Volume I, Issue 2

Opening the World through Literature

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

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

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

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

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

Kathy G. Short, Editor

Creating a Vision of Possibility as Professional Learners

by Lisa Thomas, Instructional Coach, Van Horne Elementary School

The district states that my responsibility as an instructional coach is to facilitate the implementation of state and district initiatives and to build teacher capacity for effective instruction by establishing professional learning communities within our school. While the district has trained instructional coaches in a range of prescribed professional development protocols, the ways in which we each go about our work has largely been left up to us and our principals, and so the job looks a little different at each school. Our monthly meetings provide much needed chances to talk together about our developing roles within our schools and to share the ways that we are going
Month after month, I struggle to describe the work that we are doing at Van Horne. If I say that we meet to reflect and plan after school, they assume we’ve created Critical Friends Groups (Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000). If I tell them that I teach children while teachers observe, they envision Demonstration Lessons (Sweeney, 2003). When I share that we meet to analyze student work, they label it Data Drive Dialogue (Wellman & Lipton, 2004). Some wonder how I hold teachers accountable for the implementation of new ideas if I don’t schedule classroom observations followed by Learning Focused Conversations (Lipton & Wellman, 2003). I struggle with helping others understand that, while our work connects in structure and purpose to these professional development protocols, it is very different. And yet I know that our work has been responsible for significant changes in what we all understand and do in classrooms and in the way we view ourselves as professionals.

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

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

The participation framework that supports our investigations into teaching and learning is organized around three contexts: the Learning Lab, the study group, and the classroom. Our Learning Lab is a classroom setting that I established where each teacher and class of students visit once a week. Our after-work study group is an opportunity for us as educators to reflect on and plan for Learning Lab experiences and to study professional literature related to these experiences. Teachers explore the ideas that are introduced in the lab and discussed in the study group within their own classrooms in a variety of ways depending on each teacher’s instructional goals. Permeating all three contexts is our stance as action researchers engaged in intentional, systematic inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990).
The regular participants in our project include classroom teachers and students from all grade levels, an interested teacher from another school, our principal, our school counselor, our arts integration specialist, Kathy, and me. Participation in our project is voluntary, but teachers who want to bring their kids to the lab must also be willing to come to the study group, which takes place after contract time. Our teachers are very busy people with demanding personal responsibilities, but every year nearly every teacher chooses to be involved.

The Learning Lab

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

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

When teachers were asked to share their impressions of the Learning Lab, many talked about how much they valued the opportunity to watch their kids. They appreciated the insights that came from the freedom to study their students as they were engaged in learning over time. Teachers are often too busy when they are teaching to take field notes and focus in-depth on particular students.
My role in the lab is as a co-learner. Because the lessons grow out of our study group, they are new to all of us. I don’t possess the expertise to be a model for others, even if I believed that modeling was an effective form of professional development. I’m just willing to jump in and try things out first. I make a lot of mistakes, but teachers don’t expect perfection and I believe that my willingness to take this chance helps to foster a school wide culture that encourages the kind of risk taking critical to meaningful professional growth.

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

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

Our Learning Lab provides a connected learning experience within a particular inquiry that goes across classes and grade levels throughout the school. The weekly content and response engagements are similar for all students, but we make modifications so they make sense for
learners of different ages. We initially planned these common experiences to support shared dialogue about the work during study group. What has been unexpected, however, is the way that this common lab curriculum has created a strong sense of community and connectedness within the school. The shared language, literature, and learning across classrooms bring us together as a school community. Teachers love knowing that their new groups of students each year have participated in these experiences. This shared history connects teachers to one another and to all of the children in the school.

The Study Group

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

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

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

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

**Action Research**

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

References


Practice Makes Perfect in Our Community of Practice

by Amy Edwards, Fifth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I have previously been part of a professional development program that included a fabulous year of training outside the classroom run by gifted presenters. While they used wonderful examples of how to implement these ideas in our classrooms, there was one problem. I was expected to bring this information back to my staff using the Trainer of Trainers method. It was a disaster. There was not enough time for me to feel proficient enough to present this new information to my colleagues without having time to first try it out with students. Even with a couple of demonstrations with students, I didn’t feel proficient enough to explain the instructional strategies in depth. The presenters went to great lengths to have us outline when and where we were going to present this information to our staff in professional development settings. My learning was decontextualized and not part of a community of practice. It was not based on experiential learning or legitimate peripheral participation that would have allowed me to get comfortable with the methods or materials being taught. I was supposed to watch the presenters and then do it back at my school, nevermind thinking critically about it or trying to put it into a context. The Trainer of Trainers method left me feeling frustrated and like I just didn’t get it.
One of the biggest benefits of working within Van Horne’s community of practice is the support we receive from one another. Not only are we supported by our administration, but also by other teachers, our facilitator, Lisa Thomas, and Kathy Short, a researcher from the University of Arizona. We have a certain amount of accountability and responsibility to each other due to the learning we and our students are experiencing, but also our sense of contributing to the field through our research. No one wants to be absent or have a schedule conflict on Thursdays because that’s the day Kathy is in the lab and study group.

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

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

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

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

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

Each member of our faculty strives to connect curriculum that is being explored or discussed in the lab to their classrooms. It could be as simple as reading aloud a related book in the classroom or as complicated as rearranging reading groups to facilitate concurrent discussions. Teachers may develop their own engagements to explore conceptual thinking in ways that go beyond the work in
the lab. Always students are encouraged to construct their own meaning by synthesizing, analyzing, or evaluating while working in small or large groups in co-participation with each other. Students as well as teachers belong to a democratic community of practice. They are learning by being immersed in the situation or experience in their classrooms, the lab, or their OMA classes.

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

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

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

References


Exploring a Curriculum that is International

by Kathy G. Short, Professor, University of Arizona

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

This vision of opening the world through literature remains an elusive goal in many classrooms. Even though international books are increasingly available in the United States, many educators are not familiar with the books and are uncertain about their cultural authenticity. They are often unsure about how to use the books since many contain unfamiliar stylistic devices and terminology.
and are about experiences and settings that, at first glance, seem removed from their students’ lives. They struggle with how to help students make significant connections to move their responses beyond viewing other cultures as exotic or strange. Many unwittingly adopt strategies that are tangential, or even in opposition, to the goals of global education, through, for example, focusing on “we-they” dualisms or superficial features of cultural lifestyles that reinforce stereotypical perceptions. Simply reading more about the world can actually negatively influence the development of intercultural understanding.

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

**Teaching for Intercultural Understanding**

Teaching for intercultural understanding involves far more than lessons on human relations and sensitivity training or adding a book or unit about a country into the existing curriculum. These approaches typically lead to superficial appreciations of cultural differences that reinforce stereotypes, instead of creating new understandings about cultural perspectives and global issues.

Interculturalism is an attitude of mind, an orientation that pervades thinking and permeates the curriculum. It is based on a broad understanding of culture as ways of living and being in the world that are designs for acting, believing, and valuing. Geertz (1973) defines culture as "the shared patterns that set the tone, character and quality of people's lives" (p. 216). These patterns include language, religion, gender, relationships, class, ethnicity, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, family structures, nationality, and rural/suburban/urban communities, as well as the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives held by a group of people.

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

Key scholars in intercultural education (Allan, 2003; Fennes & Hapgood, 1997; Hofstede, 1991) as
well as global education (Begler, 1996; Case, 1991) inform our definition of intercultural understanding as an orientation in which learners:

- Explore their cultural identities and develop conceptual understandings of culture.
- Develop an awareness and respect for different cultural perspectives as well as the commonality of human experience.
- Examine issues that have personal, local and global relevance and significance.
- Value the diversity of cultures and perspectives within the world.
- Demonstrate a responsibility and commitment to making a difference to, and in, the world.
- Develop an inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring perspective on taking action to create a better and more just world.

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

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

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

Literature can encourage students to focus on themselves as cultural beings in order to go beyond the typical “Who am I?” activities. We read aloud and discuss picture books in which the characters struggle with their identities, such as You Be Me and I’ll Be You (Mandelbaum, 1990) and Cooper’s Lesson (Shin, 2004). Students have responded to these books by exploring their cultural identities in different ways, such as drawing memory maps of their neighborhoods to identify stories from when they were “little” and mapping significant events in their lives on Life Journey Maps. They also created Cultural X-Rays in which they labeled the outside of their bodies with aspects of their culture that are evident to others, such as language, age, ethnicity, gender, and religion, and the inside with the values and beliefs that they hold in their hearts. These Cultural X-Rays were created by students in Amy Edwards’ fifth grade classroom.
These engagements help students realize that their experiences within families and communities shape how they think and act. Multicultural books that reflect their own life experiences in the American Southwest are essential to building these understandings. We weave multicultural literature along with international books throughout our inquiries so that students recognize the commonalities in life experiences across diverse cultures as well as the unique aspects of these cultures.

**Cross-Cultural Studies**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We found that integrating literature from diverse cultures into student inquiries provides for a much wider range of perspectives on a particular theme or topic and so encourages more complexity in the issues that students consider. They cannot settle comfortably into the issues that are part of their own cultural perspective but are challenged to go beyond that world view. We have been able to locate global literature on various social and historical themes and topics but have
struggled with finding books from a range of global cultures on science and mathematical content. Those books appear to rarely be selected for translation and publication in North America.

Inquiries on Global Issues

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

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

We moved students beyond a discussion at the local level to the broader global issues through browsing books from many different parts of the world that were on a range of human rights issues, including *Aani and the Tree Huggers* (Atkins, 1995), *Brothers in Hope* (Williams, 2005), *Selavi* (Landowne, 2005) and *Friends from the Other Side* (Anzaldua, 1993). We also read aloud and discussed books such as *The Carpet Boy’s Gift* (Shea, 2006) to examine the strategies that children use to take action in their own contexts. In their classrooms, students engaged in range of inquiries that included discussions about literature related to particular human rights issues such
as child labor, gender inequity, undocumented immigrants, and homelessness based on their interests. Throughout these inquiries, students particularly noted the strategies characters used to take action and used these strategies to take action on some of the issues they identified in their own school context.

**Critically Reading the Word and the World**

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

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

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

**Final Reflections**

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

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

References

Conceptualization as a Way of Thinking in Schools

by Lisa Thomas, Instructional Coach, Van Horne Elementary School

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

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

We didn’t want to emphasize isolated elements of thinking (spending one week on synthesis, another on symbolic thinking) in a way that would move us away from the flexible coordination and collaboration of real thought. Nor did we want learners to be challenged occasionally and
randomly in “higher order thinking” through a series of pre-crafted, teacher created questions. We wanted this type of thinking to be connected, continuous, meaningful, and natural.

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

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

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

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

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

The concept of Journey became our “organizing idea; a mental construct that was timeless, universal, abstract and broad” (Erickson, 2002, p. 52). Throughout the semester, teachers and students engaged in experiences intended to help us conceptualize journey as a framework of thought to develop insights into our lives and our world. To support students in viewing journeys conceptually, we believed that we first had to develop an understanding as teachers and so met together in a retreat. Erickson (2002) asserts that “unless teachers consciously identify these
[conceptual] understandings, they focus on the fact-based content as the endpoint in instruction, and the conceptual level of understanding is usually not addressed” (p. 49). Teachers must have opportunities to construct these meanings themselves to understand the processes necessary to support students’ explorations. Our hope was that, as teachers, our interactions with students would shift as a result of our conceptual understanding.

**Developing Broad Conceptualization**

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

**Establishing a Touchstone Text**

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

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

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

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

Exploring Metaphor

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

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

*Gathering and Sorting Our Understandings*

Gathering examples of journeys across a large collection of books pushed us to think beyond our own experiences--to consider journeys literally and symbolically across many contexts. Kathy Short, a researcher from the University of Arizona, and I brought dozens of books to the teacher retreat where we identified multiple journeys in the stories. Some were obvious and literal, while others were more subtle and metaphorical. We individually browsed the collection, recording journeys that we noticed on sticky notes. When we came together we grouped our individual examples into broader categories. The labels for the categories didn’t exist at this point. We simply put our examples on charts next to the ideas of our colleagues if we saw a connection. When we were through, four broad categories and two sub-categories emerged: Types of Journeys (mental and physical), Pathways of Journeys, Milestones, and Results.
As we sorted, we were able to see multiple examples of journeys side by side, noticing what they had in common. These commonalities helped us begin to define the concept of journey. We started to think past the specifics of individual examples and to ask ourselves “What can we say is true about all journeys?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• We go on trips and come back.

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

• We go on a trip.

• First Christmas.

**Webbing and Categorizing Our Understandings**

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

When teachers completed the charts of examples of journeys gathered from the text sets, we worked together to create a web of journeys. The broad labels from our sorting experience naturally became the main categories on our web. As we added our individual ideas to the broad categories, we thought of other examples, ideas we had not found in the books and added them to our web. Because some of the new ideas didn’t fit well into the existing categories, we had to add new categories. The webbing process helped us expand, organize, define, and better understand the concept of journey broadly.
The older students were asked to work in small groups to create a web of the kinds of journeys that they saw on their life journey maps. To accomplish this, they need to think across their Life Journey Maps and create categories and connections.

![Image of a web diagram]

**Pulling Our Thinking Together through Defining**

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

- A journey is a movement along a physical, emotional, intellectual, social or spiritual pathway.
- A journey is a series of events that have a defined beginning and end that results in physical, intellectual, emotional, or spiritual change.
- A journey is movement made of connected events.
- An individual’s path created by mental, physical, and spiritual events that often become milestones, producing a blanket of life (results).

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

**Mapping to Conceptualize**

When we began using the term journey as a label for a range of events in the world, the older children easily grasped journey as a concept and could apply it abstractly. The younger children were eager to use the term, but called everything (the desk, their teacher) a journey, indicating that...
they weren’t yet thinking conceptually and needed more explicit support.

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

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

We read *No, I Want Daddy!* by Nadine Brun-Cosme (2004) and changed the shape of the box on the response map to a heart to symbolically highlight emotional journeys. The response map for *Stevie* by John Steptoe (1987) showed two heads connected by a pathway to highlight the process of change within a mental journey. Each map was designed to push the young children to think more flexibly and symbolically about journeys.
The mapping responses were open-ended, providing space for children to explore their own interpretations and thinking about the books, but they were more focused than what we would typically have used within the lab, in that they directed children’s attention to particular themes within the book. In this case, the responses were designed to expand and develop students’ conceptualizations about journeys. After several experiences with maps, we opened up the mapping responses so that children could show their thinking on their own and asked them to choose two books to compare through creating a map that made sense to them. These responses showed evidence of the concepts that they were exploring:

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

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

Symbolic Thinking

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

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

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

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

Complex thought is difficult to explain and almost impossible to explicitly teach. The group dynamics are powerful in helping learners to understand these nebulous ideas. Demonstrating and talking about the approximations made by some children provides pieces of meaning that we can
all use to construct understanding. Over time, students and teachers were more comfortable identifying big ideas within the stories that we read.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We used books to help students better understand these issues and to imagine ways of living beyond their own current lives. We gathered text sets about moving and picture books about refugees for read aloud discussions. We also had text sets for them to browse to help them explore
the geography and cultures of their new homes and to help them imagine the differences and necessary adjustments to their lives and world views. Packing a suitcase or backpack for the journey forced them to further consider what was of most value to them in their current lives and in what ways their lives might change in another place.

*Integrating Thinking through Synthesis*

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

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

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

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

To push students to move to synthesis, I demonstrated how I might choose an idea to develop in an essay. I took a “wide angle” look at the web and asked myself, “What do I most want to say about journeys?” I shared an idea that occurred to me and demonstrated writing multiple thesis statements to address this idea.
Students were asked to engage in this same process of thinking. They were encouraged to write multiple thesis statements and share their thinking with others at their tables.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Conclusion**

The thinking that learners can achieve is influenced by the experiences in which they engage, not through the type of questions to which teachers ask them to respond. If we continuously engage students in learning that requires complex thinking they will demonstrate and develop their
existing thinking capacities within the school setting. Teachers also need to challenge their own thinking in order to recognize and support complex thought in their students. Analysis of student work further challenges teachers to identify different types of thinking in order to push themselves and their students to continue developing their thinking to new levels. As we continue to push for conceptual understanding in our students and ourselves we are amazed by the thinking that occurs. This thinking supports us in making sense of the important issues that we encounter in literature and that exist in our world.

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Thinking Conceptually about Journeys through an Author Study

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

Moving my students toward thinking conceptually was a new way for me to frame my curriculum. I was intrigued with exploring an idea-centered curriculum that focused on deeper, conceptual ideas as opposed to a topic-centered curriculum that focused on details and memorization (Erickson, 2002). As an educator I push my students’ thinking when reading or responding to a piece of literature but often I find myself settling for their first responses or retellings from the story. I wanted students to dig deeper and be able to connect the concept of journeys to their own lives and other books. Erickson (2002) states that a concept is “a mental construct, an organizing idea that categorizes a variety of examples” (p.56) and I was curious to see if a concept could become an organizational frame for young children’s thinking. I also wanted our kids to see the connection between our work in the learning lab and in the classroom because I believed that this link was the key to their understanding of journeys.
I have frequently used Author Studies with first graders so I knew linking journeys to this type of study in the classroom wouldn’t be difficult. The challenge would be supporting the kids in thinking conceptually about journeys. I enjoy author studies as a way to introduce kids to a particular author’s work and as a link to genre in our Writers Workshop. I felt an author study would help to weave our work from the lab with journeys into literature engagements back in my classroom. I chose Patricia Polacco as our author because I was familiar with her work and owned a number of her books. Since her characters often go though a change to create a pathway within her books, they seemed to lend themselves to conceptual connections to journeys.

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

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

Kids did start thinking beyond journey as trip as they considered the significant events in Dodsworth’s life as a journey. They were then asked to create their own life journey maps at home, creating a similar pathway to Dodsworth’s. When the kids brought their maps in to share it was easy to see that many had received a great deal of help by family members and so they had a hard
time explaining the journeys represented on their life maps. I was disappointed as I felt the purpose of this assignment had been lost and so students were still looking at journeys as going somewhere. This could be seen in their responses to Lisa’s question, “How is your life like a journey?” Kids responded with:

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

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

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

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

- Teaching and Learning
- School Journeys
• Young to Old
• Sports
• New Animals
• Meeting New People
• Problems
• Trying New Things
• Physical

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

• The girl was a baby and she grew up.

• It was a growing up journey.

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

• It’s a learning journey.

• She’s taking us on lots of journey.

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

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

• She learns about herself as she gets older.

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

• Throws a fit to problem-solving

• Goes from sad to happy

• Crawling to walking
• Car seat to seat belts
• Crib to bed
• Eating yucky stuff to eating good stuff

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

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

• School Journeys- went to preschool
• Young to Old Journey
• Learning Journey- to talk
• Problem Journey- time out

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

• Starts with Anna and she goes from happy to mad.
• Dad goes from happy to sad in the story.
Little girl was excited and then when her mom tells her no she goes to being mad.

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was time for the kids to use a "pathway" to illustrate the process of a journey. The goal was to get the kids to think about the in-betweens of the journey, moving past just thinking about the beginning and end. Looking back at No, I Want Daddy! (2004) the kids were able to reconstruct the pathway of this book.
Stevie (Steptoe, 1987) was the book where I noticed that their conversation was beginning to relate to journeys and they were noticing the change that occurred in the characters. It was one of those ah-ha moments as a teacher.

- In the middle he felt annoyed and at the end he missed him.
- It was an emotional journey.
- He went from being mad to liking Stevie.
- What he felt at the beginning was happy before Stevie came and then he changed to being annoyed after Stevie stayed.
- Mom had an emotional journey- she didn’t care what Stevie did then Stevie moved and she cared about Robert and his feelings now.

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

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

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

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

The next day we revisited the book, this time with both the first and second graders together and
asked them to record their thoughts on a grafitti board. The goal was for the kids to respond with illustrations, words, connections, thoughts or wonderings while the book was being read aloud.

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

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

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

• She uses her family as characters again.

• It was an emotional journey.

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

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

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

  • She put herself in the story

• Family memories

• Emotional journeys

• Faced her fears

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

• *Sebastian’s Roller Skates*
  
  (de Deu Prats, 2005) and

*The Pink Refrigerator*

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

• *When I Was Little* (1995) and *Once There Were Giants* (Waddell, 1997) were growing and doing things.
• *Stevie* and *No, I Want Daddy!* were about families and people. Could also use *When I was Little* and *Once There were Giants*.

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

With our Polacco study we grouped our first and second graders together and had them create comparison charts with the books we had studied. We had a whole group discussion of connections and journeys between the different books and asked the kids to choose two Polacco books to connect to a common journey. The various journeys they came up with included family, emotional, author, mind, physical, learning, and passed-down journeys. This thinking was due in large to the "Important Ideas" charts we had been keeping in our rooms related to the books we read. Our groups were made up of a mix of first and second graders. Each group was given a chart listing two journeys from our class discussion and they then could choose the two Polacco books they wanted to attach to those journeys. Their job was to intersect the book they chose and the journey and illustrate the connection with both pictures and words.
Their work was fantastic; they were using the word "because" to explain their thinking and they had no problems identifying types of journeys and their relationships to the books. I believe this was made possible due to their exploration of the broad concept of journeys in the Learning Lab and enhanced with our author study of Patricia Polacco. Overall the whole experience allowed my
kids to move deeper in thought when reading and discussing a piece of literature.

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

References

- de Deu Prats, J. (2005). Sebastian’s roller skates. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller
- Waddell (1997). Once there were giants. New York: Candlewick.

Mapping Our Understandings of Literature

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

Reading picture books aloud to my students has always been one of my favorite times of the day. Typically, these read-aloud times include talk about children’s personal connections and interpretations of a book. I have explored other ways of thinking and responding to books, such as sketches, drama, webbing, charting, and graffiti boards. These ways of responding provide time for students to reflect on their thinking about a story in ways that are often more supportive of young
children’s thinking instead of only relying on talk to explore interpretations (Short, Kahn, & Kauffman, 2000). Recently I have been intrigued by the ways in which mapping has helped my students organize their thinking and explore relationships between ideas, people, and events in the stories we are reading.

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

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

Our focus on journeys began with reading aloud The Pink Refrigerator by Tim Egan (2007). This became a touchstone text for our classroom because the students had a very strong connection to the book and continued to refer to it throughout the entire school year. Dodsworth owns a thrift shop, and each day visits the junkyard to bring back items to sell in his shop. One day he notices a pink refrigerator with a note attached, stating “make pictures,” and inside the refrigerator are paints, brushes, and a sketchbook. Dodsworth intends to sell the art supplies, but instead he uses them. Each day thereafter a new note appears and Dodsworth continues to carry out each exploration. Most students initially recognized this story as a physical journey of moving from one place to another in their maps of his life. Alexis drew a map reflecting her thinking that Dodsworth’s journey was basically linear, while Eyalu depicts Dodsworth's life journey as having pathways separate from his main route.
In our teacher study group, we reflected on the students’ understandings about journeys from this experience. It was apparent that they did not have a conceptual understanding and saw a journey as a physical movement from place to place. We decided to teach what they were on the edge of knowing about journeys—what they were starting to explore but didn’t quite grasp yet. That decision led us to focus on growing up journeys, emotional journeys, and learning journeys in our next experiences with the younger children.

Our next two books, *Once There Were Giants* by Martin Waddell and Penny Dale (1989) and *When I Was Little* by Jamie Lee Curtis (1993) presented stories about the changes young children go through as they mature. The students easily labeled this type of journey as a growing up journey. We asked students to create a simple map in which they identified and mapped some of the changes for the main character. We wanted them to explore journeys as changes that are not necessarily a physical change in location. Zach’s map of the little girl’s metamorphosis from *When I Was Little* is evidence of his understanding of the changes that occur on such a journey.
To challenge students to continue developing their conceptual understandings about journeys, we explored emotional journeys. *No, I Want Daddy!* By Nadine Brun-Cosme (2003) illustrates the many changes in emotion that a young girl experiences. Anna comes home happy, but her mother’s grumpy mood results in her anger and she decides she wants Daddy to do everything with her that evening. After her daddy tucks her in bed she feels as though something is missing until her mother quietly visits her. They are able to mend hurt feelings and Anna is finally able to sleep. We used the visual of a heart to help students map the emotional journeys that Anna goes through in the book. Students had to decide which of her emotional journeys they wanted to depict. Denae’s map reflects Anna’s change in feelings from sad to happy. On this map we also asked students to make a personal connection of a time when they experienced an emotional journey. Denae’s understanding is apparent in her illustration and her writing about her journey as well as Anna’s.

![Heart map illustrating Anna's emotional journey]

John Steptoe’s (1969) book, *Stevie*, deepened the students’ understandings of emotional journeys. Robert is angry that his mother is babysitting for another little boy. He is angry because Stevie plays with his toys when he’s at school and leaves dirty footprints on his bed. But when Stevie’s parents decide to move away, Robert is sad and misses him. At this point we recognized that students could see a change occurring in the different types of journeys so we decided to use the maps in a different way to highlight pathways. We wanted students to understand that there is a process that leads to change. Hearts were still used to illustrate the emotional aspect of the journey, but this time students selected an emotional change and illustrated the process of that change over time. Alexis chose to show Robert’s multiple changes in emotions across the book.
Another journey that students explored was a mind journey, which they also called a learning journey. *Sebastian’s Roller Skates* (de Deu Prats, 2003) was read aloud to further their conceptual understandings. The book tells a story of a shy young boy who gains confidence by learning to roller skate. As shown in Tanner’s map, Sebastian didn’t know how to skate at the beginning of the story, but learns to do so by the end of the story. This book was significant because not only did the students identify the learning journey, but they also understood that by learning to skate Sebastian gained confidence that helped him to overcome his shyness.

Initially I considered these mapping strategies as examples of students’ understandings about the books and about journeys. It wasn’t until several months after we began our exploration of journeys, that I realized the effect of thinking conceptually on my students as thinkers. We asked the students to look at all of their different maps and reflect with a partner. I realized this opportunity to analyze, make connections between maps, and explain each map to a partner was vital because when my students were asked, “What are some of the big ideas that are true about our
they showed a deep understanding of the concept of journeys. This question was posed to see if students could identify big ideas based on our explorations of journeys. I anticipated a retelling of events from the stories, but their responses were evidence that the students had a broad understanding of the concept:

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

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

• When you grow up you have different things.

• You can learn from other people.

• You learn harder things as you get older.

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

• Sometimes your emotions change because of other people.

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

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

Our Holiday Memory Maps evolved from our involvement with the study of journeys. We asked the first and second-grade students to discuss their holiday traditions with their parents. Students were then asked to identify one of their favorite holiday memories and to map it using a pathway of their choice. After the map was created, the students labeled the kind of journey they experienced during that particular memory. Many students used familiar labels, such as emotional and learning journeys, and some created new labels. David’s learning journey, Megan’s happy journey, and Tanner’s waiting journey reflect some of the thinking that students engaged in around their
memories.
A broad concept serves as an umbrella that students and teachers can use to encompass a wide range of topics, themes, and ideas. It does not limit the possibilities for class and student inquiries, but provides a point of connection across those inquiries (Short, et al., 1996). My students’ thinking grew from simple and concrete understandings that a journey represented physical movement from one place to another to the conceptual idea that a journey is a pathway of changes that involve growing up, emotions, and learning. Even more significant to me was the students’ ability to apply this conceptual knowledge in other areas, as they did with the Holiday Memory Map.

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

References


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

- **Sheshna:** Step by step, everyday something different is going to happen. The past is going with you. Everything you do will stay with you.

- **Cole:** Life is a puzzle and you are the pieces.

- **Sheshna:** Everyday you are adding a piece of the puzzle. You are putting yourself together. Hey world, here I am!

- **Michael:** This is related to what Cole and Sheshna said. Sheshna said because we make the life journey, we might not remember everything. But we can remember by our journey maps. It may not seem important then, but later, it seems important.

- **Christian:** Life is a journey and an iceberg. It starts off small and builds as you go along. Sometimes bad things happen to it like the Titanic hitting it and causing it to be damaged. You never know what will happen in your life.
  - Beginnings and Endings

- **Dreams and Wishes**

- **Pain and Healing**

- **Spiritual and Emotional**

- **People and Relationships**

- **Growing and Learning**

- **Movement and Competition**
  - Connect

- **Question/wonder**

- **Predict**

- **Determine importance**

- **Visualize**

- **Infer**

- **Synthesize**

- **Justina:** Owen’s mother breathes fire to teach him a lesson. It’s a mental journey
or maybe a spiritual journey from hurrying to relaxation? Mom goes from stressed out to relaxed. It’s mental because the mind had to slow down and relax.

- **Andres:** Pain is a journey. We had 5 books that were sad. I thought about death and how it changes your life. You’re going along one way and it makes you take a left turn. It’s a spiritual journey as well. If someone in your family dies, you will be sad. You go from happy to sad.

- **Lisa:** How is it a Spiritual Journey and not Emotional?

- **Justina:** A Mental category needs to be added. Emotional? Under Change, let’s add Death.

- **Christian:** I can back up Justina’s comment. I have lost someone. It changes your life right away. At first death is a physical change, but after a while, it’s more spiritual. After 2-3 years you get used to the way it is. It’s really hard on the family. One person brings it up and everyone gets sad. Then it becomes…when you mention them once in a while. I didn’t read in Kinder and failed. I didn’t read because I did that with my dad and I didn’t want to share that with others. [Christian’s dad died when he was 5 years old.] So I think Death should be added to the category of Mental Journeys. It connects from Emotional and then, Death.

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

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

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

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

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

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

  - Hammer and screwdriver didn’t fit.

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

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

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

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

1st Sort: Sports, Practice, Relationships, and Conflict
2nd Sort: Power, Feelings, and Competition
3rd Sort: Children, Serious
4th Sort: Pain, Loving, Sharing/Not Sharing, Growing

Spiritual and Emotional

1st: War/Conflict, culture, Trust, Metaphor/Symbols
2nd: Religion, Change, Family Culture, Death, and Elderly teaching
3rd: Cultural, Betrayal, Courage
4th: Family Trust, Anger, and Tragedy

Beginnings and Endings

1st: Traveling, Cycles, Changes, Typical Day
2nd: Moving, Life, Ends where it Begins (circular)

Growing and Learning

1st: Working, School Learning, Emotion, Adventures
2nd: Africa, Animals, Asia, USA

People and Relationships

1st: Friendship, Relatives, And Not True Friends
2nd: Family, Trouble, Weekend, and Decisions
3rd: Not a Good Life, Caring, Funny, Helping, and Visiting

Dreams and Wishes

1st: Animals, Funny, Countries, and Serious
2nd: Weird, Certain Time Period, Fantasy, Realistic Fiction, and Happy Endings
3rd: Magic, Your Own Thing, Far from Home, Trouble

Pain and Healing

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

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

3rd: Different Country, Friendship

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

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

Text Set:

Beginnings and Endings

(Marshall, Queta, Kaleb, Shawn)

Big Idea: Adventure

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

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

*DREAMS AND WISHES*  
(Justina, Alex, Kynshyla, and Maya)

Big Idea: Hard work pays off.

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

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

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

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

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

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Text Set:

*PAIN AND HEALING*  
(Ryan, DG, Nicolas, and Andres)

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

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

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Text Set:

*SPIRITUAL AND EMOTION*  
(Christian, Austin, and Cole)

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

This group used a creative way to display the information on a tree where the branches were the big ideas and the books were the leaves on each branch. The most significant thing for this group was the concept of “Changing of things through Life. Spiritual/Emotional changes can affect our inner selves. Change can help and hurt us.”
Text Set:
*People and Relationships*
(Maycee, Mary, Sarena C., Serina T.)

Big Idea: Family relationships.

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

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

Big Idea: Challenges

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

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

Big Idea: Competition

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

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

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

• Journeys can be easy.

• You face challenges in journeys.

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

  • Find out their lifestyle.

• Get more money.

• Learn a new language.

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

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


*Owl Moon*  
(Yolen, 1987)

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

*Christmas in the Country* (Rylant, 2005)

*Going Home* (Bunting, 1998)

*Mim’s Christmas Jam* (Pinkney, 2001)

*Christmas Tree Memories* (Aliki, 1994)

*The Wednesday Surprise* (Bunting, 1989)
My Mama Had a Dancing Heart (Gray, 1999)

Just the Two of Us (Smith, 2005)

Chanukah Lights Everywhere (Rosen, 2001)

The Trees of Dancing Goats (Polacco, 1996)

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

• The author was in the story.

• It was about having family together.

  • I wonder if she still lives in the mountains.

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

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

• It makes me feel cold.

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

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

• They all have family and love.

• No they all have memories.

• All the books go together.


What types of journeys are occurring?

What makes it a journey?

**Nick:**

You go through challenges that are hard.

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

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

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

**Elana:** There are lots of events in both.

• wanting to do new things

• doing new things

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

• life journeys

• maturity journeys

• following interests

  • time journeys

• history journeys

• friendship journeys

• pet journeys (getting used to a new pet)
sports journeys
medical journeys (surgeries)
growing up (birthdays)
first-time journeys (first day of school)
adventurous journeys
school journeys (field trips)
moving journeys
  Animals working together: 
No, I Want Daddy!
Koala Lou
Anansi
Fox
People working together: Baseball Saved Us, Stevie
Things that make the characters try new things: The Pink Refrigerator, Sebastian’s Roller Skates
Changes because of getting older: Once There Were Giants, Wilford Gordon MacDonald Partridge
  Problems with mothers: 
Koala Lu
No, I Want Daddy!
Being trapped: Anansi, Fox
Going to School: Once There Were Giants, Sebastian’s Roller Skates
Pushing someone away: Fox, No, I Want Daddy!, Baseball Saved Us
Sitting around: Wilford Gordon MacDonald Partridge, The Pink Refrigerator
• Physical Journey: 
  *The Pink Refrigerator*
  ,
  *Sebastian’s Roller Skates*
  ,
  *Anansi*

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

• Growing Journey: *Once There Were Giants*

• Mental Growth Journey: *Wilford Gordon MacDonald Partridge*

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

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

  • working together

• things that make you try new things

• change because of getting older

• being trapped

• pushing someone away

• problem with mothers

• sad about being alone

• going to school

• sitting around

• life experiences

• growing journeys

• mental growth journey

• emotional journey

• going journey (physical journey)
• learning journey

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

• Adrian stated that he didn’t want to lose customers.
  • Jason argued with the deli owner that Dorrie was freezing and needed food.

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

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

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

Megan: I wonder if we have a rule like that.

Jake: People would be nicer if we had one.

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

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

Jacob: It’s hard to live by.

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

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

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

Ben: I wonder if cavemen did it.

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

Jake: Some people don’t remember it because it’s so old.
Zach: I don’t think people forgot. I think they don’t know about it.

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

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

- To have lunch
- To pick up trash
- To be treated with respect
- To have a principal
- To have a teacher
- To get a turn when playing a game
- Nobody disturbs anybody when they’re reading a book
- To have a break for eating
- To play a game
- To listen to the teacher without other people distracting us
- To come to a clean school
- To not ignore the teacher
- To not be bullied

Longer time outside

Students need to get out their wiggles

Teachers have time to finish work

• Clean school

Makes our school healthier

Keeps clothes from getting dirty
Helps to recycle and the world benefits

Helps Mr. Leo (our custodian)

Good for animals

Easier for monitors because they always ask kids to clean up

• *Have more parking spaces*

Less accidents

More people can come to school

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

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

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

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

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

**Jason:**

It means that you do it.

**Tanner:** It’s standing up for yourself or others.

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

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

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

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

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

**Jason:** You can take action by picking up trash.

**Deana:** And by reminding others to pick up trash.

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

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

**Jason:** You can take action by helping people.

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

**Jacob:** Sometimes when you take action you need help.

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

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

**Megan:** You can take action by not bullying.

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

**Denae:** You can take action by helping people.

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

**David:** Maybe we could help everyone.

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

• Everyone has the right to learn.

• Everyone has the right to have a friend.

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

  • Will she read *Stuart Little*?

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

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

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

  • Moxy is still a daydreamer.

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

• Consequences are a part of this book as well.

• Moxy has a choice to write the letters.

• Moxy has bad ideas.

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

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

  


**Haley:**
To get what you want you have to take peaceful action.

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

**Jacob:** All books had people who were nice.

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

- The big idea from *The Tree* was to save what you love.
- The big idea from *Just A Dream* was to take care of the earth.
- The big ideas from *Aani and the Tree Huggers* were taking action, bravery, and courage.
- The big ideas from *Someday a Tree* were hope and friendship.
- Some of the choices people made in the books to make the world a better place were replanting the tree, giving the tree new soil, picking up trash, not cutting the tree down, and making a circle around the tree.