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WOW STORIES

EXPLORING THE DIVERSITY THAT SURROUNDS US

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Worlds of WORDS

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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

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Introduction: Exploring the Diversity that Surrounds Us

When we think of helping students create intercultural connections exploring cultures from around the world often comes to mind. Yet, we also need to facilitate connections with cultures closer to home that are different from our own. In this issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom* we share seven vignettes showing students using literature to explore diversity in our communities.

In the first vignette, Judi Moreillon describes her experience as a librarian facilitating explorations of race and racism through online literature discussions of Jacqueline Woodson novels. Next, Susanna Steeg shares how her fourth graders worked to understand and respect physical difference. In the third vignette I discuss three engagements that helped first through third graders explore their own families and cultures. Finally, Wenyun Lin shares how Taiwanese third graders respond to a story with Chinese characters written by a cultural outsider.

In the second part of this issue, three authors describe different ways that one preschool is promoting respect towards and understanding of home cultures and languages within their school community. Lead Teacher Sabina Mosso-Taylor shares the underlying principles of the school and ways that home cultures are supported. Classroom teacher Tammy Spann Frierson describes a classroom engagement that helped the young girls in her classroom confront stereotypical images of what it means to be beautiful. Finally, parent volunteer Julia López-Robertson describes how she uses literature to help her son and his classmates celebrate the Spanish language and Latino heritage.

As you read these vignettes, think about how you connect children and adolescents with literature in ways that promote intercultural understandings. Consider sharing your innovative practices by submitting a vignette to *WOW Stories*. We are interested in descriptions of interactions with literature in classrooms and libraries at preschool through secondary levels.

See our call for manuscripts and author guidelines for more information.

Janine M. Schall
Editor, *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*

Multicultural Conversations: Online Literature Circles Focused on Social Issues

By Judi Moreillon

A Single Shard, *The Other Side of Truth*, *The Breadwinner*, *Homeless Bird*, *Monster*, and *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* are some of my favorite multicultural middle grade novels. Librarians who are new to a school, however, inherit a collection of books selected by their predecessors. In order to find these "classic" and other similar titles, I had to dig deep into our school library collection since the collection I inherited during the 2008-2009 school year was not characterized by a great deal of cultural diversity. Still, when I was called upon to provide booktalks to seventh and eighth grade students, I chose as many titles as possible by Linda Sue Park, Beverly Naidoo, Deborah Ellis, Gloria Whelan, Walter Dean Myers, and Christopher Paul Curtis. But despite my best efforts, our mostly dominant-culture students persisted in checking out culturally-familiar or culturally-neutral titles (For me, the vast majority of fantasy and science fiction books fall into the latter category). At the end of each class period after my booktalks, I found that most multicultural titles remained untouched on the browsing tables.

Rochman (1993) wrote, "It's obvious that for mainstream young people, books about 'other' cultures are not as easy to pick up as *YM* magazine, or as easy to watch as 'Beverly Hills 90210.' And, in fact, it shouldn't be. We don't want a homogenized culture. If you're a kid in New York, then reading about a refugee in North Korea, or a teenager in the bush in Africa, or a Mormon in Utah, involves some effort, some imagination, some opening up of who you are" (p. 25). So, I bided my time but didn't give up on the idea of broadening and deepening students' transactions with multicultural literature.

Context

In the 2008-2009 school year, I served as the teacher-librarian at Emily Gray Junior High-Tanque Verde High School in the American Southwest. Our schools are located in an affluent, overwhelmingly white, European American community and share a campus and a library. From the beginning of the school year, I noticed a definite trend in students' book preferences. In independent book checkouts, mainstream, popular-culture titles dominated students' choices: *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* and *Twilight* series, the *Eragon* and *Eldest* series, and current and classic fantasy and science fiction titles.

This observation aligns with the results of a recent study of award-winning books and titles popular with teens. Koss and Teale (2009) analyzed 370 titles published between 1999 and 2005. They noted that fiction was predominant, comprising 47% of these titles; most of these titles were

contemporary realistic fiction. European Americans were the predominant culture at 32%, with African American characters making up only 5% of the characters in the fiction; other groups were even more underrepresented. Although "multicultural titles" made up 20% of these books, few portrayed multiple cultures. Thirty percent of the books analyzed were international, but the majority of these titles portrayed white characters living in European cultures.

As a middle/high school librarian, my mission is to integrate literature, information, and technology into the classroom curriculum. During that school year, I was fortunate to coteach online literature circle discussions with Jennifer Hunt, an eighth-grade Pre-AP language arts teacher in a year-long, Qwest grant-funded project she called WANDA (Works Analyzed Notated Discussed & Archived) (http://wandawiki.wikispaces.com/). We collaborated to support students' inquiries as they participated in four literature circles, each one spanning the majority of an 8-week grading period. Over the course of the year, students discussed American Southwest themed books, fantasy and science fiction, historical fiction, and finally, the Jacqueline Woodson novels around which this article is centered.

Online Literature Circles

Literature circles provide students with choice in what they read and allow students to discuss and collaborate within an inquiry-based framework. This discussion format is intended for students to make personal connections to the texts they read and to describe and discuss the issues raised in literature selections through social discourse (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996). The WANDA wiki-based literature circle project added an additional element to learning by providing students with the technological means to discuss books with students beyond their classroom and to collaborate with others to create Web pages to organize, discuss, and share their responses to the novels using words and images as well as multimedia. These read-write tools allowed students to discuss books outside of class time and the school day and to work in a 21st-century technology-supported collaborative environment.

All of the students in Jenni's three sections of Pre-AP eighth-grade language arts were required to participate in four literature circles, one during each quarter of the school year. Jenni established criteria for posting to the discussion board within the wiki and for the various story-element focused pages of each literature circle wiki. Her eighth-grade student aide created the actual wiki homepage for each group and invited the literature circle group members to join. The group members then built the wiki pages on which they discussed their literature circle book.

For the first literature circle, Jenni experimented with assigning roles, such as Vocabulary Elaborator, Literary Expositor, or Background Researcher, but abandoned that structure in favor to a more collaborative approach in which students negotiated their roles and were responsible for

the entirety of the wiki work rather than specific pages or parts. Students conducted all of their literature circle discussions in the wiki environment and published their responses online. Jenni and I (joined by her student teacher in the spring) read and discussed the students' postings. We shared responsibility for participating as needed and assessing the students' work using rubrics we jointly created. Jenni worked with the students in learning the wiki technology and recording podcasts. I took responsibility for teaching aspects of Web site design and several Web 2.0 tools to support their literature responses, including Wordle word clouds (http://www.wordle.net), a narrated slideshow tool called VoiceThread (http://voicethread.com), and newspaper clipping generator (http://fodey.com), tools which they used extensively in the final lit circle of the year. We both taught and reinforced concepts of netiquette and the ethical use of information, especially respect for intellectual property distributed on the Web.

For the first wiki-based literature discussion, students chose from a set of American Southwest–themed books for which I provided booktalks (see Table I). I selected these books to encourage students to activate their background knowledge to make connections and support comprehension (Moreillon, 2007). I hoped that starting with familiar settings could help students achieve a year-long language arts objective related to articulating the impact of the setting on the mood and tone of the book. I also recommended these titles to Jenni because of the diversity of characters and cultures that were portrayed.

Title	Author	Publisher, Date
Becoming Naomi Léon	Pam Muñoz Ryan	Scholastic, 2004
The Big Wander	Will Hobbs	Atheneum, 1992
Canyons	Gary Paulsen	Delacourt, 1990
Crossing the Wire	Will Hobbs	HarperCollins, 2006
Downriver	Will Hobbs	Random House, 1987
Esperanza Rising	Pam Muñoz Ryan	Scholastic, 2004
Hole in the Sky	Pete Hautman	Simon & Schuster, 2001
Kokopelli's Flute	Will Hobbs	Atheneum, 1995
The Last Snake Runner	Kimberley Griffiths Little	Knopf, 2002
Walker of Time	Helen Hughes Vick	Random House, 1987
Weedflower	Cynthia Kadohata	Atheneum, 2006

Table 1: Southwest Fiction Literature

For this first online literature circle, the students formed groups with students from their own class period. Although the discussions were carried out online, they had opportunities to talk about their work face-to-face in the classroom. (Go to http://wandawiki.wikispaces.com/Southwest+Literature+Circle+Books) to see examples of the online discussions). This online literature circle also included conversations with university students in the School of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona. Graduate students shared their WANDA wiki experiences in an online forum during their graduate course and posted some of the eighth-grade students' responses to these books on the Southwest Literature Web site (See http://southwestlit.com/pages/fall08.htm). The second literature circle centered on fantasy or science fiction books. Students formed groups from different sections of the

Pre-AP class, which made it necessary for students to conduct all of their literature circle conversations and to negotiate decisions about their wiki work virtually. In order to select these titles, students began by searching online for book reviews from a teacher-selected list and were invited to recommend additional titles. The students determined their top three choices and formed groups (See the wikis at http://wandawiki.wikispaces.com/Fantasy+%26+Science+Fiction+Wikis). Table 2 shows the titles students chose.

Title	Author	Publisher, Date
20,000 Leagues Under the Sea	Jules Verne	TOR, 1995
Airborn	Kenneth Oppel	EOS, 2004
Artemis Fowl	Eoin Colfer	Hyperion, 2001
The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm	Nancy Farmer	Orchard, 1994
Ella Enchanted	Gail Carson Levine	HarperCollins, 1997
Eragon	Christopher Paolini	Knopf, 2003
The Golden Compass	Philip Pullman	Knopf, 1996
The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy	Douglas Adams	Harmony, 1979
Mister Monday	Garth Nix	Scholastic, 2003
The Supernaturalist	Eoin Colfer	Hyperion, 2004
The Uglies	Scott Westerfeld	Simon Pulse, 2005
The Wizard of Earthsea	Ursula Leguin	Bantam, 1975

Table 2: Fantasy and Science Fiction Literature Circles

For their third literature circle selections, students chose historical fiction that addressed the time period they were studying in their social studies class. Sarah Ewing, the student teacher who joined the class in the spring, provided a list and students added titles that met the historical time-period criterion. Again, they formed groups from different classes. (See http://wandawiki.wikispaces.com/Historical+Fiction+LC). Table 3 shows the historical fiction titles student read and discussed.

Title	Author	Publisher, Date
Al Capone Does My Shirts	Gennifer Choldenko	Putnam's Sons, 2004
The Book Thief	Marcus Zusak	Knopf, 2006
Briar Rose	Jane Yolen	Doherty, 1992
A Day No Pigs Would Die	Robert Newton Peck	Random House, 1973
Diary of Anne Frank	Anne Frank	Globe, 1988
Eyes of the Emperor	Graham Salisbury	Wendy Lamb, 2005
Goodnight, Mr. Tom	Michelle Magorian	Harper, 1981
Heroes	Robert Cormier	Delacourt, 1998
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings	Maya Angelou	Bantam, 1993
Number the Stars	Lois Lowry	Houghton Mifflin, 1989
Under a War Torn Sky	L. M. Elliot	Hyperion, 2001

Table 3: Historical Fiction Literature Circles

A Window Opens

In the spring, Jenni, Sarah and I brainstormed possible authors for an author study focus for the last literature circle of the year. Although students were reading titles with more diversity due to the literature circles, I saw the possibility for opening an even wider window on the world. "The lack of cultural diversity in YA literature indicates that educators will need to make special efforts

to seek out and use quality books that include diverse characters, and that publishers should increase their efforts to make available YA books that include multicultural characters and discuss issues related to race and diversity in significant ways" (Koss & Teale, 2009, p. 572).

I shared with Jenni and Sarah my less-than-positive experiences in encouraging students to choose multicultural titles for class assignments and independent reading. I also shared my admiration for Jacqueline Woodson's novels and noted that when I arrived, our school only had one of her titles in the collection. Woodson's books were some of the first I purchased for our school. I booktalked several titles for Jenni and Sarah and described the responses of preservice classroom teachers and librarians to the topics and themes in these books. We agreed to focus the fourth and final literature circles of the year on Woodson's work.

First, we asked students to research the author using TeachingBooks.net, a subscription database of information about children's and YA authors and their work. Next, students read reviews of Woodson's novels. Then they selected their top three titles and formed literature circle groups. (See http://wandawiki.wikispaces.com/Woodson+Author+Study). Assuming that we would need to push students to go deeper, we decided to structure these literature circles more than the previous three circles. One of our goals was to challenge students' preconceived notions and worldviews by prompting them to discuss the social issues raised in these stories. Table 4 shows the Woodson novels students read and discussed. *Hush* and *If You Come Softly* were discussed by two different groups.

Title	Publisher, Date
After Tupac and D Foster	Penguin, 2008
Feathers	Putnam's Sons, 2007
Hush	Putnam's Sons, 2002
If You Come Softly	Putnam's, 1998
I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This	Penguin, 2006
Miracle's Boys	Putnam's Sons, 2002
Peace, Locomotion	Penguin, 2009

Table 4: Jacqueline Woodson Author Study Literature Circles

Teacher-Directed Discussion Questions

In order to focus the literature circle discussions on social issues, Jenni posted these questions: "What are the social issues in this book (e.g., crime, abuse, racism)? How does Woodson's presentation of these issues confirm or challenge your preconceived ideas about these issues? What can you learn from this?" (These questions, which were posted on March 19, 2009, and students' responses are on the discussion tab from the main page of each group's wiki.)

All students responded to these questions, and many answered in terms of their preconceived ideas. Students discussed divorce and foster families, war and peace, the impact of race on the

2008 presidential election, interracial friendships and dating, and stereotypes of "popular girls" (white), poverty and abuse happening more often in "other" families, or "bad guys" (race and crime) as portrayed in movies or as reported in the media.

Racism is a frequent topic in Woodson's work. These snippets from students' discussions focus on that issue. Keith read Hush and wrote: "It shows that even cops, who are supposed to be good people, sometimes kill just based on race." His group mate Mckenna extended that thought, "It teaches us how terrible people on the other side of the racial problem [African Americans] feel." In a Hush discussion group, Carolina wrote, "We normally assume African-Americans or Mexicans to be criminals or to be guilty, and that is racism."

The Denver

Sunday, August 30, 2006

Racism on the Force!

While many say racism is dead you may want to look out the window the next time you get pulled over. Beside the fact that a sample of one police station had only one African-American cop in the whole station other things are happening as well. In recent news a young African-American boy was shot by two white cops. I can't go into more details then that since no more then that is out in the public right now but one brave soul has broken that cop to cop silence and ratted them out. I salute this anonymous soul for making a valid effort to stab that monster we call racism into it's disgustingly cold heart.

Figure 1: Newspaper Clipping. Plot Page for Hush Group 2 by Adam B., Maddie C., Paul H., Melissa M., Nat L., and Lily N. (http://hushii.wikispaces.com/Plot)

When Mark wrote, "Racism is slowly dying," Mckenna replied, "but racism also affects more than just white and black people. Asian, South American, and Mexican people are also subject to racism. (And any other race, for that matter.) What I meant is that we live in a wealthier part of Tucson. We rarely hear of racism cases or anything like that… When I read it [*Hush*], it sort of gave us a

glimpse of what the real world can be like…. Many of us would have previously overlooked something like that." Nat who discussed *Hush* with another group said, "Living in a place like we live in can really make you brush off racism like it is nothing."

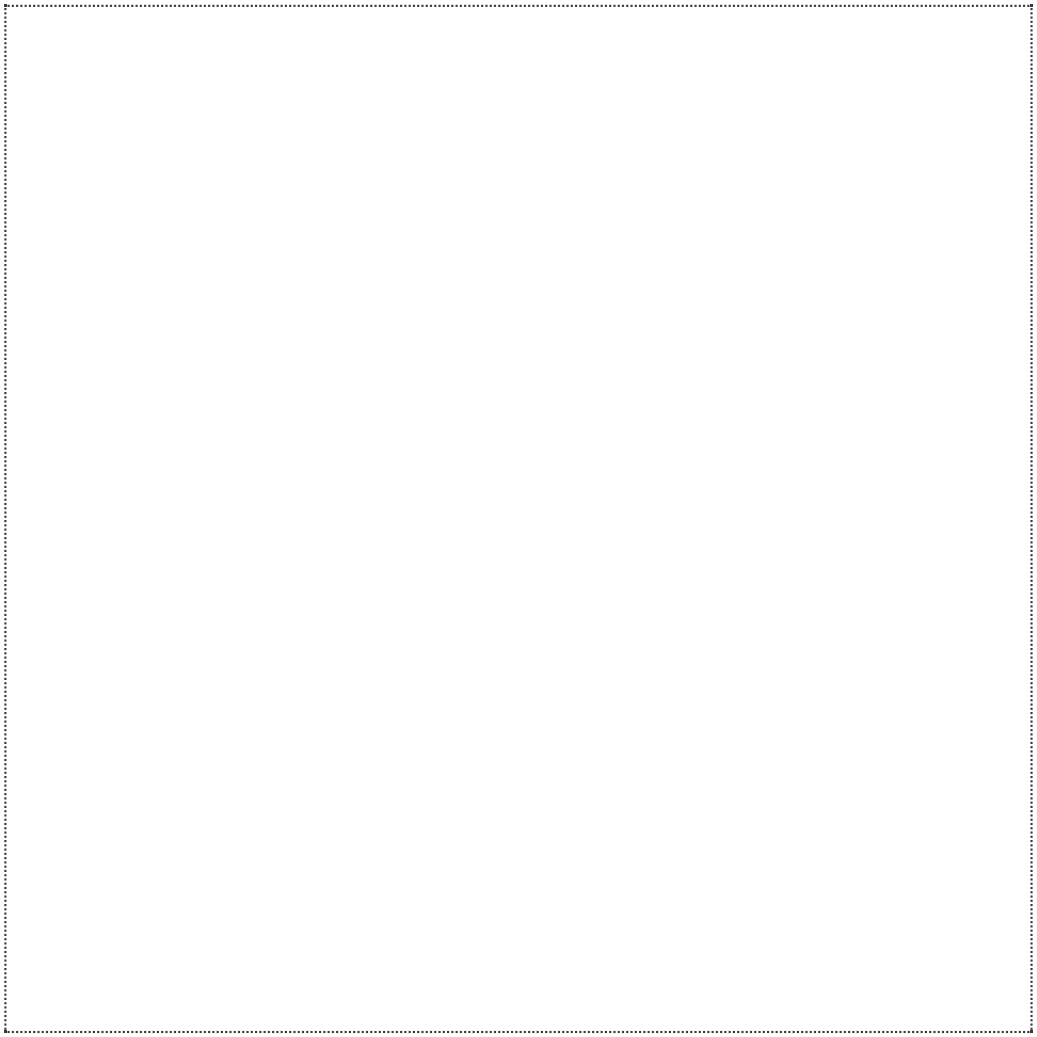

Figure 2: Hush Group 1 VoiceThread by Eme, Keith, and McKenna (http://hushi.wikispaces.com/Plot)

Broadening and Deepening the Conversation

After discussing students' initial responses, Jenni, Sarah, and I felt that the students had just scratched the surface of their prejudices. To encourage them to dig deeper, we invited library student aides, fifteen high school students in grades 9-12, to read the students' wiki pages that described the characters, settings, and plots of these books and then to enter into the March 19th social issues discussion. Library aides were instructed to post thought-provoking questions or comments to stimulate the eighth-graders' responses.

High school students asked junior high students to describe how issues of race play out on our campus. Some of the eighth-graders had not yet expanded their discussion to include instances of

racism that involve groups other than whites and African Americans. One Latina library aide shared her experiences of being an "other" on our campus. Another aide asked junior high students to speculate on how Woodson would have been treated for speaking out against racial prejudice in Nazi Germany. Although many greatly benefited from this probing, I felt that one group still hadn't fully examined their stereotypes related to race, poverty and sexual abuse.

Figure 3: I Hadn't Meant to Tell You VoiceThread: Plot Page by Courtney, Willow, Laura, Kenza, Marisa, and Rachel. http://ihadntmeanttotellyou.wikispaces.com/Plot

On March 31st, I posed a question to the I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This Group:

"If—before you read this book—someone told you that in this story there is one white girl and one black girl and that one is rich and lives in a supportive family and the other is poor and is abused by a close family member, then asked you to predict which girl is white and which girl is African American, would you have correctly predicted the race of each character?"

Figure 4: I Hadn't Meant to Tell You

Of the six girls in this literature circle group, five wrote at length about how they would have been "wrong," and would have predicted the poor, sexually-abused girl was black. (The sixth girl did not respond to this question.) Library aides made similar comments related to their own prejudices. This discussion is worth reading in its entirety at http://ihadntmeanttotellyou.wikispaces.com/message/view/home/10247836. As the conversation was winding down, one library aide wrote, "The best way to shatter stereotypes is to give strong examples against them and this story contradicts the stereotypes on almost every level."

Wordle for Marie by Courtney, Willow, Laura, Kenza, Marisa, and Rachel (http://ihadntmeanttotellyou.wikispaces.com/Characters)

Figure 5: I Hadn't Meant to Tell You Wordle for Lena by Courtney, Willow, Laura, Kenza, Marisa, and Rachel

Paul identified Jacqueline Woodson as a "crusader against racism in the U.S." Although some students declared themselves to be free of racial prejudices, others recognized that Woodson's stories encouraged them to consider race, some for the first time. Emi wrote, "She [Jacqueline Woodson] made me think about how black people think about being black. I guess I never really considered that side of things before." Some were able to put themselves in the shoes of an interracial couple (If You Come Softly) and noted that they didn't believe they could handle the pressure from parents, friends, or society that is often a consequence of an intimate interracial relationship. Jeremy, a student who also discussed that title, wrote, "I learned how harsh the real world can be and how much worse it is if you have more melanin." These responses show Rosenblatt's transaction theory (1978) was at work in the 21st century. Meaning in these novels was negotiated by these readers, the texts they read, the multimedia responses they created, and the author Jacqueline Woodson.

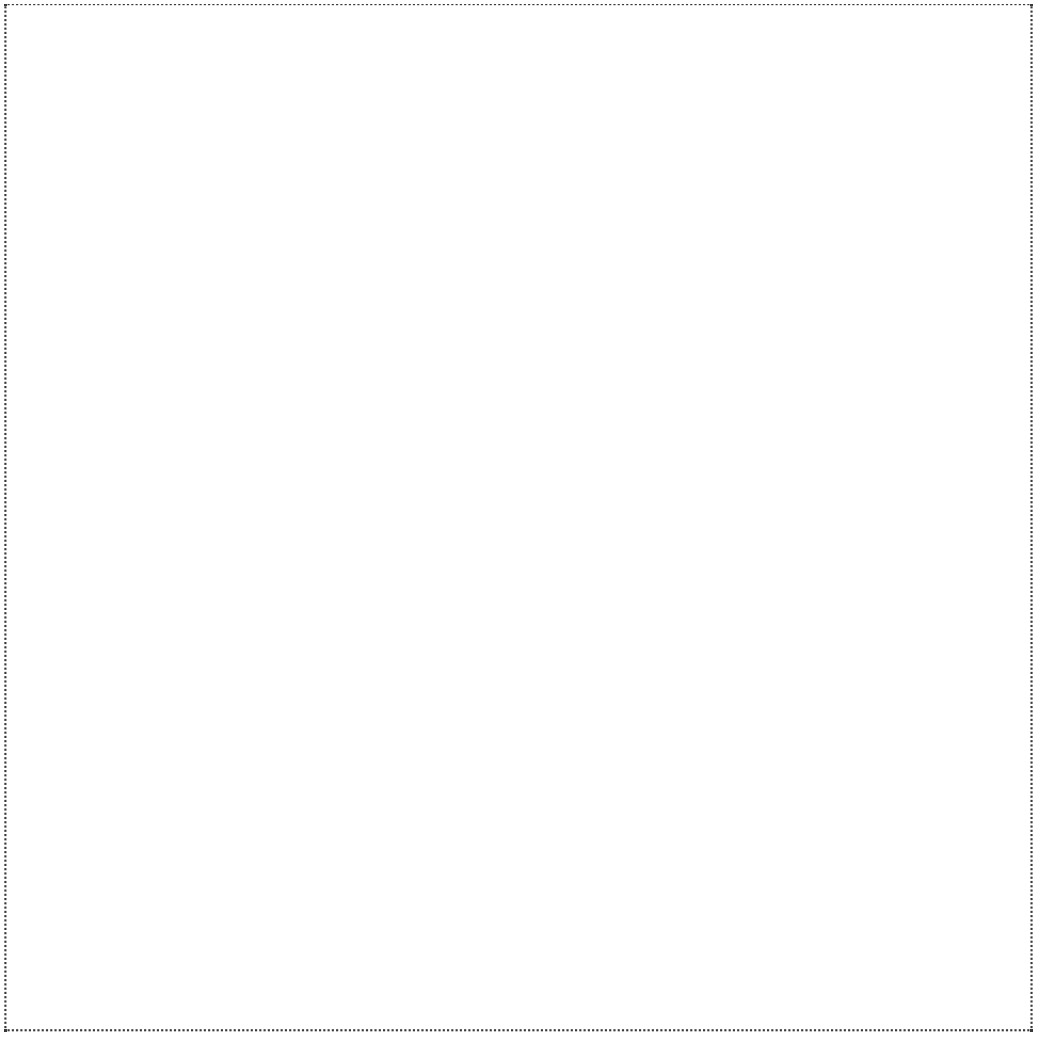

Figure 6: If You Come Softly Group 1 VoiceThread: Characters Page by Emi O., Abby R., Rachel F., Alex R., Jen D., and Paige G. http://ifyoucomesoftlyi.wikispaces.com/Characters

Summary

The high-quality, multicultural literature we selected for this project invited readers to educate both their hearts and minds (Bishop, 1994). Many students made critical first steps in walking in the shoes of an "other." Some began to examine their preconceived ideas on social issues. In the online literature circle discussion forum, students negotiated meaning socially and challenged each other to deepen their engagement with the texts. They practiced and developed careful "listening" (reading) and communication (writing) skills and collaboration that are necessary in 21st-century learning environments.

The students' wiki-based conversations became, in fact, other texts for exploration. Their written thoughts, questions, and responses provided critical information for us. In classroom-based literature circles with just one classroom teacher present, facilitating multiple groups reading different titles is a challenge. The ongoing nature of literature circles makes it difficult for school librarians to participate, especially at the middle and high school levels, where the time

commitment restricts them from interacting with students in other classes at regular times over a period of several weeks. The fact that these discussions occurred online allowed the classroom teachers and me to monitor the conversations and interject thought-provoking comments and questions as needed to push the students to more critical responses and interactions. Instead of participating in transient oral exchanges, the meanings readers shared were student-generated written texts and multimedia representations that they, their high school discussion mates, their teachers, university graduate students, and the world could savor and question, reflect upon, and revisit.

By selecting multicultural novels and bringing students' attention to the social issues in these stories, we encouraged them to examine and re-examine their perceptions of the world. "Books can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community: not with role models and literal recipes, not with noble messages about the human family, but with enthralling stories that make us imagine the lives of others. A good story lets you know people as individuals in all their particularity and conflict; and once you see someone as a person—flawed, complex, striving—then you've reached beyond stereotype" (Rochman, 1993, p. 19).

If the Woodson circles had not been conducted at the end of the school year, the next step might have been to involve students in literature discussions of international titles with many different "others." Students' summative portfolios assessments and self-reflections showed that the literature circle wikis had a positive impact on their learning this year and pushed them to develop as collaborators and content creators. Students shared that these final literature circles, in particular, made them consider new points of view. As Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu wrote, "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step." We believe these students have taken an important first step.

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(2002) *Miracle's boys*. New York: Scholastic.

(2009*) Peace, locomotion*. New York: Putnam's Sons.

Collaborators' Bios:

At the time of this project, Judi Moreillon was the teacher-librarian at Emily Gray Junior High – Tanque Verde High School in Tucson, Arizona and an adjunct assistant professor teaching multicultural children's and young adult literature at the University of Arizona. She is now on the faculty in the School of Library and Information Studies at Texas Woman's University in Denton, Texas. Contact Judi at: jmoreillon@twu.edu

Jennifer Hunt is the 8th-grade Pre-Advanced Placement language arts teacher at Emily Gray Junior High School in Tucson. In 2009, her classes earned 2nd place in the ABLE IT in Schools Achievement Award for this work and the school received 15 notebook computers, a cart, and professional development courses for all Emily Gray Junior High School teachers. The WANDA Wiki Web site also earned the Arizona Technology in Education Alliance 2009 Exemplary Middle School Web Site Award. Contact Jenni at: jhunt@tanq.org

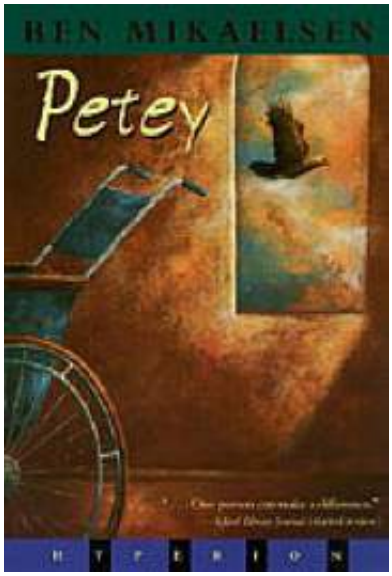
Sarah Ewing was the student teacher in Ms. Hunt's classroom during the spring semester of this project. She is now a first-year 7th-grade language arts teacher at Emily Gray Junior High School. Contact Sarah at: sewing@tanq.org

"We Want to Tell the World": One Teacher's Experience with the Power of *Petey*

By Susanna M. Steeg

"That one's Petey Corbin. He's an idiot retard, but a friendly one—you know, laughs and smiles a lot. Sometimes you swear he's thinking, but it's just conditioning. They used to get him up every day and put him in a wheelchair. Lucky for us, they stopped that."

(Mikaelsen, 1998, p. 113)



I steal a glance up from the page of the book I am reading aloud to take stock of my fourth-graders' reactions. They sit just below where I am curled on the couch. The lights are off, except for a single reading lamp. This is our daily read-aloud ritual; a time of togetherness that quietly opens the door to great possibilities. Many are hugging their knees and staring into the middle distance, thoughtful. Some are slightly agape; all are solemn. "Why am I reading those words, 'idiot' and 'retard'?" I ask. "What does it suggest to you about what people thought of Petey?"

No one answers for a moment before Alison (pseudonyms used for all students) raises her hand. "Miss Steeg, they thought he wasn't smart. They didn't know he was normal just like us." In a quick flash, I watch understanding dash across David's face as he comments, "They only saw what was on the outside." His peers nod and murmur. It is a thrilling statement from a boy who leans toward bullying behaviors, covering his own insecurities with aggressions towards others.

Ben Mikaelsen's (1998) *Petey* is a moving story about the life of a man born with cerebral palsy (CP) in the early 1900's. Mikaelsen skillfully reveals glimpses of Petey's intelligence and caring personality to the reader while blinding the characters around Petey to his abilities. I purposefully chose this book to read aloud to my fourth-grade students, because I was dissatisfied with what I was observing about my classroom community; students were not demonstrating sensitivity to issues of difference in one another. Some exploited weaker students on the playground or ignored those who were not their friends during classroom interactions. Classroom discussions around literature were stilted and short-sighted, as students offered flippant comments, laughed inappropriately, or scorned others' ideas in subtle but nevertheless hurtful ways. Students gave common "school" answers, concentrating on the plot-based details of a text, rather than the richer themes or critical conversations which held the potential for meaningful change. We were falling far short of my ideal "classroom culture of caring" (Levine, 2003; Watson, Kendzizor, Dasho, Rutherford, & Solomon, 1998).

In light of these shortcomings, I worked to address these issues through a literature unit highlighting issues of difference and change. With the help of an involved classroom mentor, Jeanne Fain, we planned literature engagements designed to move my students toward greater

sensitivity to issues of social justice, to uncover the stereotypes we hold about differences in others. I kept notes on what was happening in my classroom, reflecting both orally and in writing to get to the root of these issues and to help me think about my practice. I wanted to help my students develop an inner awareness of what matters in terms of their relationships with people, believing that fostering a greater sensitivity to these issues would support and safeguard them in taking meaningful learning risks.

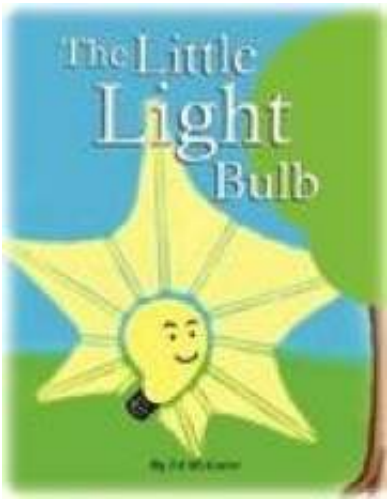
Many authors advocate for the power of children's literature to increase student awareness of social issues and help them develop more caring ways of being (Christensen, 2000; Fain, 2008; Fain & Horn, 2006; Foss, 2002; Jennings, 2002; Knowles, Knowles, & Smith, 2007). Conversations about children's literature can "disrupt the familiar," by telling honest stories that challenge social injustices while offering a call for social action (Bargiel, Beck, Koblitz, Pierce, & Wolf, 1997). In conceptualizing what I might do, I appreciated Foss's (2002) discussion about the difficulties in engaging her privileged, middle-class students in critical conversations around literature, wherein they problematize the very social constructs that personally benefit them. My students and I were members of that same population. Our efforts at these critical conversations took time, but I identified with Foss's desire to "create an environment and curriculum that challenges students to look at themselves and the world in a new way" (p. 402). For our class, *Petey* was a way in to this discussion.

As Jeanne and I dialogued about my dissatisfaction with our classroom community, we brainstormed learning opportunities using quality literature to help students value and affirm diversity. This overall unit focusing on diversity and change constituted a unifying theme over much of the school year, proving to be a journey of combining children's literature with real-life experiences to prompt awareness and social action. *Paint the Wind* (Ryan, 2009), *Through My Eyes* (Bridges, 1999) and *Uncle Jed's Barbershop* (Mitchell & Ransome, 1998) were just a few of the titles I read aloud and used as conversation and reflection points (see Appendix A). *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* (DiCamillo, 2006) was another significant part of the unit. Students formed choice book groups, read and discussed the text together in supported ways, and chose final response projects culminating in a celebration day. Students also chose picture books with critical themes and held written conversations with family members to invite family perspectives and extend the talk (Short, 1996). *Petey*, however, was our most powerful read-aloud, and the subsequent learning opportunities impacted my students significantly.

We read *Petey* towards the beginning of this unit, over the course of six weeks, during which there was a noticeable progression in student talk and understanding about the book. Early on in the story, students' conversations about the read-aloud were animated, yet revealed their biases and misperceptions. What Petey "could not do" dominated their initial observations and conversations; students' words seemed to use Petey's differences to characterize him as "less than,"

in keeping with the classroom community issues I had been noticing.

A few weeks after reading *Petey*, friends introduced me to Ed, a man who had struggled with CP from birth. I enjoyed meeting him and his beautiful dog, Margo, who assisted Ed with basic tasks. I asked if he might come to my classroom to talk with students about his life with CP and he agreed. When I told the students, they were elated at the idea of meeting someone like Petey. I could tell we had a long way to go with challenging stereotypes when they were astounded at the news that Ed went to school, drove a truck, played soccer, and both authored and illustrated children's books. In their minds, Ed and Petey were one and the same. Petey couldn't write books, so they were surprised that Ed did. Although reading and discussing *Petey* had brought students along in their thinking, they were not yet transferring a value or appreciation for diversity into their own interactions with others.



As we brainstormed ways to share something with Ed as a thank-you, students decided to write a summary text of *Petey* to give to Ed. We also read Ed's book *The Little Light Bulb*, which set the stage for an impromptu classroom discussion on its deep themes and truths. Its straightforward text reads, "There once was a Little Light Bulb with a very special light. The problem was the other bulbs did not glow in this bright light….[they] thought it was not right that such a light should shine so very, very bright."

I was gratified to see my students' response to this simple, yet powerful book. On the day I read it aloud, they asked, "Miss Steeg, can we get into a circle and have a dinner table conversation about this?" When I agreed, students immediately shifted themselves into a circle so everyone could see one another and the conversation began, proceeding without raised hands or questions from me. Although we had been working on this conversational strategy, borrowed from Mills, O'Keefe & Jennings (2004), I saw a good deal of hard work pay off in that day's grand conversation (Eeds & Peterson, 2007). Students demonstrated that they knew how to "speak into the silence" and pay attention to others' comments so that they could piggy-back their own comments. They evidenced growth in their ability to let others go first, sustain attention to others' thoughts, and contribute meaningfully.

That day's conversation, and others that followed it, helped us prepare for Ed's visit, which was a highlight of our year. In preparation, Jeanne and I helped the students push back all the furniture to accommodate Ed's wheelchair. Students settled themselves on the floor and waited impatiently as I walked out to meet Ed at the school's entrance. Ed's enthusiastic greeting and Margo's obedient presence thrilled the students. Ed showed us video footage of his soccer team and demonstrated the bumper guards for his wheelchair. He fielded questions and the students

interpreted for one another when communication broke down.

Then Ed climbed out of his wheelchair onto the floor. "I'm going to show you about CP the best way I know. Take off your socks," he said. My fourth-graders gleefully ripped off their socks and shoes, waiting for the next instruction.

"Put the socks on your hands." Once students were ready, Ed gave the next direction, "Now, try to tie your shoes."

Students all over the room exclaimed to one another as they struggled with the task, nodding with understanding as Ed explained that tasks for a person with CP were actually much tougher and that CP meant a life of constant struggle. "But you can make a difference, just like the little light bulb."

Knowing the students were curious about how he drove, Ed invited us to watch him use his wheelchair lift to get into his huge truck and waved good-bye as he roared out of the parking lot. My normally boisterous students were quiet as we walked back to our classroom. I could tell they were contemplating the difficulties of life created by CP. Some, like me, marveled at Ed's positive attitude despite the unromantic realities of this disease. A fellow teacher who had joined us for Ed's visit exhorted them, "You need to tell the world about what you learned today."

As we sat down together to debrief, students took turns processing the experience. I think Melanie described it best when she said, "Meeting Ed was an experience of a lifetime….we have to share it with others." In the next few days, students peppered me with ideas. "Can we visit other classrooms and tell other students about our visit with Ed? We want to make them put their socks their hands, too. They need to understand that people who look different from everyone else are really the same." Although I mentally cringed at this generalization, I understood the sentiment; they were learning to honor and affirm differences instead of fearing or rejecting them. And they wanted others to do the same. Jeanne and I engaged the students in conversations about the practicality of sending them all over the school and telling other students to take their socks off. When Jeanne suggested creating an iMovie that we could air on the school news network, students enthusiastically took up that idea. They wrote scripts for plays and recorded dinner table conversations, giving up their recess time to practice, act, and film the mini-dramas.

As I spliced the movie together, I reflected on the changes I had witnessed. One student, Josephina, who had previously lingered on the margins of our classroom community, had voiced a striking comment to the class during one whole-group conversation, "Have you guys thought about how everyone is disabled in some way? Some people can do some things that others can't do. So we're all actually disabled!" Her insight became an oft-quoted statement in our room: "We're all disabled in some way!" I was amazed to see students take this up—adopting disability as a way of

identifying with everyone, taking on an attitude of humility that tempered the "ultra-cool attitudes" that fourth-graders often develop.

Another student, William, revealed a shift in thinking during an interview for the iMovie, "I've learned how important it is not to point or stare at people who look different. It's kinda mean. " I edited the movie to open with William's quote, followed by a collage of still pictures and silent video of students' dinner table conversations, backgrounded by music. I interspersed snippets of students' conversations with a voice-over explaining the crux of our unit and the students' message. The video moved to Melanie, who gave a verbal summary of *Petey*, before another student, Tyler, read Ed's book aloud. From there, the iMovie cut to the students' role-plays of instances of inclusion--a basketball game where the student in the wheelchair gets the ball, and an instance of introductions to our quietest student, who took on the role of Ed. The six-minute video went out on the morning video announcements on two occasions.

Although the iMovie was a culminating event to a full year of work on diversity and change, student comments evidenced small but significant steps forward throughout those final months of the school year. My thirty-one tweens showed increased compassion for others, and began celebrating differences. I saw indications that *Petey* had disrupted familiar ways of being. Students spoke with the special needs students in the hallway instead of simply walking by. They stopped to help others who dropped things, and more readily admitted they were wrong in a dispute. And the day their iMovie debuted for the school, they basked in the glow of knowing they had done something to tell others about their journey that began with *Petey* and found its catalyst in Ed's visit. The awareness that began with *Petey* found its embodiment in social action through Ed's visit, as he entered into a space I could not touch, appropriately and gently confronting students' stereotypes in ways that brought *Petey* alive once again. The students' passion to tell others about what they experienced renewed my own zeal for children's literature, and its power to plant seeds of change.

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Appendix A: Children's Literature Addressing Issues of Diversity and Change

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Exploring Multicultural Literature with a Focus on Family

By Janine M. Schall

After receiving a grant from the National Council of Geographic Education, I worked in a Montessori charter school for a semester in order to help students explore their own cultures and those of others through engagements with multicultural and international literature. While I also incorporated geographic concepts such as relating the five themes of geography to student lives and to the mapping of familiar locations, for this vignette I share just one part of our work together: the exploration of families. While we focused on our own families, we also discussed how other people live by reading a variety of multicultural literature and sharing our exploration.

The classroom consisted of 25 first through third grade students. While the majority were white European-Americans, the class included one Asian-American, two Arab-Americans and one multiracial (African-American and white) child. Although most belonged to mainstream Protestant religions, there were also some religious differences among the students with two Jewish students, one Wiccan, one Muslim, and two Sikh children. I was a familiar figure to the students since I was a part time Title I teacher at the school and a regular substitute teacher. For this experience I spent three half-days in the classroom each week for the fall semester. Because I wanted students to share these explorations with their families, I sent informational letters home at the beginning of each major engagement explaining what we would be doing in class and asking parents to support our learning by talking with the children about what we were doing.

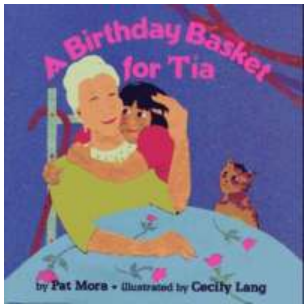
Our explorations of families centered around children's literature that represented a wide variety of family structures, situations, and cultures. I read aloud a new book at least once a week and discussed it with the whole group. I also brought in a text set of picture books that the children could use for independent reading (see figure 1 for a sample of the text set) and added to this collection each time we began a new engagement. Most of the students were enthusiastic readers and were eager to explore the text set since their own classroom library was fairly small. They used the text set heavily, reading independently and with friends, and recommending books to each other.

Title	Author	Summary
Heather Has Two Mommies	Lesléa Newman	Every child at Heather's preschool has a different kind of family structure, including Heather, who has same-sex parents.
I Love Saturdays y Domingos	Alma Flor Ada	A young girl describes the Saturdays she spends with her Anglo grandparents and the Sundays she spends with her Mexican-American grandparents
Sitti's Secrets	Naomi Shihab Nye	Mona visits her grandmother in Palestine.
Friday Night Is Papa Night	Ruth A. Sonneborn	Pedro and his family wait for his father to return after a week away at work.
My Big Brother	Valorie Fisher	A baby tells about her amazing big brother.
At Daddy's on Saturday	Linda Walvoord Girard	When her parents divorce, Katie spends time with her father on weekends.
Our Gracie Aunt	Jacqueline Woodson	When their mother can no longer care for them, two children go to live with their aunt.

Table 1. Sample from Initial Text Set on Families

Three major engagements accompanied the experiences with children's literature. As we read children's books, the students also participated in making a Memory Museum, writing family stories, and recording family recipes.

Personal Connections through a Memory Museum



We began the explorations of families by encouraging personal connections to the theme through the creation of a Memory Museum. I read *A Birthday Basket for Tia* by Pat Mora (1992) as the whole class sat on the floor during circle time. In this picture book, Cecilia gathers a basketful of items that represent the loving relationship she has with her great-aunt in order to create a special gift for the great-aunt's 90th birthday. After the students briefly discussed the book by making personal connections to birthday parties of their own, I reminded the students how Cecilia collected precious items and showed the class several things that had personal meaning to me. These included a photograph of my grandmother when she was a young woman and a wood carving from Ireland. I told the children why these items were important to me, and then invited the children to think about things from their own lives that showed something important about themselves and their families. We discussed ideas for a few minutes, then I asked the students to talk with their parents about what they could bring to school for our next work session. Before our time together ended, I showed the students two other books that had a similar focus as *A Birthday Basket for Tia*; *Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later)* (Howard, 1991) and *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* (Fox, 1984). These books were added to the text set on families.

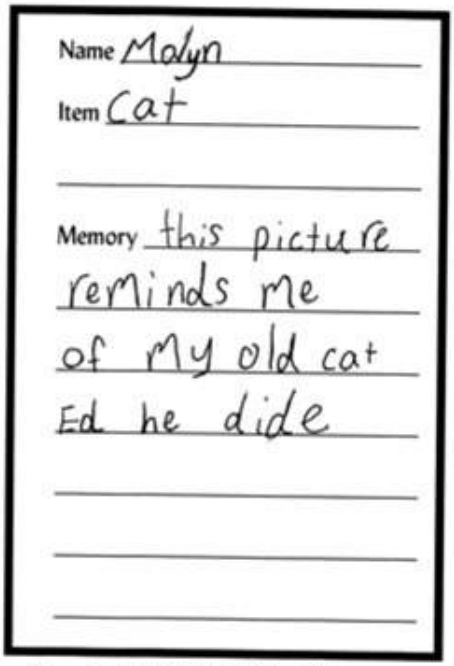


Figure 1. Malyn's label for her Memory Museum exhibit describes a photo of a favorite pet.

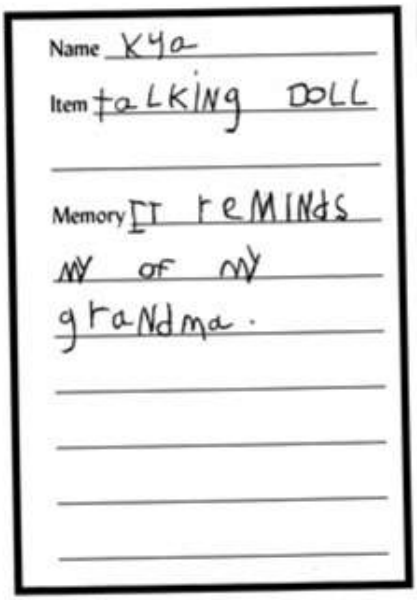


Figure 2. Kya describes a gift from her grandmother.

The next time we met the children came to circle accompanied by a wide variety of items, from stuffed animals to a live rabbit. While it was difficult to keep the children from immediately sharing, I encouraged them to save their items for sharing during the museum exhibition. We discussed their experiences with museums and how we needed labels for our museum exhibits. I handed out blank labels and the students decided what they wanted to share. After we arranged the exhibits and their labels in a nearby empty room, groups of children took turns visiting the museum and looking at the exhibits. In my teaching journal I describe the experience:

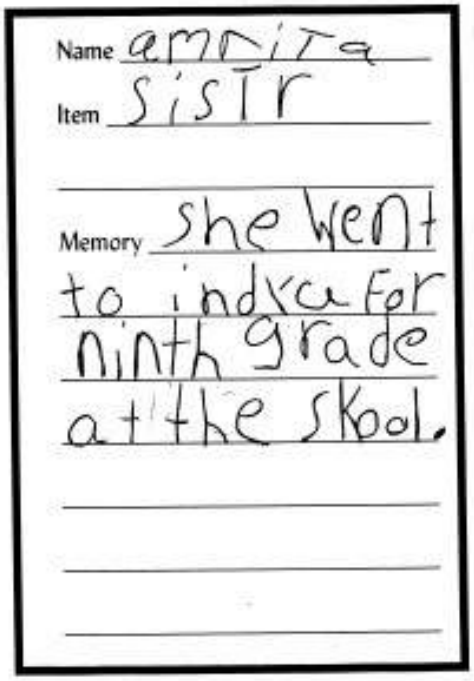


Figure 3. Amrita describes a photo of her older sister on a label for the Memory Museum.

Groups of eight at a time came out with me to view the museum. They all immediately searched for the items they brought in (I asked for 1-2, some kids brought up to 4). The students spent much longer examining the museum than I thought they would. I expected a quick in and out tour from most of them, but they carefully looked at each item, and, with permissions from the owner, touched or picked up many of them.

There was a lot of talking, with kids asking each other what they brought in and why and sharing memories. I was pleased that everyone was respectful of what others displayed. The memory

museum became a touchstone event for us, with students referring back to the experience and to the items they brought in throughout the entire time we worked together.

Exploring Family Stories

After our experience with the Memory Museum, we spent two weeks discussing and writing family stories. On our first day with this focus I only had a brief time with the students due to parent/teacher conferences. We met in circle and I read aloud "Aunt Sue's Stories" by Langston Hughes. We talked together about who tells stories in our families, with students mentioning grandparents, older siblings, and parents. I next read *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes* (Lewis, 2000) about a woman traveling to China to pick up her adopted daughter. We then discussed different kinds of stories that people tell, with students mentioning stories about losing your tooth or being adopted. At our next session I read aloud *My Great-Aunt Arizona* (Houston, 1992). In this book the narrator tells the story of his great-aunt's life from her childhood to her work as a teacher. As the class discussed the book, we also talked about what kinds of stories we could tell about our own families, like the narrator was doing. Then I told the story of how my grandparents got engaged. In my teaching journal I wrote:

The class liked the book and had lots of questions about the pictures. They loved my story and when I suggested they might have stories of their own about their grandparents or other relatives I could see them begin to get excited. Hands shot up and people wanted to share.

Next I read aloud *Sophie* (Fox, 1994), a story about the loving relationship between a girl and her grandfather from the girl's birth until the grandfather's death. Our discussion of the read aloud initially focused on the folk-style illustrations with their exaggerated features which some students thought were weird. After some time spent reexamining the illustrations, I moved the discussion to talk about grandparents. Several students shared memories and stories about their grandparents. Nathaniel asked if stories about pets were ok, and when I said that they were, asked me if I had a pet story. I told the class about raising gerbils when I was their age. Before I left for the day I asked them to think of a story to share with the class during our next session. I also introduced other books with a theme of family stories for the text set. These include*d Grandfather's Journey* (Say 1993), *Bigmama's* (Crew, 1991) and *How My Family Lives in America* (Kuklin, 1992).

In our next session we had a storytelling circle. I described it in my teaching journal:

Stories, stories, stories today! In whole group circle we shared family stories, with everyone getting a chance to tell one story. I was anticipating stories about grandparents and what parents did when they were kids. Instead we had lots of stories about pets. My first thought was that they were influenced by the story I told about my gerbils, but I also told a story about my grandparent's engagement. I think they just chose what was important to them—pets in most

cases. Several students passed when it was their turn to share and several people desperately wanted to share more. After everyone had a chance to tell one story I sent them off to write their story down, but told the ones that wanted to continue to stay. Malyn, Amber, Sedona, Sam and Tara stayed. Malyn didn't tell a story whole group and she didn't tell one small group either, but she was very interested in listening.

Students worked on initial drafts that morning and the following day, with some students deciding to write more than one story. At our next session I asked them to read their stories aloud to at least one other student who provided comments and suggestions for improvement. After revising, students completed their final versions. Dawn, a first grader wrote:

When I got my goat at a goat sale. Once I saw a goat herd and I got to pick out my present because I wanted something to myself because my little sister wants everything that I get. I went to the goat herd and there was a whole bunch of goats. I picked out a goat and I named him Eager. He was six months old but now he is one. He lives in my corral with my other animals. I love my goat. He growed up almost to my sister. She is three feet. His mom was named Bee. He is still alive and I love him.

Sam, a second grader, wrote:

Once three days before I was born my dad was going fishing with his friend. His friend's name was Alan. His friend had a bad disease and it killed him. Then three days later I was born and since he died my middle name is Alan.

Another second grader, Alia, wrote:

One day my mom was walking home from school and a crow came and pecked on her head and another and another and another and a lot until she ran home and one got stuck in the door. And it got whacked in the nose. After that she always watched for crows and if she saw one she ran home.

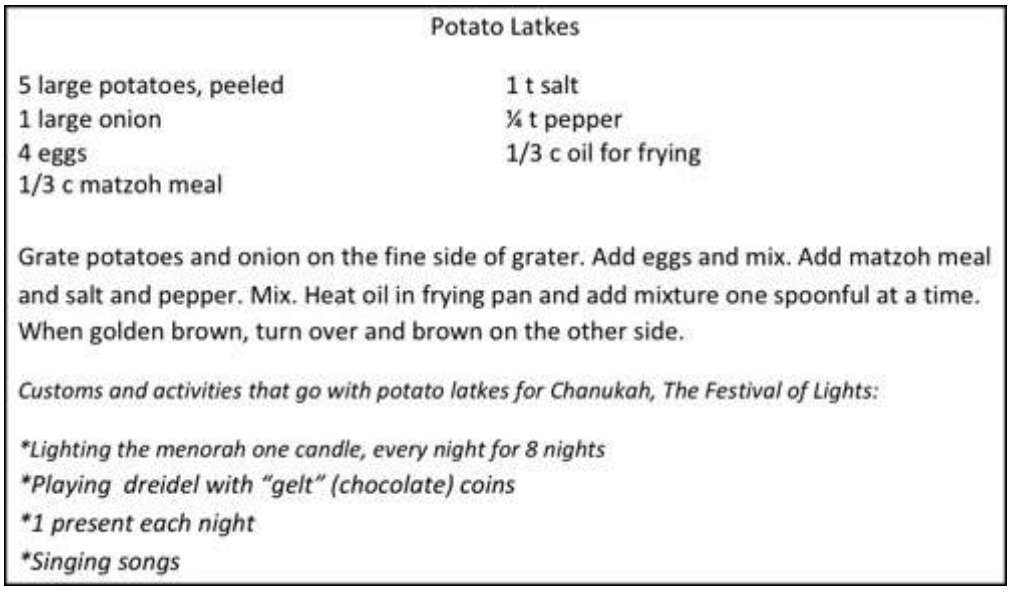
I arranged the stories into a class book. The next time we met I introduced the book to the students and several students volunteered to read aloud their stories and talk about them with the class. We discussed how many of the family stories had common themes and how some stories were similar to the books in the text set. The family story book then became a permanent part of the classroom library, where it was one of the most popular books for independent reading time.

Food as Family Tradition and Celebration

In our last focused engagement on family, I read aloud *Family* (Monk, 2001). In this book a multiracial girl attends a reunion of her mother's family, bringing with her a special treat from her

Dad's side of the family. One student remarked that the book character had a white parent and an African-American parent just like she did. Many students loudly expressed their negative opinions about the special treat—whole pickles with a peppermint stick inserted in the middle of each. After we talked about how everyone likes different food and how the students were reacting the same way that the kids at the reunion initially reacted, we moved on to talking about special foods that our families make and share. I then asked students to talk to their parents about their family's special foods and to write down a recipe and why it was special. Before leaving for the day I introduced several other books about family and food for the text set, including *The Ugly Vegetables* (Lin, 1999), *Let's Eat! What Children Eat Around the World* (Hollyer, 2003) and *Jalapeño Bagels* (Wing, 1996).

Over the next two sessions students brought in their family recipes. In whole group sharing time we talked about each recipe. Sam brought in a recipe that reflected his Jewish heritage (see figure 5). Anwyn shared a food that she always ate when she visited her grandmother in Germany (see figure 6). Luna brought a recipe that she regularly made with her father (see figure 7). We added this recipe book to the classroom library.



Potato Latkes

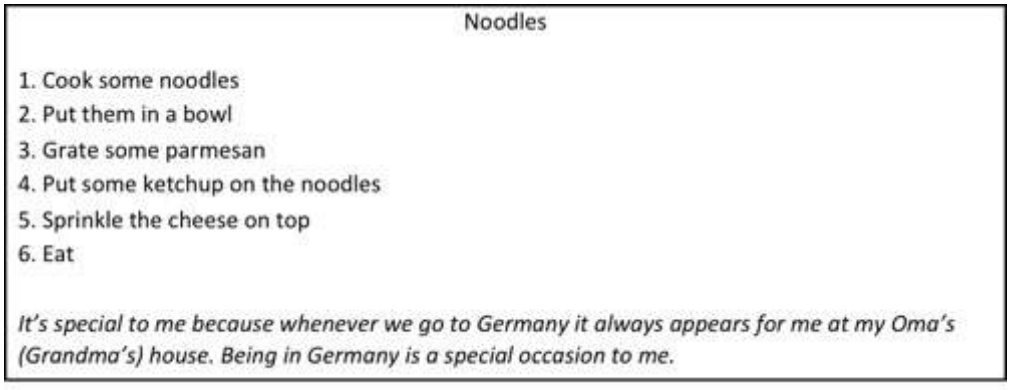
5 large potatoes, peeled
1 large onion
4 eggs
1/3 c matzoh meal
1 t salt
¼ t pepper
1/3 c oil for frying

Grate potatoes and onion on the fine side of grater. Add eggs and mix. Add matzoh meal and salt and pepper. Mix. Heat oil in frying pan and add mixture one spoonful at a time. When golden brown, turn over and brown on the other side.

Customs and activities that go with potato latkes for Chanukah, The Festival of Lights:

**Lighting the menorah one candle, every night for 8 nights*
**Playing dreidel with "gelt" (chocolate) coins*
**1 present each night*
**Singing songs*

Figure 4. Second grader Sam shares a traditional family recipe.

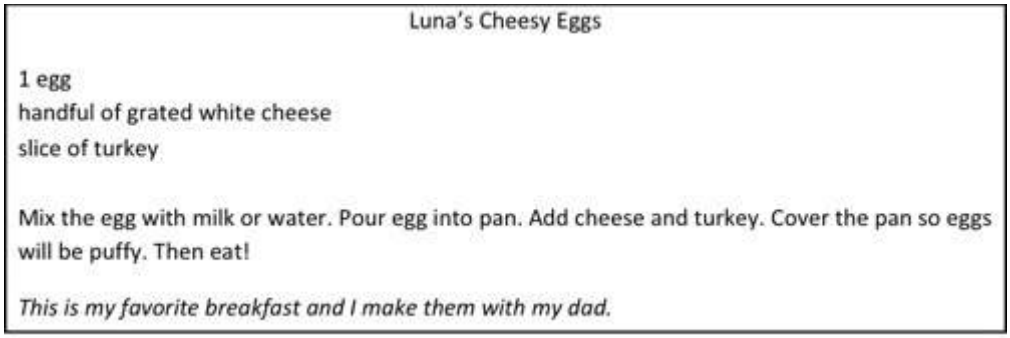


Noodles

1. Cook some noodles
2. Put them in a bowl
3. Grate some parmesan
4. Put some ketchup on the noodles
5. Sprinkle the cheese on top
6. Eat

It's special to me because whenever we go to Germany it always appears for me at my Oma's (Grandma's) house. Being in Germany is a special occasion to me.

Figure 5. Anwyn describes a special food.


Luna's Cheesy Eggs

1 egg
handful of grated white cheese
slice of turkey

Mix the egg with milk or water. Pour egg into pan. Add cheese and turkey. Cover the pan so eggs will be puffy. Then eat!

This is my favorite breakfast and I make them with my dad.

Figure 6. First grade student Luna shares her favorite breakfast.

Finally, I collected the recipes into a class book, which made a popular addition to the classroom library.

Conclusions

The students participated enthusiastically in these engagements and whenever they saw me at the school they asked when I would next be coming to their classroom. They enjoyed thinking and sharing about their own lives and were just as eager to hear about how their classmates lived and how book characters handled the same things the students were talking about in class.

Our explorations of culture, family and self also strengthened the connection between home and school. Students were encouraged to talk with their families about what we were doing and to bring their home experiences into the classroom. Students knew that their home experiences were valued because we showed how important they were through engagements that privileged the home experience. Because we also read a great deal of multicultural literature that showed how other people live, the students were able to compare their lives with the lives of others. This both provided the necessary contrast so that students could see the unique aspects of their own cultures and also showed other perspectives and ways of being.

Some students did have difficulty with the literature outside of their own experience. While they were very respectful of the differences in children in their own classroom, the lives and experiences of book characters did not always receive the same respect from some children. We spent a great deal of time talking about why people did things in certain ways and how it compared to students' own lives, emphasizing how differences were normal and interesting, rather than weird.

After our experiences exploring family and culture, the students went on to explore other cultures more formally with the regular classroom teacher. With the foundation of understanding their own cultures, they were able to realize how other people live isn't exotic or weird, but different and understandable within their particular context.

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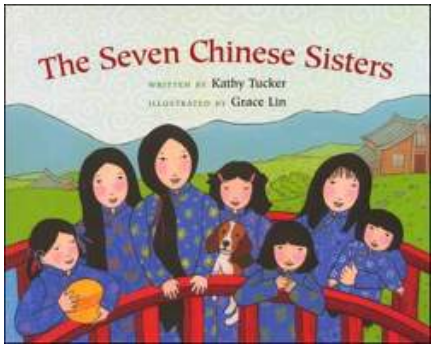
The Responses of Third Graders in Taiwan to *The Seven Chinese Sisters*

by Wenyun Lin



The clothing of the girls is not like Chinese.
That dog is cute; it looks like Beagle.
No, it does not look like a Chinese dog!

These responses were students' immediate comments when Yi-Jun showed them the cover illustration and title for *The Seven Chinese Sisters*. Yi-Jun then said, "This is a story about Chinese people which was written and illustrated by foreign authors. Maybe you could think about whether there is anything about how Chinese people are portrayed in this book that is different from what you know."

The Seven Chinese Sisters is a retelling of an ancient Chinese folktale of seven sisters, each of whom has a unique skill. Written by Kathy Tucker and illustrated by Grace Lin, a Chinese American, the book is only available in English. Teacher educator, Wenyun, and classroom teacher, Yi-Jun, were curious about how Taiwanese children would respond to a book about Chinese culture that is not culturally authentic. We knew that there were a range of problems in the book, such as the image of the dragon, the clothing worn by the sisters, the windows in the house, and the furnishings of the kitchen (see http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewi3/7 for a review of the cultural authenticity of the book).

We engaged third graders in talking about this book. In class, Yi-Jun read aloud the book aloud in Chinese, translating each page from English to Chinese. After each page, she stopped to invite students to respond. The discussion began with the following comments:

Yi-Jun (showing the cover page) :

The title of story is The Seven Chinese Sisters

Chion-Yi:

Is it Chinese or Vietnamese.

Yi-Jun:

What do you mean by this?

Chion-Yi:

The way they are dressed is not like Chinese clothing; instead, it is more like Vietnamese.

Chen-Yi:

That dog is cute but it looks like Beagle.

Yi-An:

No, Beagle is not Chinese.
"You all sound reasonable."

Yi-June responded and read aloud the next page.

Wenyun and Yi-Jun were amazed by this discussion. It showed that students were applying what they had learned about Vietnam from a study that occurred weeks before reading this story. Although we did not share our opinion of the book during the discussion, we agreed with students that the clothing in the book looks more like Vietnamese clothing instead of Chinese. The clothing of the girls in the story is called cheongsam, a close-fitting Chinese dress with side vents. Students pointed out that it was not Chinese because Chinese ladies don't wear long pants under the cheongsam as shown in the illustrations. Also, cheongsam is fitted instead of loose.

Yi-June kept reading aloud page by page and inviting students to respond. Some of the other comments by students included:

Ming-Yin:

There was no scooter in ancient China.

Yi-Shen:

Chinese dragons don't live in a cave; instead, they live in the cloud or in the water.

Mon-Shuan:

Why is there English on the rice bag?

Zi-Yi:

Why is there a gas burner in the kitchen?

Yu-Mai: T

he chopping board in ancient China was round and made by wood. My grandma has one.

These students pointed out details that are not culturally authentic in the illustrations. Their comments demonstrate their knowledge about Chinese culture, such as the image of dragon and the chopping board. Throughout the discussion, students focused on the mismatch of ancient and modern life, especially in the household objects and furnishings displayed in the story.

Other students paid more attention to the rationality of the story and whether the plot made sense to them:

Bi-Hen:

How come the human being can speak to the dog?

Shang-Jia:

Why can the youngest sister speak all of a sudden? How could the sisters know that it was their youngest sister who called for help since they had never heard how their youngest sister spoke?

Yun-Jin:

Anyone who can speak to a dog cannot necessarily speak to the dragon.

Yin-Zi:

If I were a dragon, I would eat the sister right away with salt.

Chion-Yi:

Why did the sisters count the tree? Who would do that for nothing?

Shang-Jia:

They would not find their way home even if they counted five hundred trees because they went to the wrong direction.

As the discussion kept going, the students seemed to pay more attention to whether the context made sense and was rational instead of to the cultural authenticity of the story and illustrations. We were curious about how students would respond to the book if they thought through the book by themselves, without our suppport. Therefore, Yi-Jun did a picture walk of the book after the discussion, and asked students to write a journal entry responding to the book. However, most of

the journals still showed that they focused on the rationality of the story instead of the cultural authenticity. Here are some of their responses:

- There should be no modern stuff in ancient China. (4 entries)

- There was no scooter in ancient China. (8 entries)

- The big sister should ride a bicycle or three-wheel bicycle instead of a scooter. (2 entries)

- The way the sisters dressed does not fit the modern society if it is a story for the modern world. (1 entry)

From the journals, we found that most students responded positively when Yi-Jun asked if they liked the story. Wei-Ling, Pei-Shien and Yi-Je said, “It is a good book since every one in the story uses their full talents.” Ting-Gan said, “I like that they worked together to rescue their youngest sister, and they help each other and work together. “ Chien-Yi said, “I like this story although somethings are nonsense in the story to Chinese. However, as a story, it is reasonable. Basically, it is a good story.”

At first, Wenyun wondered why students seemed to focus on the rationality of the story instead of cultural authenticity, which is what she expected them to explore. After reflection on the content of the curriculum, she realized that their responses probably reflected the national curriculum, which does not support third graders with knowledge about Chinese culture. No wonder students focused their responses on what made sense within the story. Still, there were two students who chose to write to the author as their reflection. Their letters demonstrate that they were aware that some parts of the story are not culturally authentic.

Dear author,

How are you?

We read your book "The Seven Chinese Sisters" today in class. I think the book is well organized because you introduce the sisters' talents in the beginning and then you create opportunities for them to demonstrate their talents in the later parts of the story.

However, there are a couple of parts in the story which are not reasonable. Did you do that on purpose or because you did not pay attention? For example, Chinese don't put napkins on the table when they are eating. Besides, according to Chinese tradition, the dragon would take something back if his food was taken. More important, our dragon would never sit on the floor and cry. Those are some things I don't understand in your story.

Wishing you peace and health

Your reader

Lee, Guo-Hau

Dear author

How are you?

I think your book "The Seven Chinese Sisters" is interesting. You make each character with talents. However, the talents of seven sisters should be more in Chinese talents so that children in foreign countries could be clear about that. When you write about a Chinese dragon, you should make him behave more dominate instead of timid. In the kitchen, you should draw Chinese cooking on the stove instead of the oven; or, if you still want to draw an oven, you should not draw an oven in that foreign-country style. Besides, traditionally when Chinese have dinner or lunch, we don't use napkins.

I hope you will modify the improper parts of this story when you publish the book next time. I hope your book sells well.

Guo, Shian-Ting

Ji-Mei Elemtary School

Teachers are often impressed by the creative ways in which students think, but they may not realize the potential for students to also think critically about issues in books, primarily because students

are seldom given the chance to share their critical perspectives. Actually, many teachers themselves are not critical thinkers. Growing up in the Chinese culture where books and written texts are highly respected and considered a final authority, teachers as well as students are not encouraged to challenge the books, especially learning materials such as textbooks and children's books. This classroom story demonstrates that children can challenge the text if given the opportunity. Through responding to books about their culture, children can explore their cultural knowledge and also have a sense of how people of other cultures perceive their culture. Talking about global literature provides a way to explore one's own and other's cultures.

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Creating a School Culture of Respect and Appreciation

by Sabina Mosso-Taylor

The Spears Creek Road Child Development Program is located in Columbia, South Carolina. The program serves 260 three-, four, and five-year-old children in thirteen classrooms scattered throughout the district in nine elementary schools. Five of the thirteen classrooms operate as a Montessori Magnet within the Spears Creek Child Development Program. One teacher and two assistants, one-full time and one part-time, work with twenty students in each classroom. We are a tuition-based program for three- and four-year-olds, but accept vouchers for families who qualify. There is no charge for kindergarten students, providing socioeconomic diversity.

Our Program Philosophy and Faculty

We respect each and every child as a unique and dynamic being; therefore, to best meet the needs of our children, variety, quality, and relevance are the cornerstones of our program. Cognizant that all aspects of development are interwoven, the learning environment is designed to foster and sustain intellectual, social, personal, emotional, physical and creative growth simultaneously. To promote such growth, we strive to maintain a program that is child-centered and experienced-based. We believe that teachers serve as guides and facilitators of learning and provide essential sensory, perceptual motor experiences for each individual child.

Our conviction is that a comprehensive, sound early childhood curriculum enables each child to:

•Continue to foster a positive literate identity.

•Grow in ability to relate, interact, and communicate effectively with peers and adults.

•Acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for critical thinking, creative expression, and productivity in an ever changing world.

We respect the role and the rights of parents and families in their children's learning, and seek a cooperative home-school relationship. We endeavor to create and sustain an atmosphere of welcome to encourage families to contribute to and to benefit from our program.

All teachers are certified in early childhood education and have the minimum of a Bachelor's degree in early childhood. Many hold Master's degrees and some have National Board Certification. Our faculty is fairly homogeneous - one female teacher is a person of color, one is a White male, and all others are White female teachers. Our students, on the other hand, are very diverse. Approximately 59% of students are children of color. Our teaching assistants are also diverse and are a valuable part of our program.

A Glimpse into Our School

As the lead teacher of the Spears Creek Road Child Development program I often visit classrooms and spend time with the students getting to know a little bit about them, who they are and what they like, as much as possible with 260 students. Occasionally, I am asked to help out in the classrooms. One day as I assisted Mrs. Frierson, and her sensational class of three- , four- and five-year-olds, we decided to go outdoors to read since the weather was especially beautiful. The students asked me to read *A Pocketful of Kisses* by Audrey Penn (2004), the story is of a young raccoon, Chester, and his woodland friends. As I began reading, I came to a picture of a snake in the book, and Mason, one of the older students, shouted, "Hey, how do you say that in Spanish?" Knowing only a little Spanish, I said, "You know, I am not sure." Mason immediately turned to Pedro, a bilingual Spanish/English student, and asked, "Pedro, how do you say snake in Spanish?" Without hesitation Pedro responded, "serpiente." The students and I repeated the word, with Pedro taking the lead. As I read further, this interaction continued throughout the story. The students came across other animals, such as a mouse and rabbit, with Pedro providing the Spanish translations, "ratón" and "conejo." Pedro and I took turns taking the lead, as the students looked to him for translations for the animal names as I read aloud from the book. Pedro never appeared to be surprised by the requests, always proudly offering translations.

Valuing All Literacies

This scenario is one small example of how children in our program value each others' languages and cultures. As I later relayed this story to Pedro's mom, we laughed as we reminisced about the once quiet little boy who entered school the previous year at three-years of age, not so interested in speaking Spanish at school. How he had grown! As the administrator of the program, I feel that these engagements are not only important, but our obligation to students and their families. Interactions such as these serve to create a culture of learning inclusive of all ways of knowing and being. This is particularly true for supporting children's language learning in school. Our program consists of many students from bilingual homes, including Korean, Japanese, Tamil, Telegru, Spanish and Russian. Therefore, it is critically important that the teachers in our program value students' home language in their classrooms while they simultaneously learn English or any other language (Nieto, 2008; Valdés, 2001).

Students also need to see, as much as possible, faculty and staff who are representative of their cultures and who, whenever possible, speak the students' languages. We are fortunate to have wonderful assistants such as Señora Heron, who speaks predominately Spanish to the students and who helps to support the Spanish-speaking students in our program. She also serves as our Spanish teacher, teaching Spanish to each of the thirteen classrooms for 30 minutes a week. Another valuable teacher's assistant is Mrs. Samanthapudi, who speaks Telegru. One of her students, Nidhi, is from India and speaks Telegru. Mrs. Samanthapudi converses with Nidhi at school and is able to greet and speak with her family in their native language.

Family and Community Support of Curriculum

Some parents in our program have come to their children's classrooms to teach their home languages, such as Russian or Tamil, share interesting facts and stories, and teach students about the things that are important to their family. In these situations, teachers and students are learners, learning from and with families. Family knowledge is placed at the forefront of the curriculum in our school, providing opportunities for voices to be heard who may have been previously silenced, underrepresented, or misrepresented. Parents and teachers work together to ensure that children see themselves, their families, and their community represented in the curriculum and materials in the classroom. For example, family pictures adorn the classroom shelves, book cases, and walls; language and literature in students' native languages are available in reading and writing areas; and parents are encouraged to create labels for the room, read books on tape for the listening center, and share printed material such as magazines and books for the reading center.

Figure 1.Vedha's mom, Mrs. Avali, teaching Tamil to Mrs. Curtis' class

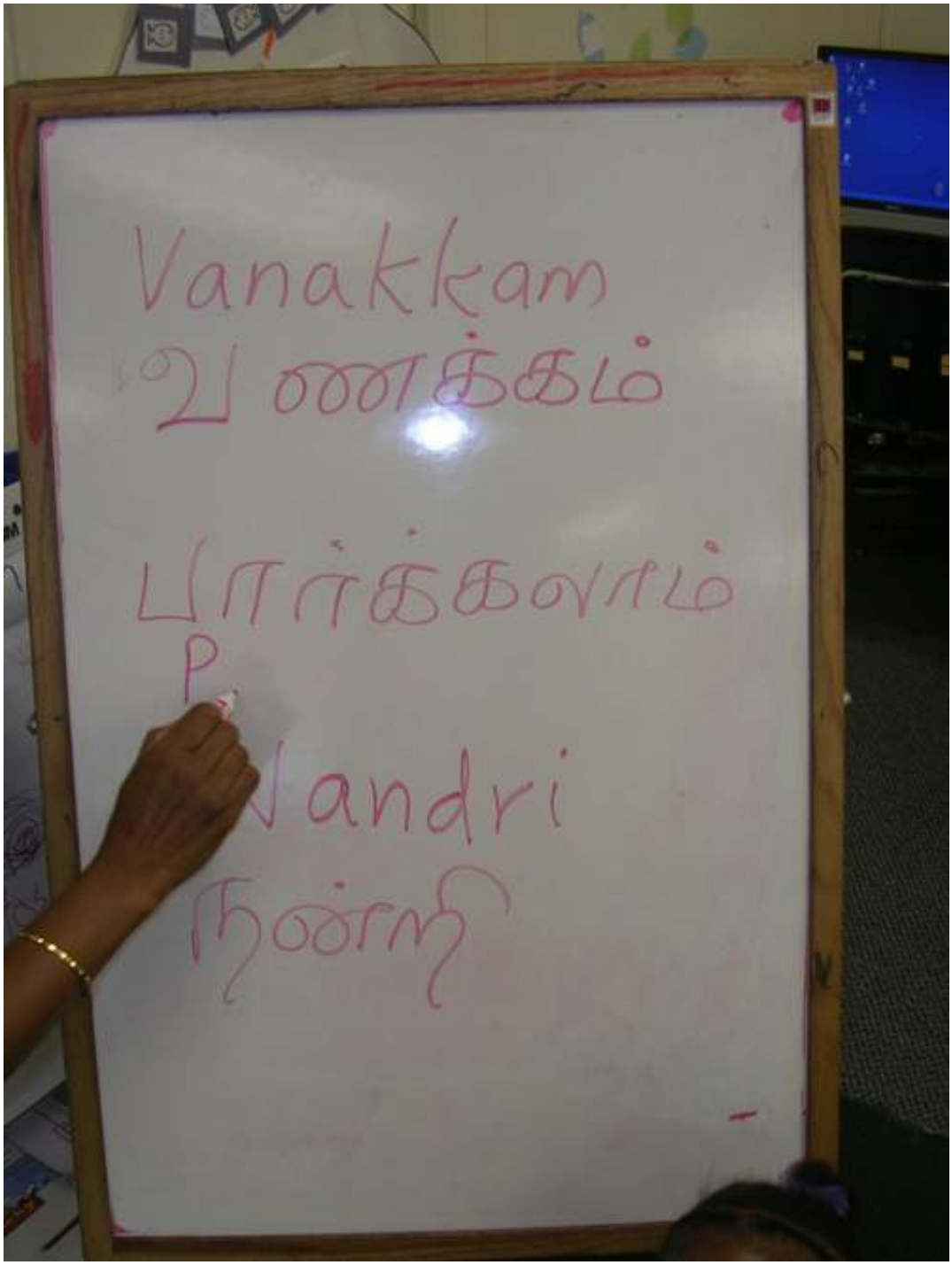

Figure 2.Vedha's mom, Mrs. Avali, teaching Tamil to Mrs. Curtis' class

Students' parents and family members are valuable resources for our school. Further examples are the exciting interactions happening particularly in Mrs. Frierson's classroom. Dr. Julia López-Robertson, also known as, "Pedro's mom," visits the class once a week to read Spanish literature. She has Mrs. Frierson's class enamored with Señor Calavera from the Yuyi Morales' books. Julia is a professor at the University of South Carolina and serves in a community role as a University instructor. She teaches her language and literacy class on our school's campus and her 25 students, or *Amiguitos*, engage in one-on-one interactions with the students in our program. This partnership further serves to support our students' literate identities.

Our Role as Educators and Leader

Understanding our role as educators in the support of students' identity development is of particular interest to me as an administrator and is one that we all take seriously in our program. For that reason, professional development is a key to staying abreast of the literature and research in the areas of diversity, language marginalization, and identity development. As Neito and Bode (2008) suggest, teaching students about diversity has to be more than teaching about piñatas and tacos; there has to be a sincere commitment from all involved to provide all students with a more inclusive understanding of the world around them. All too often, teachers are left alone to create this kind of environment for students, or fight an uphill battle with administrators who may not share the same sense of urgency. Our program differs in that the school culture is created and sustained by the administrator, faculty, staff and parents who believe that these interactions between and among students, families, teachers and administrators are not only valued but must exist for everyone to truly learn.

Conclusion

I am in awe and thankful for our richly diverse students and their families, because they enrich our program and our lives in so many ways. I appreciate and respect my faculty and staff for seeing the need to go beyond what has been traditionally valued in schools to embrace all ways of knowing, including the various languages and literacies in our students' worlds, and to further explore their own biases and stereotypes as they seek to understand others. Although we are far from perfect, we are constantly striving to work to be better for our students and their families. Through parent, family and community involvement and teachers' continued actions in supporting students and their families in their classrooms, I have renewed confidence in myself as a leader, that together we can make our program one that we - students, families, faculty and staff- can be proud of. A place where all can proclaim-This is OUR school!

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The Real Princesses

by Tammy Y. Spann Frierson

I often refer to my class as the *Sensations*; a beautiful eclectic group of ten boys and ten girls who thirst for learning new things. I have eight Caucasian students, eight African American students, one Latino student, two Asian students, and one biracial student. The class is a multiage setting with seven three year olds, seven four year olds, and six kindergarteners.

At times I read popular children's stories without showing students the pictures. I also read various picture-less chapter books to my students. I consider both of these techniques a form of storytelling. I do this to allow them to create their own images of the characters of the stories. Since there was a major buzz in the air about the December release of the movie, The *Princess and the Frog*, I asked students bring in their favorite princess or prince story for me to read to the class.

What makes a princess?

I was familiar with the four books that students brought in for us to read and to discuss the similarities and difference in the stories. I placed three of the books on the board and began reading the first story, a Disney version of Cinderella brought in by an African American girl. I placed the book inside a manila folder as I read so the students didn't see the cover of the book. Then, I read the other three books: *The Little Mermaid* based on the Disney movie (provided by an African American girl), *Aida* by Leontyne Price (provided by a Korean girl), and *Mulan* based on the Disney movie (provided by a Caucasian girl). None of the students brought in any books about a prince. After I finished the stories, I asked the students to help me make a list of the characteristics of a princess. The list consisted of the following words: nice, kind, pretty, a girl, smart, happy, a friend, beautiful, and a lady. After the class was satisfied that the list was complete, I added 'a princess is a helper to her friends and tries her best at everything she does.' I then asked the students how many princesses we had in our class. In my mind the students would count the ten girls in the class and we would move on to the similarities and differences activity I had planned. To my surprise one of my four year-old students named Maris (all names are pseudonyms), immediately pointed to a Caucasian girl with blonde hair named Lily.

I asked Lily to stand up and join me in front of the class. I complimented her on her beauty and went over the list of characteristics we had created. Lily met the requirements. I then asked an

African American, Korean, and Indian girl to join us and we continued my princess characteristic check. They too met all the requirements. Maris agreed they were all beautiful, but insisted only Lily could be a real princess. I asked her why Lily was the only real princess and she responded, "Lily is white and she has long yellow hair like a princess." I told Maris that she was everything we had listed as a characteristic of a princess and asked her if she felt like she could be a princess. She replied, "No." When I asked, "why not," Maris said, "I don't have pretty long yellow hair, my hair is not like hers and I'm brown not white either……Lily is pretty like a princess." I was shocked. I decided to abandon my planned activity and have a mini focus group discussion about beauty and the varying appearances of princesses. The boys went on to another activity as I noticed their interest level was waning and they had not made stereotypic comments. I decided that if my girls developed a positive self image of themselves as *royalty* the boys could develop a broader understanding of princesses by observing their female classmates.

'Googling' for Real Princesses

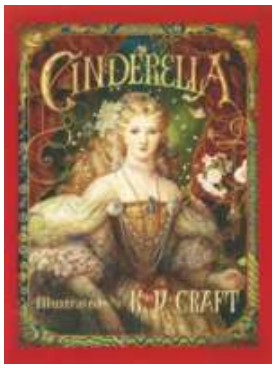
The girls and I sat down and looked at the princesses in the books they had brought from home. I desperately wished I had more books to read with them that would depict the many princesses from around the world who looked different from those featured in the classic Walt Disney genre of books and movies. I decided to gather the girls around the computer and test my skills at googling. I found lots of photos of real beautiful princesses. They were as diverse as the countries they represented, including Dutch Princess Maxima, Princess Siriwanwaree from Thailand, Princess Letizia of Spain, Princess Rania of Jordan, and several others from around the world. I asked the girls to draw pictures of themselves as princesses, while I quickly cut and pasted the photographs in a quick PowerPoint. After about ten minutes I gathered the girls back around me like a mother hen trying to impart some defining lesson about life. It's not uncommon for me to change my direction with a lesson if the students (or I) have one of those "Aha" moments that lead to new understandings of the chaotic world around them and their place in it. This was one of those situations for me.

Before I showed them my PowerPoint I asked them to tell me what princesses have that we don't have. Their list included, "a big castle, they're beautiful, they have a lot of friends, candy, pretty clothes, a prince, money, toys, and they can do anything." I told them I wanted to show them photographs of real princesses. They were thrilled. They looked at the photos, which did not include any of the Disney princesses, and then asked me where the princesses were. I know it should not have surprised me but I was floored. I kept hearing the phrase echoing in my head that many of my girls were not beautiful if they weren't white with blonde hair and blue eyes. Their standard of a princess mirrored society's standard for beauty. When they told me what a princess has that we don't have, I was sad to realize that the "good stuff" in life was reserved for the people who looked a certain way. The reality was that, through the eyes of my girls, only Lily could ever be

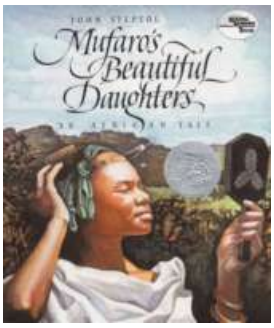
beautiful and live the life of a princess. More importantly, I was concerned about their inability to see themselves as beautiful and valuable at the ages of three, four, five, and six. How would they ever see their true worth if they physically don't meet the standards that they had accepted from society?

I encouraged the girls and their families to go to see the movie, *The Princess and the Frog*, during the opening weekend and everybody went as did my family. I couldn't wait to have another discussion with the girls about the princess factor in the movie. On Monday one of my girls wore a Princess and the Frog shirt that provided a perfect transition into a discussion about Princess Tiana, the movie princess, and Cinderella.

Real princesses in the classroom



I read aloud the classic Disney version again in addition to *Cinderella* by K.Y. Craft (2000), *Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story from China* by Ai-Ling Louis (1996), *The Persian Cinderella* by Shirley Climo (1999), *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* by John Steptoe (1987), and *The Golden Sandal: A Middle Eastern Cinderella Story* by Rebecca Hickox (1999). The girls were clearly interested in the nontraditional princess books. I also checked out several other princess books from various cultures from the library.



I also updated my slideshow and added each girl's photo, placing a tiara from clipart on their heads. I decided to insert a slide before each girl that included an introduction, saying "Here is Princess [the girls name]. She is nice, kind, pretty, a girl, smart, happy, a friend, a young lady, a helper to all people. She can have and do anything she sets her mind to. She has beautiful hair, beautiful skin, and SHE IS A BEAUTIFUL PRINCESS!" I read this introduction before each girl's photo, and each time they sat silent and eager. When I called out their names, they smiled as though it was the first time they had heard their names as princesses. When the slideshow ended, they asked me to play and read it again. This was truly a rich moment for me. I saw their pride when they heard their names and saw their faces. They felt like the princesses they are.

In closing

When we went on to look at the similarities and differences between Tiana and Cinderella, the girls stated the obvious about the physical differences between the characters, but this time they identified Tiana as a *real princess*. I realized that the biased interpretations of beauty and literature in the media had played a role in the development of their understandings of self though the images projected in books and film. This realization made me aware of my responsibility to

encourage students to define themselves and others around them through personal interactions, not media perceptions.

I will definitely revisit the topic of princesses again. I will never again take the interest in princesses among my students as a simple happily ever after fairytale subject that has no impact on a girl's ability or inability to have dreams that really can come true. I will approach it with a diverse collection of literature, photos, and media clips that shows the wide variety of royal princesses from around the world before beginning our discussion about the similarities and differences among the princesses. We can study the world by looking at the people, customs, landforms, and weather of the homelands of various princesses.

I do want to continue my strategy of reading aloud and sometimes hiding the work of illustrators when I share stories with my students. I think it might help them understand that their potential for dreaming, loving, and living can never be defined by others' interpretations of beauty, intelligence, or success. Those understandings should come from the amazing pictures of life that they are painting for themselves.

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Learning Language through Stories and Songs in a Multiage Preschool Classroom

by Julia López-Robertson

"Today is bridge day!"
"I know what you have in the fish bag!"
"Oooh, I see the fish bag!"
"Today is singing day! I see the abejita!"
"¿Mami, vamos a cantar hoy? ¡Yo sé que sí, yo vi la bolsa!" [Mami, are we going to sing today? I know we are. I saw the bag!"]

These excited questions and comments are from three to five year olds in Mrs. Frierson's multiage Montessori classroom at the Spears Creek Road Child Development Center in Columbia, South Carolina. I have been with the children for almost two years during the time my son has been in this classroom, and I can usually be found reading and singing with them on Friday mornings.

The children's comments indicate that they know what is inside the 'fish bag' and what happens when I bring the bag to school. The bridge that they mention refers to a song by José Luis Orozco, La vibora de la mar, which I have on a CD inside an abejita/bee CD case in my tote bag which is decorated with colorful fish. During my time with the children, we read a variety of books, sing songs, and practice finger plays in Spanish. I have shared Spanish children's songs, books translated into Spanish (i.e. *El conejito Knuffle/Knuffle Bunny*) and Latino children's literature by Latino authors and/or illustrators. I have chosen to do this in Spanish so that children,

- Recognize the value in being bilingual.

- See that Spanish has a place in school.

•Learn about other cultures and languages.

•Share my love of children's literature in general and Latino literature in particular.

•Experience the beauty of the Spanish language and Latino culture to plant a seed for an interest in (or life-long love) of languages and cultures.

My read alouds and songs are based on a sociocultural view of literacy where children are active participants in their learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The children are encouraged to "explore their understandings and use language for making meaning" through approximations, rather than to produce the 'right' answer (Freeman & Freeman, 2004, p. 9). The children are not yet proficient in the target language, but in the process of learning more Spanish they play with the language and express their ideas in a variety of ways (Freeman & Freeman, 2004). Their ideas and approximations are always celebrated.

There are twenty children, ten boys and ten girls; six kindergarteners, seven four year olds and seven three year olds. Of the twenty children in the classroom one child is Latino, one is African American and Latina, one is from India, one is Asian, eight children are African American and eight are White. The languages represented in the classroom are English, Spanish, and Tamil. While the diversity found in this classroom is representative of the population in South Carolina, it is rare for diversity to be so well represented in most South Carolina schools.

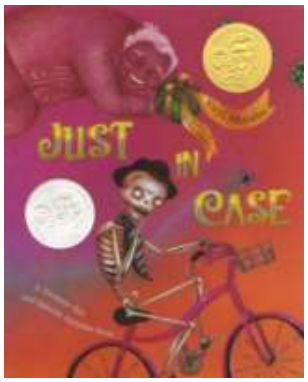
The children are fortunate to have wonderful and caring teachers with them all day. Tammy Frierson is the primary teacher, Mary Robinson is the full time Teaching Assistant, Colleen Moffatt is the afternoon teaching assistant and Rocio Herron is the morning teaching assistant and the Spanish teacher. Sra. Herron is a native of Costa Rica and shares her language and culture with the children daily on an informal basis and once a week more formally during her scheduled Spanish lesson.

Sra. Herron's lessons connect with other areas of the curriculum which affords the children the opportunity to make connections across the day. For example, the children had been learning and talking about colors for a few weeks and were aware of the color words in both English and Spanish. One Friday, while I was reading *La semana de Cookie /Cookie's Week* (Ward and dePaola, 1988) the children immediately shouted, "Cookie is a negro gato" [Cookie is a black cat]. As we continued to read the book each time Cookie appeared the children commented 'negro gato.' I took this teachable moment to explain the differences between the Spanish and English languages

when it comes to adjective placement (in Spanish the adjective follows the noun) and before I could provide an example, one of the children added, “Oh, so this is how you say it--Cookie is a gato negro.”

Reading with the children: It’s all about Señor Calavera and ‘el gato’

We have read and enjoyed many books and one of the children’s favorite authors (who happens to be one of mine too) is Latina author/illustrator Yuyi Morales. We’ve read and talked about all of Yuyi’s books, but decided to take a closer look at two of her books and engage in a mini author inquiry. We focused our inquiry on *Just a Minute: A Trickster Tale and Counting Book* (2003) and *Just In Case: A Trickster Tale and Spanish Alphabet Book* (2008). These books tell the adventures of Señor Calavera. The children absolutely love them and are mesmerized by Señor Calavera.



Before reading *Just In Case: A Trickster Tale and Spanish Alphabet Book*, I asked the children to look at the cover and tell me what they thought the book might be about. Almost all of them commented on the ‘cute cat’ on the front cover and some guessed that there was a party because ‘she is decorating the cake.’ One of the children said “It’s a counting book,” and I asked her how she knew this. Her response was, “I read it.” One of the children pointed to Señor Calavera on the cover and shouted, “Who is that?” My son, who had already read the book, said, in a matter of fact manner, “Oh, that’s Señor Calavera. He is Grandma Beetle’s friend.” Now the focus shifted from the cake and words on the cover to Señor Calavera. Additional comments were shared about Señor Calavera’s big watch, his pretty hat, his long fingers, and then a child shouted, “He is a skeleton and it isn’t even Halloween!” With the turning of each page, children made more comments about Señor Calavera--“Look he is drinking. Where is it [the drink] going? He can’t keep it in.” “He has big teeth.” “He looks worried.”

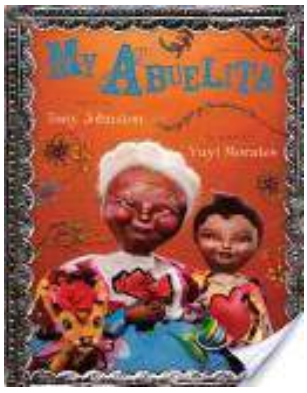
As I read, the children caught on quickly to the pattern of Grandma Beetle saying “Just a minute, Señor Calavera, I will go with you right away, I have just…” and usually said it before I even had a chance to turn the page. “Wow, he is a good waiter,” one of the children commented, referring to the patience Señor Calavera shows while waiting for Grandma Beetle. As we continued to read the children remained focused on the brilliant and lively illustrations and then all of sudden someone yelled, “Pedro’s mommy, there is a little black cat on each page!” As soon as this comment was made, the children called for me to go back to the beginning of the book to see if there was a cat on each page.

While searching the page for the cat one of the children shared very excitedly, “I know, Yuyi

Morales made a game for us. A game of hide and go seek with the gato!" The children all agreed that the author had purposely hidden the cat on each page for the children to have "extra fun while reading the book." One of the younger children commented, "She hided the cat on every page for us to find."

We continued reading and searching and each time as I turned the page they would yell, "I see the cat!" "Yeah, I see a gato". "¡El gato! ¡El gato! I see the gato!" We were about half way through the book when a child said, "Wait, I have seen this cat before. We read a book about a little cat that looks like this one." "Yeah, the gato that gets into trouble!" The others chimed in and agreed that we had seen this cat in another book. I shared with the children that I had absolutely no idea what cat or book they were talking about. I think that they were getting frustrated with me because as they continued explaining the gato to me, I still had no idea what they were talking about, until the last few comments. "You know the cat in the toilet!" "It's Cookie! Cookie, the cat that spills water and makes a mess! You broughted that book last time!" Finally, I caught on and they were so right! Cookie, the main character in *La semana de Cookie* does look a lot like this little gato.

The children continued to look, listen, and talk while we read. They were intent on finding the gato on each page. Just when it seemed that the gato talk had lost interest, one of the children shared, "It's not the same *gato* you know. We asked Yuyi Morales and she told us that her *gato* is named Frida, like Frida Kahlo, and this other cat is named Cookie so it's not her cat. It's not the same gato." A few weeks prior to this discussion, Yuyi Morales had participated in a blog (wowlit.org) and answered questions and comments sent by the children. One comment from a child was about the cat: "I like your cat. I know her name is Frida because I saw the *My Abuelita* movie." Yuyi replied, "Thank you for liking my cat. Yes, the cat in my abuelita's book is Frida. You can see some more pictures of Frida on Abuelita's Webpage www.yuyimorales.com/my_abuelita/abuelita.html."



We visited the webpage and found some cute pictures of Frida. This discovery led the children to wonder why the gato in *Just A Minute!: A Trickster Tale And Counting Book* (2003) and *Just In Case: A Trickster Tale And Spanish Alphabet Book* (2008) does not look like the gato in *My Abuelita* (Johnston, 2009) but more like the gato in *Cookie's Week*. After a few minutes a child simply said, "She [Yuyi Morales] is the writer and drawer and she can do what she wants with her books." The comment seemed to satisfy everyone and the discussion ended.

Singing with the children: Cho-co-la-te

When I was growing up, my mamá always made *chocolate* [hot chocolate] on cold winter days; it was so delicious and warmed me up on the inside and out. I wanted to share a bit about my culture

with the children so after a few weeks of singing *Cho-co-la-te* (Orozco, 1994), I told the children that we were going to make chocolate. They were so excited. I explained that my chocolate was probably different from the hot chocolate that they were used to drinking; the difference being that mine is made from chunks of chocolate and most of what they made and drank came from powder or syrup.

Chocolate day came and they were ready and excited. After heating up the milk, we cut the bars of chocolate, placed them in the pitcher and then each child took a turn stirring while we sang our song.

Cho-co-la-te
Uno, dos, tres, CHO (clap)
Uno, dos, tres CO (clap)
Uno, dos, tres, LA (clap)
Uno, dos, tres, TE (clap)
CHOCOLATE, CHOCOLATE,Bate [stir], Bate [stir], CHOCOLATE

Closing thoughts

Napoli (2003) believes that “second language learning is more successful when richly interactive language is used in the classroom” (p.19). The read alouds and songs that we engage in on weekly basis support the children’s growing development of a sense of story while also engaging them in actively learning an additional language, Spanish. During their Spanish lessons with Sra. Herron and during my read alouds and songs, the children know that in order to fully participate in the lessons and gain the most from them, they must use Spanish.

The young children in this classroom are learning the value of being bilingual while becoming bilingual and in some cases multilingual; they use Spanish on a daily basis with their teachers, peers, families, and with me and are developing the “ability to understand and produce language because language is essential for social interaction” (Freeman & Freeman, 2004, p.8). The children are learning Spanish because it is such an embedded part of their daily classroom life and because their teachers value their learning of an additional language.

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