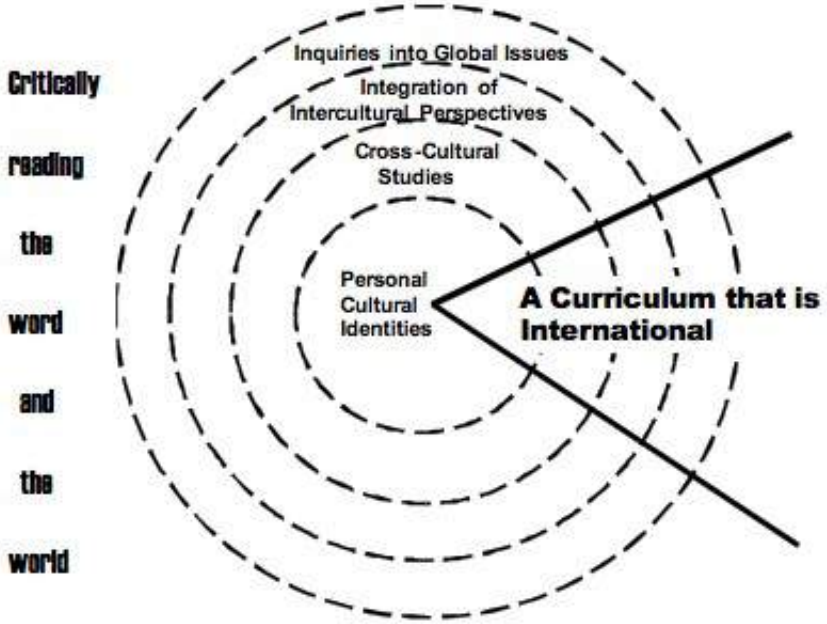
• Value the diversity of cultures and perspectives within the world.

• Demonstrate a responsibility and commitment to making a difference to, and in, the world.

• Develop an inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring perspective on taking action to create a better and more just world.

To enact these theoretical beliefs in our work with children, we are using a specific curriculum framework to guide our work. This framework highlights multiple ways of engaging with international perspectives to support children's critical explorations of their cultural identities, ways of living within specific cultures, the range of cultural perspectives within any unit of study, and complex global issues. The curricular components in the framework interrelate and build from each other to highlight different intercultural understandings. Surrounding these components is an environment in which students are encouraged to inquire from a critical stance. This framework has supported us in exploring the potentials that each component offers for children's understandings and the ways in which global perspectives and literature can be integrated into the life of the school.

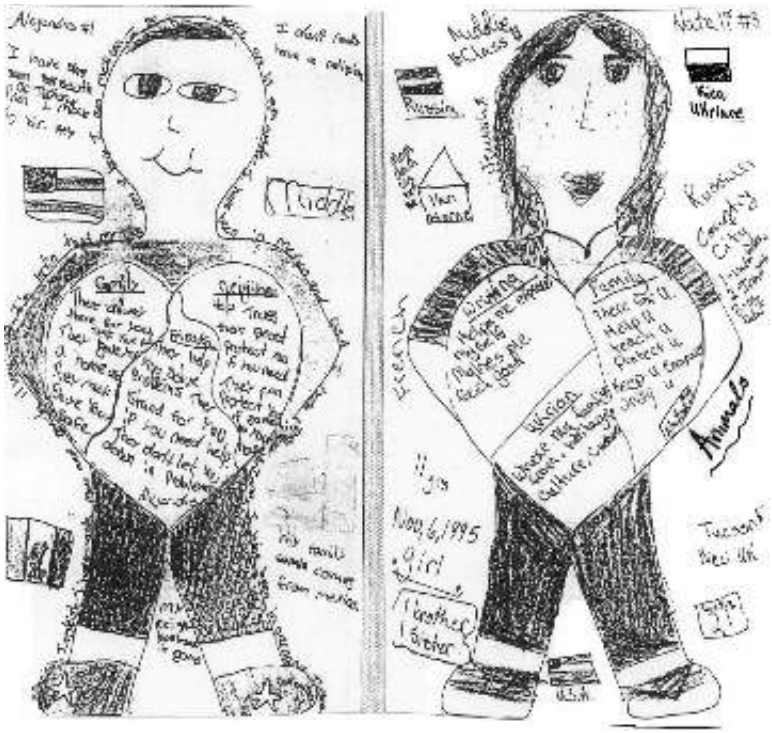
For the past two years, we have closely examined each component of this framework through our discussions in a biweekly Teacher Study Group and in our weekly Learning Lab work with the children. By focusing together on a particular part of the framework for several months, we have worked toward more in-depth understandings of these components so that teachers can then consider how to take this work into their own classroom curricula. This vignette overviews the work we have engaged in around this framework over the past two years within the Learning Lab and Teacher Study Group.



Personal Cultural Identities

All learners, adults and children, must explore their own cultures before they can understand why culture matters in the lives of others around them. Interculturalism does not begin with the ability to consider other points of view but with the realization that you have a point of view. Children bring their personal experiences of living in the world and being part of specific cultural groups and social contexts to school. They need to examine their own histories to understand how those experiences and interactions determine their view of the world and they need to find their lives reflected in books in order to value school as relevant. When students recognize the cultures that influence their thinking, they become more aware of how and why culture is important to others. They no longer see culture as about the "other" and as exotic, but recognize that it is at the heart of defining who they are as human beings.

Literature can encourage students to focus on themselves as cultural beings in order to go beyond the typical "Who am I?" activities. We read aloud and discuss picture books in which the characters struggle with their identities, such as *You Be Me and I'll Be You* (Mandelbaum, 1990) and *Cooper's Lesson* (Shin, 2004). Students have responded to these books by exploring their cultural identities in different ways, such as drawing memory maps of their neighborhoods to identify stories from when they were "little" and mapping significant events in their lives on Life Journey Maps. They also created Cultural X-Rays in which they labeled the outside of their bodies with aspects of their culture that are evident to others, such as language, age, ethnicity, gender, and religion, and the inside with the values and beliefs that they hold in their hearts. These Cultural X-Rays were created by students in Amy Edwards' fifth grade classroom.



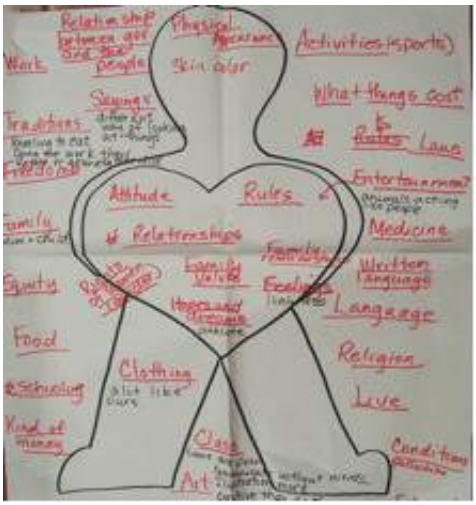
These engagements help students realize that their experiences within families and communities shape how they think and act. Multicultural books that reflect their own life experiences in the American Southwest are essential to building these understandings. We weave multicultural literature along with international books throughout our inquiries so that students recognize the commonalities in life experiences across diverse cultures as well as the unique aspects of these cultures.

Cross-Cultural Studies

Although intercultural understanding is grounded in awareness of one's own cultural perspective, students need to consider points of view beyond their own so they come to recognize that their perspective is one of many ways to view the world; not the only one or the norm against which to measure other viewpoints. In-depth studies of specific global cultures can broaden students' perspectives and provide a window on the world. Unfortunately cross-cultural studies often take the form of theme units that focus on superficial aspects of a culture through a limited study of the 5fs -- food, fashion, folklore, festivals, and famous people. A cross-cultural study should provide an opportunity for children to examine the complexity and diversity within a particular cultural group. Focusing on food or folklore is a beginning but can lead to stereotypes and superficial understandings unless students also examine the deeper values and beliefs that are significant within that culture. A cross-cultural study should include literature that reflects complexity in terms of the economic, social, political, aesthetic, moral, historical, and geographical contexts of a cultural group (Begler, 1996).

We found that because our students already recognized the complexity of culture within their own

lives, we could use their experience of creating Cultural X-Rays to brainstorm what they might explore about another culture. When fifth-grade students began a study of Korean culture, for example, they used a large blank Cultural X-ray to brainstorm the aspects of identity that they needed to explore to understand this culture.



This large chart of brainstormed cultural characteristics served as a place for students to record observations throughout our study as they read from a range of fiction and nonfiction literature. *When My Name Was Keoko* (Park, 2002) was read aloud and discussed and students browsed a collection of many picture books and informational books. We found that the books about Korean culture available in the U.S. were primarily historical fiction and folklore with few contemporary images, leaving the impression that Korean culture was mired in the past with traditional clothing and small villages. We purchased picture books from South Korea written in Hangul to provide contemporary images and to encourage explorations of the Korean language. We also located books that had been recently translated into English, such as *My Cat Copies Me* (Kwon, 2007), and discussed picture books, such as *Waiting for Mama* (Lee, 2007), that students could connect to their lives but which also provided an anomaly because of actions or values that were unexpected from their cultural viewpoint.

The value of an in-depth cross-cultural study is that students look deeply to understand the complexity within a culture and so go beyond the surface-level explorations that characterize this type of study. Not only can these studies provide a window on a culture, but they can also encourage insights into students' cultural identities. Students come to deeper understandings about their own cultures and perspectives when they encounter alternative possibilities for thinking about the world. Cross-cultural studies thus provide both a mirror and a window for children as they look out on ways of viewing the world and reflect back on themselves in a new light.

Integration of International Perspectives

While an occasional cross-cultural study is appropriate, literature reflecting a wide range of cultural perspectives needs to be woven into every classroom study, no matter what the topic or curriculum area. We worked to integrate the stories, languages, lifestyles, and ways of learning from many cultures into units of study across the curriculum, not just one or two special units each year. Whether the focus was folklore, family, living at peace with others, the moon, or fractions, we are trying to incorporate literature reflecting a range of global perspectives. Otherwise, interculturalism can be viewed as a special unit instead of an orientation that pervades everything.

We took on a school-wide focus on Journeys, beginning with a conceptual understanding of journeys through connections to children's own lives. We discussed literature, such as *Once There Were Giants* (Waddell, 1997) and *The Pink Refrigerator* (Egan, 2007) and asked students to map their own life journeys.

Their discussions of different types of journeys led to a range of inquiries. The younger students focused on mapping learning and emotional journeys through responding to books such as *No, I Want Daddy!* (Brune-Cosme, 2004) and *Sebastian's Roller Skates* (de Deu Prats, 200). The older students met in small groups to discuss text sets organized around themes that emerged from their brainstorming. Each of these text sets included 10-15 picture books from a range of cultural perspectives around the themes of Beginnings and Endings, Movement and Competition, Dreams and Wishes, Growing and Learning, Pain and Healing, Spiritual and Emotional Pathways, and People and Relationships. Their inquiries eventually led students to a study of the forced migration of people who become refugees throughout the world.

We found that integrating literature from diverse cultures into student inquiries provides for a much wider range of perspectives on a particular theme or topic and so encourages more complexity in the issues that students consider. They cannot settle comfortably into the issues that are part of their own cultural perspective but are challenged to go beyond that world view. We have been able to locate global literature on various social and historical themes and topics but have

struggled with finding books from a range of global cultures on science and mathematical content. Those books appear to rarely be selected for translation and publication in North America.

Inquiries on Global Issues

Another curricular component that is significant for building intercultural understanding are inquiries that focus on specific global issues, many of which highlight difficult social, political and environmental issues, such as violence, human rights and social justice, environmental degradation, overpopulation, poverty, language loss, race and ethnicity, and economic imperialism (Collins, Czarra, & Smith, 1998). Students need to occasionally study a global issue in-depth and over time to understand the local and global complexity of these issues and to consider ways of taking action in their lives. These studies are essential in encouraging students to go beyond talk and inquiry to determine how to take action to create a better and more just world.

We engaged in a school-wide inquiry on Human Rights that each classroom took in different directions. We began with developing a conceptual understanding of rights through connections to children's lives. We knew that children often complain about events they see as "unfair" at school. We read aloud and discussed books such as *A Fine, Fine School* (Creech, 2003) and *The Recess Queen* (O'Neill, 2002) and invited students to create maps of the school on which they located unfair events. These maps supported students in searching for the rights that are involved when they feel something is unfair. Students created lists of what they believed their rights were at school and noted which rights they felt needed to be addressed in their own context.

We moved students beyond a discussion at the local level to the broader global issues through browsing books from many different parts of the world that were on a range of human rights issues, including *Aani and the Tree Huggers* (Atkins, 1995), *Brothers in Hope* (Williams, 2005), *Selavi* (Landowne, 2005) and *Friends from the Other Side* (Anzaldua, 1993). We also read aloud and discussed books such as *The Carpet Boy's Gift* (Shea, 2006) to examine the strategies that children use to take action in their own contexts. In their classrooms, students engaged in range of inquiries that included discussions about literature related to particular human rights issues such

as child labor, gender inequity, undocumented immigrants, and homelessness based on their interests. Throughout these inquiries, students particularly noted the strategies characters used to take action and used these strategies to take action on some of the issues they identified in their own school context.

Critically Reading the Word and the World

All components of a curriculum that is international should be permeated with critically reading the word and the world. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) used this phrase to indicate the importance of raising issues of power, oppression, and social justice. Without a focus on critically reading the word and world, the four components could easily become a superficial tour of culture where students learn about internationalism as tourists who pick up isolated pieces of information. A tourist curriculum is based on the assumption that "if we all just learned more about each other, we would like each other and the world's problems would be solved." This approach does not consider difficult issues of social justice and so students are unable to make real changes in how they think about and relate to others.

Reading critically is the stance that race, class, and gender matter in how we interpret and analyze our experiences in the world as well as the texts we encounter. Freire argues that students need to wrestle with ideas and words, not just walk on top of them. Reading the word and the world from a critical stance provides the opportunity to question "what is" and "who benefits" as well as to consider the "what if" of new possibilities. We noticed, for example, that students initially avoided talking about issues of racism by taking a position of colorblindness, stating "It doesn't matter what you look like on the outside, it's the inside that counts." These statements deny that skin color matters in how people are treated and is one essential aspect of cultural identity. Colorblindness allowed students to walk on top of words and they needed to be challenged to wrestle with the difficult issues of racism in their lives as well as the broader world. As always, we began with books close to their lives such as *First Day in Grapes* (Perez, 2002) about a Latino child who is treated with prejudice before moving into literature on these issues from a range of cultural perspectives

Critically reading the word and the world involves students in thinking critically and questioning the way things are and power relationships, in order to consider multiple cultures, perspectives, and ways of taking action. We encourage students to take this critical stance whether they are looking at their own personal cultural identities, engaging in a cross-cultural study, considering multiple perspectives across the curriculum, or examining a difficult global issue.

Final Reflections

This curriculum framework provided us with a means of evaluating what is currently happening within the school to support the development of intercultural understanding and global

perspectives. We can identify what is working well along with what is missing or needs to be strengthened. Although all aspects of this framework will not be in place at one particular moment in time, they should all be available to students across the school year. The interactions across the framework are essential to building complex understandings of interculturalism. The components of personal cultural identity and cross-cultural studies focus students on developing conceptual understandings of culture, the integration of international books across the curriculum develops their conceptual understandings of perspective, and inquiries on global issues highlight conceptual understandings of taking action. All of these understandings are essential for interculturalism as an orientation for approaching life, both inside and outside of school.

Children's engagements with literature have the potential to transform their world views through understanding their current lives and imagining beyond themselves. Students do need to find their lives reflected in books, but if what they read in school only mirrors their own views of the world, they cannot envision alternative ways of thinking and being. These experiences need to be embedded within a curriculum that is international or their potential to challenge students to critically confront issues of culture is diminished or lost. A curriculum and literature that are international offer all of us, educators and students, the potential for enriching and transforming our lives and our views of the world.

References

- Allan, M. (2003). Frontier crossing: Cultural dissonance, intercultural learning, and the multicultural personality. *Journal of Research in International Education*, *2*(1), 83-110.
- Anzaldua, G. (1993). *Friends from the other side*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press.
- Atkins, J. (1995). *Aani and the tree huggers*. New York: Lee & Low.
- Begler, E. (1996). Global cultures: The first steps toward understanding. *Social Education*, *62*(5), 272-276.
- Brune-Cosme, N. (2004). *No, I want daddy!* New York: Clarion.
- Case, R. (1991). Key elements of a global perspective. *Social Education 57*(6), 318-325.
- Collins, H. T., Czarra, F. & Smith, A. Guidelines for global and international studies education. *Social Education*, *62*(5), 311-317.
- Creech, S. (2001). *A fine, fine school*. New York: HarperCollins.
- de Deu Prats, J. (2005). *Sebastian's roller skates*. Ill. F. Rovira. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- Egan, P. (2007). *The pink refrigerator*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Fennes, H. & Hapgood, K. (1997). *Intercultural learning in the classroom*. London: Cassell.
- Fleck, L. (1935). *The genesis and development of a scientific fact*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic.

- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organizations*. London: Profile.
- Kwon, Y. D. (2007). *My cat copies me*. LaJolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- Landowne, Y. (2005). *Selavi, that is life: A Haitian story of hope*. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos.
- Lee, T. J. (2007). *Waiting for mama*. Ill. K. Dong-Sung. New York: North-South.
- Mandelbaum, P. (1990). *You be me, I'll be you*. LaJolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- O'Neill, A. (2002). *The recess queen*. Ill. L. Huliska-Beith. New York: Scholastic.
- Park, L.S. (2002) *When my name was Keoko*. New York: Yearling.
- Perez, L. (2002). *First day in grapes*. Ill. R. Casilla. New York: Lee & Low.
- Shea, P. D. (2003). *The carpet boy's gift*. Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House.
- Shin, S.Y. (2004). *Cooper's lesson*. Ill. K. Cogan. San Francisco: Children's Book Press.
- Short, K.G. & Harste, J. (1996). *Creating classrooms for authors and inquirers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Waddell, M. (1997). *Once there were giants*. New York: Candlewick.
- Williams, M. (2005). *Brothers in hope*. Ill. G. Christie. New York: Lee & Low.

Conceptualization as a Way of Thinking in Schools

by Lisa Thomas, Instructional Coach, Van Horne Elementary School

Learners need to think conceptually to develop insights into their world through the stories that they read. They need to be able to go beyond the specific story events, context and characters to dig deeply into broader issues and ideas. Dewey (1938) argues that without this type of reflection, their thinking is not taken to a higher level to become an organized part of how that learner approaches and thinks about future experiences.

The teachers at Van Horne have worked to support elementary students in recognizing and accessing their ability to think conceptually. Our struggles with supporting this type of thinking have led us to realize that conceptualization is a broad umbrella of thought that grows out of the complex integration of different types of thinking. We want the adults and children at our school to be conceptual thinkers, and we have worked to encourage this thinking in a variety of ways. We know that people, young and old, naturally think conceptually. This kind of thinking is required to learn and function in our world. Our challenge has not been in teaching and learning how to think conceptually, but instead in understanding this thinking in a way that allows us to recognize and access it to support our learning in the school setting where it is often underutilized.

We didn't want to emphasize isolated elements of thinking (spending one week on synthesis, another on symbolic thinking) in a way that would move us away from the flexible coordination and collaboration of real thought. Nor did we want learners to be challenged occasionally and

randomly in “higher order thinking” through a series of pre-crafted, teacher created questions. We wanted this type of thinking to be connected, continuous, meaningful, and natural.

Much of our reflection and planning time during the past school year was spent gathering and creating engagements that highlight and define conceptual thought. We chose response engagements that encourage particular types of thinking within the broader context of a unit of inquiry and then reflected as a group on the kind of thinking that occurred. This allowed the learners the chance to be more aware of their thinking so that they could pull from it as a resource as needed. The context of experiences throughout the inquiry unit allowed learners to see the role of the specific type of thinking within the whole of conceptual thought.

As I reflected on our experiences in the Learning Lab and in study group this year, and analyzed the way that each influenced the development of conceptual understanding, two types of engagements emerged:

- Engagements that encouraged broad conceptualization
- Engagements that encouraged deep conceptualization

Before we began our work with the students, we engaged as teachers in two critical processes that set the stage for the rest of our semester. This work pushed us to think conceptually ourselves, which positioned us to support students’ movement toward conceptualization. These processes involved deciding to work from a broad concept as an organizer across our school and meeting in a retreat to develop our own conceptual understandings of that broad concept.

We began in August with teachers sharing their curricular plans for specific units of study and reflecting on why they saw those units as significant for students. After thinking about the units of study across the grade levels and considering the work we planned to do within the lab, we chose a school-wide broad concept that would connect these contexts. This focus made it possible for us to connect our work within the Learning Lab curriculum across grade levels and for teachers to connect their classroom studies with the work in the Learning Lab. It also provided a way for our arts specialist and counselor to integrate their work with classrooms across the school in more meaningful ways.

The concept of Journey became our “organizing idea; a mental construct that was timeless, universal, abstract and broad” (Erickson, 2002, p. 52). Throughout the semester, teachers and students engaged in experiences intended to help us conceptualize journey as a framework of thought to develop insights into our lives and our world. To support students in viewing journeys conceptually, we believed that we first had to develop an understanding as teachers and so met together in a retreat. Erickson (2002) asserts that “unless teachers consciously identify these

[conceptual] understandings, they focus on the fact-based content as the endpoint in instruction, and the conceptual level of understanding is usually not addressed" (p. 49). Teachers must have opportunities to construct these meanings themselves to understand the processes necessary to support students' explorations. Our hope was that, as teachers, our interactions with students would shift as a result of our conceptual understanding.

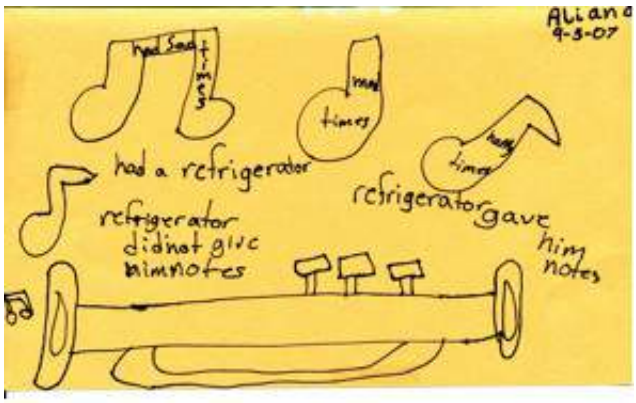
Developing Broad Conceptualization

Our broad explorations of journey supported us in recognizing the concept in a wide range of situations and allowed us to identify many types of literal and metaphorical journeys. We were able to see the *presence* of journey in our world, and to begin to develop mental definitions of journey. We did this through a number of carefully designed engagements, each building on the one before, each challenging existing understanding. Our study group time was spent reviewing the notes we had taken in the lab and analyzing student work to determine what was understood and what seemed to be missing from students' understandings, leading us to consider what should come next--what were we (teachers and students) on the edge of understanding?

Establishing a Touchstone Text

We chose *The Pink Refrigerator* by Tim Egan (2007) as a touchstone text, a text that we could revisit multiple times and that could serve as a common point of reference within each community of readers and across the school. We read it for the first time to introduce the idea of journey, but returned to it throughout the study and revisited it to conclude our work. *The Pink Refrigerator* is about a mole named Dodsworth whose life is fairly monotonous until he encounters a magical refrigerator that inspires him to try new things and take on a life of inquiry. This book explores both literal and metaphorical journeys and can be interpreted at many levels, making it appropriate across grade levels and worth revisiting throughout our study.

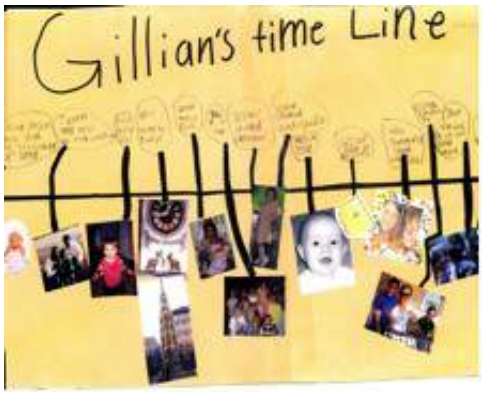
After discussing the book, we asked the children to map Dodsworth's life journey from the story. This response allowed them to reflect on the story and served as a warm up for creating their own Life Journey Maps.



Connecting to Our Own Lives

For learning to take place, we need to make connections between new experiences and what we have already experienced and understood about our world (Short, 1993). Real meaning arises when we are able to structure these connections ourselves, to interpret ideas in light of personal experiences (Peterson & Eeds, 1990). Before we could think broadly about journeys we needed to reflect on journeys within our own lives. Teachers and students engaged in mapping a personal journey. During the retreat before we began our study in the Learning Lab, teachers used the concept of journey to frame a life experience by creating professional journey maps.

Within the lab, students were asked to work with their families to create maps showing their life journeys. Both teachers and students were encouraged to be creative in representing their journeys. Some chose sequential structures like timelines and game boards, while others used structures that represented events or people in their lives as part of a whole like a puzzle piece or a heart. One student used a graph format to merge the events and the emotions in his life journey.



Exploring Metaphor

We needed to think beyond the literal definition of journey to apply a broad concept to world experiences. Students knew and understood literal journeys as vacations or trips from one place to

another, but they needed to be encouraged to think metaphorically and symbolically. We also needed shared language that we could use to talk together about these new types of journeys. The term "metaphor" was introduced to children using a picture book, *Once There Were Giants* (Waddell, 1989), the story about a baby who grows to become a young woman with children of her own. The story begins, "Once there were Giants in our house. There were Mom and Dad and Jill and John and Uncle Tom. The small one on the rug is me." It ends, "Then we had a baby girl and things changed. There are Giants in our house again! There is my husband, Don, and Jill and John, my mom and my dad and Uncle Tom and one of the Giants is....ME!"

It was easy for children of all ages to see that that there weren't really giants in the story. They understood that the author was using the word "giant" to emphasize the difference in the size between the adults and the babies. This book gave us a chance to explore metaphor, an understanding critical to conceptual thinking, and helped us begin to develop a shared language as a learning community. Shared words like metaphor were needed so that we could describe, reflect on, and explain our thinking throughout this process.

Gathering and Sorting Our Understandings

Gathering examples of journeys across a large collection of books pushed us to think beyond our own experiences--to consider journeys literally and symbolically across many contexts. Kathy Short, a researcher from the University of Arizona, and I brought dozens of books to the teacher retreat where we identified multiple journeys in the stories. Some were obvious and literal, while others were more subtle and metaphorical. We individually browsed the collection, recording journeys that we noticed on sticky notes. When we came together we grouped our individual examples into broader categories. The labels for the categories didn't exist at this point. We simply put our examples on charts next to the ideas of our colleagues if we saw a connection. When we were through, four broad categories and two sub-categories emerged: Types of Journeys (mental and physical), Pathways of Journeys, Milestones, and Results.

As we sorted, we were able to see multiple examples of journeys side by side, noticing what they had in common. These commonalities helped us begin to define the concept of journey. We started to think past the specifics of individual examples and to ask ourselves “What can we say is true about all journeys?”

Later we challenged students to think broadly about journey in a similar fashion. Their gathering was done from their life journey maps. After they shared their maps and identified the similarities and differences in small groups, we came together to share their observations. Children made comments, such as:

- We were in Disneyland at the same time.
- We all had some sort of animal.
- Our group organized from being a baby until now.
- Me and Jose had no photos, just sketches and words.
- We were all born in 1997 or 1998.

Their comments indicated that they were thinking only about the events and the different ways those events were shown on the maps.

To push them to view their lives through a Journey lens, we asked, “How is your life like a journey?” The responses of the older children indicated their ability to generalize journey characteristics across the examples:

- We go from one thing to being able to do another thing.
- Lots of exciting things happen, sometimes good and some bad.
- If you try something new, you are experiencing things.
- You see new places and learn new things every day.
- You learn new things even if you don’t know it.
- You explore new things and keep learning and never stop learning.
- You can hurt and move into recovery. Recovery is a journey.
- Your life is a path that you choose.

• Your life is step by step.

• Pieces of a puzzle are your life. Everyday you put the pieces of the puzzle together.

Though there was some attempt to generalize, the younger children's responses tended to be more literal and indicated that they didn't understand what we were asking:

• We go on trips and come back.

• I caught my first fish when I went on a trip to go camping.

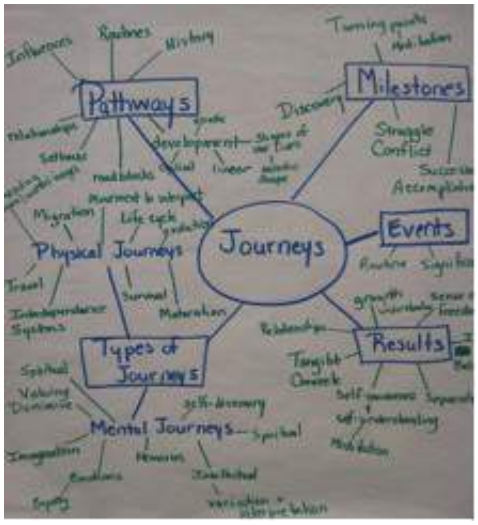
• We go on a trip.

• First Christmas.

Webbing and Categorizing Our Understandings

Webbing encourages conceptualization through the creation of categories and subcategories and making visible the connections between the ideas within a concept. We frequently created webs as teachers and students in the study group and lab and students often chose to use webs as a strategy for making sense of ideas on their own.

When teachers completed the charts of examples of journeys gathered from the text sets, we worked together to create a web of journeys. The broad labels from our sorting experience naturally became the main categories on our web. As we added our individual ideas to the broad categories, we thought of other examples, ideas we had not found in the books and added them to our web. Because some of the new ideas didn't fit well into the existing categories, we had to add new categories. The webbing process helped us expand, organize, define, and better understand the concept of journey broadly.



The older students were asked to work in small groups to create a web of the kinds of journeys that they saw on their life journey maps. To accomplish this, they need to think across their Life Journey Maps and create categories and connections.

Pulling Our Thinking Together through Defining

After we had taken the time to gather, sort and web types of journeys, the teachers worked in small groups to write a broad definition of journey. We developed four definitions:

• A journey is a movement along a physical, emotional, intellectual, social or spiritual pathway.

• A journey is a series of events that have a defined beginning and end that results in physical, intellectual, emotional, or spiritual change.

• A journey is movement made of connected events.

• An individual's path created by mental, physical, and spiritual events that often become milestones, producing a blanket of life (results).

The process of creating these definitions allowed us to bring together the ideas that we had gathered so far. While each definition is unique, they share common characteristics and demonstrated a shared conceptualization. The elements shared by these definitions reemerged frequently throughout our study and many became big ideas about journey that we explicitly explored with our first and second graders to support their symbolic and conceptual thinking.

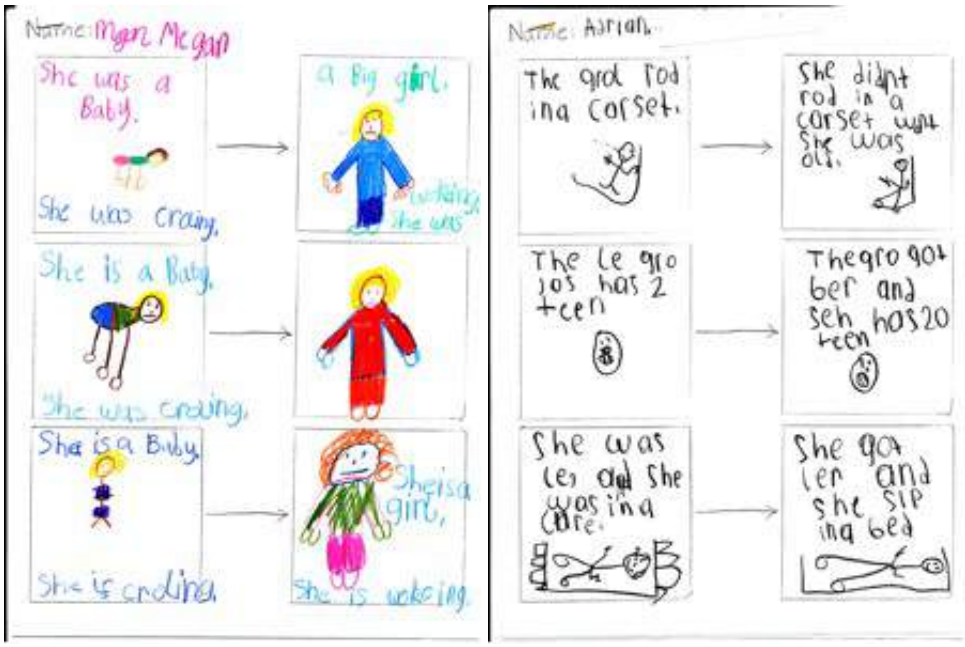
Mapping to Conceptualize

When we began using the term journey as a label for a range of events in the world, the older children easily grasped journey as a concept and could apply it abstractly. The younger children were eager to use the term, but called everything (the desk, their teacher) a journey, indicating that

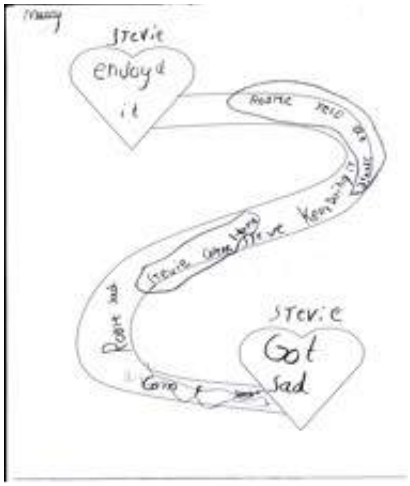
they weren't yet thinking conceptually and needed more explicit support.

We designed response maps that used common symbols to encourage key conceptual aspects of journey and asked the children to use these maps to show their thinking in response to read alouds. The picture books were carefully chosen, making sure in the beginning that the books didn't have examples of literal journeys in which characters moved from place to place. The journeys were symbolic with one type of journey highlighted so that children could more easily explore this type of journey together.

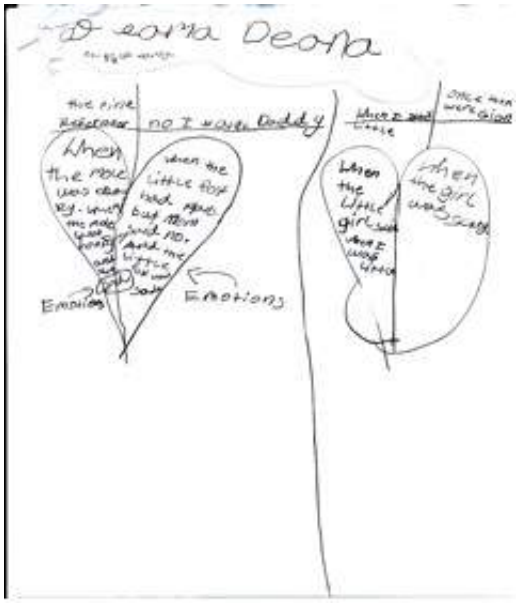
In analyzing the young children's initial discussions of journeys, we noted that they seemed to be on the edge of recognizing growing up as a metaphorical journey. We read aloud a picture book about the change that occurs as we grow older and created a map that showed two boxes with an arrow in between. Our hope was that students would realize that journeys are not simply movement from place to place; that journeys can be events that involve change in what someone thinks and does. After reading and briefly discussing *When I Was Little: A Four-Year Old's Memoir of Her Youth* by Jamie Lee Curtis (1993), students showed the growing journeys within the story on their maps.



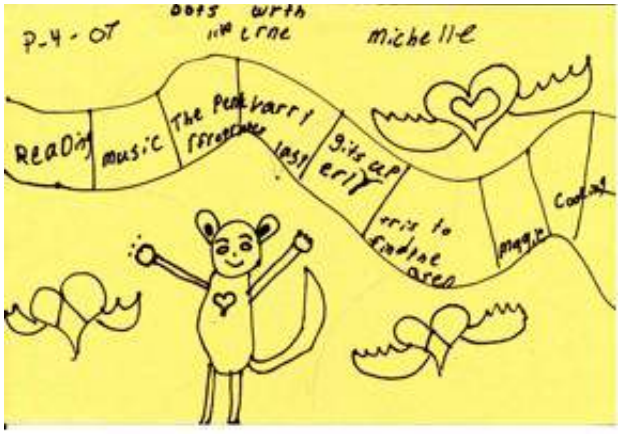
We read *No, I Want Daddy!* by Nadine Brun-Cosme (2004) and changed the shape of the box on the response map to a heart to symbolically highlight emotional journeys. The response map for *Stevie* by John Steptoe (1987) showed two heads connected by a pathway to highlight the process of change within a mental journey. Each map was designed to push the young children to think more flexibly and symbolically about journeys.



The mapping responses were open-ended, providing space for children to explore their own interpretations and thinking about the books, but they were more focused than what we would typically have used within the lab, in that they directed children's attention to particular themes within the book. In this case, the responses were designed to expand and develop students' conceptualizations about journeys. After several experiences with maps, we opened up the mapping responses so that children could show their thinking on their own and asked them to choose two books to compare through creating a map that made sense to them. These responses showed evidence of the concepts that they were exploring:



The older students needed less support in moving to conceptual thinking about journeys. They were able to develop a mapping structure that fit their thinking and talk about their maps conceptually. We did not engage in these same mapping responses with them, but could move immediately to deeper conceptualization through text sets. They created maps to show their life journeys and to show their broad thinking about our touchstone text, *The Pink Refrigerator*, before moving to more in-depth considerations of journeys through text sets.



Developing Deep Conceptualization

After having multiple opportunities to think broadly about journeys, we spent time thinking in depth about issues related to journeys. The older students moved into this thinking earlier in work than did the younger children but all of the students gradually moved from engagements that encouraged them to broaden their conceptualizations of journeys toward more focused inquiry into conceptual issues around journeys.

Symbolic Thinking

Sketch to Stretch (Short, Harste, Burke, 1996) was one engagement we used to deepen students' understanding through thinking symbolically. Sketch to Stretch is a graphic representation of the meaning of a text. The reader identifies an idea or concept he or she considers important from within a story, and then, using color, shapes, pictures, equations, or words communicates that understanding or connection symbolically.

Sketch to Stretch is challenging for children and often more so for adults, who frequently draw an illustration of the story rather than a connection to their thinking about that story. We found that it is helpful to show examples. I shared a Sketch to Stretch that I had created in response to a book that we had read in a previous session. I talked about how I thought about an important idea from within the story and then sketched images to represent the idea. I intentionally left my sketch unfinished and invited the students to suggest ideas that might make my sketch clearer. When they seemed to grasp that they could use color, shape, design, symbols, words or equations to represent the meanings of a text, I read a new story and asked everyone to show their thinking about the meaning of that story using Sketch to Stretch.

Changing the Scope of Thinking

We needed to recognize the big ideas within our thinking about a story and then consider the issues associated with those ideas in order to deepen our thinking. We started by working together to identify the big ideas in large group. After reading and talking about a book we asked children to identify the big ideas within the story and within their discussion of that story. Many of our older students and teachers had previously spent a great deal of time on identifying the main idea within stories and so we needed to open up their thinking to books exploring multiple big ideas.

The support of the large group in developing understanding seemed critical at this point. Individuals who were more confident spoke up, while those less sure were able to listen and learn from their peers. Within the large group, there were always a few who could identify at least one big idea within a story. We collected and discussed these examples, noticing that they were universal in the sense of carrying across many books and in students' life experiences. From the examples and the talk around the examples, those who were initially less confident began to understand and identify big ideas themselves.

Complex thought is difficult to explain and almost impossible to explicitly teach. The group dynamics are powerful in helping learners to understand these nebulous ideas. Demonstrating and talking about the approximations made by some children provides pieces of meaning that we can

all use to construct understanding. Over time, students and teachers were more comfortable identifying big ideas within the stories that we read.

The older students had several sessions where they browsed a large set of books that we had gathered around journeys. The books were not organized into any categories or themes so we asked students to work in small groups to web the big ideas that they found within these books. During study group, the teachers examined these webs across grade levels and identified some common reoccurring themes.

- Beginnings and Endings
- Dreams and Wishes
- Pain and Healing
- Spiritual and Emotional
- People and Relationships
- Growing and Learning
- Movement and Competition

We reorganized the books into text sets to encourage students to think in more depth about these themes or big ideas. Students selected a text set that was of most interest to them and spent several sessions in small groups reading and discussing the books around their theme. However, we wanted them to go beyond the idea or theme to the issues of most significance to them within that theme. We knew this shift in focus would be difficult for many.

We used a big idea that was represented across the webs from the different intermediate classes to demonstrate how to identify the issues around a big idea. Power was a big idea that many students identified in their reading. I wrote power in the center of a piece of chart paper and asked the kids to help me think about the issues that we encounter in our world related to power. I told them that when I think about issues in our world, I am often thinking about what is good, bad, fair and unfair about that idea. We all deal with issues related to power in our lives. Children have lived with and have strong feelings about the issues related to power as well. We webbed their responses about what they saw as good, bad, fair and unfair about power.

Students then went back to their text sets and chose one of the big ideas that they had identified from their text set. They discussed the idea and webbed the issues they saw as related to that idea.

Imaginative Thinking

Imagination is essential for students to be able to think critically about events and people outside their own experience. Empathy is a form of imagination. We require empathy to place ourselves within the story world in a real way, to see what the characters see, to know what they know, to feel what they feel. Otherwise, our tendency is to judge the characters' experiences and ways of thinking based only on our perspectives of the world as the norm.

Toward the end of the semester we shifted as a group to look at forced journeys--journeys that people have no choice but to take. The older students looked at refugees, specifically people forced to flee their homes because of violence or natural disaster, while the younger students explored moving to a new town; a decision often made by parents without the input of children. Issues related to forced journeys had repeatedly emerged across different groups of students and we wanted to give students an opportunity to examine this issue in greater depth.

We engaged all the children in a simulation over the next few weeks. The older students were told that war was at their doorstep and they would need to flee within the next several weeks to a country that was willing to take refugees. Seven countries were willing to take a certain number of refugees and students could select only from those where there was space. The younger children were told that their parents had decided to move to New York City, clear across the country. We asked them to imagine what it would be like, how they would feel, what decisions they would make, and what they would need to do to prepare and adjust to their new homes if they were suddenly forced to move.

We used books to help students better understand these issues and to imagine ways of living beyond their own current lives. We gathered text sets about moving and picture books about refugees for read aloud discussions. We also had text sets for them to browse to help them explore

the geography and cultures of their new homes and to help them imagine the differences and necessary adjustments to their lives and world views. Packing a suitcase or backpack for the journey forced them to further consider what was of most value to them in their current lives and in what ways their lives might change in another place.

Integrating Thinking through Synthesis

Synthesis is "a merging o f new information with existing knowledge to create an original idea, see a new perspective, or form a new line of thinking to achieve insight" (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, p. 143). Intermediate students engaged in two experiences that required synthesis. While both were forms of assessment, it was clear that students continued to revise their understanding throughout these engagements.

After the intermediate students had a chance to think deeply about the issues explored within their journey text sets, we asked them to create a map or visual chart representing how the big ideas and issues each group had identified played out across the texts. We helped them envision this map by showing them a range of possibilities created by students from another school. In discussing the examples we told the students that their maps needed to communicate the important ideas and issues across the texts, they needed to have a title that communicated their focus to others, and that the structure of the map needed to fit the ideas they were trying to show.

As the students created their maps, the energy and depth of thought in each class was palpable. The maps became more that just a refection of what they already understood. The process of creating the map, deciding on a focus and a structure, selecting something worth communicating and collaborating in representing that idea pushed their understanding to new levels. What was exciting was seeing that students were aware that they were thinking in new ways. The process demanded synthesis.

The maps were an opportunity for group synthesis. At the end of our journey unit we asked the intermediate students to show their thinking in individual essays. Developing and supporting a thesis statement would require students to synthesize ideas that were most significant to each of them. We reviewed our learning by showing the students photographs of them during various engagements throughout the semester. We reminded them of the read alouds and posted their group charts and webs. Then we worked as a group to create a web of what each class felt they knew about journeys.

To push students to move to synthesis, I demonstrated how I might choose an idea to develop in an essay. I took a "wide angle" look at the web and asked myself, "What do I most want to say about journeys?" I shared an idea that occurred to me and demonstrated writing multiple thesis statements to address this idea.

Students were asked to engage in this same process of thinking. They were encouraged to write multiple thesis statements and share their thinking with others at their tables.

- When in a new place, you can have difficulties meeting people.
- Different people value different things.
- Journeys can be a new and learning experience.
- Moving causes a lot of changes making it usually hard or sad.
- Journeys cause you to leave things behind.
- Leaving people and things can be an emotional journey.

Once each student decided on a thesis statement, they individually wrote their essays. For all of the students this was a first experience writing an essay. Alex chose to explore the emotions that a refugee might face when forced to leave his home. He wrote:

> When you do leave, it can leave you with mixed emotions. You may have left a lot behind but it was better for your safety. On the other hand, in the eyes of the refugee, what just happened was devastating. The journey ahead is just a guess. How long is it? How will you eat or drink? How will you get away?

German moved to our school from Mexico earlier in the year. His essay was an opportunity for him to share his personal experiences with adapting to a new home:

> Friends here speak another language and they play different. Where I am from we do a lot of things in nature, such as fishing, walking and climbing trees. Here many kids play just sports and are much more competitive. This makes it hard for me to play with them.

Each student wrote about what was personally significant. As a result the essays were quite different than the reports that they were used to writing. They were interesting, original and personal and demonstrated remarkable understanding of the issues that we explored during our inquiry.

Conclusion

The thinking that learners can achieve is influenced by the experiences in which they engage, not through the type of questions to which teachers ask them to respond. If we continuously engage students in learning that requires complex thinking they will demonstrate and develop their

existing thinking capacities within the school setting. Teachers also need to challenge their own thinking in order to recognize and support complex thought in their students. Analysis of student work further challenges teachers to identify different types of thinking in order to push themselves and their students to continue developing their thinking to new levels. As we continue to push for conceptual understanding in our students and ourselves we are amazed by the thinking that occurs. This thinking supports us in making sense of the important issues that we encounter in literature and that exist in our world.

References

- Brune-Cosme, N. (2004). *No, I want daddy*. New York: Clarion.
- Curtis, J. (1995). *When I was little*. New York: HarperCollins.
- de Deu Prats, J. (2005). *Sebastian's roller skates*. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- Egan, P. (2007). *The pink refrigerator*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Erickson, H.L. (2002). *Concept-based curriculum and instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Harvey, S. & Goudvis, A. (2000). *Strategies that work*. York, MA: Stenhouse.
- Short, K., Harste, J., Burke, C., (1996). *Creating classrooms for authors and inquirers*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Steptoe, J. (1987). *Stevie*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Waddell (1997). *Once there were giants*. New York: Candlewick.

Thinking Conceptually about Journeys through an Author Study

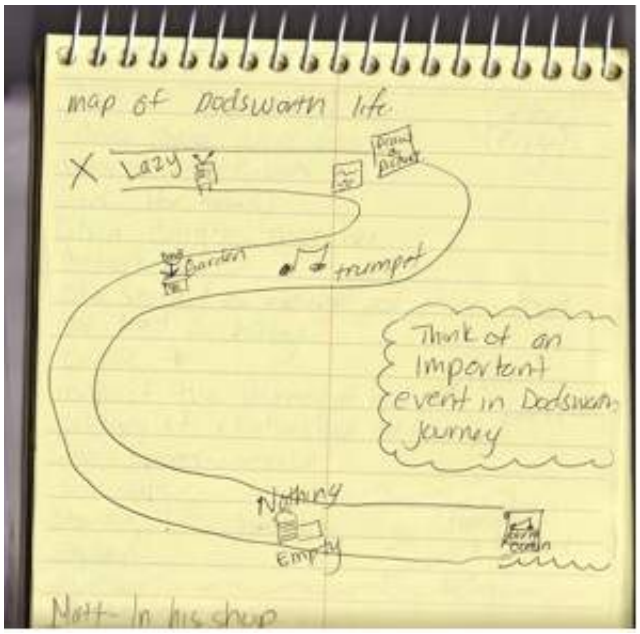
by Jennifer Griffith, First Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Moving my students toward thinking conceptually was a new way for me to frame my curriculum. I was intrigued with exploring an idea-centered curriculum that focused on deeper, conceptual ideas as opposed to a topic-centered curriculum that focused on details and memorization (Erickson, 2002). As an educator I push my students' thinking when reading or responding to a piece of literature but often I find myself settling for their first responses or retellings from the story. I wanted students to dig deeper and be able to connect the concept of journeys to their own lives and to other books. Erickson (2002) states that a concept is "a mental construct, an organizing idea that categorizes a variety of examples" (p.56) and I was curious to see if a concept could become an organizational frame for young children's thinking. I also wanted our kids to see the connection between our work in the learning lab and in the classroom because I believed that this link was the key to their understanding of journeys.

I have frequently used Author Studies with first graders so I knew linking journeys to this type of study in the classroom wouldn't be difficult. The challenge would be supporting the kids in thinking conceptually about journeys. I enjoy author studies as a way to introduce kids to a particular author's work and as a link to genre in our Writers Workshop. I felt an author study would help to weave our work from the lab with journeys into literature engagements back in my classroom. I chose Patricia Polacco as our author because I was familiar with her work and owned a number of her books. Since her characters often go though a change to create a pathway within her books, they seemed to lend themselves to conceptual connections to journeys.

The Learning Lab was a place we came on a weekly basis and where our conceptual thinking began. We started with working hard at having the kids define and identify the types of journeys in pictures books and to discuss why they considered something a particular journey. The first couple of months were spent building the foundation for thinking conceptually. We focused in the lab on engagements with literature that supported their thinking about journeys and utilized a variety of mapping strategies to explore the journeys in these books.

In September the children were asked what a journey was. Their responses were similar--journeys had to do with going somewhere or being on a trip. We were introduced to *The Pink Refrigerator* (Egan, 2007) and looked at Dodsworth's adventures as a journey. Lisa Thomas, our instructional coach and director of the Learning Lab, demonstrated how to create a path to chart Dodsworth's journey throughout the book.



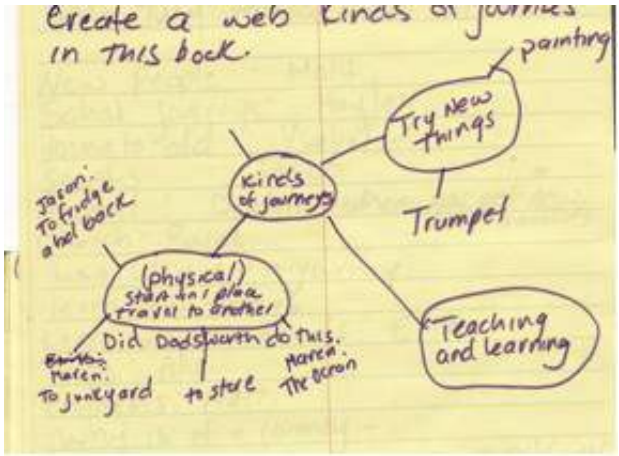
Kids did start thinking beyond journey as trip as they considered the significant events in Dodsworth's life as a journey. They were then asked to create their own life journey maps at home, creating a similar pathway to Dodsworth's. When the kids brought their maps in to share it was easy to see that many had received a great deal of help by family members and so they had a hard

time explaining the journeys represented on their life maps. I was disappointed as I felt the purpose of this assignment had been lost and so students were still looking at journeys as going somewhere. This could be seen in their responses to Lisa's question, "How is your life like a journey'?" Kids responded with:

- We go on trips and come back.
- Changing.
- Having birthdays.
- Going camping.
- Discovering new things.

It was obvious that we needed to shift our study and our thinking about how to help our kids think conceptually about journeys. Erickson (2002) states "that a curriculum cannot be coherent if students do not realize the relevance of the study to their everyday lives" (p.44) so we knew that we needed to find other ways to connect the concept to their lives.

Classifying different kinds of journeys helped kids think more conceptually. To help us with this process, we reread *The Pink Refrigerator* and studied the types of Dodsworth's journeys and then created a web to help organize our conceptual thinking.



To help the kids connect journey to their own lives we asked students to go back to their life journey maps and create small group webs identifying the kinds of journeys on their maps. The kids seemed to grasp this idea of classification but were still having a hard time relating their categories to a journey. They did identify a much wider range of categories from their maps.

- Teaching and Learning
- School Journeys

• Young to Old

• Sports

• New Animals

• Meeting New People

• Problems

• Trying New Things

• Physical

After listening to *When I Was Little: A 4-Year-Old's Memoir of her Youth* (Curtis, 1995) we identified growing and learning journeys. The kids loved the illustrations and dialogue in the book and were highly engaged during the reading of the story. Their talk was much livelier because of this engagement.

• The girl was a baby and she grew up.

• It was a growing up journey.

• She told us about stuff she couldn't do and now she can.

• It's a learning journey.

• She's taking us on lots of journey.

• It's a reading journey- talking about things she learned to do.

• Growing journey- a baby born, gets older and older.

• She learns about herself as she gets older.

We talked about how there are lots of changes as you get older and Lisa challenged the kids to identify the changes that happened in the book. This task seemed to come easy for them.

• Throws a fit to problem-solving

• Goes from sad to happy

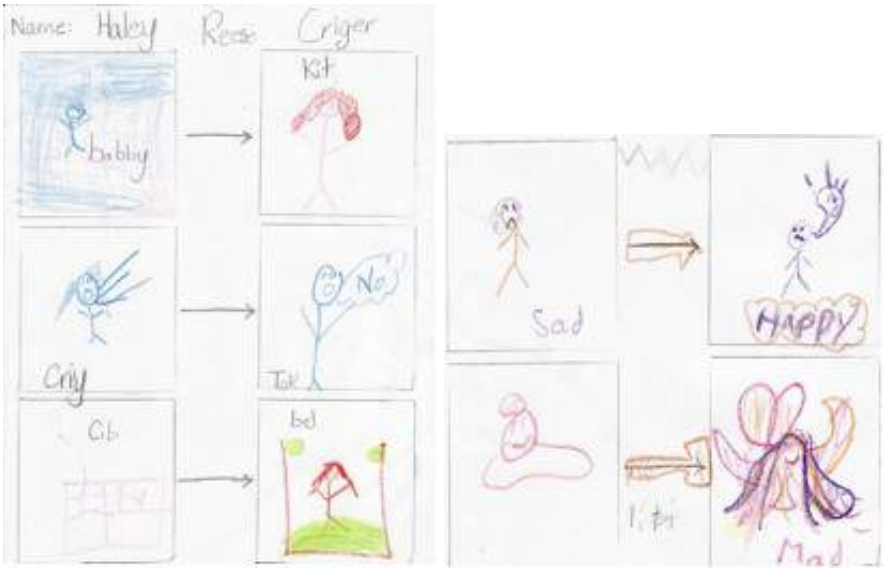
• Crawling to walking

• Car seat to seat belts

• Crib to bed

• Eating yucky stuff to eating good stuff

At tables the kids worked on a response strategy of mapping changes from the book using pictures and words.



They then were able to take these changes and add them to our web of 'kinds of journeys' to help their conceptual thinking.

• School Journeys- went to preschool

• Young to Old Journey

• Learning Journey- to talk

• Problem Journey- time out

The following week we continued exploring new journeys through literature and read *No, I Want Daddy!* (Brune-Cosme, 2004). The kids were encouraged to look at how the characters changed emotionally rather than physically. They were prompted to search for emotional journeys as Lisa read the book for a second time, giving them a focus for their listening, an important strategy that gave the kids time to process the story. They had many comments about this book:

• Starts with Anna and she goes from happy to mad.

• Dad goes from happy to sad in the story.

• Little girl was excited and then when her mom tells her no she goes to being mad.

• She was happy when Daddy came home and then is cross at her mom.

The kids then did a response strategy to help them think about emotional journeys where they were able to include the emotional changes of characters.

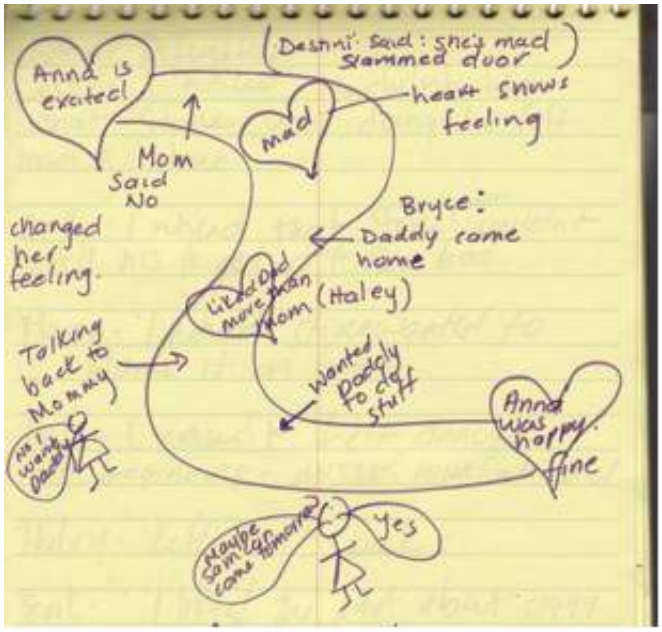
It was then decided to add feeling journeys to our growing web on kinds of journeys. It was at this moment that Kathy Short, a collaborator from the University of Arizona, Lisa Thomas, the Instructional Coach at Van Horne, and I saw a shift in their thinking and their ability to explicitly discuss the 'why' of a journey. The kids were backing up what they were saying related to emotional journeys and could identify the shift in feelings and the events that led to the shift.

> • I noticed when Anna came home her mom was grumpy, got answer, said not to everything and Anna was naughty.

• She was in a happy mood when she got home when her mom said no she got angry.

• She wanted to have her friend at her house, mom said no, she was happy to see her dad, still liked her mom but said no to her mom because she was still angry with her.

It was time for the kids to use a "pathway" to illustrate the process of a journey. The goal was to get the kids to think about the in-betweens of the journey, moving past just thinking about the beginning and end. Looking back at *No, I Want Daddy!* (2004) the kids were able to reconstruct the pathway of this book.



Stevie (Steptoe, 1987) was the book where I noticed that their conversation was beginning to relate to journeys and they were noticing the change that occurred in the characters. It was one of those ah-ha moments as a teacher.

- In the middle he felt annoyed and at the end he missed him.

- It was an emotional journey.

- He went from being mad to liking Stevie.

- What he felt at the beginning was happy before Stevie came and then he changed to being annoyed after Stevie stayed.

- Mom had an emotional journey- she didn't care what Stevie did then Stevie moved and she cared about Robert and his feelings now.

The kids then worked on creating a pathway using illustrations and words to show the emotional journey of a chosen character from the book.

By October they were making great connections in the lab and I felt that the kids were ready to move into our focused study of Patricia Polacco to bring this conceptual thinking into the classroom. It was important to me that they had the foundations of thinking about journeys as more than just a trip before starting our author study. I felt that they had a grasp on creating a pathway and identifying different kinds of journeys in literature. I decided to start with our study to help enhance our thinking conceptually about journeys. As a staff we reflected on our own definition of journey. The definition that resonated with me used during this study for my own understanding is that a "journey is a movement of events along a physical, emotional, intellectual, social or spiritual pathway." I believed that the response mapping strategies that we had been using to explore journeys could help their thinking about Polacco's books.

We began with *The Keeping Quilt* (Polacco, 2001) and decided to chart the "Big Ideas" in each story to guide our thinking and to see connections between her books. The ideas from our first book included:

- The quilt was passed down.
- There were bread, salt, gold coin, sprinkle of wine in all family events.
- She put herself in the story.
- Noticed the illustrations- that only the babushka is in color.

As a class we created a pathway of the quilt's journey, highlighting the momentous events. The kids were able to identify the in-betweens in addition to clearly defining the beginning and end of the pathway.

The next day we revisited the book, this time with both the first and second graders together and

asked them to record their thoughts on a grafitti board. The goal was for the kids to respond with illustrations, words, connections, thoughts or wonderings while the book was being read aloud.

This board, created by second graders, shows a growing up journey. The child chose to list the important life events of the grandma, her life in Russia and the U.S. raising a family, and then dying. The child also highlighted the quilt and the events it was a part of such as the births and weddings.

We continued to explore more Patricia Polacco books as our work in the lab exploring journeys continued. *My Rotten Red-Headed Older Brother* (Polacco, 1998) elicited more discussion and connections among Patricia's work. I noticed the evolution of their talk and the way their thinking became more thoughtful and not so random. They went from talking about the part they liked the best or simple things they noticed in illustrations, to making connections between books and referring to journeys in their conversation.

- Babushka was in this story as well.
- Even if sister or brother are mean they'll help you when you get hurt.
- Patricia put herself in the story.
- It's about family.
- The grandma was alive in the story so it must have taken place before she died.
- It wasn't until "Betty Doll" that I saw the kids begin to connect it to the types of journeys we had been discussing and make the connections between the Polacco books.
- The doll gets passed down like the quilt.

• Clothes made the doll like clothes made the quilt.

• She uses her family as characters again.

• It was an emotional journey.

• When death happens they're always in our hearts.

It was exciting to see their conversation shifting from simple observations of the story to bigger ideas and connections.

Thundercake (Polacco, 2002) and *When Lightening Comes in a Jar* (Polacco, 2007) were two other books where the kids made connections across her books.

• She put herself in the story

• Family memories

• Emotional journeys

• Faced her fears

The strategy of comparison charts was used in the lab to analyze connections between the books in our text set of Journeys and so we used the same strategy with our Polacco study. Intertextuality is the process of searching for connections across a group of texts; in this case, students were connecting them to a common journey. In the lab the children sorted the books into categories to look for these intertextual connections. They would choose two books and explain their reasoning for connecting them. I was impressed with their responses.

•

Sebastian's Roller Skates

(de Deu Prats, 2005) and

The Pink Refrigerator

(2007) both have something they find, roller skates and frig, gave him a way to try skating and to not be shy anymore and gave him stuff to try.

• *When I Was Little* (1995) and *Once There Were Giants* (Waddell, 1997) were growing and doing things.

• *Stevie* and *No, I Want Daddy!* were about families and people. Could also use *When I was Little* and *Once There were Giants*.

The kids also took a journey from their web and identified it with a particular book. Illustrations of these connections were created by partners and placed on the chart.

With our Polacco study we grouped our first and second graders together and had them create comparison charts with the books we had studied. We had a whole group discussion of connections and journeys between the different books and asked the kids to choose two Polacco books to connect to a common journey. The various journeys they came up with included family, emotional, author, mind, physical, learning, and passed-down journeys. This thinking was due in large to the "Important Ideas" charts we had been keeping in our rooms related to the books we read. Our groups were made up of a mix of first and second graders. Each group was given a chart listing two journeys from our class discussion and they then could choose the two Polacco books they wanted to attach to those journeys. Their job was to intersect the book they chose and the journey and illustrate the connection with both pictures and words.

Their work was fantastic; they were using the word "because" to explain their thinking and they had no problems identifying types of journeys and their relationships to the books. I believe this was made possible due to their exploration of the broad concept of journeys in the Learning Lab and enhanced with our author study of Patricia Polacco. Overall the whole experience allowed my

kids to move deeper in thought when reading and discussing a piece of literature.

When I set out on this study I was skeptical about whether first graders were going to conceptually grasp the idea of journeys. The engagements that were used to help the students understand journeys were successful; particularly the use of mapping as a response strategy and exploring different journeys in literature to develop broader views. Approaching curriculum from an "idea" point of view rather than a "topic" helped my students achieve conceptual understanding as a way of thinking about the world. Their major focus of attention was no longer on gathering details and facts but on developing deep and essential understandings (Erickson, 2002). This shift in focus also led to a more coherent curriculum where the parts were unified and connected by a sense of the whole, in our case by the connections to journeys woven across our classroom, school, and everyday lives. This sense of connectedness gave a different energy and purpose to our work in the classroom. We moved away from only doing school work to journeying together in life work.

References

- Egan, P. (2007). *The pink refrigerator*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Curtis, J. (1995). *When I was little*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Brune-Cosme, N. (2004). *No, I want daddy*. New York: Clarion.
- de Deu Prats, J. (2005). *Sebastian's roller skates*. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller
- Erickson, H.L. (2002). *Concept-based curriculum and instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Polacco, P. (2001). *The keeping quilt*. New York: Aladdin.
- Polacco, P. (1998). *My rotten red-headed older brother*. New York: Aladdin.
- Polacco, P. (2002). *Thundercake*. New York: Philomel.
- Polacco, P. (2007). *When lightening comes in a jar*. New York: Puffin.
- Steptoe, J. (1987). *Stevie*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Waddell (1997). *Once there were giants*. New York: Candlewick.

Mapping Our Understandings of Literature

by Jaquetta Alexander, Second Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

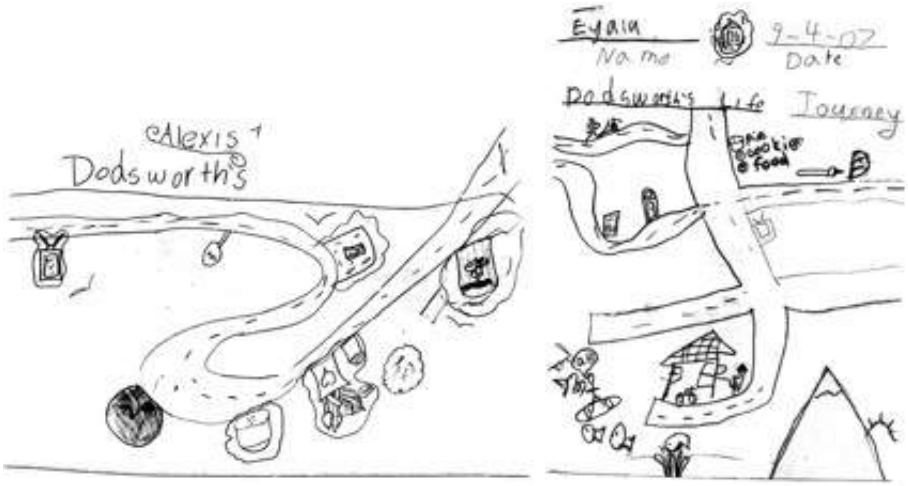
Reading picture books aloud to my students has always been one of my favorite times of the day. Typically, these read-aloud times include talk about children's personal connections and interpretations of a book. I have explored other ways of thinking and responding to books, such as sketches, drama, webbing, charting, and graffiti boards. These ways of responding provide time for students to reflect on their thinking about a story in ways that are often more supportive of young

children's thinking instead of only relying on talk to explore interpretations (Short, Kahn, & Kauffman, 2000). Recently I have been intrigued by the ways in which mapping has helped my students organize their thinking and explore relationships between ideas, people, and events in the stories we are reading.

I associate maps with geography and did not consider their potential as a response strategy until we began a conceptual exploration of journeys in the Learning Lab that carried over into my classroom. We used literature to challenge students to go beyond a literal understanding of journeys as trips to a more conceptual or metaphoric understandings. Each time we read a new book, students engaged in a literature discussion and some type of mapping response strategy. Given the connection of maps to journeys, mapping was a natural choice for response and for encouraging the development of conceptual thinking. This strategy gave the students a visual way to think about and organize their responses. By the end of the fall semester, students recognized that a journey could be much more than the physical movement from one place to another.

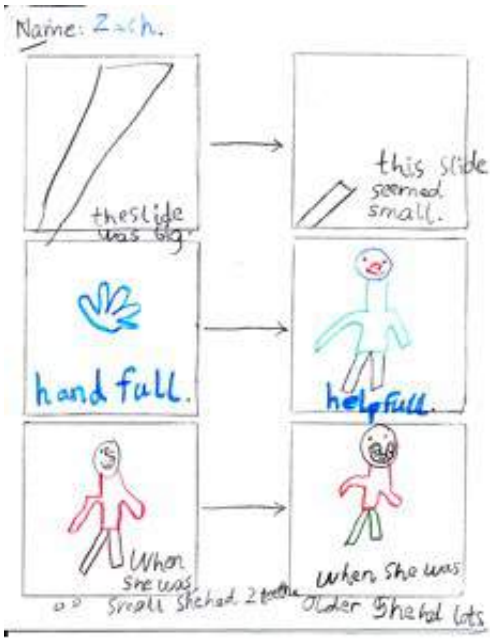
Moline (1995) argues that maps are used to place information in its spatial context. Maps can enable a learner to highlight spatial relationships, summarize a process, show changes over time, and record the movement of people or ideas. When children create maps, they are forced to organize their ideas and information on paper while paying attention to spatial relationships. They have to prioritize the ideas and information because they can't include everything on the map. The spatial organization emphasizes the relative importance of particular ideas or events and provides a visual representation of the relationships between these ideas or events. For young children, the maps we created highlighted relationships and helped to make abstract concepts more concrete.

Our focus on journeys began with reading aloud *The Pink Refrigerator* by Tim Egan (2007). This became a touchstone text for our classroom because the students had a very strong connection to the book and continued to refer to it throughout the entire school year. Dodsworth owns a thrift shop, and each day visits the junkyard to bring back items to sell in his shop. One day he notices a pink refrigerator with a note attached, stating "make pictures," and inside the refrigerator are paints, brushes, and a sketchbook. Dodsworth intends to sell the art supplies, but instead he uses them. Each day thereafter a new note appears and Dodsworth continues to carry out each exploration. Most students initially recognized this story as a physical journey of moving from one place to another in their maps of his life. Alexis drew a map reflecting her thinking that Dodsworth's journey was basically linear, while Eyalu depicts Dodsworth's life journey as having pathways separate from his main route.

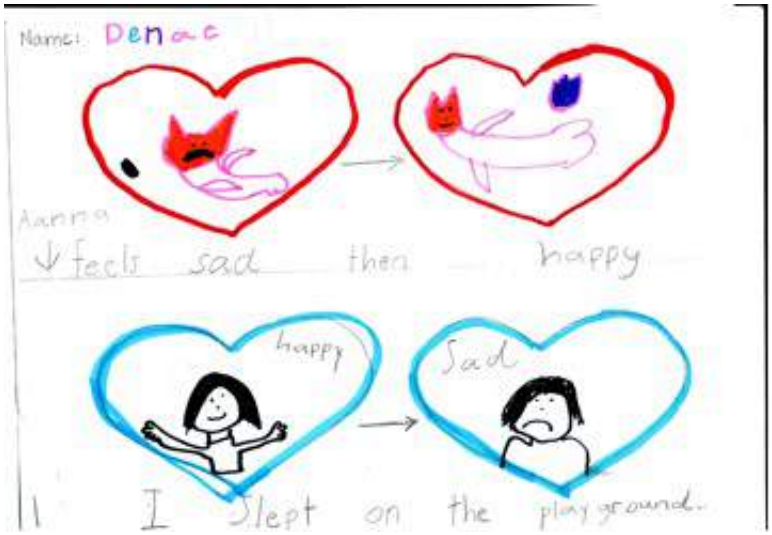


In our teacher study group, we reflected on the students' understandings about journeys from this experience. It was apparent that they did not have a conceptual understanding and saw a journey as a physical movement from place to place. We decided to teach what they were on the edge of knowing about journeys—what they were starting to explore but didn't quite grasp yet. That decision led us to focus on growing up journeys, emotional journeys, and learning journeys in our next experiences with the younger children.

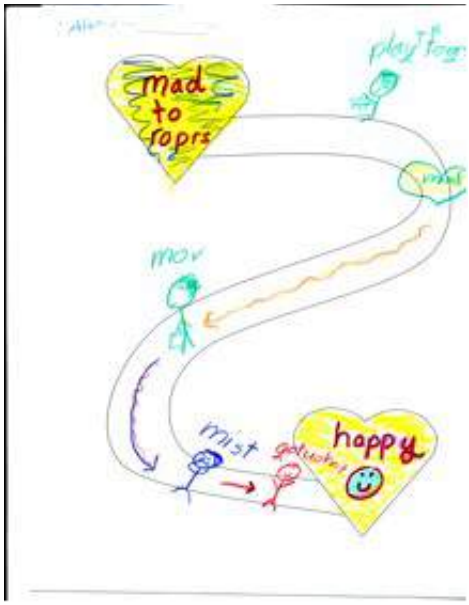
Our next two books, *Once There Were Giants* by Martin Waddell and Penny Dale (1989) and *When I Was Little* by Jamie Lee Curtis (1993) presented stories about the changes young children go through as they mature. The students easily labeled this type of journey as a growing up journey. We asked students to create a simple map in which they identified and mapped some of the changes for the main character. We wanted them to explore journeys as changes that are not necessarily a physical change in location. Zach's map of the little girl's metamorphosis from *When I Was Little* is evidence of his understanding of the changes that occur on such a journey.



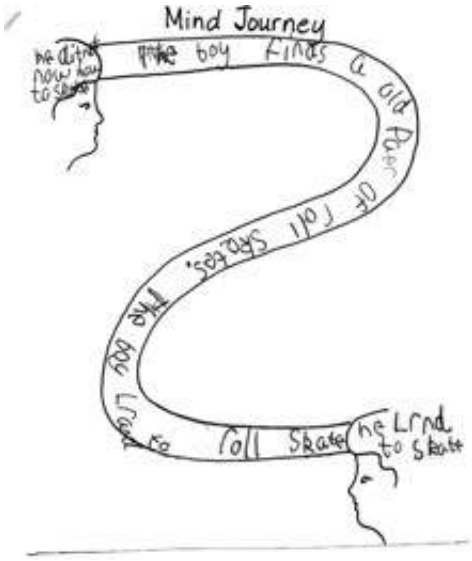
To challenge students to continue developing their conceptual understandings about journeys, we explored emotional journeys. *No, I Want Daddy!* By Nadine Brun-Cosme (2003) illustrates the many changes in emotion that a young girl experiences. Anna comes home happy, but her mother's grumpy mood results in her anger and she decides she wants Daddy to do everything with her that evening. After her daddy tucks her in bed she feels as though something is missing until her mother quietly visits her. They are able to mend hurt feelings and Anna is finally able to sleep. We used the visual of a heart to help students map the emotional journeys that Anna goes through in the book. Students had to decide which of her emotional journeys they wanted to depict. Denae's map reflects Anna's change in feelings from sad to happy. On this map we also asked students to make a personal connection of a time when they experienced an emotional journey. Denae's understanding is apparent in her illustration and her writing about her journey as well as Anna's.



John Steptoe's (1969) book, *Stevie*, deepened the students' understandings of emotional journeys. Robert is angry that his mother is babysitting for another little boy. He is angry because Stevie plays with his toys when he's at school and leaves dirty footprints on his bed. But when Stevie's parents decide to move away, Robert is sad and misses him. At this point we recognized that students could see a change occurring in the different types of journeys so we decided to use the maps in a different way to highlight pathways. We wanted students to understand that there is a process that leads to change. Hearts were still used to illustrate the emotional aspect of the journey, but this time students selected an emotional change and illustrated the process of that change over time. Alexis chose to show Robert's multiple changes in emotions across the book.



Another journey that students explored was a mind journey, which they also called a learning journey. *Sebastian's Roller Skates* (de Deu Prats, 2003) was read aloud to further their conceptual understandings. The book tells a story of a shy young boy who gains confidence by learning to roller skate. As shown in Tanner's map, Sebastian didn't know how to skate at the beginning of the story, but learns to do so by the end of the story. This book was significant because not only did the students identify the learning journey, but they also understood that by learning to skate Sebastian gained confidence that helped him to overcome his shyness.



Initially I considered these mapping strategies as examples of students' understandings about the books and about journeys. It wasn't until several months after we began our exploration of journeys, that I realized the effect of thinking conceptually on my students as thinkers. We asked the students to look at all of their different maps and reflect with a partner. I realized this opportunity to analyze, make connections between maps, and explain each map to a partner was vital because when my students were asked, "What are some of the big ideas that are true about our

world?" they showed a deep understanding of the concept of journeys. This question was posed to see if students could identify big ideas based on our explorations of journeys. I anticipated a retelling of events from the stories, but their responses were evidence that the students had a broad understanding of the concept:

• When you grow up you get to do different things.

• Growing up is like a journey because you start as a baby, then a kid, then a teenager, then an adult, then you're old.

• When you grow up you have different things.

• You can learn from other people.

• You learn harder things as you get older.

• As you get older you get different kinds of emotions. When you're younger you're silly, when you're older you're serious.

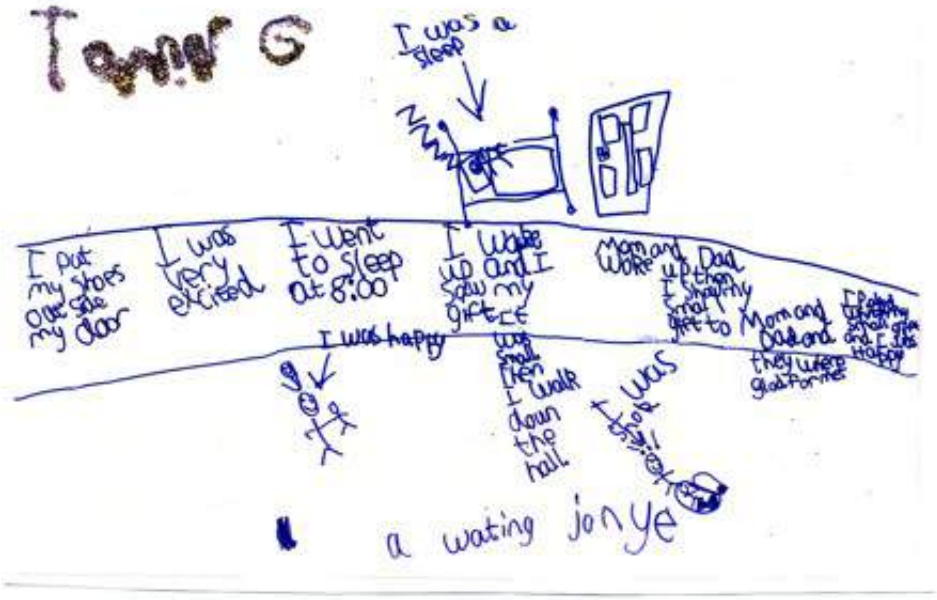
• Sometimes your emotions change because of other people.

These responses show that the students were better able to see and understand the themes within each book and to form conceptual understandings of journeys at a metaphorical level. Erickson (2002) suggests that using a conceptual lens for a topic of study, as we did with journeys, facilitates and requires deep understanding and allows for the transfer of knowledge to new settings.

Additional evidence of their conceptual thinking occurred when the students voluntarily offered their own labels for journeys in books we were reading in the classroom. For example, one day while reading *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson (2001), Manny commented that it included a "friendship journey." In the spring when our concept study had shifted to human rights, my students were learning about how our choices affect our environment when Deana shouted out, "Wow, that's a thoughtful journey because we have to always be thoughtful about our choices." The students continued to recognize different types of journeys throughout the entire school year.

Our Holiday Memory Maps evolved from our involvement with the study of journeys. We asked the first and second-grade students to discuss their holiday traditions with their parents. Students were then asked to identify one of their favorite holiday memories and to map it using a pathway of their choice. After the map was created, the students labeled the kind of journey they experienced during that particular memory. Many students used familiar labels, such as emotional and learning journeys, and some created new labels. David's learning journey, Megan's happy journey, and Tanner's waiting journey reflect some of the thinking that students engaged in around their

memories.


I was a sleep
I put my shoes on the side my door
I was very excited
I went to sleep at 8:00
I woke up and I saw my gift
Mom and Dad woke up then I shown my gift to Mom and Dad and they were glad for me
I was happy
I walk down the hall
I was food forever!
a waiting jonye

Megan
My mommy lets me get the cookie make the circles
I made Candy Canes with my mom and they smell delicious
I like being with my mom and I feel good.
mom
Harry Journey

David
We are getting the ginger bread ready
I was feeling happy rolling the sugar bread
I like to cut out the ginger bread men
I turn the oven on to 350°
It is fun to watch them cook
The gingerbread men are ready
Learning

A broad concept serves as an umbrella that students and teachers can use to encompass a wide range of topics, themes, and ideas. It does not limit the possibilities for class and student inquiries, but provides a point of connection across those inquiries (Short, et al., 1996). My students' thinking grew from simple and concrete understandings that a journey represented physical movement from one place to another to the conceptual idea that a journey is a pathway of changes that involve growing up, emotions, and learning. Even more significant to me was the students' ability to apply this conceptual knowledge in other areas, as they did with the Holiday Memory Map.

The mapping response strategies played a key role in supporting students in making this shift from literal to conceptual understandings and in applying their understandings in new contexts. Mapping provided a concrete way for them to visually show change over time through pathways and to understand the process of change. They could see the connections and relationships in ways that would have not been apparent if we had only used talk or writing to respond to the books. Mapping is a strategy that both extends and transforms students' thinking and supports them in making the abstract concrete.

References

- Brun-Cosme, N. (2002). *No, I want daddy!* New York: Clarion.
- Curtis, J.L. (1993). *When I was little*. New York: HarperCollins.
- de Deu Prats, J. (2003). *Sebastian's roller skates*. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- Egan, T. (2007). *The pink refrigerator*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Erickson, H. (2002). *Concept-based curriculum and instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Moline, S. (1995). *I see what you mean: Children at work with visual information*. York, ME: Stenhouse.
- Short, K. G., Kauffman, G., & Kahn, L. (2000). "I just need to draw": Responding to literature across multiple sign systems. *The Reading Teacher*, *54*, 160-171.
- Short, K. Schroeder, J., Laird, J., Kauffman, G., Ferguson, M., & Crawford, K. (1996). *Learning together through inquiry*. York, ME: Stenhouse.
- Steptoe, J. (1969). *Stevie*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Waddell, M. (1989). *Once there were giants*. Ill. P. Dale. New York: Delacorte.
- Woodson, J. (2001). *On the other side*. Ill. E.B. Lewis. New York: Putnam.

  - **Christian:** It's choices of where you're going. Things you need to do. Life is a path. Choosing the wrong path can mean trouble for a while, and then you go back and fix it.
  - **Michael:** Maybe going to other countries, trying new things, learning new things.
  - **Cole:** Step by step. Just like in life.
  - **Ryan:** Like a cartoon, picture by picture moving along on a road, pictures or

visual images in our heads. It's like watching a video.

- **Sheshna:** Step by step, everyday something different is going to happen. The past is going with you. Everything you do will stay with you.
- **Cole:** Life is a puzzle and you are the pieces.
- **Sheshna:** Everyday you are adding a piece of the puzzle. You are putting yourself together. Hey world, here I am!
- **Michael:** This is related to what Cole and Sheshna said. Sheshna said because we make the life journey, we might not remember everything. But we can remember by our journey maps. It may not seem important then, but later, it seems important.
- **Christian:** Life is a journey and an iceberg. It starts off small and builds as you go along. Sometimes bad things happen to it like the Titanic hitting it and causing it to be damaged. You never know what will happen in your life.

• Beginnings and Endings

• Dreams and Wishes

• Pain and Healing

• Spiritual and Emotional

• People and Relationships

• Growing and Learning

• Movement and Competition

• Connect

• Question/wonder

• Predict

• Determine importance

• Visualize

• Infer

• Synthesize

- **Justina:** Owen's mother breathes fire to teach him a lesson. It's a mental journey

or maybe a spiritual journey from hurrying to relaxation? Mom goes from stressed out to relaxed. It's mental because the mind had to slow down and relax.

- **Andres:** Pain is a journey. We had 5 books that were sad. I thought about death and how it changes your life. You're going along one way and it makes you take a left turn. It's a spiritual journey as well. If someone in your family dies, you will be sad. You go from happy to sad.
- **Lisa:** How is it a Spiritual Journey and not Emotional?
- **Justina:** A Mental category needs to be added. Emotional? Under Change, let's add Death.
- **Christian:** I can back up Justina's comment. I have lost someone. It changes your life right away. At first [death] is a physical change, but after a while, it's more spiritual. After 2-3 years you get used to the way it is. It's really hard on the family. One person brings it up and everyone gets sad. Then it becomes…when you mention them once in a while. I didn't read in Kinder and failed. I didn't read because I did that with my dad and I didn't want to share that with others. [Christian's dad died when he was 5 years old.] So I think Death should be added to the category of Mental Journeys. It connects from Emotional and then, Death.

• Things made of glass: Vase, light bulb, marble, and magnifier

• Things that were solid and not hollow: hammer, spoon, screwdriver, and plastic disk

• Things made of plastic: cup, spoon, pen, calculator, CD, basket, dice, thread spool

• Artistic/creative: brush, pen, paper, thread, game, dice, cards

• Hard or metal: (moved solid into this category)

• Stuff that made things work: battery makes toys work, key makes car work, calculator makes math.

• Hammer and screwdriver didn't fit.

1. Sort all of the books into categories and label the categories with a sticky note.

2. Explain your categories to a teacher to make sure they make sense.

3. Record on the sheet how the books were sorted and the titles.

4. Start again by putting all the books in one pile and resort them into new categories.

Competition and Movement

1st Sort: Sports, Practice, Relationships, and Conflict

2nd Sort: Power, Feelings, and Competition

3rd Sort: Children, Serious

4th Sort: Pain, Loving, Sharing/Not Sharing, Growing

Spiritual and Emotional

1st: War/Conflict, culture, Trust, Metaphor/Symbols

2nd: Religion, Change, Family Culture, Death, and Elderly teaching

3rd: Cultural, Betrayal, Courage

4th: Family Trust, Anger, and Tragedy

Beginnings and Endings

1st: Traveling, Cycles, Changes, Typical Day

2nd: Moving, Life, Ends where it Begins (circular)

Growing and Learning

1st: Working, School Learning, Emotion, Adventures

2nd: Africa, Animals, Asia, USA

People and Relationships

1st: Friendship, Relatives, And Not True Friends

2nd: Family, Trouble, Weekend, and Decisions

3rd: Not a Good Life, Caring, Funny, Helping, and Visiting

Dreams and Wishes

1st: Animals, Funny, Countries, and Serious

2nd: Weird, Certain Time Period, Fantasy, Realistic Fiction, and Happy Endings

3rd: Magic, Your Own Thing, Far from Home, Trouble

Pain and Healing

1st: Happy, Sad, Healing, Mad/Anger, Death

2nd: Pain/Tough Life, Racial, Jail/Caged, Meeting New People, Disabled

3rd: Different Country, Friendship

4th: War, Animals, Left Out, Different Life

- **Justina:** Power is something you want but don't need. You have to go and get it. You have to push others to get it. Not with your hands, but if you want something, by demanding and telling them to give it to you.
- **Ryan:** Sometimes you have power and don't know it.
- **Christian:** I think people need power. Look what's happening in Iraq. Our president was power hungry. Other presidents wouldn't have started was, but after 9-11.
- **Ryan:** We are there to free people not to control them. Hitler had bad power. Teachers have power. You can make us be quiet, tell us what to do, and leave when you want. If we don't listen, it takes away power. Because you have power, you are responsible.
- **Maya:** Gender is an issue. Girls don't have as much power.
- **Michael:** People who are famous have power. They can tell us what to do.
- **Maya:** Popularity. Some girls say you have to do what I say. They think they have power. We have power if we have determination to get power.
- **Justina:** The president has power. He can make people do anything.
- **Lisa:** How does he get power?
- **Michael:** Everyone can get power if they try. There are many ways to get power but sometimes it doesn't always work.

Text Set:

Beginnings and Endings

(Marshall, Queta, Kaleb, Shawn)

Big Idea: Adventure

This group used a game board format because it represented an adventure. Adventures provide learning experiences.

Marshall: It is important to kids so they can share what they learn through life.

Text Set:
Dreams and Wishes
(Justina, Alex, Kynshyla, and Maya)

Big Idea: Hard work pays off.

This group used puzzle pieces to show connections between the texts and stars to show what was magic in each book.

Kynshyla: You had to work your way through stuff. Nothing is given to you. Work to earn your reward.

Justina: Be patient. It (the reward) is not always going to come to you right away.

Kynshyla: You don't always get what you work for, but you get something in return.

Alex: You have to work but then wait for the reward.

Text Set:
Pain and Healing
(Ryan, DG, Nicolas, and Andres)

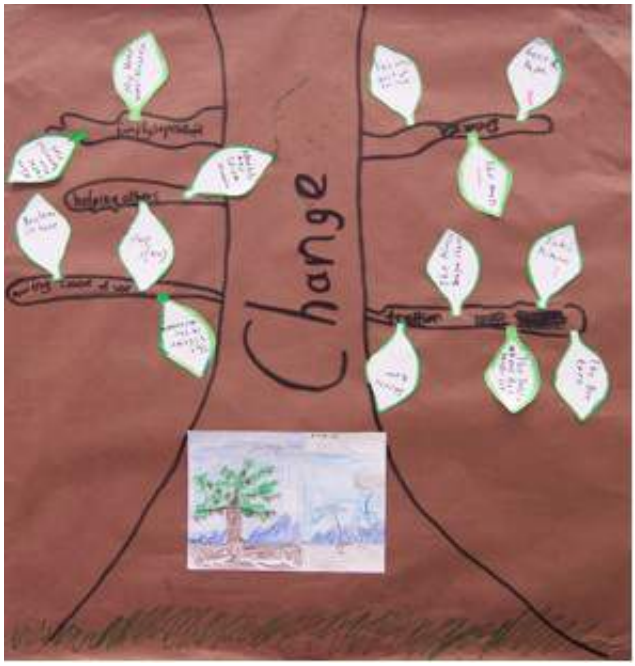
Big Idea: **Andres:** Pain causes or leads to healing.

DG: We noticed that it was connected in some way.

Text Set:
Spiritual and Emotion
(Christian, Austin, and Cole)

Big Idea: Change Ex. Family, Separation, Death, Moving, Cause of War all had something to do with change.

This group used a creative way to display the information on a tree where the branches were the big ideas and the books were the leaves on each branch. The most significant thing for this group was the concept of "Changing of things through Life. Spiritual/Emotional changes can affect our inner selves. Change can help and hurt us."



Text Set:
People and Relationships
(Maycee, Mary, Sarena C., Serina T.)

Big Idea: Family relationships.

How families make their decisions, connected to books and how they care for each other.

Text Set:
Growing and Learning
(Madison, Sheshna, Susana)

Big Idea: Challenges

Challenges can be good and bad. Something you don't want to do but have to. You can learn from it or challenges can push you backwards.

Text Set:
Movement and Competition
(Michael, Joey, Angel, Jordan)

Big Idea: Competition

The way people treat each other during competition. The use of insults, not true statements, intimidation. Treating each other as if one was better than the other. It matters how they treat each other.

- Beaugrande, R. (1980). *Text, discourse, and process*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Erickson, H.L. (2002). *Concept-based curriculum and instruction: Teaching beyond the facts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Pink, D. (2005). *A whole new mind: Why right-brainers will rule the future*. New York: Berkley.
- Santman, D. (2005). *Shades of meaning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Short, K.G. (1993). Making connections across literature and life. In Holland, K., Hungerford, R. & Ernst, S. eds. *Journeying: Children responding to literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Short, K.G. & Harste, J. (1996). *Creating classrooms for authors and inquirers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Bartoletti, S. (2005) *Hitler youth*. New York: Scholastic.
- Bunting, E. (1991). *Fly away home*. New York: Clarion.
- Diakite, P. (2006). *I lost my tooth in Africa*. New York: Scholastic.
- Egan, T. (2007). *The pink refrigerator*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Garland, S. (1993). *The lotus seed*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace.
- Lauture, D. (1996). *Running the road to ABC*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Leonard, M. (2002). *Tibili*. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller Book Publishers.
- Lionni, L. (1960). *Inch by inch*. New York: Harper.
- Lowry, L. (1989). *Number the stars*. New York: Yearling.
- Propp, B. (1999). *When the soldiers were gone*. New York: Putnam.

- Sciesza, J. (1995). *Math curse*. New York: Viking.
- Sherpa, A.Z. (1997). *Zangbu's Story*. Seattle: Storytellers Ink.
- Shin, S.U. (2004). *Cooper's lesson*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press.
- Teckenrup, B. (2007). *How big is the world?* New York: Boxer.
- Waddell, M. (1989). *Once there were giants*. New York: Delacorte.
- Yolen, J. (1988). *The devil's arithmetic*. New York: Viking.
- D'Adamo, F. (2001). *Iqbal*. New York: Aladdin.
- Morrison, T. (2002). *The big box*. New York: Hyperion/Jump at the Sun.
- Perez, L.K. (2002). *First day in grapes*. New York: Lee & Low.
- Pin, I. (2006). *When I grow up, I will win the Nobel Peace Prize*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Ryan, P.M. (2000). *Esperanza rising*. New York: Scholastic.
- Short, K., Harste, J. & Burke, B. (1996). *Creating classrooms for authors and inquirers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Whitin, P. (1994). Opening potential: Visual response to literature. *Language Arts*, *71*, 101-107.
- Wiles, D. (2001). *Freedom summer*. New York: Atheneum.

• Journeys can be hard.

• Sometimes you have to leave things that are important behind.

• Journeys can take you to an unexpected place→ good or bad (you don't always get to where you wanted to go).

• Journeys can be easy.

• You face challenges in journeys.

• Things that are important to you change along the way (one of the hard parts of being a refugee).

• Find out their lifestyle.

• Get more money.

• Learn a new language.

• Find a new school - Make new friends as school.

• Leave things behind.

- **Sarvnaz:** You need to be brave and smart when you go to a new place.
- **Aden:** Physical journeys can be challenging.
- **Thomas:** Journeys can change peoples' lives.
- **Conner:** If you are a refugee you will have to leave some of your most important things behind.

- Applegate, K. (2007). *Home of the brave*. Minneapolis, MN: Fiewel & Friends.
- Bunting, E. (2005). *Gleam and glow*. Ill. P. Sylvada. New York: Voyager.
- Egan, T. (2007). *The pink refrigerator*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Harvey, S. & Goudvis, A. (2000). *Strategies that work*. York, ME: Stenhouse.
- Keene, E. & Zimmermann, S. (1997). *Mosaic of thought*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinmann.
- Lofthouse, L. (2007). *Ziba came on a boat*. Ill. R. Ingpen. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- Ryan, P.M. (2002). *Esperanza rising*. New York: Scholastic.
- Feelings, T. (1995). *The middle passage*. New York: Dial.
- Paterson, K. (1996). *Jip*. New York: Scholastic.
- Rappaport, D. (1991). *Escape from slavery: Five journeys to freedom*. New York: Harper.
- Ruby, L. (1994). *Steal away home*. New York: Aladdin.
- Short, K., & Harste, J. with Burke, C. (1996). *Creating classrooms for authors and inquirers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Short, K., Kauffman, G., & Kahn, L. (2000). "I just need to draw": Responding to literature across multiple sign systems. *The Reading Teacher*, *54*(2), 160-171.
- Wilson, G.P. (2003) Supporting young children's thinking through tableau. *Language Arts*, *80*(1), 375-383.
- Yates, E. (1950). *Amos Fortune, free man*. New York: Dutton.

Owl Moon

(Yolen,1987)

When I was Young in the Mountains (Rylant, 1982)

Christmas in the Country (Rylant, 2005)

Going Home (Bunting, 1998)

Mim's Christmas Jam (Pinkney, 2001)

Christmas Tree Memories (Aliki, 1994)

The Wednesday Surprise (Bunting, 1989)

My Mama Had a Dancing Heart (Gray, 1999)

Just the Two of Us (Smith, 2005)

Chanukah Lights Everywhere (Rosen, 2001)

The Trees of Dancing Goats (Polacco, 1996)

• It was about her [the author's] memories.

• The author was in the story.

• It was about having family together.

• I wonder if she still lives in the mountains.

• It reminds me of when my brother was a little boy because she was little.

• I felt bad for her she didn't have a bath and stuff.

• It makes me feel cold.

• I reminded me of Christmas. She was scared and so was I when I went to the mountains.

• I got it I can see what they all have.

• They all have family and love.

• No they all have memories.

• All the books go together.

- Aliki. (1994). *Christmas tree memories*. New York: Harper-Trophy.
- Bunting, E. (1998). *Going home*. Ill. D. Diaz. New York: Harper Trophy.
- Bunting, E. (1989) *The Wednesday surprise*. Ill. D. Carrick. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Gray, L. (1999). *My mama had a dancing heart*. Ill. R. Colon. New York: Orchard.
- Pinkney, A. (2001). *Mim's Christmas jam*. Ill. B. Pinkney. New York: Gulliver.
- Polacco, P. (1996). *The trees of dancing goats*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Rosen, M. (2001). *Chanukah lights everywhere*. New York: Gulliver.
- Rylant, C. (1982). *When I was young in the mountains*. Ill. D. Goode. New York: Dutton.

- Rylant, C. (2005). *Christmas in the country*. Ill. D. Goode. New York: Scholastic.
- Short, K.G & Harste, J. (1996). *Creating classrooms for authors and inquirers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Short, K.G. (1993). Making connections across literature and life. In Holland, K., Hungerford, R & Ernst, S., eds. *Journeys among children: Responding to literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Smith, W. (2005). *Just the two of us*. Ill. K. Nelson. New York: Scholastic.
- Yolen, J. (2002). *Owl moon*. Ill. J. Schoenherr. New York: Philomel.

What types of journeys are occurring?

What makes it a journey?

Nick:

You go through challenges that are hard.

James: In life things are sometimes hard and sometimes not.

Brittney: You are getting through easy, fun, and hard stuff.

Kaitlynn: Obstacles are bumps in your journey. Challenges are like a bump. Challenges are like when you turn too fast.

Elana: There are lots of events in both.

• wanting to do new things

• doing new things

• physical journeys (Dodsworth going to the ocean and going to the junk yard everyday)

• life journeys

• maturity journeys

• following interests

• time journeys

• history journeys

• friendship journeys

• pet journeys (getting used to a new pet)

• sports journeys

• medical journeys (surgeries)

• growing up (birthdays)

• first-time journeys (first day of school)

• adventurous journeys

• school journeys (field trips)

• moving journeys

• Animals working together: *No, I Want Daddy!*, *Koala Lou*, *Anansi*, *Fox*

• People working together: *Baseball Saved Us*, *Stevie*

• Things that make the characters try new things: *The Pink Refrigerator*, *Sebastian's Roller Skates*

• Changes because of getting older: *Once There Were Giants*, *Wilford Gordon MacDonald Partridge*

• Problems with mothers: *Koala Lu*, *No, I Want Daddy!*

• Being trapped: *Anansi*, *Fox*

• Going to School: *Once There Were Giants*, *Sebastian's Roller Skates*

• Pushing someone away: *Fox*, *No, I Want Daddy!*, *Baseball Saved Us*

• Sitting around: *Wilford Gordon MacDonald Partridge*, *The Pink Refrigerator*

• Physical Journey: *The Pink Refrigerator*, *Sebastian's Roller Skates*, *Anansi*

(The students then realized that all the books could fit in this category)

• Growing Journey: *Once There Were Giants*

• Mental Growth Journey: *Wilford Gordon MacDonald Partridge*

• Learning Journey: *Baseball Saved Us*, *The Pink Refrigerator*, *Sebastian's Roller Skates*, *Koala Lou*

• Emotional Journey: *Koala Lou*, *Stevie*, *No, I Want Daddy!*, *Fox*

• working together

• things that make you try new things

• change because of getting older

• being trapped

• pushing someone away

• problem with mothers

• sad about being alone

• going to school

• sitting around

• life experiences

• growing journeys

• mental growth journey

• emotional journey

• going journey (physical journey)

• learning journey

- Brun-Cosme, N. (2002). *No, I want daddy!* New York: Clarion.
- Calkins, L. (1995). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- de Deu Prats, J. (2003). *Sebastian's roller skates*. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- Egan, T. (2007). *The pink refrigerator*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Erickson, H.L. (2002). *Concept-based curriculum and instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Fox, M. (1988). *Koala Lou*. Ill. P. Lofts. New York: Voyager.
- Fox, M. (1985). *Wilford Gordon MacDonald Partridge*. Ill. J. Vivas. LaJolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- McDermott, G. (1972). *Anansi the spider: A tale from the Ashanti*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Mochizuki, K. (1993). *Baseball saved us*. New York: Lee & Low.
- Short, K.G. (1993). Making connections across literature and life. In Holland, K., Hungerford, R., & Ernst, S. (eds.). *Journeys among children: Responding to literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Steptoe, J. (1969). *Stevie*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Waddell, M. (1989). *Once there were giants*. Ill. P. Dale. New York: Delacorte Press.
- Wilde, M. (2000). *Fox*. Ill. R. Brooks. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- Applegate, K. (2007). *Home of the brave*. New York: Feiwel & Friends.
- Avi. (1984). *The fighting ground*. New York: Harper Trophy.
- Budhos, M. (2006). *Ask me no questions*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Bunting, E. (2001). *Gleam and glow*. Ill. P. Sylvada. Orlando, FL: Harcourt.
- Collier, J.L. & Collier, C. (1974). *My brother Sam is dead*. New York: Scholastic.
- D'Adamo, F. (2003). *Iqbal*. New York: Aladdin.
- Feeling, T. (1995). *The middle passage: White ships/black cargo*. New York: Dial.
- Hathorn, L. (1994). *Way home*. New York: Crown.
- Lewison, M., Flint, A.S., & Van Sluys, K. (2002). Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices. *Language Arts*, *79*(5) 382-392.
- Lofthouse, L. (2007). *Ziba came on a boat*. Ill. R. Ingpen. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- Mc Govern, A. (1997). *The lady in the box*. Ill. M. Backer. New York.
- O'Dell, S. (1980). *Sarah Bishop*. New York: Scholastic.
- Pradl, G. (1996). *Literature for democracy: Reading as a social act*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook
- Rosenblatt, L. (1938). *Literature as exploration*. Chicago: Modern Language

Association.

- Shea, P. (2003). *The carpet boy's gift*. Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House.
- Sherpa, A.Z. (1997). *Zangbu's Story*. Seattle: Storytellers Ink.
- Walsh, J. (1982). *The green book*. New York: Sunburst.
- Wilson, G. P. (2003). Supporting young children's thinking through tableau. *Language Arts*, *80*(5) 375-383.
- Woodruff, E. (1991). *George Washington's socks*. New York: Scholastic.

• David said that he didn't care about the woman, and that he just wanted to keep his career.

• Adrian stated that he didn't want to lose customers.

• Jason argued with the deli owner that Dorrie was freezing and needed food.

• Denae said that Dorrie needed a warm place to stay.

• Eyalu stated that Dorrie needed to stay at the shop because she needed the warm air.

• Tanner said that she'll maybe die because the other places are too cold.

Megan:

I wonder if we have a rule like that.

Jake: People would be nicer if we had one.

Tanner: We would have no war if all countries had it.

Denae: I wonder what it's about, about being nice or is it your imagination?

Jacob: It's hard to live by.

Megan: It's a part of being nice to people.

Manny: I wonder what our moms and dads would say about it?

Jake: We should have a golden rule at our homes.

Ben: I wonder if cavemen did it.

David: Some people don't care about other people and then it turns into a big mess.

Jake: Some people don't remember it because it's so old.

Zach: I don't think people forgot. I think they don't know about it.

Tanner and Deana agreed: Some people don't care and don't follow it.

Tanner: If the golden rule was the law, the world would be really different.

• To have lunch

• To pick up trash

• To be treated with respect

• To have a principal

• To have a teacher

• To get a turn when playing a game

• Nobody disturbs anybody when they're reading a book

• To have a break for eating

• To play a game

• To listen to the teacher without other people distracting us

• To come to a clean school

• To not ignore the teacher

• To not be bullied

•

Longer time outside

Students need to get out their wiggles

Teachers have time to finish work

• *Clean school*

Makes our school healthier

Keeps clothes from getting dirty

Helps to recycle and the world benefits

Helps Mr. Leo (our custodian)

Good for animals

Easier for monitors because they always ask kids to clean up

• *Have more parking spaces*

Less accidents

More people can come to school

1. Have you ever seen trash blowing over from the dump? Tell us about it.

2. Do you think the dump people can do something? Tell us about it.

3. Is there anything we can do to stop the dump from letting the trash blow into our school? Tell us about it.

4. Is there a way we can move the dump from Van Horne? Tell us about it.

5. Is the trash really from the dump? Tell us about it.

Jason:

It means that you do it.

Tanner: It's standing up for yourself or others.

Jacob: Some people take action by trying to solve a problem.

Zach: You can take action by doing something bad or good.

Manny: You can take action for anything – something you care about.

Adrian: Sometimes when you take action it affects other people.

David: Sometimes when you take action it might help/ change the world.

Jason: You can take action by picking up trash.

Deana: And by reminding others to pick up trash.

Manny: You have to take time to think about your action and how it might cause

things to happen.

Jacob: Sometimes when you try to think of an action you can be mean or nice.

Jason: You can take action by helping people.

Manny: Don't raise your voice while you're trying to take action.

Jacob: Sometimes when you take action you need help.

Megan: One way of taking action is to be nice.

Tanner: You can take action anywhere. It doesn't have to be just at school or home.

Megan: You can take action by not bullying.

Manny: When you take action you have to really figure out what's wrong.

Denae: You can take action by helping people.

Jacob: I've recognized sometimes that bullying is trying to solve a problem meanly.

David: Maybe we could help everyone.

- Atkins, J. (1995). *Aani and the tree huggers*. New York: Lee & Low.
- Bunting, E. (1993). *Someday a tree*. New York: Clarion.
- Cooper, I. (2007). *The golden rule*. New York: Abrams.
- Creech, S. (2001). *A fine, fine school*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Edmiston, B. (1993). Going up the beanstalk: Discovering giant possibilities for responding to literature through drama. In Holland, K., Hungerford, R. & Ernst, S., eds. *Journeys among children responding to literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gifford, P. (2007). *Moxy Maxwell does not love Stuart Little*. New York: Schwartz & Wade.
- Gifford, P. (2008). *Moxy Maxwell does not love writing thank-you notes*. New York: Schwartz & Wade.
- Hart, R.A. (1992). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*. Florence, Italy: UNICEF.
- Lyons, D. (2002). *The tree*. New York: Scholastic.
- McGovern, A. (1997). *The lady in the box*. New York: Turtle.
- Short, K. & Harste, J. (1996). *Creating classrooms for authors and inquirers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Van Allsburg, C. (1990). *Just a dream*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Vasquez, V. (2004). *Negotiating critical literacies with young children*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

• Everyone has the right to play games on the playground or in the classroom.

• Everyone has the right to learn.

• Everyone has the right to have a friend.

• Everyone has the right to eat lunch for their energy.

• Will she read *Stuart Little*?

• The book is ruined [when the book fell in the pool].

• She will keep herself busy so she doesn't have to read the book.

• She will run out of time [in reference to Moxy's mother telling her there will be consequences if she doesn't get the book read].

• Moxy is still a daydreamer.

• Moxy doesn't want to or like to write thank you notes.

• Consequences are a part of this book as well.

• Moxy has a choice to write the letters.

• Moxy has bad ideas.

• Moxy tries everything to not do what she's supposed to.

• In both books she had a great idea that turned bad.

- Gifford, P. (2007). *Moxy Maxwell does not love Stuart Little*. New York: Schwartz & Wade.
- Gifford, P. (2008). *Moxy Maxwell does not love writing thank-you notes*. New York: Schwartz & Wade.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Macmillan.

Haley:

To get what you want you have to take peaceful action.

Tanner: All the books had people who cared about the earth.

Jacob: All books had people who were nice.

Eyalu: All the books are about the earth and that it's important to take care of it.

• The big idea from The Tree was to save what you love.

• The big idea from Just A Dream was to take care of the earth.

• The big ideas from Aani and the Tree Huggers were taking action, bravery, and courage.

• The big ideas from Someday a Tree were hope and friendship.

• Some of the choices people made in the books to make the world a better place were replanting the tree, giving the tree new soil, picking up trash, not cutting the tree down, and making a circle around the tree.

- Atkins, J. (1995). *Aani and the tree huggers*. New York: Lee & Low.
- Bunting, E. (1993). *Someday a tree*. New York: Clarion.
- Crawford, K., Ferguson, M., Kauffman, G., Laird, J., Schroeder, J., & Short, K. G. (1998). Examining children's historical and multicultural understandings: The dialectical nature of collaborative research. In T. Shanahan & F. Rodriquez-Brown, *National Reading Conference Yearbook*, *47*, 323-333.
- Lyons, D. (2002). *The tree*. New York: Scholastic.
- Van Allsburg, C. (1990). *Just a dream*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Kaye, C.B. (2004). *The complete guide to service learning*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit.
- Lofthouse, L. (2007). *Ziba came on a boat*. Ill. R. Ingpen. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- Rosenblatt, L.M. (1995). *Literature as exploration*. New York: The Modern Language Association.
- Williams, K.L. & Mohammed, K. (2007). *Four feet, two sandals*. Ill. D. Chayka. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Williams, M. (2005). *Brothers in hope*. Ill. G. Christie. New York: Lee & Low.
- Anzaldua, G. (1993). *Friends from the other side*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press.
- D'Adamo, F. (2005). *Iqbal*. New York: Aladdin.

To get what you want you have to take peaceful action.

Tanner: All the books had people who cared about the earth.

Jacob: All books had people who were nice.

Eyalu: All the books are about the earth and that it's important to take care of it.

• The big idea from The Tree was to save what you love.

• The big idea from Just A Dream was to take care of the earth.

• The big ideas from Aani and the Tree Huggers were taking action, bravery, and courage.

• The big ideas from Someday a Tree were hope and friendship.

• Some of the choices people made in the books to make the world a better place were replanting the tree, giving the tree new soil, picking up trash, not cutting the tree down, and making a circle around the tree.

- Atkins, J. (1995). *Aani and the tree huggers*. New York: Lee & Low.
- Bunting, E. (1993). *Someday a tree*. New York: Clarion.
- Crawford, K., Ferguson, M., Kauffman, G., Laird, J., Schroeder, J., & Short, K. G. (1998). Examining children's historical and multicultural understandings: The dialectical nature of collaborative research. In T. Shanahan & F. Rodriquez-Brown, *National Reading Conference Yearbook*, *47*, 323-333.
- Lyons, D. (2002). *The tree*. New York: Scholastic.
- Van Allsburg, C. (1990). *Just a dream*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Kaye, C.B. (2004). *The complete guide to service learning*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit.
- Lofthouse, L. (2007). *Ziba came on a boat*. Ill. R. Ingpen. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- Rosenblatt, L.M. (1995). *Literature as exploration*. New York: The Modern Language Association.
- Williams, K.L. & Mohammed, K. (2007). *Four feet, two sandals*. Ill. D. Chayka. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Williams, M. (2005). *Brothers in hope*. Ill. G. Christie. New York: Lee & Low.
- Anzaldua, G. (1993). *Friends from the other side*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press.
- D'Adamo, F. (2005). *Iqbal*. New York: Aladdin.

- McGovern, A. (1997). *The lady in the box*. New York: Turtle.
- UNICEF (2001). *For every child*. New York: Dial.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1938). *Literature as exploration*. Chicago: Modern Language Association.
- Shea, P.D. (2003). *The carpet boy's gift*. Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House.
- Wade, R.C. (2007). *Social studies for social injustice*. New York: Teachers College.

"Life is a Journey and an Iceberg": Creating a Context for Conceptual Thinking

by Amy Edwards, Fifth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Sometimes we need an outside perspective to fully see our students and appreciate the growth they have made as thinkers. Lane Wallace, a friend and a columnist/editor for *Flying Magazine*, visited our classroom to share her experiences in Sudan, Chad, and the Republic of Congo. She had also been mountain climbing in Nepal, a region we were reading about in *Zangbu's Story* by Ang Zangbu Sherpa (1997). As she shared her slide show of Nepal, she allowed students to linger on each picture and to ask many questions. Afterwards, she expressed her amazement at the depth and thoughtfulness of their thinking and commented on the uniqueness of this thinking for ten and 11 year-old children. She remembered not being valued or encouraged as a conceptual thinker as a child in school. She found it refreshing that kids were being taught to think conceptually and felt good about the state of education, at least for kids at Van Horne. Being a true intellectual, Lane felt there was hope for us all.

Changes in technology and globalization are having a huge impact on the way we live. Although students were being trained a generation ago as accountants to crunch numbers, lawyers to write contracts, and computer programmers to design computer codes, a massive shift in thinking is required for graduates to be competitive in our global market. David Pink (2005) argues that we have moved from an information age to a conceptual age and so the future belongs to a new kind of thinker. These creators, empathizers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers will be highly valued and rewarded in contemporary society. Our students will benefit from the global focus on conceptual thinking that they are developing through their work.

Students at our school participate in the Learning Lab once a week, working with our Instructional Coach, Lisa Thomas, and Kathy Short from the University of Arizona to explore intercultural understandings through literature, art, and discussion. Instructional engagements in the lab are connected to the learning in our fifth grade classroom through big ideas that cut across social studies and science units and the literature studies within these units. Teachers also meet after

school in a study group to discuss and plan the teaching and learning taking place in the lab and ways of connecting lab experiences to the curriculum in individual classrooms.

Conceptual thinking is important for students because there are just too many facts in life to remember. Facts are important, but they need to be connected to something bigger to be accessible and useful for learners. Concepts are mental constructs, organizing ideas that categorize a variety of examples or facts. They are timeless, universal, abstract, and broad (Erickson, 2002). In exploring our big idea during the fall semester we were eager to encourage conceptual thinking. Strategies for exploring conceptual thinking included discussion of metaphors, creation of life journey maps, use of graffiti boards to sort through the details of the story and encourage collaboration of thinking, and sorting text sets to create categories and identify issues within big ideas or concepts. In the first semester, we asked our students to use Journey as a metaphor to think about their world conceptually throughout our various studies.

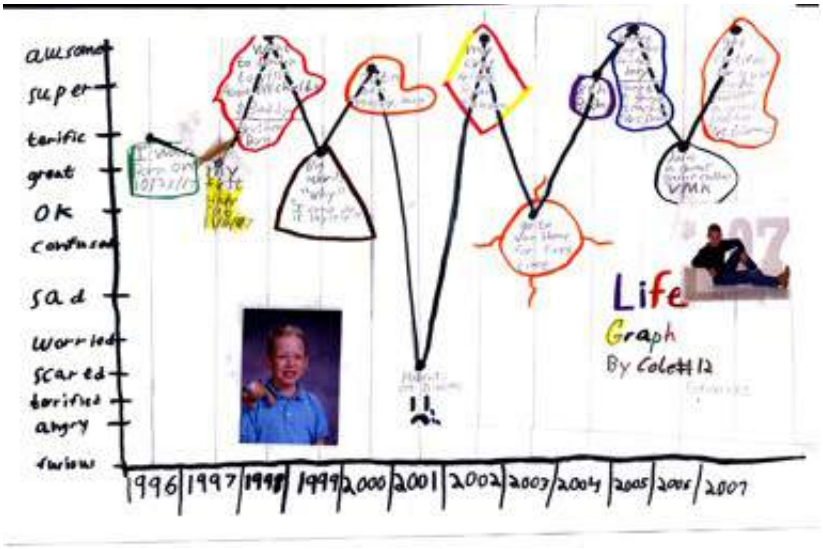
In teaching any concept, it is best to begin with students' personal experiences. We planned initial engagements that helped our students to make connections to what they already knew, because we learn more effectively by building on our life experiences (Short & Harste, 1996). We asked students to focus on their life journeys, a focus that also encouraged them to continue exploring their cultural identities. In the Learning Lab, students were asked to create life journey maps to start developing their conceptual thinking about journeys using subject matter they were very familiar with--themselves. We then built on the concept of journey on a larger scale to explore many other types of journeys and issues associated with journeys, such as migration, competition, death, emotions, and learning.

To introduce the life journey maps, Lisa read aloud *The Pink Refrigerator* by Tim Eagan (2007) and talked with students about the life journey of the main character, Dodsworth. They noticed Dodsworth's need to continue learning and came up with "Keep Trying New Things" as the big idea. Students were asked to find ways to depict Dodsworth's journey using pictures and words as possibilities to consider for their own life journey maps. Lisa also shared life journey maps created by teachers as further demonstrations of the possibilities for how one's life could be visually represented. Conceptual thinking was supported by encouraging students to think together about the ideas through discussion and by looking at others' work.

Perspective is an important concept in understanding our world. Lisa read *Once There Were Giants* (Waddel, l989) to demonstrate different points of view and the concept of metaphor before students were asked to share their life journey maps with one another. They noticed that the book was not about giants, but instead described the main character's view of adults when she was a child who then grew up to become a "giant" or grown up. They also noticed that the book moved in a circular journey since the girl had a baby of her own at the end of the story, thus starting the cycle

all over again. Looking at their lives from their own perspectives was unique and personal. Being able to share these events with other students gave them an opportunity to view their own life journeys and those of classmates through different eyes.

Students represented their lives in creative ways on their life journey maps. Andres created his life journey map in the form of a computer-generated timeline with pictures imported for each year. The caption under each picture highlighted the events important to him that year. Alex organized her information along a hand drawn highway showing all the stops as highlights in her life's journey. Cole showed his life journey on a line graph with the vertical axis showing emotions and the horizontal axis the years of his life. He started with the label "furious" on the bottom of the graph and then listed emotions getting more positive as they went up to the top of the axis. He labeled furious, angry, terrified, scared, worried, sad, confused, ok, great, terrific, super, and finally awesome. The line graph showed the ups and downs of Cole's life in a way that was unique from any other student. Especially noteworthy is the dip in the line graph showing "scared" at the time of his parents' divorce. Having students record their own life journeys helped them to start thinking conceptually about journeys at a personal level.



After sharing their maps with the class, students were asked, “How is your life like a journey?” The ensuing dialogue, where students built meaning by listening to each other and adding their own ideas to those of other students, is an example of how these fifth graders were using metaphors to think conceptually about important events in their lives.

This dialogue is exciting because students made connections with one another’s thinking by building on each other’s comments and engaging in metaphorical thinking. Metaphors depend on conceptual understanding for connections between the two dissimilar items within the metaphor to make sense. Metaphors such as path, cartoon story strip, puzzle, and iceberg were raised during this discussion.

To give students further opportunities to think conceptually, a large set of related texts were pulled together after teachers spent time in study group examining student-created webs on types of journeys. The books were selected based on the ideas about journeys generated by students. We encouraged students to read from these journey text sets over the next several weeks to broaden and deepen their understandings. The themes of the text sets included:

Before asking students to choose a theme to read more about, Lisa talked about the cognitive strategies we use to understand concepts. We knew that students already engaged in these strategies, but at an unconscious level. We wanted to explicitly talk with students about their strategies so they would develop metacognitive awareness and more effectively use the strategies as thinkers. The strategies that she identified included:

Students were asked to choose a theme that interested them and go to a table for an extended time to read freely in the text set around that theme. I settled in with the set of books about Growing and Learning and read along with the students. This text set included *Math Curse* by Jon Scieszka (1995), *Inch by Inch* by Leo Lionni (1960), *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting, (1991), *Running the Road to ABC* by Denise Lauture (1996), *I Lost my Tooth in Africa* by Penda Diakite (2006), *How*

Big is the World by Britta Teckentrup (2007), *Cooper's Lesson* by Sun Uyng Shin (2004), *Tibili* by Marie Leonard (2002), and *Lotus Seed* by Tatsuro Kiuchi (1993). The students were engrossed in the books.

Later students returned to the Story Floor to discuss what they had noticed about journeys in their reading.

Our class ran out of time as we had to go to lunch, so we were not able to finish the discussion. Christian's thinking is conceptual, connected, and amazingly deep for an 11 year old. I knew that we needed to build on this thinking.

After the students had several weeks to read the books in their selected text set, we asked them to sort the books in their set into categories based on different connections or patterns across the books. We noticed that they enjoyed the individual books, but not making connections across the texts and wanted to encourage them to raise their level of thinking. They were asked to sort the books in multiple ways to take their thinking from obvious connections to deeper connections across the books. Students were told that this type of conceptual thinking was intertextuality, the process of making meaning through connections with past and present texts and life experiences (Beaugrande, 1980). Making connections is a natural way for young children to learn. Since schools are typically organized around isolated subjects, children often stop searching for connections that facilitate learning (Short & Harste, 1996). We wanted to give our students the opportunity to make these connections to deepen their understanding. To demonstrate the process of sorting and creating categories, Lisa displayed multiple items to sort, including a hammer, glass, light bulb, calculator, brush, pen, and other items. She asked the children how the items should be grouped so that every object went with something else and that nothing was left out. They ended up with:

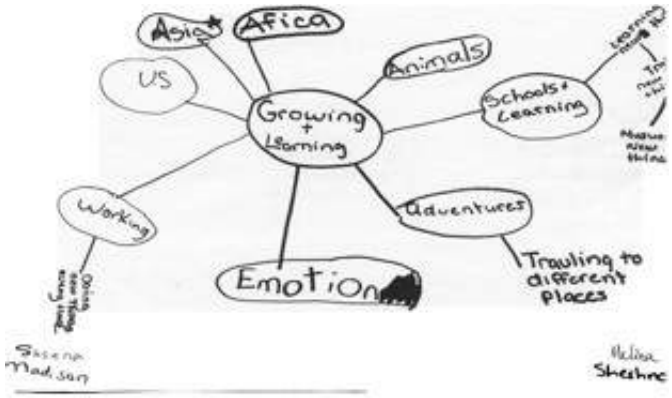
Lisa talked about physical characteristics and how it wouldn't challenge our thinking to sort the books by color, and that instead we wanted to think about the big ideas and meanings across the books. She pointed out that the size of a book didn't help us to think about the concept of journey. Students went to the tables to use this strategy to sort the books in each of their text sets in multiple ways. They were asked to follow the following steps:

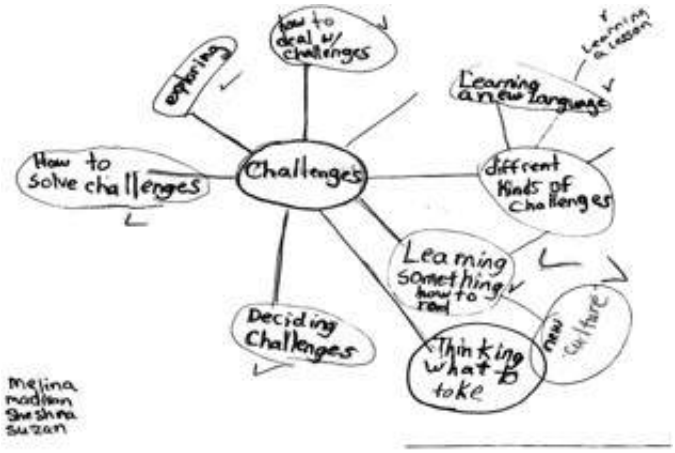
Moving from table to table it was evident that conceptual thinking was taking place as students justified why they were sorting the texts in a particular way. Some of the concept categories students came up within each text set included:

Finally, students were asked to web the concepts from each text set and how these concepts were related. We were interested in finding evidence of conceptual thinking and would later look at their work in study group to see where this inquiry would take us next.

At our next Learning Lab time, students spent a little more time with their sets of books and added any new ideas to their webs that emerged from their conversations. They were also asked to sort the books one more time into new categories. Students then came together at the Story Floor to discuss their understandings about journeys as a whole group. Thinking conceptually was still hard but getting easier for these students as they were asked to push their thinking. We began the study with students' own life experiences, but now wanted to challenge them to go further as thinkers. We knew that if students stay too close to what they already know, they are not challenged as learners into new understandings (Short, 1993). Even students who typically did not have to challenge themselves in order to complete work in school found this text sorting and categorizing engagement difficult and admitted that they really had to think hard. Christian said he pushed his thinking until his brain hurt!

Lisa encouraged the students to look for issues hiding in the texts. We wanted students to look for issues rather than topics so they would dig more deeply into meanings. Concepts support abstract thinking and encourage the development of interpretations about issues instead of just naming topics (Santman, 2005). Students were asked to look for good/bad or fair/unfair issues within their text sets and to then choose the issue they thought was most complex and interesting for their literature circle discussions. The following webs show how the students' thinking shifted from their initial webbing about their text set to their web on the issue they identified and discussed.





We looked at the webs in our study group to identify the issues that were significant to students.

We noticed the concept of power coming up over and over again and decided to focus on that issue in our next lab session so that students could experience focusing a discussion around an issue rather than a topic to encourage more depth in their talk. At our next lab, Lisa asked, “What’s good or bad about power in school, home, or on the playground?” It was apparent these students knew a lot about power and had strong opinions:

Students were told they would be creating a visual representation of their thinking about their text sets through some type of graphic organizer to show the connections and issues that they had explored in their discussions. Kathy showed a range of student charts from fifth graders in another school as examples of how they organized their thinking about different text sets. These students had used large butcher paper in a variety of ways to display how their books were similar or different and to highlight the issues that emerged from their discussions. Some work was represented using a matrix while others used a quilt-like pattern. These examples were a demonstration of possible ways for students to show their thinking concretely without assigning one specific type of chart. Some of them used these ideas exactly, while others came up with innovative ways to show their connections between the texts.

Several lab sessions were spent working on these charts before students were asked to share with the whole group. Groups were encouraged to come up with the one most significant idea relating to the meaning of their text set to share with the class. They were not allowed to read off of their charts but were asked to share one aspect of their group’s thinking. They highlighted the following ideas in their sharing:

Students struggled with expressing what they saw as the most significant idea or issue in their discussions. Some groups seemed surprised that they had to really think in order to share. They had to be selective, when it would have been much easier to share everything they had discussed. We saw evidence of Mayce and others thinking out loud as they shared to work through this process of finding the one most significant idea. With support from the adults in the room, students were able to verbalize the thinking from their small groups. Synthesizing was difficult for them, but they did it!

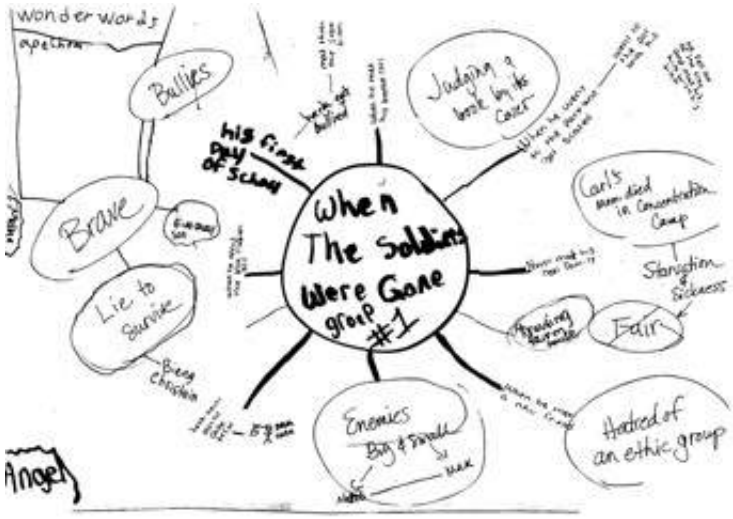
In our classroom students were reading Literature Circle books relating to WWII and the Holocaust. Novels included *When the Soldiers Were Gone* (Propp, 1999), *Number the Stars* (Lois Lowry, 1989), *The Devil’s Arithmetic* (Yolen, 1988), and a non-fiction selection, *Hitler Youth* (Bartoletti, 2005). Students read and discussed in small groups as well as participated in whole group discussions of books that included common themes connected all the texts.

In small group discussion several response strategies were used to facilitate conceptual thinking. One strategy was a graffiti board, where small groups of students respond to literature using

pictures or words written randomly on a large piece of brainstorming paper. Graffiti boards let students respond to a story before and during their discussion in their literature circles. As the discussion unfolds, the events of the story take a back seat to the issues, tensions, and problems that students connect to within a book. I like this strategy because it allows even the most reluctant students to share their thoughts on the paper for others to see.

In whole class discussions students shared concepts and ideas from the graffiti boards and created a web showing how these thoughts were related. I encouraged them to dig deep to find the big ideas of the story, asking, “Why did this author write this text? What are they trying to teach us?” Some of the ideas students discovered and wanted to know more about were fair/unfair issues concerning treatment of ethnic groups, issues of power, bravery, genocide, and issues of prejudice, and propaganda, which took them far deeper than facts about the Holocaust. As student discussed the eventual end of WWII, they seemed to believe that the issues of the Holocaust had been resolved and were sure the world had solved the problems of racism since Dr. Martin Luther King had had his dream. Other students, however, asked about the fighting in Darfur and problems in the Middle East. Weren’t these some of the same problems?

Thinking conceptually led students to more questions and inquiries. What I saw as significant was that students were taking an active role in their thinking, not just learning facts in isolation. They were seeing patterns in how their world was connected and the value of digging deeper for meaning.



Building on the conceptual thinking from our lab experiences with text sets, our librarian pulled together text sets related to the ideas represented on the class web. The books were mostly picture books, however, some were novels. Topics ranged from the Negro baseball leagues, to Japanese internment camps, to playground issues at school. Students were encouraged to read widely before books were sorted into categories according to the big ideas and themes found on the class web. Students were able to do this quickly and much more easily than the first time. It was great to see the students working hard to get at the big ideas represented by books that at first glance seemed to have nothing to do with the Holocaust. Quickly it became apparent that teaching children to think conceptually has many benefits, particularly in encouraging them to think more deeply about their world and how to make their own connections instead of trying to make sense of someone else's thinking (Short, 1993). They were asking hard questions about difficult social issues and to see the complexity of those issues.

Conceptual thinking allows students to reflect more broadly about issues in our world instead of just learning about topics that are much narrower in scope. There is simply too much information in our world today for teachers to teach facts in isolation from the concepts that bring meaning to those facts. As we move from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age (Pink, 2005), we know that the students at our school have had the opportunity to view the world from a global vantage point and to think conceptually in order to be ready for this shift. This thinking has supported students in making connections to ideas and issues that go beyond what I had previously encouraged in our discussions of literature. More importantly, I know that children like Lane will be valued for thinking about the big picture instead of simply being asked to memorize the snapshot.

Professional References

Children's Literature References

Encouraging Symbolic Thinking through Literature

by Kathryn Bolasky, Third Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Engaging my students in meaningful responses to literature was a tension for me throughout the school year. My students were proficient in making text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections to literature, but I struggled with pushing them to dig more deeply into their interpretations. I wanted them to struggle with ideas and issues as they considered their understandings of literature, not just make a comment about a connection. Our teacher study group provided opportunities for me to explore new response strategies. Looking back over the year, I realize that one response strategy, Sketch to Stretch, became particularly significant. When I compared our initial sketches with ones completed during the last week of school, I was impressed and surprised by the change in the complexity of student thinking. By the end of the year, my students went from simply illustrating the events of a story to symbolically representing their understandings of literature through visual images.

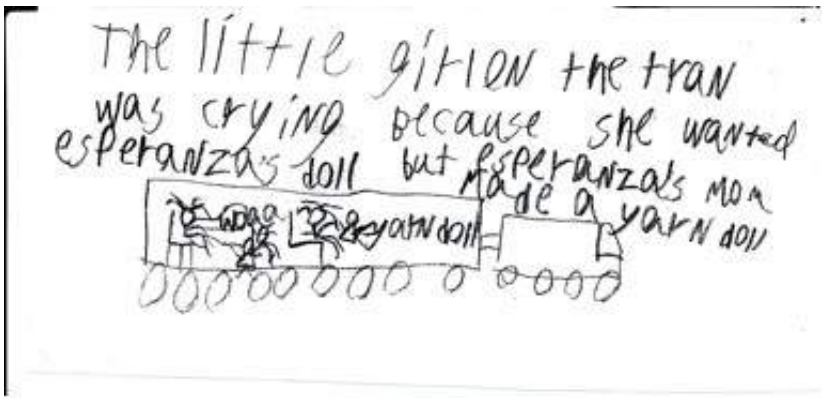
Whitin (1994) defines Sketch to Stretch as “a visual representation of colors, lines, symbols, and shapes to convey one’s understanding of conflict, character, theme, or feelings” (p. 101). Readers do not illustrate the events of the story, but explore their meanings or connections to a story through visual images. Typically, we ask students to respond to literature through conversation or a writing. Short, Harste, and Burke (1996) argue that language is not the only way to create meaning and that there are many sign systems that we use as human beings to “share and make meaning,” including music, art, mathematics, drama, and language. Sketch to Stretch involves moving from the sign system of language to the sign system of art, a process called transmediation. Short, Harste, and Burke point out that transmediation is not just a translation or transfer of meaning from one system to another. Each sign system has a different meaning potential and so readers have to transform the meaning they have created in language as they move into art. This transformation encourages readers to go beyond a literal understanding of their reading and supports complexity in student thinking as well as the ability to think symbolically about significant concepts within the book.

I was introduced to Sketch to Stretch as a response strategy in study group and was anxious to try it out with my class. I was reading aloud *Esperanza Rising* (Ryan, 2000) and decided to have students respond in literature logs. I had been struggling to engage students in meaningful discussions with each other and hoped that responding in lit logs and using Sketch to Stretch would provide them with ideas to talk about in the discussion. This novel captures the compelling story of a young Mexican girl who immigrates to a new country and into a different social class. The death of her wealthy, loving father results in her uncle's pressuring her mother to remarry one of them, and so Esperanza and her mother are forced to leave their ranch and belongings behind and

flee to a new life as migrant workers in California.

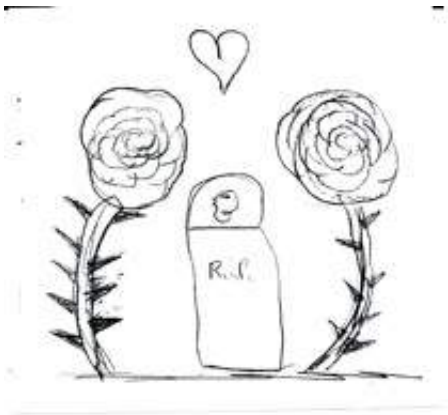
I explained that I wanted students to explore the big ideas of the chapter using pictures or words. My past experience as a primary teacher led me to believe that using pictures as a response would ease their anxiety about putting their thoughts into writing. Their responses incorporated both writing and pictures, but only showed basic comprehension of the events in the story. Even though their responses were retellings, not sketches of meanings, the sketches were a significant step in developing their thinking about literature because they were using more than one sign system to visually represent events from the story.

Their sketches indicated that students were able to identify the important events in each chapter, but they could not explain why those events were important. Mason's response depicts a pivotal scene from the Chapter 7 where Esperanza and her mother are on the train and a young passenger wants to play with Esperanza's treasured doll. This part of the story is a turning point for Esperanza and her mother, because Esperanza interacts with someone who is poor for the first time. She has grown up in Mexico with wealth and privilege and her mother explains that they are now also struggling with poverty. Choosing to respond to this part of the chapter indicated that Mason understood the importance of the event, but he could not explain why this event is significant to the story.



Even though a majority of the responses were retellings of events, a few students did use visual symbols related to the events. Dan drew a wedding ring and a wedding band, with the caption "ring- will you marry me," to show that Esperanza's uncle wanted to marry her mother. During the discussion of this chapter, Dan indicated that he saw this as an important event, but he could not explain why. Elana used facial expressions to represent the change in Esperanza's uncle's personality. Esperanza's perceptions of her uncle change in the story and Elana noted the shift, but was not able to verbally explain how that affected the story.

Bailey's response gave me hope about using Sketch to Stretch to push student thinking. Bailey was able to effectively use symbols to signify Esperanza's father's death. She drew a grave marker that was framed by two roses and she explained that the roses symbolized Esperanza and her mother. On each stem there were large thorns. She drew a heart above the gravestone and the two roses to show the love they had for each other. Bailey's response showed me that my students could move past retellings into deeper understandings of a text.



I decided to use the conceptual frame we were focusing on in Learning Lab to guide and push our thinking. Our teacher study group had decided to look at human rights and the power of choice. With the help of Lisa Thomas, I selected a few picture books from a text set on our central theme and read aloud *When I Grow Up I Will Win the Nobel Prize* (Pin, 2006), *First Day in Grapes* (Perez, 2002), and *The Big Box* (Morrison, 2002). I started our discussions by asking, "Who had the power to make choices for a better world?" This question provided a starting point for student responses and jump started many discussions. I also made an effort to demonstrate my thinking about the important decisions that were occurring within each story. The students were able to look deeper into the stories that we read. They talked about decisions that characters were making and explored why these choices were significant in that character's life and world. As our discussions developed, I noticed that the students were creating more detailed sketches as well because of the support of this talk in exploring and developing their thinking about different interpretations for a book.

These experiences demonstrated that students needed to explore their initial interpretations of

literature before moving into the sketching. I originally thought that Sketch to Stretch responses would develop student discussions, but I came to understand that students needed to engage in exploratory talk about a book before moving to symbolic thinking. Symbolic thinking was new to them and they needed the initial sharing to help them consider possible issues and interpretations to explore symbolically through visual images and then could move back into more in-depth dialogue about the book. *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2001) was a key picture book that helped shift our thinking from using art to summarize a plot to using art to symbolically represent the deeper meanings of the story. Set in Mississippi in the summer of 1964, the book portrays the close friendship of two boys, one black and the other white, who celebrate the passage of the Civil Rights Act by going to the town pool, expecting to be able to swim together for the first time. Instead, they find a work crew filling the pool with asphalt, a reflection of the town's resistance to desegregation.

Lisa read aloud the book and gave students time to talk about their questions before asking them to sketch. By discussing first, the students talked through their confusions and helped each other go beyond recounting the plot into interpretations. Through the discussions students learned to think interpretively and this supported them in moving into symbolic thinking. The students could take their new understandings and create sketches of the concepts and ideas that they each wanted to think more about.

Elena took ideas from the story that were discussed and effectively used visual images to explain her understanding. She used symbols to show the many tensions in the story. Her sketch is divided into two parts to represent the perspectives of the two boys. On the left side of the paper she has a chain link fence with barbed-wire across the top, storm clouds that are raining, and a butterfly with black wings. These images are juxtaposed against the visual images on the right side of the sketch which depict a blue sky, sun, brightly colored butterfly, and flower. Most of Elana's understandings of the tensions in the story are illustrated in the middle of the sketch. She drew a blue line to clearly delineate the two sides, but it was not a straight line. Instead she drew a curvy line with a heart and an area that bulges into the blue sky of the right side.

When I interviewed Elana about her sketch she was very confident as she explained each aspect. She said that the left side is supposed to be dark and sad because that is how John Henry felt about not being able to do things that Joe could do. She created the right side to represent Joe's feelings about being happy, except when John Henry was discriminated against because of the color of his skin. She explained that she showed Joe's frustration with the inequality by putting a dark cloud and rain in the middle of his blue sky to indicate that not all of him is happy. This piece of cloudy, rainy sky is like the piece of Joe's heart that is sad and frustrated. I was impressed with Elana's ability to clearly capture the main character's frustrations in her sketch. Her sketch was more than an illustration of an event from the story--it was a look into her thinking about the text. When I saw all of the students' sketches displayed on a bulletin board in the Learning Lab, I realized that my class was able to use visual images as symbols to express and deepen their thinking.

After our success with *Freedom Summer*, I wanted to continue to use Sketch to Stretch as a response to our next read aloud. Due to our focus on human rights and the power to make decisions for a better world, I was reading aloud *Iqbal* (D'Adamo, 2001) to my class. Iqbal is a fictional story based on the life of a young boy who led an influential movement to protest child labor in Pakistani carpet factories. I knew that I would have to create an atmosphere where students could ask questions and thoughtfully discuss the tough issues in the book. I gave out literature logs and encouraged children to respond in any way they felt made sense. I set aside the last thirty minutes of each day to read a chapter from the book. After finishing a chapter, students responded in their literature logs and then we had a discussion. The students were involved in the story and always looked forward to the last half an hour of the day. I was surprised by the deeper understandings of the concepts, ideas and issues that students brought up during discussion, such as illiteracy, poverty, and justice. Based on their conversations and emotional connections to the story, I realized that the students were engaging with this story in ways I had never seen before. When we finished the book I explained to the class that they were going to do a Sketch to Stretch

about the overall meaning of the book for each of them. The students immediately read through their literature logs and got to work on their sketches.

As students shared their sketches with each other, I was astounded at their ability to use visual images as symbols to represent their understandings. Many of the students used symbols that we had talked about in our discussions like birds symbolizing freedom and rainbows symbolizing hope. When Dan shared his sketch, he explained that he drew the chain that was used to imprison Iqbal to his loom and it was “empty” showing that Iqbal was free. He said that he drew the top part of his sketch as dark and red because Iqbal was angry because he knew it was wrong to be chained to the loom and forced to make carpets. He shared that he left the image white behind the loom because Iqbal knew he could be free and that he was going to make it happen. Dan recognized that Iqbal was intelligent and knew child labor was wrong and was brave enough to stand up for himself and other children. Dan used the chain as a symbol of strength not despair.

Gaby shared that she drew a kite to show freedom because Iqbal and Fatima dreamed of the day that they could fly a kite and were free from the looms and their master. She also explained that she drew the kite “breaking through a fence” that held in the kids. The clouds in the sky were another symbol of freedom because the kids could not see the sky when they were working in the shop. The small details in their drawings indicate that students had listened carefully to this intense story, made their own meanings, and created visual images to show their new understandings.

Sketch to Stretch was more than just a response strategy to literature in my classroom. These sketches are an illustrated record of our learning. Through examining how the students’ sketches unfolded over time, I was able to see the ways in which my students developed more symbolic and conceptual thinking, as well as how my own learning as a teacher developed. I originally planned to use Sketch to Stretch as a way to encourage thoughtful talk about literature, but quickly learned that we needed to first engage in exploratory talk to share our initial responses. This exploratory talk provided students with the support they needed to consider their own interpretations and

engage in transmediation to move their talk into symbolic representations of our thinking. We needed to think together and I needed to demonstrate and encourage symbolic thinking to support them in creating a sketch.

As an educator it is sometimes hard to abandon carefully developed lesson plans, but in this case it was essential to do so to support my students as critical thinkers. I could have easily judged their first attempts at sketching as an indication that third graders could only illustrate events from a text. Through taking a closer look at their sketches, I saw glimpses of symbolic thinking starting to emerge. By taking instructional time to build strategies and ways of thinking about books, my students moved past their surface understandings of a text. Sketch to Stretch gave students a way to create visual images of their thinking and this move from language to visual thinking transformed their understandings and, in turn, led to richer dialogue. Action research provided a way for me to examine these small shifts in student thinking over time and, in turn, transformed my understandings about children's potential to engage in symbolic thinking.

References

Writing as a Tool for Synthesizing Our Learning

By Kathryn Bolasky, Third Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

We had engaged in a semester-long inquiry into journeys as a school and were struggling with how to effectively record student learning. Our students had done a great deal of webbing and mapping throughout the process that we studied as teachers to understand the development of their thinking and to make teaching decisions. We needed a summative assessment and finally decided to have the students write essays about their understandings of journeys. We hoped that writing essays would give the students a chance to synthesize their understandings by pulling all the pieces of our study together. Keene and Zimmermann (1997) explain synthesis as creating a road map of our meaning and a way of saying, "I have been there and this is what I remember" (p. 170). They argue that we use synthesis to understand something better for ourselves. Synthesis is a process of "ordering, recalling, retelling, and recreating into a coherent whole, the information that our minds are bombarded with every day" (p. 169).

I have to be honest and say that I was skeptical about whether my class would be able to write effective essays. I was particularly concerned that my students would summarize and retell information, rather than synthesize their understandings. Keene and Zimmerman (1997) state that "a summary is a listing of the parts and synthesis is somehow the creation of a whole" (p. 173). They note that a learner creates a personal composite of their understandings with a strong sense

of their own voice and life experiences instead of engaging in a lifeless retelling of main points. The essays my students wrote made me realize that I had underestimated their ability to take their thinking to the level of synthesis and so I decided to reflect on the process of creating these essays. I needed to understand how this process supported them in this writing and thinking.

Our inquiry into journeys took place in our Learning Lab, a place of learning and inquiry for us as teachers. We each take our students to the lab once a week for an instructional engagement and then meet together in a teacher study group every other week to analyze student work and think about where we will go next in this inquiry. The Learning Lab is facilitated by Lisa Thomas, our instructional coach, and the focus of the work in the lab is determined by our professional learning focus as a school.

We spent the fall semester thinking about how to integrate international literature and global perspectives into our units of study. We chose Journeys as a broad concept to explore in the lab because it connected to our individual units at the different grade levels. Students had created their own Life Journey Maps and explored journey as a metaphor through various read-alouds, texts sets, and mapping responses to develop their conceptual understandings of journeys. For several weeks, we engaged in a simulation where students were told that war and fighting were right outside their homes and they had to be ready to leave quickly on a forced journey to a safer country. We read and responded to picture books about children in refugee camps and students researched the country to which they would be moving. They each packed a suitcase, making hard decisions about what to leave behind. Throughout this inquiry, we struggled as teachers with how to encourage the development of conceptual understandings and so were eager to see the thinking in their essays.

Preparing to Write

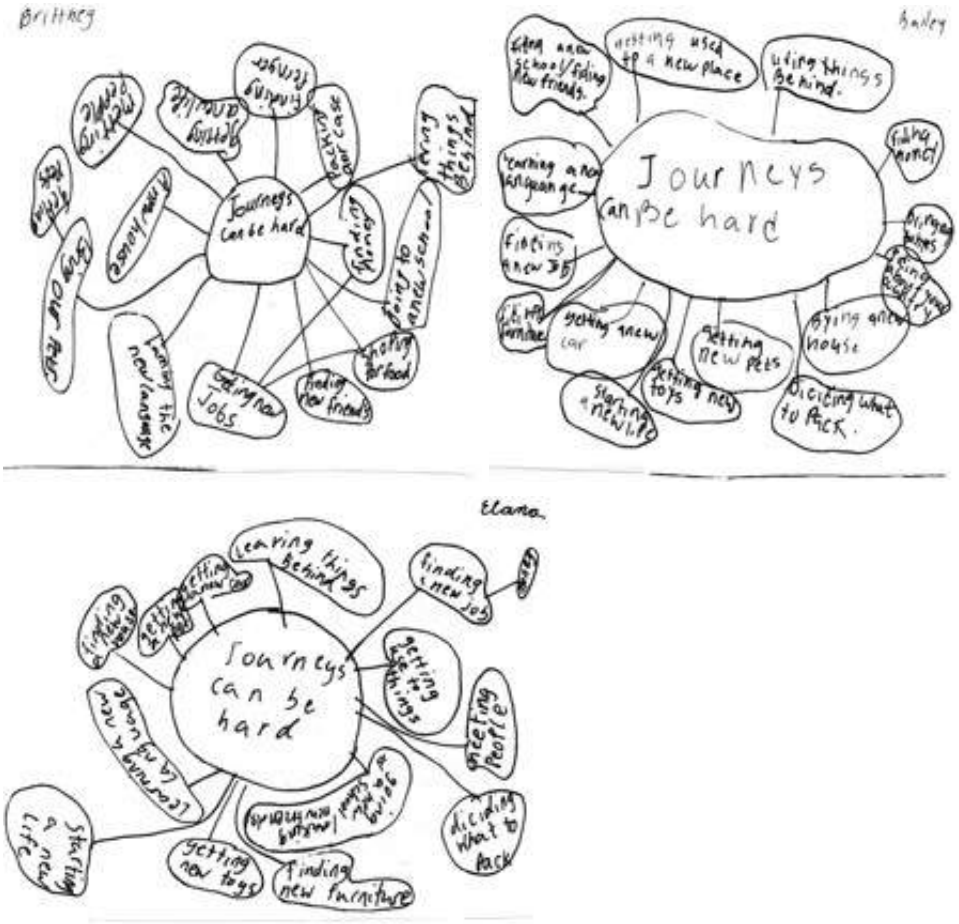
Lisa signaled the end of our journey inquiry by rereading the same story that had started our study, *The Pink Refrigerator* (Egan, 2007). The students were excited about hearing the story again and reacted as if they were reuniting with an old friend. As Lisa finished reading, she explained that they were going to write about their learning. She used *The Pink Refrigerator* to help the students understand that their writing was not an assignment but a response strategy to help them reflect on what they had learned, saying that “our writing is like the ‘Keep Exploring’ note that was on Dodsworth’s refrigerator.” This reference allowed the students to understand that there was not a right answer. Lisa explained that the goal was to use writing to push our thinking about our learning during the journey study. We started the writing process by charting our understandings of journeys on a semantic web.

The students were readily able to contribute their understandings to the web. I was happy to see

that they could recall the deeper meanings of some of the books and learning engagements in the lab. They were even able to contribute ideas from journey explorations within our classroom. Lisa continued to scaffold their thinking by listing the “Big Ideas” about journeys from their discussion. The class created the following list:

Even though I was impressed that the students could discuss these concepts, I still questioned whether they would be able to pull together their thinking and ideas to effectively write an essay. It was not until the students chose the big idea that they wanted to write about, that I began to see their higher order thinking developing.

Each student chose a “Big Idea” and worked on brainstorming their understandings about that topic or issue. I sat with one group comprised of Elana, Bailey, Brittney, and Gaby. As I observed them writing I noticed that each girl was making multiple entries on their webs. I was surprised by how many ideas they each had for their topics. My students had previously used webbing as a prewriting activity, but I had never seen them produce such complete webs. Typically, their webs had three to five ideas that connected to the main idea, but in this case they each had more than ten connections on their webs.



Gaby wanted to write about how “Journeys can be hard.” Each piece of evidence for her claim was linked to the forced journey segment of our study. Instead of retelling the details about the lack of

choice in leaving your home as a refugee, Gaby brainstormed examples of how being a refugee would affect her life. She backed up her claim with ideas like:

Each idea is an interpretation of concepts that were explored during the simulation on forced journeys. Gaby had gone beyond basic comprehension of the study by using herself as a lens to explain her understandings of the issues. When Gaby personalized her understandings, she was able to combine the details of the activities from the lab and our classroom with her learning to create new meanings. This was a huge step in shifting her thinking.

Upon reading the webs, I could easily identify which stories and engagements were most significant to students at this point in our study. Many made references to *Gleam and Glow* (Bunting, 2005), *Ziba Came on a Boat* (Lofthouse, 2007), *Home of the Brave* (Applegate, 2007), and *Esperanza Rising* (Ryan, 2002). Along with the stories that were read aloud, numerous students shared ideas and concepts that they gleaned during their exploration of the text sets from the forced journey study. These text sets were collections of picture books that provided information about the countries where the students were seeking refuge. Each set contained fiction and non-fiction that were authentic looks into life in that country. We even had books that were in the native language of each country so the students would be able to gain insights into the new language they would be immersed in. The complexity of their webs would not have been possible without the literature-rich environment that surrounded students during the study.

Creating Thesis Statements

Once the students compiled their thoughts about their big idea, Lisa worked with them on how to draft a thesis statement. She explained that a thesis statement is a sentence that answers the question, "What is it that I really want to say?" and provided students with a few examples of thesis statements she had drafted for her own essay on journeys. The students were handed their webs and given time to compose at least two thesis statements. Again, I was concerned about my class because I knew this thinking was new to them, but was eager to see their attempts.

I saw some students looking at their papers, with a blank look on their faces. When Lisa and I conferenced with those students, it was clear that they had a deep understanding of their learning, but lacked the confidence to write anything down. They were cautious about writing thesis statements because they had never done this type of writing before.

I found this conferencing time to be a turning point for their ability to synthesize the study in words. As I sat with Michelle, I asked her to show me her web and explain the important parts. Michelle's central theme was the big idea that "Journeys can lead you to a better place" and she had numerous branches that provided evidence for her claim. As she read each one, I saw a pattern in how she worded each idea by repeatedly using the word "risk." I commented that I noticed her use

of risk and asked her to explain why. Her response was “you have to take risks to go on a journey.” I wrote her explanation on her paper and congratulated her on creating her very first thesis statement. I wish I had a picture of her face when she realized she had the ability to write a thesis statement. I told her that I wanted her to try to write one on her own and left her to work while I conferenced with another student. Michelle was able to create another statement as evidence of her understanding.

I was amazed at the thesis statements that my class created. They truly were able to generate statements that provided an insight to what they had taken away from our study. Each thesis was a meaningful representation of what a particular student had learned and felt strongly about. Examples of the big ideas in their thesis statements included:

The most interesting part of reading their thesis statements for me as a teacher was identifying the part of the study to which they felt the most connected. What was even more exciting was that they used strategies and evidence to back up the positions they were taking in their thesis statements.

Providing Evidence

The students thoughtfully provided examples to back up their thesis statements in various ways. Some students chose to share personal experiences to explain a concept. Darell wrote about emotional journeys based on his thesis, “When someone important to you dies, emotions can get in your way.” He supported this claim by using his experience of losing both his grandfathers, saying, “The hardest experience for me is that I keep thinking about them. It’s like my mind is crying and it’s keeping me from my work.” Andy also used personal experiences to explain his thesis, “When you move, you leave things behind.” He argued that, “Life will not fit in a suitcase. When my mom had to move she had to leave pictures of me as a kid. She was really sad because she wanted them. Refugees have to leave their homes, toys, and pets behind.” Alex made sense of changes during a journey by using personal experiences for his thesis, “Sometimes when I am on a journey, my emotions change.” He supported this claim by stating, “I was playing my video game. I was so sad. All of the sudden I got something cool and I was happy.”

All three students engaged in complex thinking to create their own meanings and explanations about what they learned. Their voices come through strongly as they work to create a coherent synthesis around their thesis statements. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) argue that “true synthesis is achieved when a new perspective or thought is born” (p. 144). This type of synthesis is what Darell, Andy, and Alex did in using their own life experiences to help them create meaning for themselves about their learning and to support a strong viewpoint in their writing.

One essay in particular stood out. Along with using personal experiences to make sense of her learning, Sarvnaz used the strategy of taking a narrative stance while writing her essay and directly

addressing her audience. After completing her web, Sarvnaz created the thesis, “You need to be brave and smart when you go to a new place.” When she started writing she did not provide evidence from her life, but instead provided confidence-building pieces of advice. She explains to her reader that:

> When you get to a new place it will be very difficult. All you need to is be brave and smart. You will use your brain to figure things out and when you look around you will see cars and people, just like old times.

Through this strong sense of self-confidence, I noticed several indications of Sarvnaz’s learning. First she took the stories and engagements that she experienced in our study and applied those understandings to how she would feel being forced to move to a new place. Not only does this show Sarvnaz’s ability to synthesize, but her ability to think intertextually as she made connections with past texts to create a new text (Short, Kauffman, & Kahn, 2000). Sarvnaz showed her understanding of the importance of making connections by explaining that even if you are in a new place you will have the ability to be brave by making connections in your new environment. She clearly explains that you can use what you know already to help you make sense of your new surroundings.

Writing as Tool for Synthesis

Having students write essays as a way to synthesize their learning was a valuable engagement for my students and for me. Despite my initial reservations, using writing as tool to synthesize learning helped validate the students’ understanding from this study. Looking through the completed work, I can see the small steps that supported my students in pushing their thinking and writing. They needed the richness of a learning environment where literature was a way to experience multiple ways of thinking and living in the world and a way to explore complex ideas. The instructional strategy of giving students time to brainstorm the big ideas from their inquiry and then to choose one idea to web and develop was a very important context from which they could develop a position statement and a coherent argument about that position. Having Lisa share her own thinking throughout this process provided students with a demonstration of ways they might engage in this thinking.

Introducing my students to thesis statements in third grade has undoubtedly laid a solid foundation for their academic writing schema. Understanding what a thesis statement is and how it is important to their writing is something my students see as significant and are proud of knowing. During the Love of Reading week, two undergraduate college students visited our class as guest readers. When I introduced the guests, my students excitedly asked, “Do you know what a thesis statement is? We do.” They explained that they had written thesis statements and offered the

advice that you have to be sure to relate everything you write back to your thesis statement.

My students had created their own synthesis about synthesis. They had fit together the pieces of our work with essays and thesis statements to create their own understandings about synthesis as well as about journeys. They were engaged in creative, critical thinking that wove together their learning into a more complex whole. In turn, this vignette is my attempt to engage in the same process of creating a synthesis to understand this type of thinking. I only hope that I am as successful as my students in claiming this thinking for my own.

References

Moving Across the Arts to Consider New Perspectives

by Kathryn Tompkins, Fourth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

An exciting collaboration with our OMA (Opening Minds through the Arts) teacher opened up a compelling inquiry on slavery for my students. Jenny Cain introduced a powerful and evocative wordless picture book, *The Middle Passage* (Feelings, 1995), and invited students to respond with discussion, singing, music, and drama. Their connection to the book led us to read novels about slavery for literature circles in my classroom. This collaboration across our two classrooms immersed students in exploring multiple texts in the sign systems of art, music, drama, and literature and in using a range of sign systems to respond to these texts. Sign systems are "the ways in which students share and make meaning, specifically through music, art, mathematics, drama, and language" (Short, Kauffman, & Kahn, 2000, p. 160). Sign systems can thus be a way to share meaning with others through a public text, such as a song, a painting, a drama event, or a book, as well as a way to think about and make meaning in responding to these texts.

Our study began with *The Middle Passage*, the passionate result of twenty years of work by Tom Feelings. He researched the history of slavery and lived in Africa for two years in order to artistically portray the journey that captured Africans faced as they were taken across the Atlantic Ocean. The story is told completely through black and white illustrations, which are emotionally devastating. The first illustration shows a beautiful beach on which white men suddenly appear and attack with guns, assisted by other Africans. The Africans are killed or put in chains and taken to a boat to be loaded up as cargo. They are crammed onto the boat with no room to move. Some choose to remain peaceful, others try to revolt and are killed or beaten and chained again, while still others choose to end their suffering by jumping into the shark-infested waters. Those who live are force-fed to keep them alive until the boat pulls up to waiting crowds in the U.S., ready to purchase their new property.

The Middle Passage shocked my students into a more realistic view of the degradation of slavery and compelled them to react. As students viewed excerpts from the illustrations, the music from the movie "Amistad" was playing in the background, setting a quiet and pensive mood. Jenny, our OMA teacher, invited students to respond to the musical and visual texts using a variety of sign systems. One day they acted out scenes from the book using the drama strategy of tableau, “a still, silent performance that involves three-dimensional representations” (Wilson, 2003, p. 375). The students met in groups, discussed the scene and emotions that they wanted to portray from the book, and then practiced acting out and freezing their positions. Their facial expressions changed dramatically as they moved into the roles of the slaves and their captors.

Jenny asked students to respond to the tableau through a “tap in” strategy. She randomly tapped a particular student who was standing frozen in position and that student needed to say what he/she was thinking or feeling while staying in character. The students who were portraying the slave traders said that they were trying to keep the slaves from escaping because they were money to them. Students who portrayed the slaves said they were scared, or that they would rather die than go with their captors. One girl even said, “I want my mom,” which was powerful because the students realized that children, like themselves, were among those captured.

The strong emotions that came out through these dramas were striking in their depth of feeling and supported thoughtful discussions about the book. The students tried to put themselves in the situation of the slaves and struggled with what they would do in that situation. Many said they would fight back, no matter what the risk, to try and take over the boat. Others said that they would be too scared to do anything while some said they would jump overboard and add themselves to the trail of skeletons that led from Africa to the Americas. It was evident to us that the students were more invested in this book because they connected so deeply through using different sign systems to experience the musical and visual texts and to respond through drama and talk. The students were shocked by this honest and brutal portrayal of slavery and wanted to know more—a very different response than when they had read information about slavery in the history textbook.

I knew that we had to continue this inquiry in my classroom because students were continuing to ask many questions and felt compelled to understand more about the slave experience. I pulled together a text set of books on slavery and civil rights that included picture books, many non-fiction books including biographies, and a few chapter books. I kept these books out on the table so that students could read them whenever they had time. I was pleasantly surprised that they went straight to the books when they finished an assignment or had independent reading time.

In addition to the text set, I gathered new literature circle books for the students to read and discuss. I did a quick book talk on each chapter book and students chose one to read and discuss. Every week the students were responsible for completing an entry in their response journals to

show the connections that they were making to their chosen book. They could do this through webbing their ideas, sketching to show the meanings that they were constructing, or writing their thoughts and questions. These journals provided me with an assessment of their thinking and helped them jot down their thoughts and ideas for their literature circle discussions. They met about once a week with others who were reading the same book to discuss what was going on in the book and the issues that were on their minds. The discussions especially helped some of the struggling readers to make sense of what was going on in the books.

The collection of literature circle books included *Jip* (Paterson, 1996), *Amos Fortune Free Man* (Yates, 1950), *Steal Away Home* (Ruby, 1994), and *Escape from Slavery* (Rappaport, 1991). These books all focused on issues of slavery but from different perspectives. The students were so intrigued by the books that they asked to have the chance to read a second book after we completed our first round of literature circles. We did a second round so that each was able to read and discuss a second book from this set.

I chose *Jip* because I felt the students would engage with Jip's struggle to figure out his identity and would wonder how his story was related to slavery. Set in the 1850s, Jip fell off a "gypsy" wagon when he was a toddler and has been working on the town poor farm ever since. He takes care of the animals and often his friends. A "lunatic" named Put is brought to the poor farm one day and he teaches Jip, sings to him, and is a great friend—except when he has one of his crazy spells. Jip goes to school and becomes close to his teacher and a local Quaker family, all the while trying to dodge a mysterious stranger who tells Jip that he knows the identity of his father. In the end Jip has to escape when he finds out that his mother was a slave who tried to save him from his father, her master. The mystery of Jip's family kept students engaged in the book. They were drawn to the characters and got a completely different view of slavery. Those who read Jip said that it was a book that they could not put down. They wanted to know what would happen to him and often discussed how there were people who took action during this time period, like the Quaker family and the teacher who help Jip. The students did not see Jip as a slave but as a boy trying to live his life in a difficult time. Jip did not travel across the middle passage but his life was forever changed by slavery.

Amos Fortune was a book I had heard of but not previously read. The book begins in Africa and tells about life before the slave traders came. The story begins in 1725 with the At-mun-shi tribe celebrating the harvest with their chief and his children, seventeen year old Prince At-mun and twelve year old Princess Ath-mun. Suddenly the chief slouches over, but before the tribe can recognize the prince as their new chief, the older men, women and children are taken away. The prince is forced to leave his sister behind and is taken along with most of his tribe to wait in a pit. There they are joined by many other tribes and are rarely fed until one day they are cleaned up and presented to the slave traders. All who meet approval are loaded on a ship and forced to say good-

bye to their land and their lives. After two months on the ship, those who have survived the journey remember little about who they are. At-mun knows only that he is a king. He is sold to a man who is against slavery, who wants to give him a Christian home and have him help around the house. At-mun is renamed Amos and is taught how to read and write. Amos grows to care about the family, but fifteen years later his "master" dies and he is sold once again. In 1769 Amos was granted his freedom when he was almost sixty years old and spent the rest of his life working to free slaves and to help other free people. The students seemed to relate to this book because they saw the transition of a young man from African prince to captured slave to free man. They felt the story was more complete in following someone through a life time and multiple transformations.

I knew that the mystery of *Steal Away Home* would draw in students and I was impressed with the focus on the bravery of those involved with the Underground Railroad. The story takes two view points, beginning in the current with a young girl named Dana who is ripping down wall paper in her new house. Behind the paper she finds a hidden room with a skeleton and a diary. Dana spends the rest of the book trying to identify the remains and figure out their story. Her chapters alternate with the chapters that focus on James, a young boy who lived in Dana's house in the 1850s, and whose mother's diary gives insight into the life behind the skeleton. James is Quaker and his mother helped slaves on an Underground Railroad stop. The skeleton was a brave young African American woman named Lizbet Charles who worked to free slaves before she became ill and died. Her skeleton was sealed up in the house to protect James' family from legal action for helping escaped slaves. The students who read this book were relieved that there were families who were willing to risk their own safety. This book gave them a sense of hope and helped them think more realistically about ways of taking action.

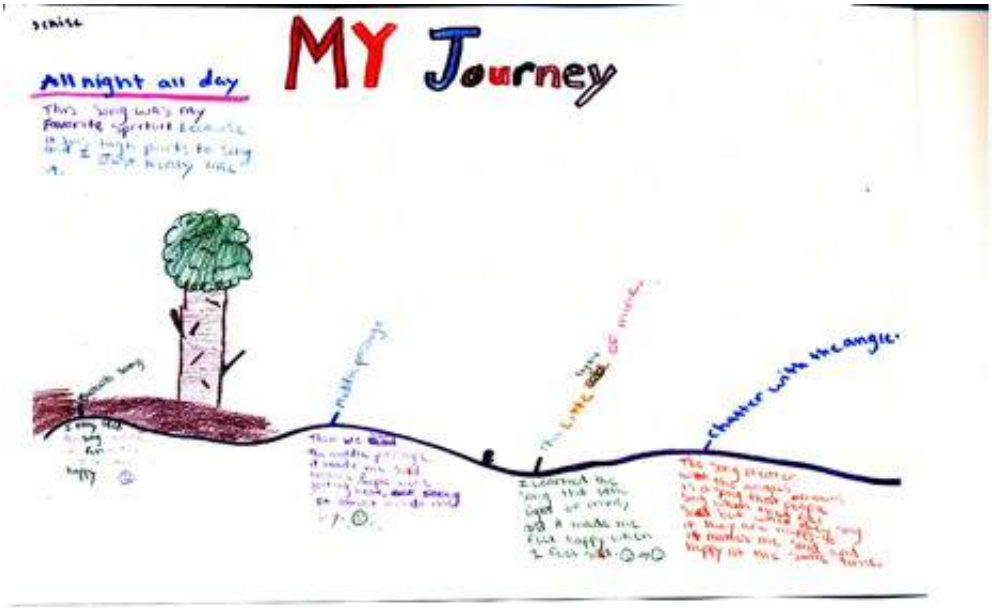
Escape from Slavery, Five Journeys to Freedom was the last book we read and is based on actual accounts of slaves who risked their lives to try for freedom. I knew that the students would relate to the book because of their interest in the experiences of slaves and the risks they were willing to take. The stories seemed to define bravery for students. I also liked how the book was divided into short stories so that students learned about the many different escape plans that slaves created. The story that the students talked the most about was of the husband and wife who pretended to be slave and slave owner and were able to escape. The wife was very light skinned so she could pass as an old white man. The class was impressed at the brilliance of this plan and the huge risk they took by escaping in full view of slave traders.

After the class read through the text set and two of the literature circle books, they drew visual images about their thinking on slavery and civil rights and wrote reflections about their sketches. I wanted to give students an opportunity to pull together their thoughts on the books that they read and explore what the books meant to them. I discovered that they felt a sense of hope because of people like the Quakers. I hadn't realized how much the role of Quakers was highlighted in the

literature circle books but students clearly felt that they played a huge role in aiding slaves on the Underground Railroad. They were angry with anyone who was involved in owning a slave and some drew chains to symbolize slavery. The students had a new respect for slaves and people helping slaves who demonstrated courage during such horrible times. From *The Middle Passage* to their literature circle books, they appreciated those willing to risk their lives in order to challenge slavery as wrong. Slavery had changed from “a thing that happened a long time ago” to an event in American history that was real and shocking for the students.

While we were reading novels and picture books in our classroom, we continued learning about slavery and civil rights in OMA. Jenny took us on a journey through time, beginning with slavery and moving into the spirituals and music that were a part of that time, and then tracking how this music later led to the creation of jazz by African Americans. The students had the opportunity to learn to sing the songs and to play them on instruments. They studied famous jazz musicians and their contributions to the jazz era. This focus allowed students to celebrate the contributions and talents of African Americans, rather than only viewing their history and struggles with sympathy.

At the end of our study, students completed final responses in OMA to show their learning and thinking on graffiti boards. Graffiti boards (Short & Harste, 1996) usually involve a group of students who respond through sketches, quotes, and connections in an unorganized way on a large sheet of paper. We chose to do a variation of graffiti boards where each student was responsible for making his or her own graffiti board. As students began to think through their responses it was interesting to watch their struggle with what to represent on their boards because they had been so moved and infuriated by the conditions of slavery but were inspired by the spirituals and the music created by the African-American community.



The students learned from many different sign systems (drama, singing, art, and writing)

throughout this experience in ways that seemed to deepen and extend their learning. They read about slavery, but were also immersed in visual and musical texts that provided for more complexity in their understandings of African American experiences and history. Using tableau to reenact scenes from *The Middle Passage* affected them on a much deeper level because they had to put themselves in the situation, whether they portrayed the slave or the slave trader. Encouraging students to respond through art as well as language allowed them to use their strengths in different sign systems as ways of thinking about ideas that were significant to them. They thought about the books using movement, music, and art and so engaged more intensely with the issues of slavery and civil rights from a wider range of perspectives. We engaged with the arts, not as cute activities, but as multiple ways of knowing and thinking about the world.

References

Making Connections through Text Sets with Young Children

by Jennifer Griffith, First Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Making connections is essential to learning, especially for young children. Kathy Short (1993) defines learning as "the search for patterns that connect," and argues that learning is hindered by the fragmentation of the school day as children jump between classrooms and subjects. She believes that learners need to "constantly make connections across past and present experiences in order to construct their understandings of themselves and their world" (p. 284). As a teacher it is my job to offer many opportunities for children to make these connections in the classroom, even though finding the right books and activities at the right moment can be a real struggle with first graders. It is often a challenge to find materials that support young children in learning something new by connecting to something they already know.

I observed my students successfully using text sets in the Learning Lab to enhance their conceptual thinking about journeys by making connections between the books and their own lives. Text sets are a collection of conceptually related books that are used by a group of students for discussion and comparison (Short, 1993). These sets contain books that provide a range of perspectives on a theme or topic. Short argues that text sets elicit a different type of dialogue in literature discussions than occurs with a stand-alone book. Discussions of text sets involve more retellings and searches for connections and comparisons across books rather than focusing on students' negotiations of their differing interpretations of a particular book. These discussions encourage students to engage in the cognitive strategy of intertextuality, the process of making meaning through connections across present and past texts and life experiences.

I was up for the challenge of bringing this type of thinking and talk into the classroom through our study of family memories. I wanted the kids to be introduced to a group of books that were connected by the significance of memory in our lives within families and in forming our identities. My goal was to enhance their thinking about literature and to encourage them to make connections to their own lives as well as between the books. I wanted the books in the text set to offer a range of perspectives so that the texts would play off of each other in the students' discussions. These experiences would support them in our culminating activity of memory mapping where students would try out the same strategies we had been using in our conceptual idea of journeys--identifying, labeling journeys, and choosing a pathway to represent their memory.

I collected a set of books around the theme of families and memories. I strove to find as many as I could that were related to the holidays, since we were close to the winter break and students' minds were on the upcoming holidays. The book titles I chose for this text set included:

A text set can be read with children in many different ways. Older students can each choose to read a different book from a text set and then share and compare their books in small group discussions. This strategy isn't the most effective with young children, mainly because they are often unable to independently read the books. Ways of using text sets with younger kids include browsing the books in a set at the beginning of a new unit or focus, pairing two books in which there is some type of opposition, sending a text set home in a book bag for families to read together, or reading aloud a different book from the set each day. Another possibility is to read and discuss the same book in a small group with each group reading a book from the class text set. The kids can then reorganize after discussion to form text set groups so that each new group has one child from the previous groups (Short & Harste, 1996).

I decided to gradually build our text set by choosing one read aloud a day from our set to discuss as a whole class so that all of the kids could participate and understand the story. The significant part of this variation is maintaining a web or chart to show the different connections and comparisons across the books. Gradually creating the chart would support kids in searching for patterns that connect and thus engage them in intertextuality as a way of thinking about text and about learning.

I showed the kids a basket that contained our text set and explained to them that over the next several weeks we would read these as a class and discuss what we noticed. I let them know that I wanted them to think about why I grouped these books together and that they would be the ones titling our basket with the theme. The basket contained more books than the ones I read during our read-aloud time so that students would have more than just the ten books to browse during open reading time. Open reading usually occurred in the morning for about fifteen minutes, when the kids could read from all the books in the classroom, not just their "just right" books. My goal was to encourage them to make connections with as many books as possible, believing that this would

support them in getting more out of the text set and being able to see more connections between the books and in their own lives. The kids were excited and I was eager to see their important ideas and connections.

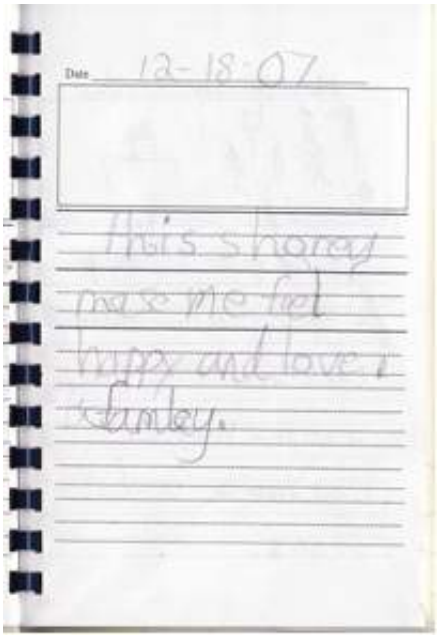
We began with a read aloud of *When I Was Young in the Mountains* (Rylant, 1982). After I completed reading the book I asked the kids to arrange themselves in a circle to begin our discussion of the book. The kids knew that during a discussion they don't have to raise their hands but do have to be respectful so as not to talk over one another and to be thoughtful in their listening and their speaking. Our discussions are open-ended, but if the kids get too away from the book, I guide them back gently to refocus their thinking. I don't run the discussion but function as an observer and facilitator if needed. As soon as I finished the book, they began discussing the important ideas they noticed.

The kids had just finished an author study of Patricia Polacco and one of the important ideas they discussed was how she put herself in the story. I thought it was significant that they were continuing to notice this positioning by the author in this story.

I created many visuals to support the kids in seeing how the books fit together. They needed more than talk to explore the connections across books. We had the basket that housed our text set and each book was placed in the book display stand after being read aloud. We also had a chart titled "Our Important Ideas" where we wrote the titles of books as they were read aloud and listed what the kids saw as the important ideas. We wrote on the chart after our discussion in our circle, focusing on the "big ideas" that stuck out for them based on their conversations about a particular book. This routine continued throughout the text set and helped the kids see connections among the books because they had a visual to refer to during and after their discussion of each book.

We used our response logs as a place for the kids to reflect on their thinking about a particular book. We weren't able to respond in our logs after each book in the set due to time limitations. The

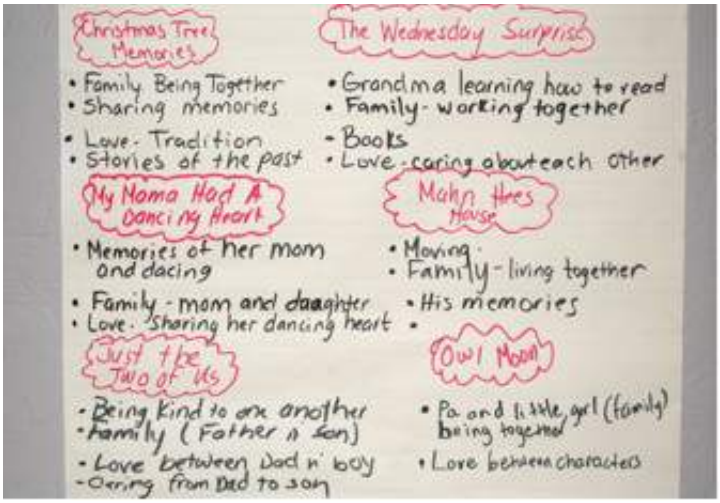
kids and I had worked on ways to respond and they knew to use phrases, such as "I wonder...", "I think...", "it reminds me..." or connections to the book. Their response logs included both writing and pictures. I encouraged the kids to write as much as they could about how the story made them feel and what they thought about the book. They could use the ideas discussed in our literature circle or something they didn't get a chance to share. Their responses to *When I Was Young in the Mountains* included:



As we continued through our text set of families and memories the kids made connections and observations about what they noticed during discussion and in their response logs. The kids commented on the theme of love and sharing in *Christmas in the Country*, *Going Home*, and *Mim's Christmas Jam*. The common thread the kids saw across most of the books still focused on the connection they had identified in *When I was Young in the Mountains*--the idea of memories and families working and being together. After reading *The Wednesday Surprise* and *Christmas Tree Memories*, about half way through our text set, the excitement level arose in our classroom. The kids couldn't wait for their turn and began shouting:

It was rewarding to see the kids making these connections. Their thinking was encouraged by setting up the classroom to visually display the books as a set and charting their "important ideas." It was obvious that the text set encouraged them to not look at literature in isolation but instead always in connection with other literature and their lives.

We completed our text set and our important ideas chart with the book *Owl Moon*. The kids talked about Pa and the little girl being together as a family and the love between the characters in the book.



I had the kids do a final reflection in their response logs to pull together their thinking and connections from the text set. Jacob wrote, “All the stories made me feel happy,” while Ayden commented, “All our responses are families, they all have family in them.” Matthew also picked up on this theme, writing, “All the stories made me feel happy and they all had love and family in them.”

I was pleased and reassured that text sets could be effective in a primary classroom. My first graders proved this with their understanding and ability to connect their past experiences with literature to the books in our set. They were also able to successfully make connections between the books in our text set by seeing and adding to our "important ideas" chart. The learning that took place during our text set confirmed research findings that indicate learning is enhanced when connections can be made to children’s existing knowledge and experiences. Implementing a text set into the curriculum with my first graders helped me more fully appreciate the importance of offering students the chance to connect to their prior knowledge to learn something new. We do a disservice to children and make learning more difficult when we expect students to learn something new without considering their life experiences and knowledge. Text sets establish a framework for kids to expect connections to their own lives and to other literature and to develop strategies for making those connections. We created a community of learners in our classroom who actively and critically search to make sense of their world and learning.

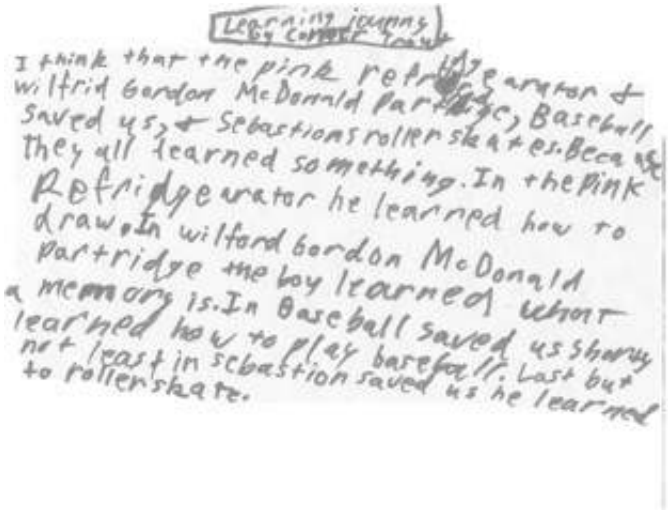
References

Encouraging Intertextual Thinking in the Classroom

by Kathryn Bolasky, Third Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Sitting on the floor of my classroom, I sorted through the piles of student work that had collected across our semester-long inquiry on journeys. It was the last week of school and I was trying to

bring order to the classroom and decide what to send home with students and to keep for my own reflection. One particular student reflection caught my attention because I didn't remember seeing it. I started to skim and then went back to read carefully. Conner had decided to thoughtfully reflect on the connections between three picture books based on the learning journeys in each story. It was at that moment that I realized that my students' thinking had shifted from making surface-level connections between books about characters and plots to understanding that books can be connected conceptually by big ideas and themes. This shift in thinking had occurred gradually over the semester without my being aware of it and so I decided to revisit my students' work to see how this shift unfolded. I wanted to look for key teaching strategies and engagements that helped pushed students to think intertextually about conceptual connections across texts. Since this was my second year of teaching, I hoped that identifying these teaching strategies would help me more consciously integrate them into my instruction for the following year.


Learning journey
by Conner

I think that the pink refrigerator &
wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge, Baseball
Saved us, & Sebastions rollerskates. Because
they all learned something. In the Pink
Refridgerator he learned how to
draw. In wilford Gordon McDonald
Partridge the boy learned what
a memory is. In Baseball saved us Sharon
learned how to play baseball. Last but
not least in sebastion saved us he learned
to rollerskate.

Intertextuality is a key thinking strategy in which learners make connections between texts and involves the process of making meaning through connections across present and past texts and life experiences (Beaugrande, 1980). This complex process requires readers to look past superficial similarities between books to the larger conceptual issues within and across texts. Thinking intertextually is the basis for critical and creative thought, but was not a process that I taught directly. Instead my students were encouraged to make connections across texts by being immersed in a collection of texts and responding to those texts in a variety of ways. Students can be guided towards intertextual thinking, but the students themselves have to inquire and make their own connections. I examined engagements that occurred within my classroom and in our school's Learning Lab with our instructional coach, Lisa Thomas, to identify the key instructional strategies that seemed to support students in moving toward intertextual thinking. These strategies included the development of a conceptual frame to support our inquiries, the use of mapping as tool for exploring our thinking, connecting through a touchstone book, exploring text sets, and connecting across books through comparison charts.

Establishing a Conceptual Frame

One key instructional strategy was the use of a broad conceptual framework to connect the various topics and subject areas we explored across our day. Our teacher study group came to consensus about focusing our research on exploring the concept of journeys because this concept wove across the individual units we were doing at the various grade levels. Since journey was a school wide framework, students were given opportunities to conceptualize journeys in more than just my classroom. They were challenged to think metaphorically about journeys during our time in Learning Lab and during our Opening Minds through the Arts (OMA) program with our fine arts specialist. This consistency was a vital aspect in the students' success with finding connections across the curriculum.

I started the year with the goal of using the concept of journeys to guide my planning and instruction in reading. Having a framework in mind helped me make decisions about what materials to use with my third graders. I soon noticed that I was finding numerous ways to connect journeys to almost everything I was teaching, not just in reading. For example, I would present a new math procedure by saying, "Today we are going to start the journey of learning how to add two three digit numbers." Students became excited when they were able to identify journeys in other contexts besides in reading and this search seemed to help them look for more meaning across the various activities in our school day.

Another key aspect in creating a conceptual framework was the language that I used with my class. I made a concerted effort to push their thinking by asking two key questions in everything we did. The questions were:

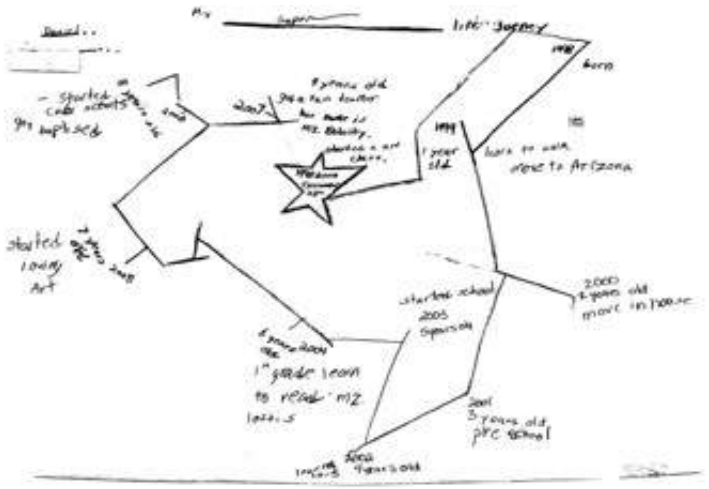
I wrote each question on a sentence strip and placed them on my chalkboard so I would remember to ask the questions as we finished various lessons throughout the day. These two questions served as an effective closure for many of my lessons. The students were able to identify different journeys in their own learning and were encouraged to back up their observations by explaining their thinking. The question "What makes it a journey?" was more crucial in developing their understanding of the different journeys because they had to explain their thinking. Students had to take the time to identify and define different types of journeys and I used a range of response strategies to encourage them to think further about these journeys. In the teacher study group, we realized that maps were a logical way to help represent our understandings, given our focus on journeys.

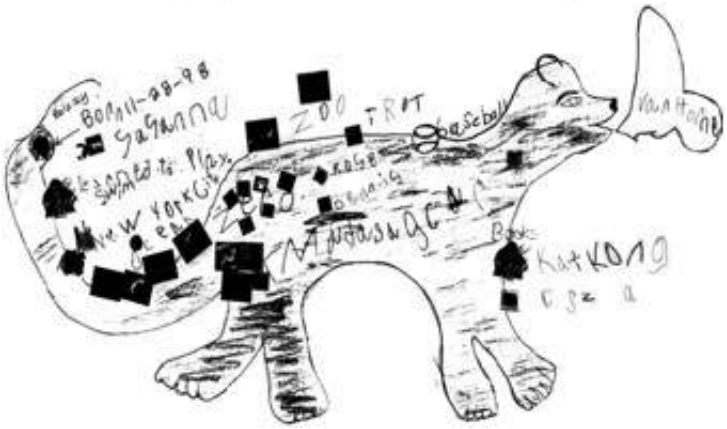
Using Mapping as a Tool for Learning

We started our focus on journeys in the Learning Lab by relating the concept to the student's lives through having them create life journey maps. Initially only four of my students completed their

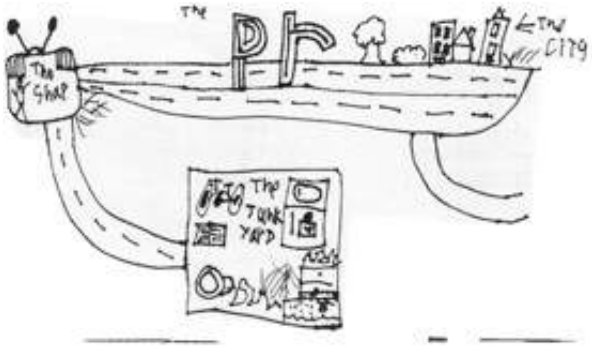
maps. Needless to say I was frustrated with this response, but Lisa talked with my class about why the life journey maps were important, asking them, “How is your life like a journey?” Their responses included:

The students needed this discussion to think about how journey could be a metaphor to think about ourselves and our world. They had a better sense of the “why” of this assignment and worked with their families to create a visual representation of their lives so far. Some students chose to do a time line, while others created a game board with each square representing a major event in their life. It was a first step in visually mapping their personal connections to the concept of journey.





Students then went on to map the important events from a picture book, *The Pink Refrigerator* (Egan 2007), that Lisa read aloud in Learning Lab. Each student was free to choose the format in which they mapped the events. When the students were working independently I noticed they mostly focused on the physical journeys that the character Dodsworth was making—the actual movement from one place to another. They were able to identify a few other types of “changes” that were occurring with Dodsworth, but could not explain why they thought they were journeys. To help develop the metaphoric understanding of different types of journeys we needed to spend more time discussing and mapping a wider range of types of journeys in the literature we were reading.



During our next session in Learning Lab, Lisa helped us take another step towards shifting our thinking by working with students to create a semantic web of “Kinds of Journeys.” The students were able to generate the following ideas:

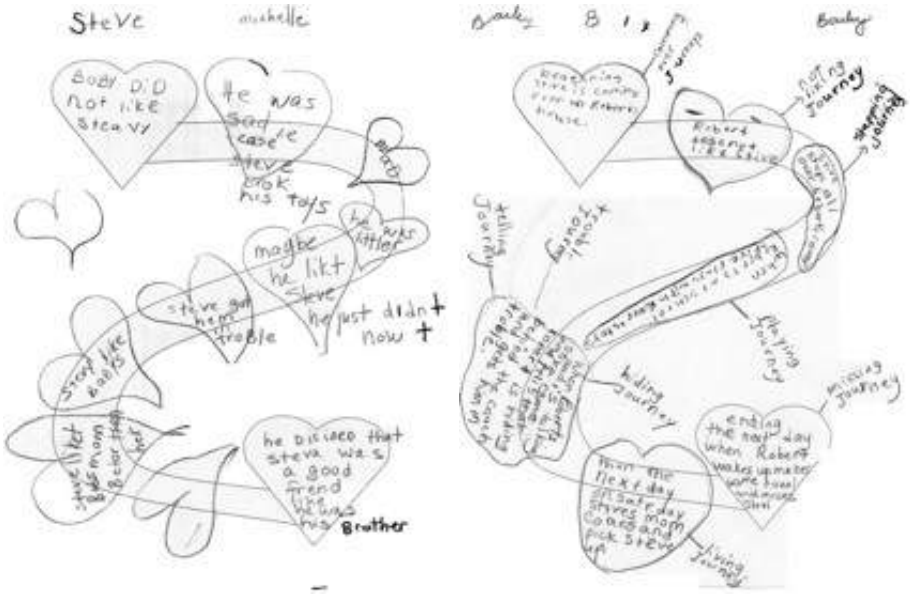
We asked students to take another look at their own life journey maps to see if they could identify any other types of journeys. After talking about their maps in small groups, they returned to the whole group area and were able to add other kinds of journeys to the web:

Giving students an opportunity to look at their lives as a journey helped them begin to conceptualize journeys. During this session of just an hour the students moved beyond their surface level thinking to take a big step towards deeper understanding. Short (1993) argues that “we learn something new when we are able to make connections between what we are currently experiencing and something we already know” (p. 284). The students understood their own lives and their personal journeys and could use that expertise to explore other variations of journeys. Creating this web resulted in the students identifying three major types of journeys--physical, emotional, and learning--that they saw as the broader categories for other types of journeys.

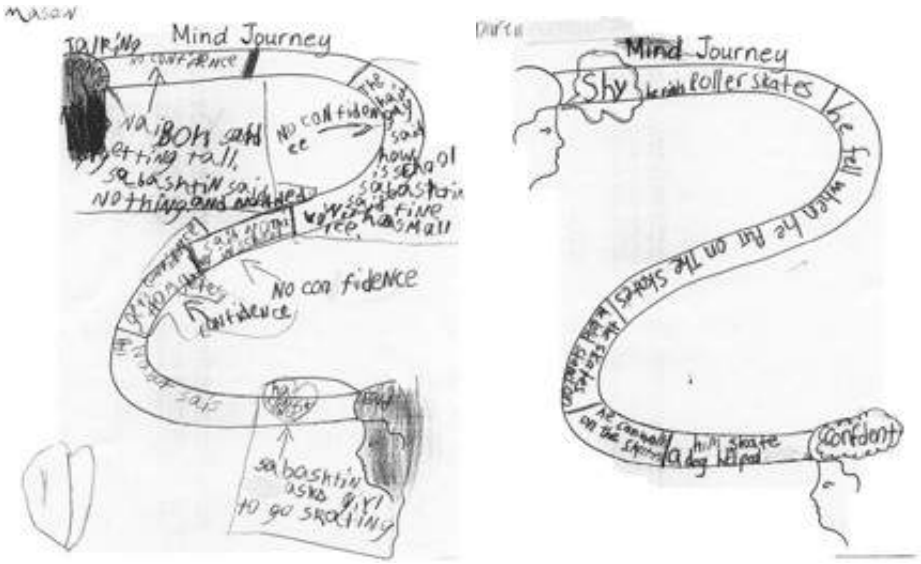
To promote a deeper understanding of these types of journeys, we created various mapping responses to encourage students to go beyond just identifying the beginning and ending points of change to exploring the pathways of change. This shift in focus of the responses allowed the students to explore, “When does a change become a journey?”

In Learning Lab, students mapped a character’s change in emotion during a story on a Heart Map. Lisa read aloud *Stevie* (Steptoe, 1969) and the students mapped the emotional changes of the main character, Robert, during the story. Michelle used the heart at the top of the page to show Robert’s

emotion at the beginning of the story “Bobby did not like Stevie.” Along the pathway, Michelle represented Robert’s changes in emotions by drawing new hearts along the pathway. At the end of the pathway there is a final heart that contains Robert’s final emotion of deciding that “Stevie was a good friend like he was his brother.”



Students also mapped the changes that occurred with character’s thinking during a story on a Mind Journey Map. Instead of having two hearts at the beginning and end of a pathway the Mind Map depicts a face to represent thinking. We used the Mind Map as a response to *Sebastian’s Roller Skates* (de Deu Prats, 2003). Mason mapped Sebastian’s change from lacking confidence to having confidence using important events from the story as evidence along the pathway. The students gained confidence in identifying a change in the story as a journey after having a way to provide evidence on the pathways.



Connecting and Reconnecting through a Touchstone Book

Another important strategy was having a touchstone book. A touchstone book is a piece of literature that exemplifies the concept or topic being explored and that is read and reread and referred to continuously throughout a unit of study (Calkins, 1994). The amazing thing about a touchstone book is that you can't necessarily predict ahead of time what book will gain that significance for students. Touchstone books materialize based on students' understandings and inquiries within the study. The touchstone book for my class happened to be from the first engagement about journeys that I facilitated in my classroom. I read aloud *Fox* by Margaret Wild (2000) with the goal of having students discuss the book and identify journeys. After I read the story aloud, I recorded their thoughts on a semantic web. The students were able to identify many different types of journeys.

This simple engagement laid a solid foundation for my students because they found the book compelling and wanted to think more about it. As the study progressed, numerous students referred back to *Fox* and the types of journeys that they had identified in the story. Having this book as a reference gave the students a sense of security--they were confident in their thinking about *Fox* due to the responses they received from me and each other during the discussion. This allowed them to take risks when approaching a new story. In fact every time they referred back to *Fox* after hearing or reading another story, their understanding of it was deepened. For example, in Learning Lab, the class completed wide reading of various text sets in order to explore different types of journeys. I sat near one student and asked him what journeys he was seeing in the book *Sebastian's Roller Skates*. Conner responded, "Physical journeys and feeling journeys, just like in *Fox*. Magpie travels to the desert and when she is left there, she goes from happy to scared. [Both characters] go from one emotion to another." Conner created meaning for the story that he was reading by using *Fox* as a reference. Touchstone books promote this type of intertextual thinking because students use their shared experience within their community of readers to make sense of new literature.

Exploring Text Sets

Text sets, collections of conceptually related books, were used in different ways throughout our study of journeys (Short, 1993). We used texts sets in small group and whole group settings to explore types of journeys. Based on the student webs about journeys, we gathered books in the Learning Lab to create the following sets: Beginning and Endings, Dreams and Wishes, Pain and Healing, Spiritual and Emotional, People and Relationships, Growing and Learning, and Movement and Competition. Students chose a theme that interested them and spent several weeks reading books in that set. They were then asked to search for themes, issues, patterns, and ideas that ran across their text set. This exploration enabled them to come to consensus on a definition of journeys. They also used another group of text sets to glean knowledge about different countries during our forced journey exploration.

The most influential text set was a collection of picture books on journeys that were read aloud to the students in the Learning Lab and my classroom. The text set grew as the study progressed, and remained available throughout our study. Each time another book was read aloud and discussed, it was placed in our text set basket next to the read-aloud chair. There were many occasions when students would refer back to a particular book in the set as a point of reference within our discussions of a new read-aloud. The read-alouds were carefully chosen so that they would reflect a broad range of types of journeys and issues about journeys. The significance of this text set came to light towards the end of the study when the students were asked to find connections across many books through comparison charts.

Connecting Books through Comparison Charts

It was not until the students created comparison charts that I fully understood the effectiveness of the text sets and the ways in which they had deepened students' thinking. The comparison chart engagement started with spreading out all of our read-aloud text set on the floor of the Learning Lab. The students were asked to sort the books according to meaning, not by size or color. In the first sort, students created the following groups:

The books were combined into one large set again and students were asked to sort the books using different categories in order to push them to consider other connections across the books:

We repeated the process a third time, this time focusing on the types of journeys in each story:

To bring closure to this sorting and categorizing activity, students were asked to create list of concepts that were present throughout the text set:

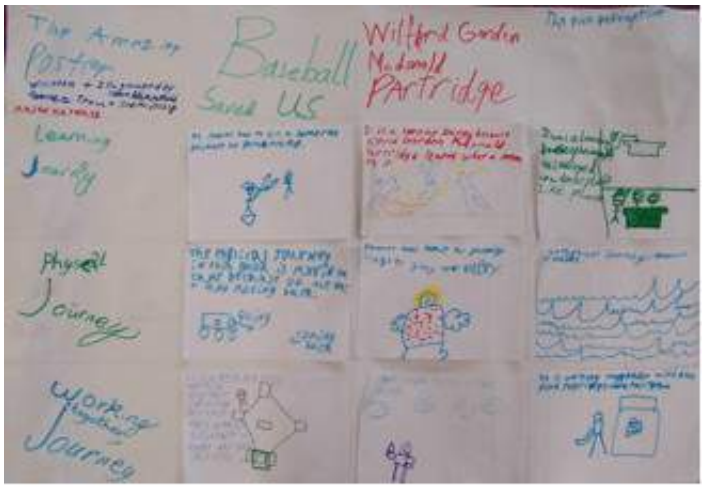
The following week in Learning Lab, students were asked to engage in an activity to showcase their connections across our text set. The students worked in small groups to create a comparison chart. Comparison charts are a response strategy where students take three books and three concepts and relate the books to each other. The template for the chart was:

Title of the Chart	Title of a Book	Title of a Book	Title of a Book
Concept	Evidence of concept	Evidence of concept	Evidence of concept
Concept	Evidence of concept	Evidence of concept	Evidence of concept
Concept	Evidence of concept	Evidence of concept	Evidence of concept

Like finding a point on a map using a coordinate grid, the conceptual connections across three separate texts can be located on a comparison chart. It was during this activity that I found evidence of my students' intertextual thinking.

Many of the small groups approached their comparison chart by looking for different types of journeys. Mason, Aden, Shesh, and Conner, for example, chose *Baseball Saved Us*, *Wilfrid Gordon MacDonald Partridge*, and *The Pink Refrigerator* and connected them with Learning Journeys, Physical Journeys, and Working Together Journeys. I was pleased with the deeper understanding the students showed on their charts. They were able to examine the event of building a baseball field in *Baseball Saved Us* and recognize that there was a process in creating a field. They also understood that many people worked together with a common goal to complete the field.

My "Ah ha! Moment" came while I was working with a group that chose to take a different approach. Instead of using types of journeys they focused on one journey. They chose emotional journeys and found three concepts of this type of journey to connect their books. I sat with Reanna, Scott, Michelle, and Nick, while they worked through connecting the three stories. My initial reaction was that the three books they chose, *Anansi*, *Baseball Saved Us*, and *Stevie*, were going to be difficult to connect. They seemed like vastly different stories to me. The group methodically started discussing the similarities across the books and their discussion resulted in the three concepts of Working Together, Loneliness, and Being Trapped. The next step was to find evidence in each story for each concept and to represent the connections on the chart. I was impressed to see the way that the group was able to identify the concept of being trapped, which I saw as a difficult connection for them. Not only did the group identify loneliness, but they found evidence from each story for this connection.



As I begin preparations for the next school year, I am anxious to continue to explore ways of encouraging intertextuality. By analyzing the work of my third-grade students, I saw the significance of this thinking for their own understandings and identified the teaching strategies that supported them. Witnessing and identifying the shift in thinking of my students helped me grow as an educator. I now know the value of developing critical thinking through encouraging deeper meanings about the ideas we are exploring. I no longer think of my instructional time in segments that are devoted to separate curriculum. I understand that, with thoughtful planning and implementing effective instructional strategies, a common theme can unite our entire school day. These connections across subjects, texts, and situations encourage students to develop more complex conceptual understandings and to be more effective as learners. They expect and search for connection as essential to learning.

References

Re-Visioning the World through Multiple Perspectives

by Amy Edwards, Fifth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

The ability to consider multiple perspectives is at the heart of a democratic classroom for students to share their voices and to reflect on ways of thinking about the world beyond their own. Rosenblatt (1938) states that democracy is based in the tension of honoring individual voices while at the same time remaining open to diverse points of view. Literature circles are an instructional engagement that supports democracy by providing a context where students share their responses as well as listen to and consider other perspectives, creating a balance between individual voice and group responsibility.

Literature circles that are based in critical literacy are particularly conducive contexts for encouraging students to go beyond their own ways of looking at the world. Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) argue that critical literacy is a multifaceted practice characterized by four dimensions: 1) disrupting the commonplace, 2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, 3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and 4) taking action and promoting social justice. Through critical literacy, students seek to understand experiences and texts from their own perspectives and that of others and to concurrently question these various perspectives. This focus on multiple perspectives encourages students to critically examine the social problems in our world and to consider new possibilities by asking questions about "what is" and considering "what if." Considering multiple perspectives encourages students to think conceptually about global issues in their complexity.

Students in our school visit a classroom called the Learning Lab once a week to experience focused lessons around a big idea that can be carried over into the classroom curriculum. Teachers involved in the lab are also a part of a study group after school to examine themes, big ideas, and the wonderings of our students. Lisa Thomas, our Instructional Coach, facilitates the lab where much of our work is guided by the inquiry of the students. We also have a researcher working with us, Dr. Kathy Short from the University of Arizona, who is an expert in the field of international children's literature. Our team is rounded out by an Arts Integration Specialist, Jenny Cain, who is a part of the OMA (Opening Minds through the Arts) program. Jenny integrates issues being explored by students in the lab with explorations around these issues through the arts. Engaging in these three settings allows students to look at the same concept or issue from different perspectives and to experience instructional strategies that involve the use of art, drama, music, and literature.

This inquiry-based program encourages students to think critically, conceptually, and collaboratively about our global culture and the world in which we live through multiple perspectives. Of course, the reality is that students often struggle with these ways of thinking. Encouraging fifth graders to consider perspectives beyond their own can be challenging, since many are developmentally at a point of trying out their own voices as distinct from the adults in their worlds. I realized that I needed to examine my field notes and student artifacts to reflect on the instructional interactions that seemed effective in engaging students to think beyond their own points of view across these three settings.

Exploring Perspective in the Learning Lab

Several instructional strategies were used within the lab to incorporate multiple perspectives. One strategy that Lisa used was to always read aloud books written by authors from a range of backgrounds within our various inquiries and to point out the author's background before sharing a book. Students quickly realized that they needed to know if an author was a cultural insider, had visited the country, or had some kind of experience related to the content of the book. They saw a

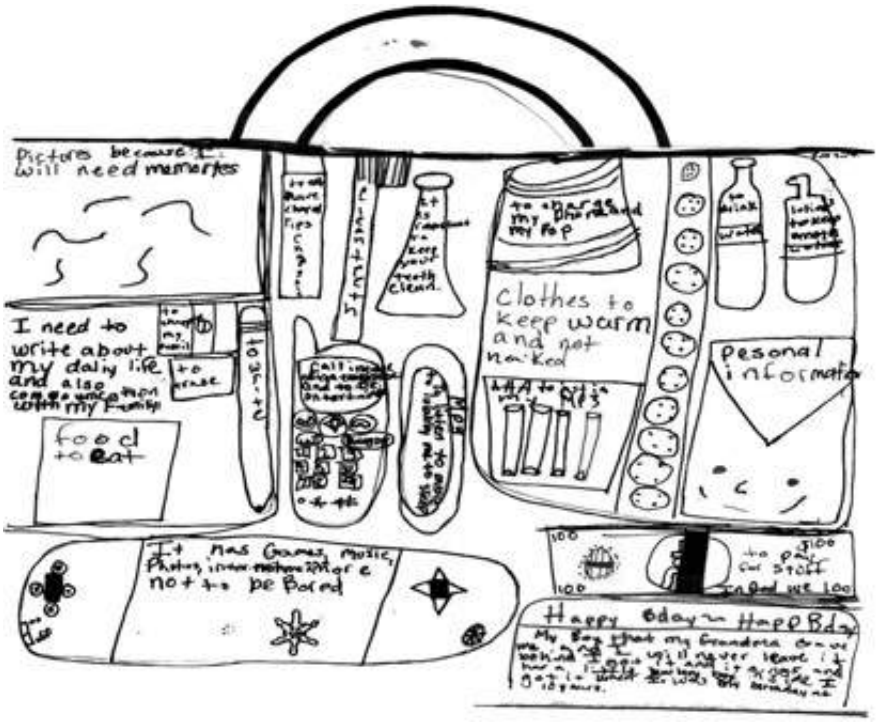
need for that context to consider an author's perspective and how and why authors write about a particular topic as well as to position themselves in critically discussing a book. The significance of this positioning was evident when the librarian commented that she started to read a book with my students in the library one day and they immediately stopped her and asked her to first tell them about the author.

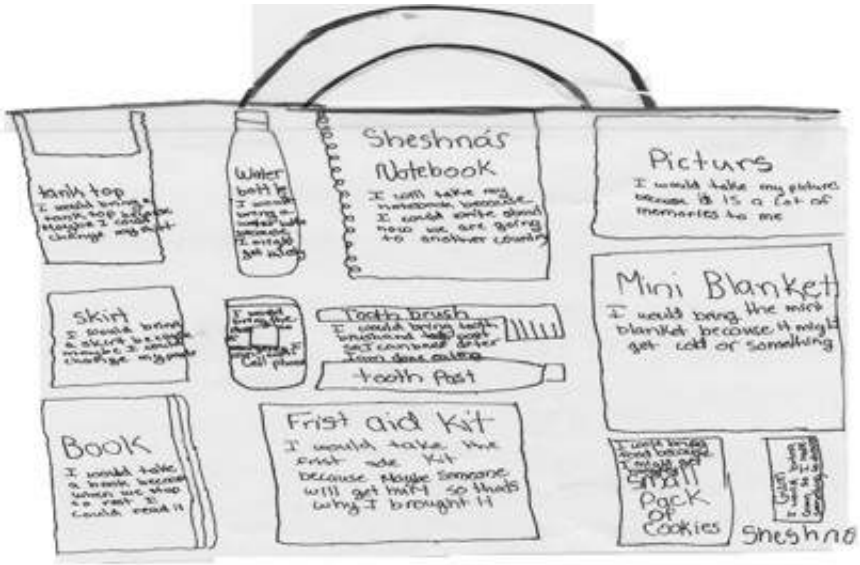
Another strategy was the use of a simulation along with text sets to explore many sides of the same issue. We had engaged in a semester-long exploration of journeys that led to an exploration of Forced Journeys due to students' interests in issues of war and refugees. To encourage students to take on a different perspective on these issues, we invited them to participate in a simulation that required them to pretend they had to leave the U.S. to flee because war and fighting were at their doorsteps and they were no longer safe. We wanted to challenge students to consider these issues through engaging in a role that was outside their own world views. Through acting in role and taking on a different way of thinking from within that role, we hope that students would try out a different frame for thinking about these issues.

A series of picture books were read aloud in the lab to engage students in our exploration of Forced Journey. Lisa was careful to explain each book's author and perspective before reading to the students. When Lisa read *Ziba Came on a Boat*, (Lofthouse, 2007), students discovered that the author was an Australian teacher who had volunteered to help refugees from Afghanistan. She was inspired to write after hearing stories of refugees from the Hazara community who now live in Perth. Eve Bunting's *Gleam and Glow* (2001) tells of a refugee family from Bosnia-Herzogovina who had to leave behind several goldfish in their fishpond. The fish survive and multiply as a symbol of hope for the family when they return to the ruins of their burned-out home. Bunting, an American author, has written many books highlighting human rights both in and out of the U.S. and while she did not have experiences in that country, she includes an author's note about the real incident upon which the book was based. Being aware of the author's stance became increasingly important to my students as we continued our study.

As part of the simulation, students were given a list of seven countries that would accept a limited number of refugees and had to learn about the culture after selecting from what was available. They were told they would have to leave their homes within the next two weeks and needed to learn as much as possible about where they were moving and what life might be like in that country. The text sets included fiction and nonfiction books as well as maps and books in the language of that country. They talked about what was most important to them in their lives in Tucson. Based on what was significant to them as well as what they thought they would most need in their new country, they packed one small suitcase and indicated why they selected each item. They were told that it could take months to get to their new homes and that their families could be separated in the meantime. The informal conversations among students as they read their text sets and packed their

suitcases indicated they were stepping into role as refugees and considering issues that had never occurred to them before. They were intrigued and concerned about the simulation, even talking with their parents about the issues. One boy even began learning Russian with his father. Using forced journey as a frame, students thought about immigration through a new lens. Because we live so close to the border with Mexico, our news in Tucson is filled with stories about people crossing without documentation, but rarely told from their perspective.





After our study of forced journeys, we shifted our focus to other journeys and looked at human rights. One of the instructional strategies used within that study to expose students to multiple perspectives involved considering different characters' points of views. After reading aloud *The Lady in the Box* (McGovern, 1997), we discussed homelessness. Students expressed concerns for the homeless woman in the story and several shared how lucky they felt when they saw someone

who was homeless and related stories about volunteering in soup kitchens. Then the conversation turned to personal connections with homelessness, and one student who was very skeptical asked, "How do we know they are really homeless?" Others added their doubts about the motives of some people who beg for money on the sides of the road. They shared their thoughts about drug and alcohol abuse among the homeless and wondered whether or not the people on those corners were really homeless and in need of help. Several thought that some homeless people like being homeless. They told stories about a time when they or someone in their family had tried to help a homeless person and were disappointed with the results. They were convinced it was a lifestyle. A couple of kids chimed in saying that it wasn't their fault and that people make mistakes and don't deserve to be homeless, but overall the students seemed to have moved to a perspective of blaming the homeless for their situation.

To provide another perspective on homelessness, Lisa read *Way Home* (Hathorn, 1994) and engaged students in a drama using role-playing to highlight different points of view. The story is told in first-person by Shane, a young boy who protects a stray homeless cat as he makes his way through the dangerous streets on his way home. He speaks to the cat affectionately and reassures it that everything will be fine once they get home, where he has milk and a nice bed for her. On the way home, the boy passes street bullies, a lavish home with a pampered cat in the window, people driving through the rain in their warm cars, and customers eating in a diner. Only on the last page, when the boy arrives home, does the reader realize that his "home" is a cardboard box in an abandoned building.

Before reading the story, Lisa gave students three minutes to do a "quick write" on their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about homelessness. She read the story and then engaged them in a drama that involved taking on different perspectives. Half of the class chose to become one of the characters in the book and the other half became reporters interviewing that character about their perspective on homelessness. After the interview, students were to report back to Lisa as the newspaper editor on what they had learned through their interviews. The experience ended with students completing another "quick write" about their opinions on homelessness.

The discussion following this activity revealed that the acting in roles supported students in considering how others might view the issue of homelessness. When Andres interviewed the cat owner in the fancy home, he found out that they never even thought about using the money they spent on the expensive cat collar to help a homeless person. Ryan interviewed Shane and found that he liked him and thought he should be helped. He said Shane was afraid to live on the street and that the gang members had guns. Alex interviewed a person in the restaurant and found out that they felt sorry for the homeless and once in a while helped them out by donating food and money to shelters. Susana interviewed the person with the fancy cat and found that they believed the homeless to be lazy. She reported the person thought they deserved to be homeless.

In looking at the two quick writes, written before and after the book and drama experience, I saw clear evidence that students had changed their attitudes and perceptions of the homeless with many concerned about finding ways to help people in that situation. The drama allowed them to try on different perspectives and their sharing from the interviews challenged them to consider a greater complexity of issues. I also think that before we read the book, the attitudes of a few dominant students influenced the other students' opinions. After the drama, they were more willing to express their opinions because of this common experience.

Exploring Perspectives in the Classroom

We used various strategies to highlight multiple perspectives in the classroom. We considered information about the authors in the books we read, read a range of books on particular issues and used art to think about and share our views with each other. We also had discussions in literature circles on books with themes that expanded on thinking from our lab interactions.

One book that I read aloud to the class, *The Green Book* (Walsh, 1986), provided a way for us to transport our thinking about forced journeys into the classroom. This short chapter book opens with a catastrophic event on the Earth that has forced people to leave the planet. They are allowed to take one personal belonging to Shine, their new home. As the events unfold, the significance of each item becomes known as we see how the refugees from Earth use the items. This view of emigration was not the typical point of view shown on the 5 o'clock news. Instead of looking at the issue of being a refugee on a global scale, students were able to see it on a larger, intergalactic scale.

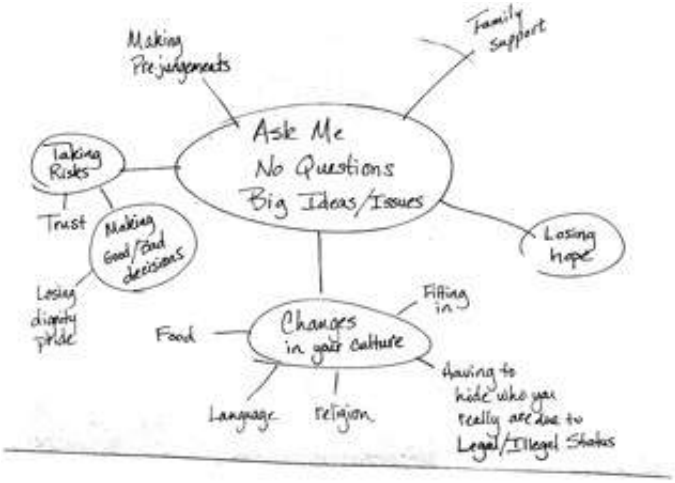
In literature circles students read novels set during the Revolutionary War in the U.S. as part of the fifth-grade social studies curriculum. I felt it was important to choose books that gave at least a glimpse of both sides of the opposing forces in that war, especially since most of the history taught in American classrooms is ethnocentric and does not take any other point of view into consideration. The history books portray the majority of the colonists as Patriots, when most actually had no opinion as to whether or not to fight for independence. Many wanted to leave well enough alone. The points of view of Loyalists or those not taking sides are not heard.

Any country tends to portray a war as one in which "we" are always the good guys. The novels we read provided students with the views of British soldiers, Loyalists, the German Hessian mercenaries, and Patriots about the war and their lives. We read *George Washington's Socks* (Woodruff, 1991), *Sarah Bishop* (O'Dell, 1980), *My Brother Sam is Dead* (Collier & Collier, 1974), and *The Fighting Ground* (Avi, 1984). We looked critically at these books by examining the attitudes and behaviors of the various groups and peoples in each book, allowing students to see a different perspective than what is normally presented in history books.

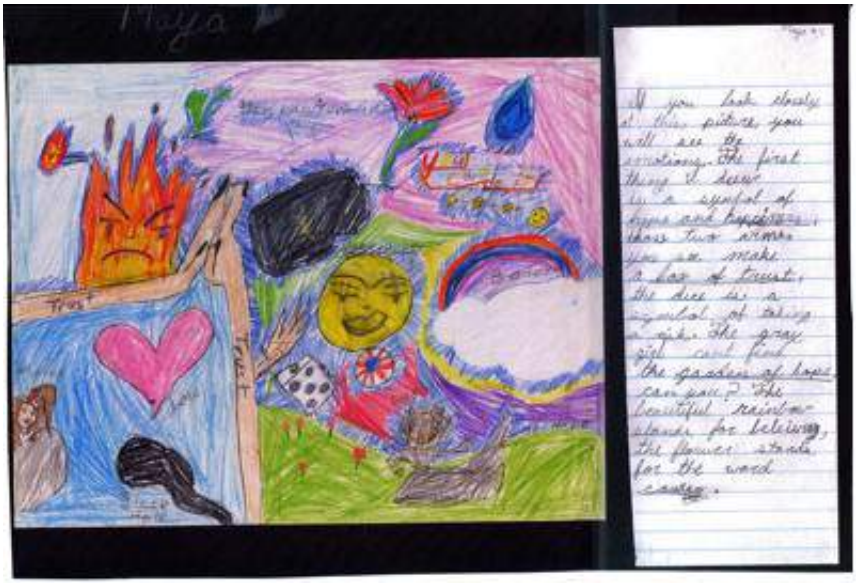
Another significant read aloud was a Sudanese immigrant novel, *Home of the Brave* (Applegate,

2007), where we discovered that the author was an American who wrote from an outsider's perspective concerned about immigrants in the U.S. She included a note in the book stating that an expert in the Sudanese culture from the local Refugee Employment agency, Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota had checked the book for accuracy. My students loved this read aloud as they imagined the ways in which Kek, a young boy from the Sudan, has to acclimate to Minnesota. The first-person voice of the book helped students put themselves in Kek's place and explore his perspectives on their country and ways of life. Michael noticed that sometimes when you go from country to country, the feelings are similar to our's in going from school to school. He noted that friends are different and that schedules can be different too. Students commented, however, that to fit in was much harder for Kek because of the language and cultural differences.

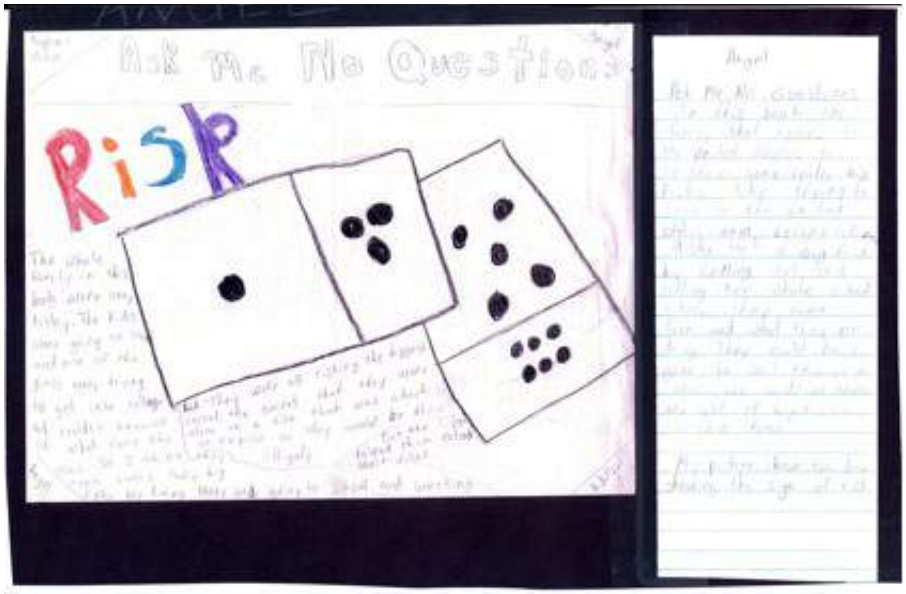
To provide yet another point of view and further their thinking in the classroom, I read aloud *Ask Me No Questions* (Budhos, 2006), the story of a family who emigrated without documentation from Bangladesh and were living in New York City at the time of 9/11. Suddenly, their world shifts and they find that being Muslim has become synonymous with being a terrorist. A Homeland Security law requiring Muslim men over the age of 18 to register leads them to flee the U.S., but their father is detained and jailed at the Canadian border because his visa has expired. The story highlights the tensions between two teen-age sisters, their struggle with prejudice, and their quest to become citizens as they try to get their father released. Teachers at their school ask no questions even when Aisha's college plans fall apart due to their immigration status. In class we talked about what it would be like to be Nadira and Aisha as outsiders living in another country and being viewed with suspicion while trying to fit in. Through their discussions, students explored many ideas about the meaning of the story including not judging someone by how they look, taking risks, not giving up hope, fear, and fitting in. The simulation in the lab had forced kids to take the perspective of an outsider. This novel forced them to look at the same situation but from the perspective of someone living in their country, giving them greater insights into the issues of immigration. These perspectives are evident in the web of the big ideas they identified from the book and their sketch to stretches of the meaning of that book. In these sketches, they used visual images to symbolize the meanings that were significant to them from the book and our discussions.



Maya stated that her sketch illustrates the big ideas she found in the book as symbolized by a “box of trust” and a “garden of hope.” The box is artfully represented by two outstretched arms with the palms pressed together in prayer. The rainbow symbolizes believing, while the flower depicts courage. The dice reflects the risks taken by the family as they try to blend in while living in the U.S. without documentation. The bright colors show her strong emotions for this family.



Angel believed that the big idea of the story is risk. His sketch shows large dice that are being rolled to represent the risks the family took daily in living and working in the U.S. without documentation. One of the girls, Aisha, loses hope for a scholarship even though she is ranked at the top of her class. She knows she will not qualify because of her legal status and will probably be deported if the family’s situation is found out. Bravely she discloses in her valedictorian speech at graduation that she and her family are illegally in the country, taking a huge risk.



In the lab, Lisa had read aloud *The Carpet Boy's Story* (Shea, 2003), a picture book on child labor in our world today. The book was written by an author from Connecticut who has other books on human rights issues. The book is narrated by Nadeem who yearns for schooling for himself and the other children who labor in a carpet factory in Pakistan to repay loans from the factory owner to their parents. Nadeem is inspired by Iqbal to lead his fellow factory workers to freedom. Although the story is fictional, the character of Iqbal was a real person whose dedication and work in the fight against child labor received international recognition. He was given a scholarship and spoke at anti-child labor conferences. Upon return to Pakistan he was shot and killed while he was riding his bike in his village when he was 13 years old.

In their discussion of this book, many students assumed that the story took place long ago in a similar time period as slavery in the U.S. and were surprised to learn that the story is in present times. Some thought Iqbal was shot because his country was having a war or conflict, while others thought the carpet factory owner shot him because he escaped. They did not understand activism and the danger of going against powerful people.

To get a different perspective on Iqbal's life and work against child labor, I read aloud a short chapter book, *Iqbal* (D'Adamo, 2001). I wanted to see what influence reading a different book about the same events and issues would have on student thinking. Both of these books are written by authors who are outsiders to the Pakistani culture but who often write about human rights. *Iqbal* is classified as a docu-novel, originally published in Italy, which focuses on Iqbal Masih, the young activist who brought global attention to contemporary child labor in Pakistan and around the world. His story is told from the point of view of a fictional character, Fatima, who works beside him in a dirty, dusty carpet factory to work off the debts of their families. Iqbal showed his peers and the world the necessity of rebellion and ran away to join with activists working to free children from this horrible fate. After reading *Iqbal*, my students had a much better understanding of the

work of activists and the risks they take to change the world for the better. They realized that children can be involved in taking risks to make changes for social justice in our world.

Throughout the rest of year as we engaged in various studies, students wanted to look for different points of view on issues. In introducing new books, I was careful to include information about the author's perspective or background and soon the kids regularly asked questions about where a story took place or where the author was from on their own. I overheard a conversation between Queta and Marshall that reflected their ability to consider multiple perspectives. Queta commented that she thought something was weird about a particular culture in *Zangbu's Story* (Sherpa, 1997). Marshall replied, "That's not weird to them. We're the weird ones if you look at it from their point of view." This ability to view life from multiple perspectives will be a valuable tool for students in the future, especially in looking closely at difficult issues.

Exploring Perspectives in the OMA Classroom

Within the OMA setting, multiple perspectives were highlighted by the use of music, drama, and visual text, as well as written text. In looking at ways to integrate the work in OMA with the fifth grade curriculum and our broad focus on journeys, Jenny and I thought it would be important to look at the journey of Africans as they were brought to the Americas through slavery. This provided a connection to their previous work on forced journeys. The context that most students had for slavery was that of their lives on the plantation systems of the Old South. Jenny started her focus on the forced journey of the Africans from the perspective of their lives in Africa. She felt it was important for students to recognize that native people in Africa had rich lives steeped in cultures that had survived for centuries. She focused particularly on the cultures of Africans from the western coast who had their own tribes, languages, customs, and systems of farming. She was careful to use the word African, and not slave, when referring to this population during the time they lived in Africa.

Using the soundtrack from motion picture "Amistad" and the illustrations from the wordless book, *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo* (Feelings, 1995), Jenny told the story of the slave forts in Ghana and other Atlantic countries of Western Africa. Students learned about the "Door of No Return" through which slaves left their homelands. The visual images brought alive the *Middle Passage* and the horrible conditions of the slave ships. The expressive music and devastating images brought students into the experience of slavery in a way that standard history books could never do.

In addition to the illustrations and music, Jenny used a drama technique called tableau to allow students to kinesthetically represent their learning through multiple perspectives. A theatre convention, tableau is a still, silent performance that involves three-dimensional representations. I

tell students it is a frozen picture using your whole body. Wilson (2003) argues that this drama strategy is significant because, “Tableau helps promote comprehension and perspective, but also offers children a non-language- dependent medium through which to think about ideas embedded in literature and to grow as thinkers” (p. 375).

There are several variations when using tableau and Jenny used a method called “tapping in” with my students. Tapping in allows the participants to speak in character about what they see happening in their particular scene when the mediator taps them on the shoulder. In groups of 4 or 5, students were asked to arrange themselves in frozen positions to portray scenes from the middle passage. One group was asked to demonstrate an African village as the slave traders are invading and the tribe’s ruler is trying to save them. Sarena, an extremely shy and quiet African American student who often has trouble speaking up, needed a little help with this activity but later admitted feeling empowered by her role as the ruler. Christian’s group portrayed a scene on a slave ship crossing the Atlantic. This tableau involved the captain of the ship and the first mate whipping slaves to keep order and control of their cargo. When Jenny tapped in to Christian’s character, the ship’s captain, his perspective brought me to tears. He held a frozen stance of himself whipping a young slave and declared that this would be his last voyage and that he regretted getting into this business. It just wasn’t worth what he said was blood money. You could hear a pin drop throughout this activity as this method evoked so much emotion from everyone in the room. It was a very powerful tool and one that gave the children a whole new perspective through literature, music, and performing art.

Next the students learned about the old Negro spirituals to understand the ways in which enslaved people relied on music to help them cope and as maps to help them escape to the north, providing another connection to our big idea of journey. Our OMA lab uses instruments and music theory designed by Karl Orff. Students learned to play the songs in six parts using ostinato, or repeating patterns in the music, with instruments, such as the alto and soprano glockenspiel, xylophones, and the soprano, alto, and base metalophones. Students had to keep all parts going at once, as they were cued by certain words in the song. They had to sing, keep a steady beat, and keep track of the part they were responsible for, all while listening to others. It was magical. Not only did they get a feel for the music by being taught to play, they understood the reason behind the music as so much more than entertainment.

Final Reflections

As students came to realize that every issue has multiple perspectives, they took on a much more critical view about their world and lives. Having students participate in open conversation has often proven that the unexpected happens in classrooms that are democratic. Democratic teaching fosters multifaceted readings and discussions that are built on complex layers of agreement and disagreement. Education that promotes transformation always entails some significant change in perspective (Pradl, 1996). Continuously offering opportunities for students to look at the world through others' eyes has become very important to me as an educator. Knowing that everything they read is written with some type of bias gives my students an understanding and critical edge they will need to negotiate the world. It gives them the power to question and to seek answers to complex issues, instead of agreeing to simple solutions.

Providing opportunities for frank and open discussion about real world problems and encouraging students to consider those problems from various perspectives through listening to others has become the heart of my teaching. Some classrooms seem to be driven by data and facts. I want more for students. I want them to be able to critically examine issues and voice their opinions, while also listening to each other and allowing their thinking to be reshaped in the process. My work as a teacher is not to define the issues for them, but to engage them in learning experiences and literature that support and challenge them to define these issues for themselves. Watching their critical engagement with each other around tough issues has become my definition of effective teaching. Along with my students, I have a new vision of what is possible for my life and for how I think about and interact with others in the world.

References

Taking Action with Young Children

by Jaquetta Alexander, Second Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

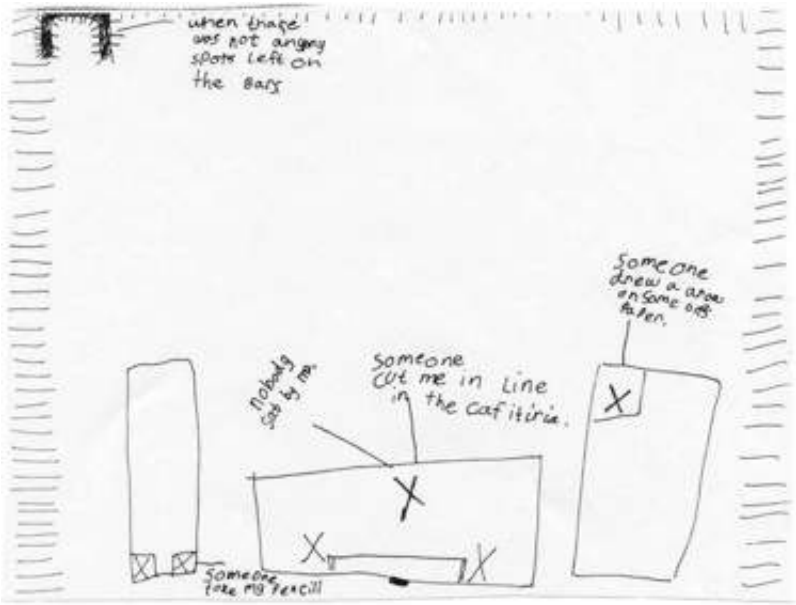
Adults often think that taking action is beyond kids. This assumption has been challenged by Vivian Vasquez (2004) whose research shows that young children can use their intelligence and voices to create change in their world on issues that are significant in their lives. My own experiences with young students indicates that they are capable of understanding broad concepts, such as human rights, and taking action in ways that make sense to them. The teachers in our school decided to focus our work in the Learning Lab on human rights during the spring semester. Because I teach second grade, we decided to begin with exploring fair and unfair because this concept was already familiar to children and something they frequently commented on. We introduced the concept of human rights at a global level after students had the opportunity to map and label events they considered fair or unfair at school. Our goal was to encourage students to identify an issue on which they wanted to take action with authentic intentions. We wanted the action to grow out of their concerns and problem-posing, not manipulate them to act on our intentions as adults (Hart, 1992).

I worked collaboratively with Jennifer Griffith, a first grade teacher, to structure time outside of the Learning Lab in our classrooms to enhance the thinking that was evolving from our work in the lab. Our work in the Learning Lab and in the classroom combined to create a foundation of understanding that was quite evident when my students were asked to reflect on their understandings about what it means to take action at the end of the school year. Their explorations of human rights and taking action were supported by our use of the same structure of read aloud, literature discussion, and response strategy in the lab and the classroom. This routine allowed students to become comfortable in knowing what was occurring next and in taking risks to explore their thinking and ideas. Our focus as teachers was on thinking with students but also on challenging them to push their thinking. After each reading, students participated in a literature discussion that not only allowed them to hear and respond to other students' thinking but also gave them the opportunity to consider new ideas.

As I read through my field notes and looked at student work, I realized that there were a number of key interactions that supported these young children in building their understandings of human rights and being able to move toward taking action. Some of these events occurred within the lab and others in the classroom, but they all revolved around children exploring multiple perspectives and considering "big ideas."

We began our human rights inquiry by reading *A Fine, Fine School* by Sharon Creech (2001).

Following our literature discussion, students created a map of the school and identified places where unfair things had occurred, either to them or another student. As the inquiry continued, students were offered many opportunities to engage in the wide reading of books on human rights, both in schools and in the world more broadly. These readings helped students make connections to their own lives and to conceptualize and think about the big picture. Short and Harste (1996) argue that inquiry should always begin with connections to the concept based on children's life experiences as a base from which to broaden their understandings. Deana's map, for example, shows times where she or someone else was treated unfairly--someone cut her in line or drew an arrow on another person's paper, etc. Deana did not use names on her map, because we had carefully discussed that the maps were not about tattling.



Early in our inquiry, students had a difficult time understanding the concept of rights. For example, a student would respond to the question, "What is your right?" by stating, "To treat people fairly" instead of "To be treated fairly." Near the end of the semester we saw a shift in student thinking, and they were able to verbalize more clearly their thoughts on human rights. We revisited the students' maps of the school because these maps had introduced them to the concept of human rights and they were able to look at the unfair events and think about the rights these represented.

A key interaction occurred when students considered different perspectives on human rights. We were exploring the power that we have to make choices to create a better world. After reading *The Lady in the Box* by Ann McGovern (1997), my students used drama to view the world through someone else's perspective. The text was about a homeless woman, Dorrie, who lives in a box in front of a local deli. The warm air that comes through the grate from the basement of the deli keeps her warm in the harsh winter weather. Two young children, Lizzie and Ben, live nearby and leave her food and warm clothes. When the deli owner forces Dorrie to move her box away to a much

colder location, the children ask their mother for help. She confronts the deli owner and convinces him to let the Dorrie stay.

We engaged students in a drama where they worked in pairs--within each pair one student played the role of the deli owner while the other took the role of one of the children. Edmiston (1993) argues that, “Drama enables students to respond thoughtfully and insightfully to literature” (p. 250). This thoughtfulness was evident in my students’ responses. Students playing the role of the deli owner took on different perspectives:

Students who played the role of either Lizzie or Ben also expressed a range of perspectives:

We did not use drama to act out the plot of the story, but to extend the students’ thinking about the plot, the relationships between the characters, and the issues of homelessness and taking action. Their responses indicate they were thinking conceptually about human rights.

Another key interaction occurred around *The Golden Rule* by Ilene Cooper (2007), in which a boy and his grandfather discuss different cultural variations of the rule that we should treat others as we ourselves want to be treated. The ending of the book was especially critical because the boy and his grandfather use their imaginations to think about how the boy can act on the Golden Rule in his life. The students easily made connections because these examples were about new students and bullying, both of which they had experienced. The big idea statements in the book about the cultural variations of the Golden Rule pushed students’ understandings because these statements articulated the issues they had been exploring, but at a much higher conceptual level. Students also began considering choices and how they affect other people.

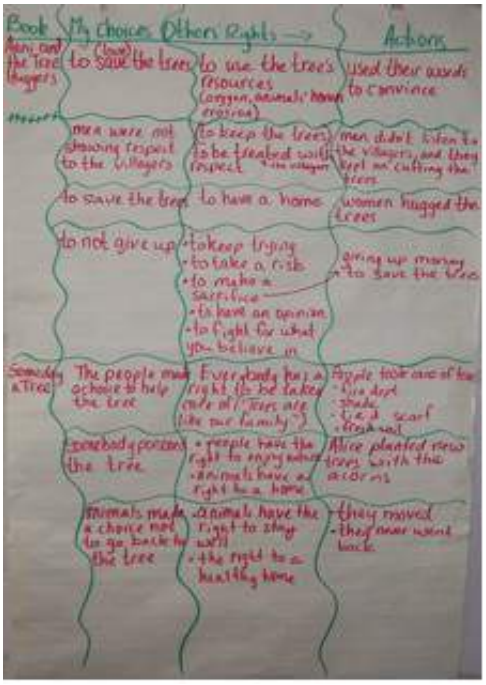
Because the text integrated the perspectives of many cultures and highlighted the power of choice, this read-aloud was a pivotal moment in connecting our previous experiences with our focus on moving toward action. Comments in the literature discussion included:

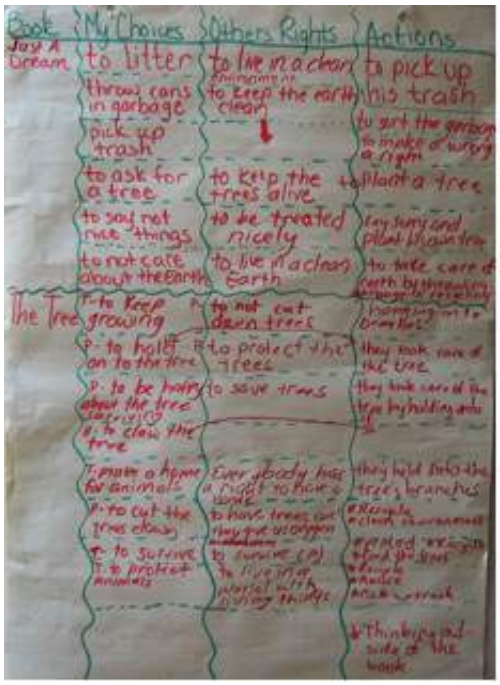
This book influenced student thinking by supporting them in synthesizing their previous discussions and experiences through exploring the broad thematic statements in the book about the Golden Rule. This book pushed students to begin thinking about making choices to make the world a better place, which provided a link to our classroom inquiries.

Jennifer Griffith, a first grade teacher, and I extended the lab work into our classrooms through two experiences that were significant in continuing to build our students’ conceptual understandings of human rights. The first, our read aloud of *Moxy Maxwell Does Not Love Stuart Little* (2007) and *Moxy Maxwell Does Not Love to Write Thank You Notes* (2008) by Peggy Gifford helped the students see the value of making choices and to consider how those choices affect others and sometimes the world.

By charting the big ideas of these chapter books after each read aloud, we were able to see the shift in student thinking and understanding, especially from the first book to the second. During the first book students recognized several big ideas, such as Moxy keeping herself busy so she wouldn't have to read the book, Moxy as a troublemaker who was bossy, Moxy not caring about the book, and Moxy looking closely at the cover to develop a true interest in the book. During the second book the students not only recognized that Moxy was making choices, but their responses reflected more complex thinking about the influence of her choices on herself and others. They talked about Moxy still being a daydreamer, the consequences of her actions, Moxy having a choice to write the thank-you letters, the influence of teamwork and helping others, Moxy not having a choice to write the notes, Moxy as someone who tries to get attention, Moxy having bad ideas that led to poor choices, Moxy telling the truth, and choices for the greater good of others. The two books were crucial in helping the students comprehend the power and consequences of choice.

The second key interaction was our study of the environment. We connected the study to Earth Day and focused on the choices that characters were making in picture books we read aloud about the environment. Four books were especially significant for student understanding: *Aani and the Tree Huggers* by Jeannine Atkins (1995), *Someday a Tree* by Eve Bunting (1993), *Just A Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg (1990), and *The Tree* by Dana Lyons (2002). Ultimately, our goal was to have students explore how our choices affect others. Jennifer and I brainstormed different strategies that we hoped would enable our young students to see this connection. The following chart played a key role in organizing students' thinking. On the chart, we recorded student thinking about each book for a particular set of categories. The students identified the choices made by characters within the book, whether they were viewed as positive or negative choices, the right that each choice influenced, and the action that was taken in connection to those choices and rights.





These two inquiries around the Moxy Maxwell books and environmental picture books created a context through which the students could conceptualize human rights and consider ways of taking action to create a better world. Roger Hart (1992) argues that, “Children need to be involved in meaningful projects with adults. It is unrealistic to expect them suddenly to become responsible, participating adult citizens at the age of 16, 18, or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved” (p. 5). Hart argues that children’s participation in taking action needs to move from tokenism to active involvement so that students’ voices are integral to the actions that are being discussed.

We began and ended our inquiry on human rights by asking students about problems that they recognized at our school. We charted their ideas and revisited them often. As adults, our role was to create a framework that students could use to think about taking action in the context of human rights, and to help them understand that a right is not the same as a wish. Within this framework, the problems and solutions that were generated grew out of student thinking. We did not impose our thinking onto students but thought with them and provided structures that would challenge them to think more deeply about their understandings of rights and taking action and to consider perspectives beyond their own.

Midway through the inquiry students were asked, “What are the rights of students at Van Horne?” Their responses were varied:

These responses indicate that some students were still struggling with understanding human rights and with distinguishing between a right and a wish. Later in the study the students added the following comments about their rights at school and their justification for this right:

Eventually we asked students to narrow down the possible rights to make a decision of one that they wanted to immediately take action on. After much deliberation and brainstorming the students decided that they wanted to make our school a cleaner place. They were particularly concerned because they believed that most of the trash was blowing onto the playground from a nearby landfill and thought that a letter of complaint should be written to the “dump people.” We talked about the need to get other perspectives on this issue and brainstormed a list of who they thought would have important perspectives:

To see the problem from a perspective other than their own, the students decided to interview Mrs. Alicia, one of our custodians. They developed the following five questions:

After hearing Mrs. Alicia's responses the students decided that the dump was not the primary problem of the trash on our school grounds—they were. They realized that students were producing the trash that was most problematic but also decided that the biggest problem was the lack of containers for trash available on the playground. After much discussion, they took action by writing a letter to our principal that shows how they decided they wanted to resolve the problem.

Dear Mr. H

We see a problem with too much trash on the playground. We think that some of it comes from the dump, but most of it comes from the kids. We have an idea to fix this problem.

We think that kids could volunteer each day to get a trash bag and move around during break. Each teacher could choose one volunteer from their class. It could be a different volunteer each day.

That would help our problem because kids would see somebody carrying a trash can and would throw the trash there instead of on the ground. Also, if they see someone throwing their trash on the ground they could remind them to pick it up and throw it away.

We could reward the people who volunteer by giving them free popcorn or a gold coin or a pickle.

We need to know if we can do this or not. If we can't we'll figure out a different idea.

Please email us back.

Love,
The Giraffe Class and Mrs. Thomas

The most rewarding part of the process for me was watching the students' thinking evolve from a

primary level of understanding to a complex, conceptual understanding of human rights. The most powerful evidence of their shift in thinking was apparent when students were asked, “What can you tell us about taking action?” on the last week of school. We wanted to see how they defined taking action. Their responses included:

Students also did a sketch to stretch (Short & Harste, 1996) to show their thinking about the meaning of taking action. They had to use visual images to symbolize their understandings.

The students’ visual and verbal responses indicate the growth in their ability to think critically about broad concepts such as human rights and taking action. Early in our inquiry, I was frustrated by their willingness to passively allow adults to make decisions for them. They didn’t believe that taking action was an option for them as young children and didn’t view themselves as being able to make decisions—that was what the adults in their lives did. Our literature discussions and charts supported them in recognizing that they are continuously making choices on a daily basis that affect their lives. The drama and interview challenged them to realize that those decisions should involve considering a range of perspectives, not just acting on their own views. These understandings provided the basis for students to start developing a strong sense of their own agency and empowerment in making decisions, not just to benefit themselves, but to benefit the world. This process also supported my own sense of agency as a teacher in making decisions in the classroom to both support and challenge the conceptual thinking of young children. The power to

make choices to create a better world describes our work within classrooms as teachers and students as well as our life work as human beings.

References

Exploring Action and Responsibility through Literature

by Jennifer Griffith, First Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

My goal as a teacher is for my students to become independent thinkers and learners. Often in early childhood education this can be seen as impossible or unnecessary because the children are “too young.” It is my job as an educator to ensure that first graders leave my classroom with control of their thinking and without being dependent on me as their teacher. I want students to be able to stop and think, to reflect on their learning, and consider the consequences of their actions before they act. I also want them to understand that they are part of a community and that they have a responsibility for their actions to their classmates and to the broader world.

When our study group decided to tackle the global issues around human rights as a school-wide inquiry, I knew that it would be challenge to engage six year olds in thinking reflectively about their actions and choices related to human rights. At the same time I knew that if my students could develop conceptual understandings of human rights, this experience would help them in their journey of becoming independent, self-reflective learners.

Our experiences in the classroom are connected to our work in the Learning Lab, a room we visit weekly for instructional engagements facilitated by our instructional coach, Lisa Thomas. We began exploring the concept of human rights with first graders in the lab through having the kids create maps of fair and unfair occurrences at our school. We explored "rights" as what you deserve and how you deserve to be treated, not just what you want. The kids worked in small groups to list what they felt were their rights at school. Some of their ideas included:

As our work continued we attempted to shift our thinking and language from fair and unfair to the concept of human rights and it was immediately clear that the kids were struggling with understanding rights as something you are entitled to. For example, the kids said, “She has the right to not be bullied” about a character in a book, but they were not able to say what she had the right to do. As teachers we also noticed the first and second graders were okay with adults telling them what to do and did not understand taking action related to their rights. They didn’t realize that they had choices that led to actions and consequences. They felt that if an adult told them to do something, then that determined their right-- their right was to do what adults demanded of them. We found it intriguing that this belief was in conflict with the ways in which young children

negotiate with and manipulate the adults in their lives when they want something. Their lack of agency and empowerment as young children to make decisions and consider their actions concerned us.

Jaquetta Alexander, the second grade teacher, and I decided to bring the thinking and language of human rights into our classrooms to extend students' thinking about these issues. We chose to read aloud a chapter book to the class to convey the idea of rights. We hoped that if students experienced rights through a character in a book, they might be able to bring the thinking back to their own lives. We wanted to use a novel so that students could really get to know that character in greater depth. We decided to read *Moxy Maxwell Does Not Love Stuart Little* (Gifford, 2007) because I had recently read the book and fallen in love with the spunkiness of the main character Moxy.

Moxy Maxwell is a procrastinator. She was assigned *Stuart Little* over the summer and still has not read the book on the last day before school is to start. Moxy's mother has given her an ultimatum--if the book isn't read by the time her mom gets home from running errands she won't be participating in her water ballet performance as the eighth daisy petal. Moxy's intentions are good but events keep getting in the way—her room needs to be cleaned and the dog has to be trained. Her imagination gets the best of her and she comes up with new inventions, including planting a peach orchard in the backyard (with bad results of course).

Jacquetta and I had both been using literature circles, response logs, webs, and charts in our classrooms and so we knew our kids had the background to make connections to their own lives, between books, and to the work in the Learning Lab. We decided to put our classes together to read aloud and discuss *Moxy*. Our goal was to encourage the kids to think about and discuss the rights or unfair and fair events they noticed in the book and to give them the opportunity for reflection about the story in their response logs. As a combined class we would chart the "Big Ideas" that kids saw as important in the book. Ultimately we were hoping to encourage kids to think about their actions and the consequences of those actions.

Our first read-aloud was met with excitement, laughter, and engagement as the kids were introduced to Moxy Maxwell. On our first day we wanted the kids to get into a routine of listening, discussing, recording, and responding in their response logs. We began with a discussion of their first impressions of Moxy. Many of the kids thought she was funny and they couldn't believe her new teacher had assigned homework over the summer. We spent a lot of time talking about Moxy's in-between's, a word she used to describe the time she had between activities and how she filled those in-betweens with other things such as having to clean her room, or train the dog, leaving her without time for reading *Stuart Little*. We then moved to our "Big Ideas" chart and recorded their observations and questions.

We were excited with their conversation and eager to start thinking about Moxy's rights.

In the following days we noticed a shift in their discussions and the big ideas they were identifying for the chart. The kids started talking about things they saw as unfair in the book. They felt that it was unfair that she was not going to be able to go to the pool and perform with her friends if she didn't get the book read in time, and they were still hung up on Moxy not using her in-between time to read Stuart Little.

When the kids responded in their logs, we encouraged them to use the language about rights that we had been exploring in the Learning Lab. I was pleasantly surprised with their responses. Bailey wrote, "She has the right to have in-betweens and go and tell the truth and to be helpful to others." Jacob believed that, "When Moxy has spare time she should read Stuart Little." Matt had a different perspective, stating, "Moxy's right is to go to the pool because she needs to be with her friends." Ayden also took Moxy's side, stating, "I think Moxy should have another chance to read *Stuart Little*."

Our time with Moxy continued over the next several weeks and we pushed our kids to think about Moxy's rights. We used an engagement that we had done in the Learning Lab with our thinking about our rights at school and asked the kids to make a list Moxy's rights.

• The right to tell the truth.

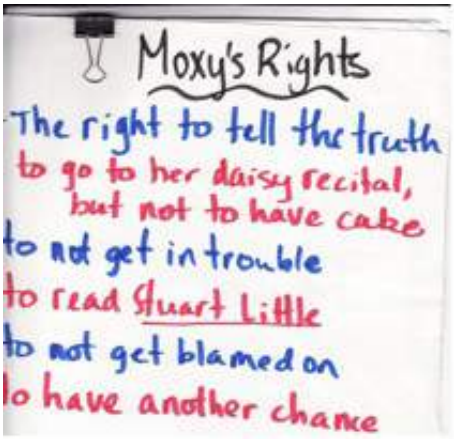
• She had the right to go to her daisy recital, but not to have cake.

• To not get in trouble.

• It was her right to read Stuart Little.

• To not get blamed on.

• The right to have another chance.



Jaquetta and I typed up these rights and put the kids in groups of four to discuss and narrow the list down to what they saw as the one most important right of Moxy. Astonishingly enough the majority of the groups chose the most important right as “It’s her right to read *Stuart Little*.” I saw this as an indication that the kids were still struggling with rights and with taking responsibility for their own actions. They were satisfied and believed that because Moxy’s mom and teacher told her she had to read *Stuart Little* that it was her right to do so. In their minds a right was a rule or mandate given to them by an adult; they weren’t seeing Moxy’s rights as choices she could actually define for herself. Choice was a child deciding to do what an adult has mandated, not a child determining the options from which that choice is made. We decided to finish the book and see if there would be any change in their thinking.

Their final thoughts that we charted on our "Big Ideas" included comments, such as “Moxy didn’t think she would like the book, but in the end she did” and “She had to look closely at the cover to see the true interest of the book.” Jaquetta and I decided to push their discussion by getting them to think about rights as choices and it was when we used this language that students began to think more critically about their rights as young children. They questioned themselves by talking about Moxy having a choice to read *Stuart Little* but having consequences if she chose not to do so, a word that many had heard from their parents. Kids stopped and thought about Moxy’s rights and reflected on the story, our discussions, and their work in the lab about rights. They were questioning their original thinking that it was her right to read the book and now were thinking that maybe she did have a choice about whether or not to read.

Dewey (1938) uses the phrase “stop and think” to emphasize the significance of reflection on the development of self-control. “Thinking is stoppage of the immediate manifestation of impulse until that impulse has been brought into connection with other possible tendencies, that may include what has happened in the past” (p.64). In other words, reflection allows a learner to stop and think about possible consequences before taking action.

It was exciting to see this shift finally occurring and so we decided to continue our thinking by reading aloud the second Moxy book, *Moxy Maxwell Does Not Love Writing Thank-you Notes* (Gifford, 2008). In this book Moxy has promised to write twelve thank-you notes by the day after Christmas so she and her brother can go to Hollywood to visit their father. But in usual Moxy fashion, her attempts to find ways to more efficiently complete this task cause chaos in the house.

We continued to think about rights as choices about actions and consequences that may arise from those choices. Jaquetta and I pushed the kids to use the language and the thinking that they were exploring as we completed our first Moxy book. We kept our routines with our read aloud the same and began a new "Big Ideas" chart with this book. The kids jumped right into their observations and connections between the two stories.

We were particularly excited about the comment that she had a choice to write the letters because it indicated that they weren't looking at writing letters as a right but instead a choice for her to make.

Time was a constraint as the school year was coming to a close so we focused on whole group discussion and our "Big Ideas" chart with the second Moxy book. Their thinking continued to develop and the kids looked much more closely at choice and how choices affect others in this book. In one chapter, Moxy tries to blame her mother for why Moxy made the choice to use her step dad's new copier. The kids' discussion was eye-opening as they were able to recognize that she was making a bad choice. Matthew blamed her mother, saying "Her mom is helping her get into trouble by leaving her alone." Bailey argued, "I don't think it was her mom's fault because her mom was being nice by leaving her to get a dress for her." Jacob agreed saying, "I would blame it on myself and take responsibility," and Aly chimed in with, "She should tell the truth and not blame her mom."

We were excited to see our first and second graders talk about taking responsibility for their actions and recognizing that choices have actions and consequences. They were coming to this realization through Moxy, recognizing how her action of using the copier created a chain of consequences. The kids saw that Moxy needed to take responsibility for her actions and that, although she had the right to make a choice just as they do in their lives, those choices might have consequences.

As a final reflection we asked the kids to look at the choices Moxy made in both books. Their responses were encouraging.

• Moxy made the choice to read *Stuart Little*.

• Moxy made a choice to not write thank-you letters.

• Moxy made a choice to use Ajax's copier.

• Moxy made a choice to not follow her mom's rules.

• Moxy made a choice to write the thank-you letters.

• Moxy made a choice to blame her mom.

• Moxy made a choice to write a thank you note to her mom.

They met in small groups to discuss the actions and consequences those choices had as a way for them to pull together their thinking.

As I reflect on these engagements with the Moxy Maxwell books, their changes in thinking from the first book to the second book are evident. The kids began with little understanding of human rights, viewing rights as what adults tell them to do rather than a choice they make that has consequences. They came to understand the concepts of taking responsibility and action along with Moxy as her thinking and sense of responsibility changed across the books. Developing conceptual understanding through a character in a book was eye-opening for me. Students were able to connect with Moxy and bring her actions back to their own lives to consider human rights and taking action—thinking normally seen as too advanced for first and second graders. Our explorations of taking action to create a better world in the Learning Lab initially made no sense to my students because they didn't believe that they had choices and that those choices led to particular consequences. They cared about others in the world, but saw themselves as powerless, leaving the responsibility for adults to do something about problems in the world.

The kids went from looking at Moxy's actions as something she had to do to something she had a choice to do and they understood that there are consequences with choices. These shifts in thinking indicate that these first and second graders are moving toward becoming self-reflective and developing self-control in their thinking and learning. John Dewey (1938) argues that "the ideal aim of education is creation of power of self-control" (p. 64). In other words, our goal as educators is for students to develop a sense of agency and empowerment that they can take action to make a difference for themselves and for others. Often times our young students are not given credit for being able to think in these ways about themselves and others. Moxy was a catalyst for our kids in gaining awareness of themselves as learners and as people who have a responsibility to themselves and to others. They are coming to understand that who they are and what they do matters for their own learning and for the world.

References

Young Children's Explorations of Multiple Perspectives

by Jaquetta Alexander, Second Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

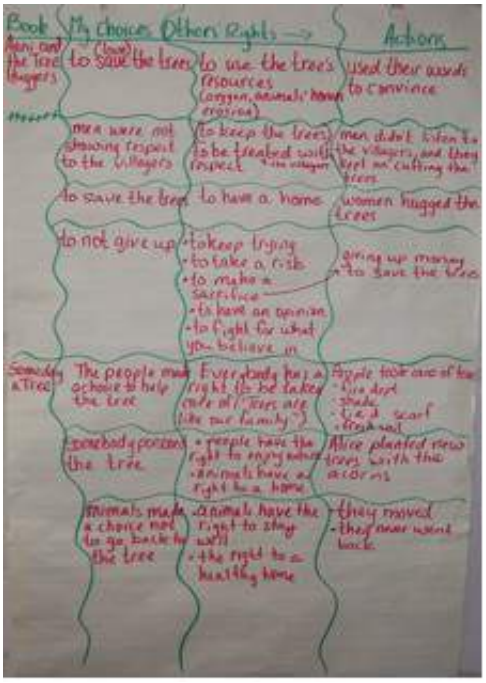
Young children are often viewed as egocentric, unable to consider perspectives outside of their own. My own experiences have convinced me that young children can consider multiple perspectives when they are engaged in contexts and inquiries that build from their life experiences. Therefore, when we began a semester-long inquiry into human rights I wanted to further explore the contexts that support young children in this type of thinking. I worked closely with Jennifer Griffith, a colleague who teaches first grade, to incorporate our focus on human rights into our classrooms. To give students many opportunities for exploring human rights, Jennifer and I used

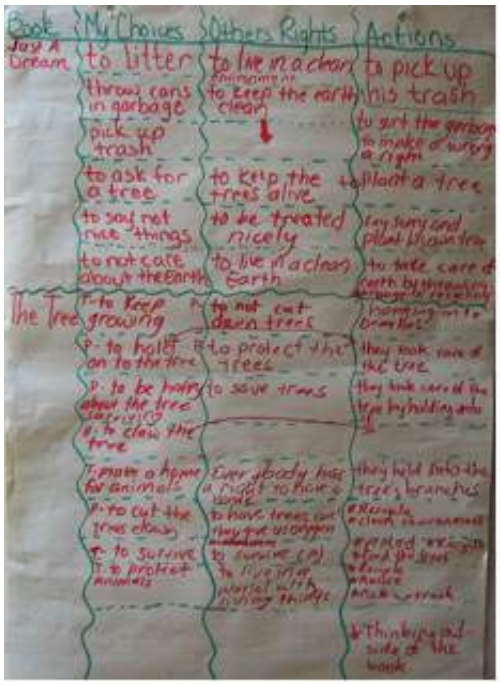
text sets that included picture books offering multiple perspectives on these issues. We also utilized literature discussions after each read aloud so that the students were exposed to the multiple perspectives of their peers. Finally, we developed a chart to document student thinking so that they could more easily identify their different perspectives across the books.

Several key interactions helped foster a better understanding of the broad concept of human rights and provided evidence that students were considering multiple perspectives. One in particular was our environmental study. We used a text set which included four key books that were significant for students--*Just a Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg (1990), *The Tree* by Dana Lyons (2002), *Aani and the Tree Huggers* by Jeannine Atkins (1995), and *Someday a Tree* by Eve Bunting (1993).

Prior to beginning the environmental study, we had regularly invited students to engage in thinking through read-alouds, literature discussions, and various response strategies, so they were familiar with these ways of thinking. We began our study of human rights by investigating fair and unfair experiences. When the students identified experiences in their own lives that were unfair we were able to link that understanding to human rights by explaining that those times represented their rights. For example, when Timmy shared that he had been bullied, we helped the students identify that it was Timmy's right to not be bullied. Finally, we pushed students to think about taking action--making choices for the common good. We carefully selected books that would be both meaningful and engaging for young children to support connections to their own life experiences.

When Jennifer and I began collaborating on the environmental study we knew it would be important to keep a record of the students' understandings. Our goal was to create connections that would support young children in constructing their own understandings of complex concepts. By creating these charts we hoped the students would recognize that people's choices, others' rights, and taking action were all interconnected. What we discovered is not only did they make those connections; they also showed evidence of understanding perspective. We believe that young children can understand difficult concepts as long as they are able to connect those concepts to their own lives.





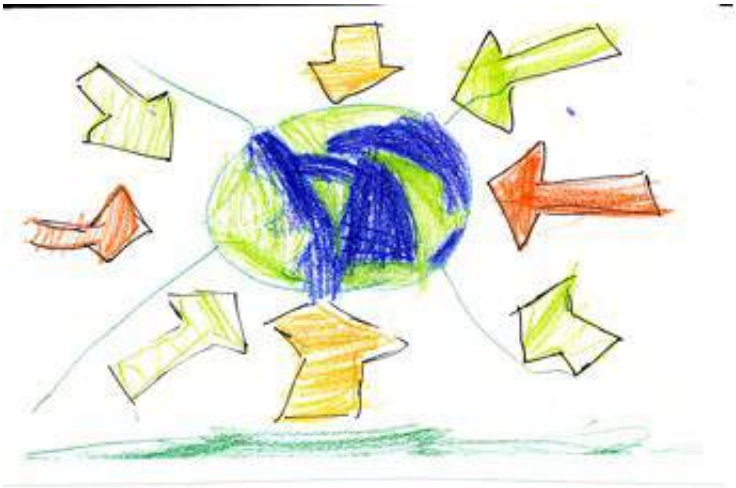
The charts are a clear representation of student thinking and ability to see connectedness across texts. After reading each book the students listed both positive and negative choices made by characters. When we read *Just a Dream*, students stated that a choice of one of the characters was to litter, that choice affected others' right to live in a clean environment, and the action piece was that the character eventually decided to pick up trash.

When Jennifer and I examined the charts, we realized the strong support that recording their thinking provided for students' understanding of perspective, especially when analyzing students' thinking about *The Tree*. Under the category of "My Choices," children noted the different choices made by each character. The codes next to the choice on the chart represent specific characters (t is for tree, p is for person, and b is for bear), indicating the students' awareness that these characters had different views. The chart doesn't reflect the complexity of their discussion about differing perspectives. When one child said that the tree had the right to keep growing, the room buzzed with discussion. Students immediately turned to their neighbor to confer about the validity of the statement. Bailey disagreed with this perspective because, "The tree isn't alive, it doesn't have legs or arms." Manny argued that the tree has choices because it has roots and they move to find water. Destini stated that the tree had the choice to do nothing because it grew underground. When the students were asked to think about how those choices affect others, Bailey responded by saying that it affects our rights because if the tree grows too big we can't climb it. Matthew then mentioned that others have the right to not cut down the tree, and that trees have the right to grow because they give us oxygen. "And wood products," added Tanner.

After completing the text set, students were asked about the big ideas across all four books. Their responses included:

A few days later, as a culmination of our focus on the environment, Jennifer and I put the students into groups of nine. We rotated the four key environmental books between groups and asked students to discuss the big ideas from each book and the choices made by the characters in each book to make the world a better place. Originally we planned on each group spending 20 minutes in this discussion, but we had to extend it over two days with each group utilizing about 45 minutes of time because their discussions were so on engaged and in depth in their analysis. Their comments included:

We asked the children to show what they understood about choices and human rights using various mediums, from markers to charcoal, to create a visual response gallery. Their sketches indicated that students understood that choices affect our planet, good choices result in a better world, and sometimes we make difficult decisions that require us to question.



Jennifer and I were excited about the students' visual and verbal responses, because they provided clear evidence that young children can consider and understand differing perspectives. The ability to consider multiple perspectives was especially significant for us because our school focus has been on developing children's intercultural and multicultural thinking about their lives and world. If we accept that young children are egocentric and so can not recognize that others have differing

perspectives, then we also accept that they can not develop intercultural understandings of the diverse ways that people think and live in the world. Our students understood that they have a perspective, that perspectives change over time, and that multiple perspectives exist on an issue or event, an indication that they are building the conceptual understandings necessary for an intercultural orientation to life (Crawford, Ferguson, Kauffman, Laird, Schroeder, & Short, 1998).

We recognize that young children have fewer experiences in the world and so this type of thinking may be more difficult, but we believe that it is our responsibility as teachers to create learning contexts that support them in using their experiences to build conceptual understandings about perspective and culture. The environmental study provided opportunities for students to build on their knowledge and concern about nature in order to synthesize new information and consider multiple perspectives. These experiences gave them the time they needed to bring together their thinking to form new understandings and to develop their ability to see the world and global issues from multiple perspectives.

References

Taking Action through Emotional Connections

by Kathryn Tompkins, Fourth Grade, Van Horne Elementary School

Classroom studies of global issues often focus on immersing students in a wealth of information to persuade them of the dire state of overpopulation, hunger, violence, homelessness, or the abuse of human rights in different parts of the world. Students may intellectually come to recognize the immense needs that exist in the world, but they do not always develop a sense of caring or emotion towards those issues. They understand the issues with their minds, not their hearts, and so the passion that drives taking action for social change is missing.

My experiences with literature have persuaded me that when students make an emotional connection to particular characters in a book, the connection of heart and mind combine to create a strong sense of connection and desire for action. This need for human connection also carries into their belief that characters who are in difficult situations have a greater chance of hope for the future if they have supportive relationships. Students attach themselves to characters who are going through difficult times and worry about them, but feel that everything will work out as long as the character has a caring relationship with someone. They explore these relationships within the story and, in turn, develop relationships with the characters that lead them to want to take action in similar real-life situations in the world.

As a teacher, I search for literature that contains characters who have the potential to come alive

for students and with whom they can develop a caring relationship. Rosenblatt (1995) argues that, "The student's personal response to literary works will be primarily colored by his attitudes toward the characters and situations they present. To ignore these student reactions destroys the very basis on which any greater literary sensitivity can be built" (p. 225). This focus on character is especially important in international books where the setting and issues may be far removed from students' own life experiences. I know that if the character is someone with whom they can develop a relationship, then I can encourage the connection that makes a book compelling for kids.

Our school focus this year was on the concept of journeys as a frame for many different explorations in our Learning Lab and classrooms. We began by trying to determine our own definition of journey. We talked about journeys in a physical sense (taking a different path, trying new things) and journeys in an emotional sense (births, deaths, experiences that change us). We used their thinking about journeys from a brainstormed web to develop picture book texts sets on different aspects of journeys so that they could explore these issues in greater depth. One text set that was especially powerful for students was the text set on emotional and spiritual journeys.

This text set included several books that became pivotal to our year. The first story that affected students on an emotional level was *Brothers in Hope* (Williams, 2005), a picture book about the lost boys of the Sudan. The students were especially taken with the bond between the older children who had to care for younger children as they fled the violence. Many of the boys started their day peacefully tending livestock, only to witness their families being killed and their villages burned as they fled from the fighting. The older boys took care of the younger ones and had to find food and safe places to rest as they walked and walked and walked, trying to get to somewhere safe.

Alex worried about how one boy could possibly take care of another without adults to help. Victoria was mortified that they had to survive by eating bark from trees. The students felt an emotional connection to the characters because they were children who were in a situation where they had to take care of other children. They tried to put themselves in that situation and imagined suddenly having to go from being a child to being a caretaker because of war. They worried about the boys and wanted to know what had happened to them since this book had been written. Because the characters actually existed as real people, students were especially perplexed about the horrible situation that these boys faced. They couldn't stop trying to imagine how they would handle this situation, but seemed to gain comfort in the realization that the boys had each other. They gave credit for the boys' survival to their bonds with each other.

This book gave the students information about current events in several African countries, and also encouraged a caring attitude that influenced their desire to help. Our first reading of *Brothers in Hope* indicated that this was a book that would continue to be significant for us as a class. Our discussion started students on a journey of emotional connections to the events taking place in our

world.

Students' focus on the relationships between characters was evident in their responses to *Ziba Came on a Boat* (Lofthouse, 2007), which highlights the relationship between a refugee mother and child. A young girl is forced to flee the fighting in her homeland of Afghanistan on a crowded fishing boat. As she drifts off to sleep she has peaceful dreams about her family and the comforts of home. When she wakes up in her mother's arms she doesn't know where she is going but she hopes for safety and freedom. The students recognized that she had a good life until the gunfire came and she was forced to leave her home. They were upset because they felt that the book didn't have an ending. They wanted to know that Ziba and her mother had arrived safely somewhere and started a new life. They didn't like that the book left her still traveling on the ocean. The only comfort they seemed to gain from the book was that she was with her mother. The relationship was important to them because they believed that there was a better chance of survival if she was with someone close to her. As long as Ziba had her mother to take care of her, she would be okay.

Friends are important in the life of fourth-graders so the story of a friendship during a time of war really got them thinking about the significance of relationships. In *Four Feet, Two Sandals* (Williams & Mohammed, 2007), relief workers drop off clothing at a refugee camp in Pakistan. When two young girls each end up with one sandal from a matching pair, they decide that having four feet and two sandals is not a problem when you can share with a friend. One morning a list of refugees who have been cleared to go to America is posted, and only one girl's name is included. Both girls want the other to keep the two sandals, but in the end each takes one sandal as a way to remember the other person. I was intrigued that students focused almost exclusively on the strength of the friendship and did not discuss the issue of the girls living in a refugee camp. They were sure the friendship would last and that the girls would reunite in America. Danielle said, "Even though she had no shoes, she had friendship." The students didn't seem to worry that the girls had been forced to flee their homes due to fighting because they felt reassured by the relationship between the girls. The girls reflected the need to have someone to care for and to be cared for by something as small as sharing a pair of sandals.

As we continued to discuss journeys, students kept returning to their desire to take action to help people who are dealing with situations like those in the books we were reading. Their talk came back to *Brothers in Hope* and students researched and shared additional information on the problems facing the people of Sudan. They had been moved by the stories of children escaping war to go to refugee camps and felt such emotional connections to the characters in the books that they knew they had to do something to help real refugees in the world.

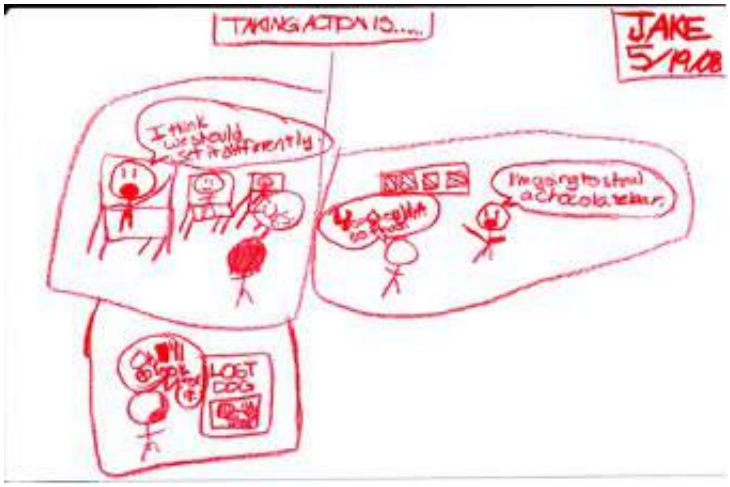
We talked about refugee camps and did some research in the computer lab. This research provided students with an understanding of the reasons for the violence that led people to flee their homes

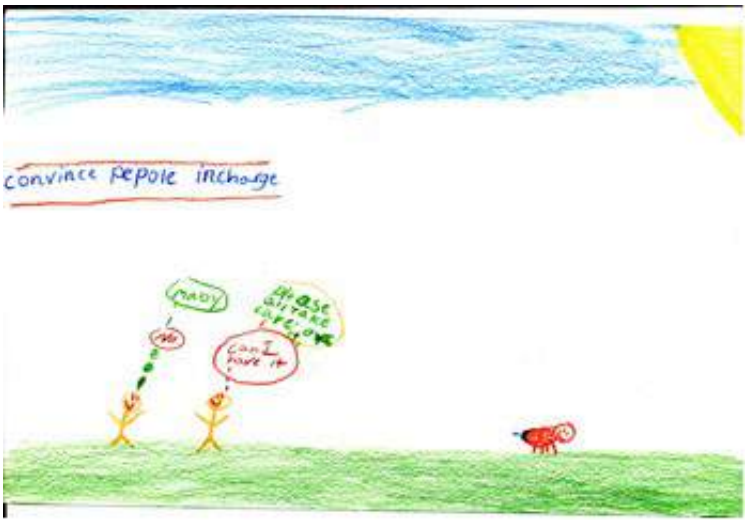
and of the situations they faced in the refugee camps. I found an organization that was geared towards children making a difference in the lives of refugees from Darfur and contacted the organization. The students were excited about this organization and came up with ways they thought they could help that organization's efforts. They decided that we needed to raise money to buy needed items for the refugee camps. We learned that many children received their protein from drinking goat milk. We found pictures on-line of children herding their flocks of goats and playing with them. The students loved that the goats were pets as well as a way to stay alive.

The students decided that one way we could raise money was to go to each classroom and explain the situation in Darfur, in particular that people had been forced from their homes. They seriously discussed the differences between what they might tell a Kindergarten class as opposed to a fifth-grade class and thought they shouldn't discuss too much violence with young kids. Their idea was to explain the situation in Darfur and ask students to each bring in $1. Each student who contributed $1 would get a little paper goat on which they could write their name to post in a huge "goat pen" in the main hallway of the school. The words "I Made a Difference," were printed in large letters over this pen. As the students shared with different classes, our goat pen quickly had to be enlarged.

Another way that they decided to raise money was a bake sale. They talked to their parents about baking goodies and announced their plans to the school, selling out quickly the day of the bake sale. Another class had a second bake sale to help the cause. They also decided to make money by having a walk-a-thon. They asked their parents and friends to sponsor them and we made punch-cards to keep track of how many laps they walked around the field. At the end of our efforts, we were able to purchase 12 goats and 1 donkey for refugee families in Darfur. The students beamed with pride because they had been the ones to organize and raise the money to help people in dire situations. I think it was significant that the money the students raised was used to purchase animals that allowed children in Darfur to take responsibility for their own survival. We were not just engaged in charity work of giving to "the less fortunate," but saw ourselves as taking action with the children in Darfur.

Kaye (2004) argues that engaging students in these kinds of experiences is essential to creating an understanding of democracy. "When young people recognize their vital role in improving society, working for social justice, and caring for the environment, then they truly understand the concept of democracy. Students recognize how participation and the ability to respond to authentic needs improve the quality of life in the community, which may lead to a lifelong ethic of service and civic participation" (p. 13). Students were taking action for the greater good and through that experienced the importance of participating with others to improve a difficult situation. One way in which they demonstrated this understanding was to create sketch-to-stretch images to visually symbolize what taking action meant to them.





In reflecting over the events that led to their action, I realized the significance of the books in which they were able to make emotional connections with characters. Students became engaged in directions that I never expected because they cared about the characters and what was happening to them. This emotional connection encouraged them to gain knowledge about refugees and what happens when someone is forced to flee their home. They were amazed by the capacity of some refugees to care for others even when their own lives are falling apart. They learned about people in

unimaginable situations who put their own needs aside to care for each other, and it made them want to take action. Through our exploration of emotional connections to characters in literature, students gained the knowledge and motivation to work for social justice and to connect with refugees halfway across the world.

References

Exploring Voice and Responsibility through Literature

by Kathryn Tompkins, Fourth Grade, Van Horne Elementary School

As a classroom teacher, I occasionally encounter students who genuinely want to save the world, care deeply about others, and know the injustices that occur around the world. I say occasionally because most children know only what goes on in their immediate lives and community. The adults in their lives, including teachers, have frequently shielded them from knowledge about the difficult problems that people face in many parts of the world and the multiple views that exist on these issues. At our school, we believe that children need to gain perspectives on these issues instead of protection from the realities of their world. As part of our ongoing inquiries into global issues through literature, we want to engage students in thoughtfully considering difficult political and social issues. We know they need knowledge and understanding about these issues in order to develop their own opinions and ideas, but they also need to go beyond themselves to recognize and consider other perspectives and possibilities.

I want my classroom to reflect Rosenblatt's (1938) concept of a democracy as a social context in which personal voice and group responsibility are balanced, so that students have conviction and enthusiasm about their own ideas along with an open mind to others' points of views and needs. Rosenblatt argues that dialogue about literature can encourage children to open their minds to alternative perspectives and ways of thinking about the world. I want to engage my students in dialogue around literature that helps them look beyond themselves and encourages them to recognize the needs of others.

The teachers in our school decided to focus on human rights issues as part of a school-wide inquiry on global perspectives. We knew we needed to first look at rights in ways that made sense to students in their lives before moving to a broader view of rights as global issues. Since "it's not fair" is a complaint that many children voice, we decided to begin the spring semester by asking students to name issues that they face in school and feel are unfair. Most of my students talked about not being able to choose who they sat by in the classroom or at lunch, not being able to play on all of the areas on the playground, and having to pay the consequences for the actions of a few.

They had difficulty thinking beyond themselves. Their discussions about unfairness and rights were focused on themselves and they didn't seem to see a bigger picture. I knew that we had to find a way to challenge them to think more unselfishly about the greater good, not just what would personally benefit each of them.

In our discussions about what determines if something is unfair, students argued that unfair events keep you from getting what you want and include discrimination based on age, gender, and whether someone likes you or labels you as different. They said that unfair occurrences can keep you from getting what you need, and sometimes others are allowed to do what you are being prevented from doing. The students believed that anything they saw as unfair was an indication that their rights were being violated.

Students webbed their thinking about human rights, which included the right to play, civil rights (the kids defined this as equal rights), adults and children not having the same rights (adults can drive), no one having the right to make fun of anyone else, and the right to be different and to make choices. As the students discussed their rights within the school, they often seemed to confuse rights with privileges. One piece of literature which challenged this view was *For Every Child* (2001), a book based on the UNICEF document on the rights of children. My students realized that they had not considered basic needs, such as food, water, clothes and somewhere to live, or the need to feel safe and cared for as human rights.

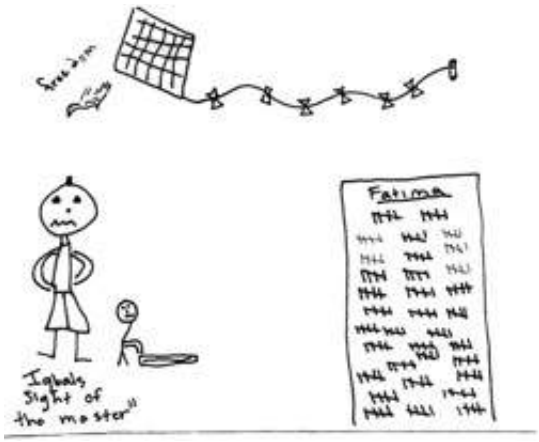
As we continued our human rights inquiry, the teachers at our school carefully chose literature that would challenge students to think beyond themselves. We believed that these books needed to offer more than information about particular global issues--they had to present characters that the students could care about to engage them in working towards actions to benefit others, not just themselves. Wade (2007) argues that "Caring for others leads naturally to working for others' rights and well-being" (p. 7), and we saw literature as a strategy for taking students beyond information to empathy.

One book that was particularly effective in engaging students was a picture book about child labor in which the characters were their age. *The Carpet Boy's Gift* (Shea, 2003) tells the story of a young boy who is forced to work from sun up to sun down making carpets to pay off his family's debt. This story mentions Iqbal Masih, a real boy who was sold into child labor in Pakistan, but who escaped and worked with an organization to free child laborers until he was shot and killed at just twelve years old. The first reactions from students were shock at the way child workers were punished for making mistakes. If they fell asleep while working or if they made a mistake on a line from a carpet they were fined and had to work longer to pay off their debts. My students really wanted to know more about this issue. They couldn't believe that such situations existed for children in the world today.

Their talk turned to dismay and condemnation that any parent would sell a child into slavery. They couldn't comprehend that life would ever be so bad that a parent would consider selling a child to pay off debts. Danielle questioned, "If they need money to help their kids live, then why would they sell them?" Victoria thought that the parents in the story were just selfish and wanted to help themselves. The kids were quick to judge the families and didn't consider how dire a situation would have to be to force a parent to sell a child. They were thinking beyond themselves, but they weren't thinking about others in the bigger sense--they didn't see the larger context of child labor and the issues that would lead to this desperate situation.

Students were confused by child slavery and wanted to know more so we decided to read the story of Iqbal (D'Adamo, 2005). This short novel is a fictional account of Iqbal's life and the lives that he touched until his death at the age of twelve. The carpet factory where Iqbal and other children worked gave the students a sense of the life of child workers, how they are fined and punished for minor infractions so that it became impossible to ever pay off their family's debts. Iqbal escaping and risking punishment again and again inspired the students because they saw how such a young child really did change the lives of many.

Students were particularly surprised that this story didn't happen "a long time ago" but in the last 15 years. They didn't want to believe that child labor still exists. Once we finished the novel, they responded through pictures and phrases. Many of the students chose to include a picture of a kite, because Iqbal saw flying a kite as a symbol of freedom. Others included the tally marks that the masters used to keep track of the children's debts because they never seemed to get erased. Jose had his grandmother order the book so that he could read it again and share it with his family. The class seemed to genuinely connect with Iqbal and gained additional understandings that supported them in moving beyond blaming the families who had to sell their children towards condemning those who supported child labor financially and those who owned child slaves. They saw how Iqbal had worked tirelessly to inform children of the existence of a law against child labor, even though those in authority did nothing to enforce the law. He risked so much and inspired so many that he was invited to give speeches all over the world. This one child took on the huge responsibility to change the world of child labor. If he could do so much and take such huge risks, surely the students in a country like the United States could work to make a difference.



Child labor wasn't an issue that the students had observed in their community, and we wanted to read aloud a book that would reflect an issue they had encountered first hand. We didn't want to fall into the trap of viewing problems as existing elsewhere but not in our own community. We knew that stories about the homeless appeared regularly on the local news and that some children had seen homeless people in the city parks or in homeless shelters and food kitchens. We hoped that the character of Dorrie in *The Lady in the Box* (McGovern, 1997) would touch them on an intimate level. The story begins as a young boy and his sister notice that a woman sleeps in a box outside the local deli. They want to help her but know that they aren't supposed to talk to strangers and so place food and clothes to help her keep warm next to her box. One day the owner of the deli forces Dorrie to move her box to another location where she can't catch a warm draft. The children immediately notice how much colder she looks and take the responsibility of helping her because they fear that she will freeze to death. When their mother asks them about the missing food, they explain what they have been doing and take her to meet Dorrie. Dorrie tells the story of how she lost her job and couldn't afford her apartment and so eventually ended up on the street. Their mother immediately goes to the deli owner and convinces him to let Dorrie move her box back by the warm draft. The children can't stop thinking about doing more to help Dorrie so their mother takes them to a homeless shelter to work at a soup kitchen. When they see Dorrie there, the boy gives her his lucky key ring as a symbol of hope that she will soon have her own key.

This book immediately engaged the students because homelessness was "real" to them. The students blamed the deli owner and were frustrated with the way he treated Dorrie. Kai said, "He was greedy and didn't care about her health." They thought he should have given her a job and allowed her to live in the shop. The students seemed to take the idea of responsibility to different level, believing that the characters in the story should have taken on the responsibility of helping Dorrie. They saw Dorrie as innocent and thought that everyone else should be taking care of her. Robbie dared to challenge this idea by stating that he would feed her and help but he wouldn't let her in the store. His statement that she might steal something because "you don't really know how she lost all of her money" angered many students. They wanted to take action to help someone who is homeless in a similar way to the children in the story. I was concerned that they were still casting

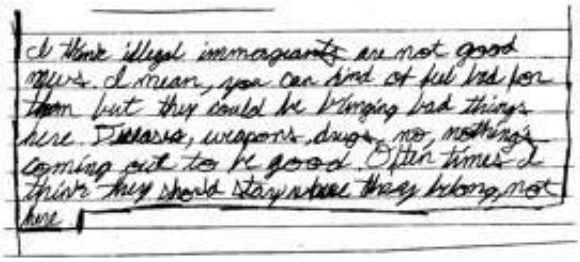
blame on others instead of coming up with ways they might personally take action to help the homelessness. They weren't discussing plans on how to help people like Dorrie who are homeless but rather assigning blame on others.

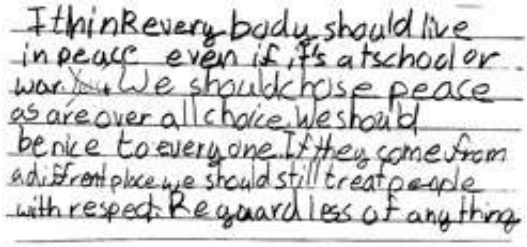
The students completed art responses to the book using sketch to stretch to show the meaning that they took away from the book. Some students felt happy that Dorrie had people who cared about her and felt satisfied that others were taking action to help her situation. Others seemed less optimistic about Dorrie's future and the entire issue of homelessness. They weren't sure how to resolve either situation.

Another familiar issue for students in Tucson is immigration because our city is just one hour away from the border with Mexico and a major corridor for undocumented people who are trying to enter the United States. Many of our students have family in Mexico or travel there frequently. They hear about the problems of undocumented people through the news and family discussions and so we chose a bilingual book, *Friends from the Other Side* (Anzaldua, 1993) as a read aloud. Prietita is a young girl living on the U.S. side of the border who becomes friends with a little boy who is hiding from authorities with his mom. Prietita notices how the neighborhood kids tease Joaquin and decides to stand up to them. Joaquin takes Prietita home to meet his mother who tells

her that they had to cross the border because she couldn't find work to support herself and Joaquin. When the border patrol comes to the neighborhood, Prietitia hides Joaquin and his mother at the herb woman's house. The border patrol agents question the people in the streets about "illegals" but everyone says that they haven't seen any so the patrol moves on.

After the read aloud the students conducted mock interviews in pairs, with one being a reporter and another a character from the story. Some of the students took the perspective of Joaquin and were angry that anyone would ever be taken out of the U.S. if they didn't want to leave, while others took the perspective of the border patrol and said that they had dangerous jobs. Students like Kai thought that "a couple of people couldn't hurt a town." Robbie thought that everyone should have "papers to get good jobs" and Zach worried about the city "getting overpopulated." Alyssa felt that "the border patrol keeps us safe." The discussion turned when Tessa said that we live in a "free country." Her statement implied that anyone and everyone who wants to should be able to live in the U.S. and not be discriminated against. This was the first time that distinct individual voices were expressed in our discussion without moving to a group voice; students strongly expressed their different opinions on the issue of immigrants entering the U.S. without documentation. More students were voicing their thoughts and offering solutions to the problem than in our previous class discussions. Some students felt that it was okay for undocumented people to live and work in the U.S. and offered ideas of jobs and how much they should be paid. Other students wanted everyone to have documentation to live in the U.S., and several felt that the border patrol has a dangerous job to keep Americans safe. They had differing views on what rights all people have versus what rights they felt that Americans have. This discussion was the first time that students explored the tensions of individual rights and group responsibility in a thoughtful dialogue with each other. We ended the discussion by taking time for a quick write about their perspectives on this issue.


I think illegal immigrants are not good
guys. I mean, you can kind of feel bad for
them but they could be bringing bad things
here. Malaria, weapons, drugs, no, nothing
coming out to be good. Often times I
think they should stay where they belong, not
here.


I think every body should live
in peace even if it's at school or
war. We should chose peace
as are over all choice. We should
be nice to everyone. If they come from
a different place we should still treat people
with respect. Regardless of anything

We returned to our focus on children's rights in our school to see if students would consider those

issues from both individual and group perspectives. The most significant issue for my students seemed to be that not all students have the same rules on the playground. They were finally thinking beyond themselves and wanted to work to help the entire school with what they saw as unjust issues. They thought that the rules should be the same for every student on the playground, regardless of grade level. They wanted everyone to benefit by having the same rights--all students should be able to play in all areas on the playground and everyone should be able to check out equipment to play with. I was pleased that they were thinking about how to take action but realized that they were confusing fair with equal and didn't realize that fairness and equality do not always involve everyone being treated exactly the same.

What was most significant, however, was their sense of empowerment that their voices did matter. Wade (2007) states that, "Taking action allows students to move from a position of powerlessness to one of possibility" (p. 14), and this focus on possibility was a shift for my students. Their first step in coming up with a plan to fix the injustices occurring on the playground was to interview a playground monitor to find out the reasons behind the rules and her feelings about the rules. The monitor was very nervous and the students were careful to let her know that they were not angry with her but were trying to understand the situation from her perspective. At the end of the interview the students' understanding seemed to be that someone (we still didn't know who) created the rules on the playground to keep students safe. The older students at the school had more freedom because there were fewer children to watch when they were outside. Some students seemed resigned to the idea that adults make the rules to keep children safe and so we should just accept the rules, but others still wanted to have a say in those rules. They were not giving up because they felt that their actions could make a difference.

The students decided that their group action would be to take responsibility for communicating how they felt about the rules to adults in the school. They wanted class representatives from each of the intermediate grades to have meetings with the principal on a regular basis to discuss the playground rules and any changes that needed to be considered. They knew this kind of change could not occur until the fall, but they also wanted to immediately have an assembly to ask other students in the school to write down what they thought about the current school rules. This request was a significant step for them because they no longer assumed that everyone else shared their perspectives on the rules. They emailed the school principal with their proposal but there was only a week left of school and so the assembly was delayed until August. One major shift that occurred in this experience was that students did not ask adults to make the change for them or simply place blame on adults for problems. They took responsibility for challenging and working to change injustices around them.

All too often we underestimate children's desire and ability to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of others. The literature that we chose to share with students

demonstrated that one voice, no matter how small, can make a difference in the world. Through literature, they gained new understandings about social issues and the ways in which they can take action to benefit children and adults who are in difficult situations. Their emotional connections to the characters in these stories supported them in considering perspectives beyond their own knowledge and views. The books invited them to live within the “story world” of that character for a period of time and to consider their experiences and views of particular issues. They were able to try on a new perspective and to gain a different understanding of the complexity of particular issues. Their focus on taking action within their own world of the school shifted through these experiences from a focus on individual needs and benefits to a consideration of both their individual voices and their responsibility to the greater good of others at the school. They also moved beyond either simply blaming adults or standing aside to let adults take care of problems. By questioning “what is” and imagining “What if?,” the students took a significant first step toward standing up and taking action to injustices on the world.

References

An Inquiry on Taking Action: Exploring Human Rights

by Jennifer Griffith, First Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School and Derek R. Griffith, Filmmaker, Director's Seat Productions

Click To Play

Exploring Culture and Connection through the Fine Arts

by Jenny Cain, Arts Integration Specialist, Van Horne Elementary School

Van Horne Elementary in Tucson Unified School District participates in OMA, Opening the Minds through the Arts, an award-winning program that integrates arts throughout the curriculum. I work with students of all grade levels, immersing them in art, music, drama, and opera related to their classroom inquiries and we also have guest artists who come to the school (visit http://www.omaprogramaz.org/ for more information about OMA).

This short video has examples from the two arts units that I developed as part of the school-wide focus on Journeys. The younger children engaged in a journey around the world through lullabies.

We gathered books and musical recordings of lullabies and enjoyed singing different variations of *Hush, Little Baby* and *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*. We made extensive use of *Moodrops: A First Book of Lullabies from around the World*, by Jane Yolen, that contained a wonderful selection of lullabies from every part of the world. The children then composed their own lullabies. The older students engaged in a study of the forced journey of enslaved Africans. We started with the music of Africa and talking drum rhymes using *Off to the Sweet Shores of Africa and Other Talking Drum Rhymes* by Uzo Unobagha. We followed the Africans on the slave ships through *The Middle Passage* by Tom Feelings, a stark and moving wordless book that we viewed while listening to the music soundtrack from the movie *Amistad*. Students engaged in tableaus as a drama technique to communicate the tensions and emotions they were feeling about this forced journey. We then studied spirituals as an expression of the history, culture, and emotions of slaves and went from there into jazz and the blues. *On My Journey Now* by Nikki Giovanni, was especially useful in providing the stories and messages behind the various spriituals. The inquiry integrated music, drama, and literature into a powerful experience fro students.

The video contains short excerpts of various engagements from the two units as well as provides an overview of our OMA program.

Watch at https://youtu.be/b0Kb53QsHlA