



Figure 6. Ricky's explanation of what it feels like to be hungry.

Strategies That Supported Developing Conceptual Understandings

As I look back over the shift that occurred in my students' thinking I clearly see that there are two instructional strategies that Lisa and I used to foster their thinking. One of the most important aspects of Learning Lab was creating engagements that built on each other. During our bi-weekly

study group meetings, we reviewed the student work and thought carefully about the logical next step for our students' learning in the lab. By being conscious that our students were engaged in a process, we were careful not to create isolated engagements. This created a context for our students to use in their thinking. They were able to use the information or ideas that they learned from the previous session to help them make sense of what they were currently engaged in learning. We developed instruction from careful assessment of student thinking and learning.

Book selection was one of the most important instructional decisions and truly promoted my students' ability to make personal connections. When I look at the responses that my students created over the year I see a commonality across the most thoughtful ones -- they are all responses to books that the students easily related to. Texts like *Please Louise!* and *I Will Never Not Ever Eat a Tomato* gleaned significant responses based on the fact that they deal with sibling interactions, which is easily relatable to my students' life experiences. I was amazed at the influence that book choice can have on the quality of responses that are produced. As I reviewed my students' responses chronologically across the year, I was surprised by two sets of responses that were vastly different in significance, yet they happened only a week apart. The first set of responses was from *The Book of Mean People* where students made strong personal connections to the main themes of the story. I then moved on to look at the following week's responses and was surprised at the simplicity and lack of connection. I was sure that students would continue the connections they had made the previous week, but I was wrong. Lisa read aloud *Clancy the Courageous Cow* by Lachie Hume (2006) to discuss the issue of power in relationships and shifting power. My students clearly did not relate to this story based on their responses. The students all responded by creating retellings or making a personal connection to a topic from the story. Not one student made a conceptual connection. I was left confused by the vast difference in the responses.



Figure 7. Julian's Response to *The Book of Mean People*- a conceptual connection.



Isaac



As I compared the two sets of responses, I realized that it was the books that played a significant role in how the students responded. *Clancy* was a very entertaining read aloud for my class, but not one where they could easily make an immediate connection to their lives. I found the texts that successfully elicited meaningful responses were the ones in which the students could easily find a connection to their own life and that were challenging in content or subject matter. It was imperative that the students relate with the text because it allowed them to make connections to their life in order to make sense out of the ideas we were exploring.

By honoring the notion that kindergarteners can think conceptually, Lisa and I were created learning experiences where students could think about more than just the literary elements of a story during read alouds. My students were able to use their own life experiences to help them make sense of complex issues, like power and hunger. Their statements about these personal connections were not abstract conceptual statements, but evidence of their understandings of large concepts.

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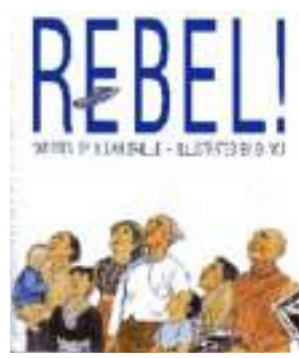
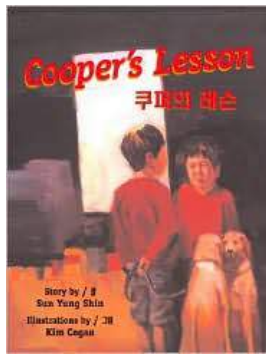
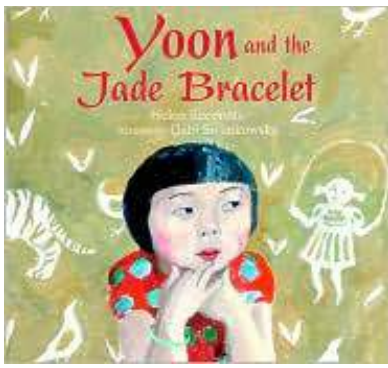
The Power of Power in Responding to Literature

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

As the end of the school year approached, Lisa Thomas, our project specialist, sat down with my third/fourth grade class to discuss what they had learned that year. She told them that each class in the school was writing an article for the school newspaper on a topic that they knew a lot about and that had been significant for them. She reviewed the various inquiries and engagements from across the year and then asked them to list what they saw as important insights from those experiences. We heard loud and clear that they wanted to write about power. Initially their focus surprised me, but as I reflected on the year with these students, their choice made sense.

We have been using a broad concept each year to frame our work with global inquiry at our school. Using concepts, such as change or journey, across classrooms and subject areas supports students in making connections across the different parts of their day and encourages them to develop conceptual thinking. They don't just learn facts and procedures but connect these details to bigger ideas and to their own lives outside of school (Ericksen, 2002). We decided to use power as our concept because we had noticed students' interest in issues related to power the previous year and it made sense that power was an issue children struggled with on a continuous basis in their interactions with adults and peers in school and at home.

The teachers participating in our study of power had long discussions about power and decided to define it as the capacity to influence outcomes. We used this definition to help us in our planning of engagements and in gathering resources. We did not impose our definition on students, but immersed them in experiences so they could develop their own definitions and understandings. We began by reading books and inviting discussion about the issues in these books as a way to encourage students to identify the types of power and issues related to power.



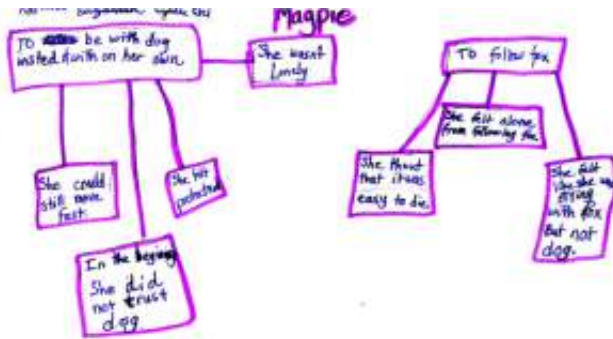
There were several read alouds over the first few weeks of school that were significant for students. [Yoon and the Jade Bracelet](#) (Recorvits, 2008) invited students to think about the power to stand up for yourself. Yoon ends up finding self-power to get her bracelet back from another girl at her school. There was also the power of knowing one's identity in [Cooper's Lesson](#) (Shin, 2004) as Cooper found power in being both Korean and American. There was even the power of standing up against a "power" to not be bullied in [Rebel](#) (Baillie, 1994). The students took different perspectives on power from each story and discussed the books in ways that helped us understand their thinking. Through these various experiences, students built more complex conceptual understandings of power that could then be used as a frame for other engagements. What I did not expect was that students, without prompting, would continue to find examples of power woven through literature all year long.

Our early discussions focused on the power in making decisions, particularly the kinds of decisions that children get to make and the ones adults make for them. The class decided they had power over things like their attitudes or who to be friends with but they did not have the power to make decisions about many things at school, such as how to do a fire drill or when they had to stop playing at recess.



Once the students had explored the power in making decisions, we moved into a discussion of the consequences that come from making those decisions. We read aloud [Fox](#) (Wild, 2001), the story of a fox who lures Magpie away from his friend, the dog, and then abandons him far off in the desert. The book was read aloud to the whole group and then they went to tables to complete flow charts showing the consequences of a decision made by one of the characters in the book. The students discussed how the bird had the power to leave the dog and faced some sad consequences when the fox abandoned her in the

desert. They realized that everyone has power but some have more power than others.

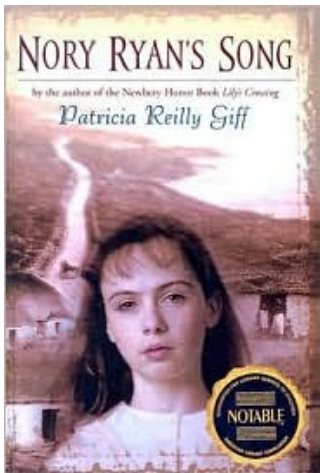
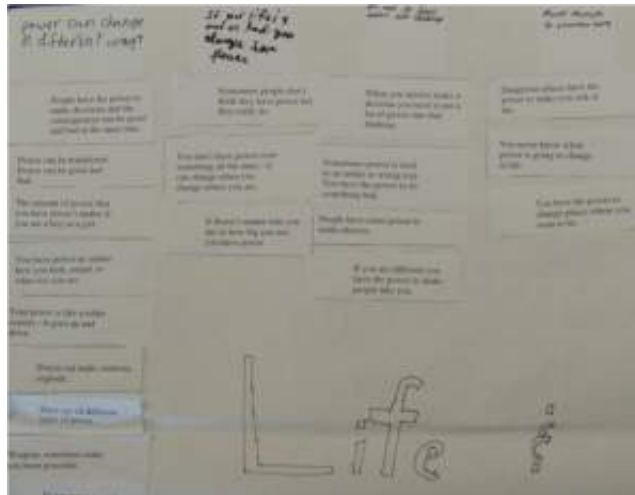


After each read aloud discussion and response, Lisa took a few minutes to record students' big ideas about power on an ongoing chart. To challenge students to pull together these insights into larger categories and ideas, the power statements from the chart were typed and cut into strips that small groups then worked together to sort into larger categories. Each group determined their own categories and labels for those categories. This process was clearly a difficult one that students found intellectually stimulating even as they struggled with the categories and with negotiating in their groups. They had to consider power in more complex and in-depth ways and look for connections across ideas that were just lists for them. Their categories reflected the ways in which they were thinking about power. I was excited to see that each group had the same set of power statements on paper strips but grouped them in different ways, reflecting their thinking as a group. The large categories developed by each group included:

- Power can change in different ways, you always have power whether your life is good or bad, you need to have power into thinking, and power changes in different places.
- You can have power to choose and get a consequence, sharing power, some people think they have power but they don't, when power backfires, and losing power.
- Power changes as you grow, the consequences of power, how power changes, choosing power, and unfair/mean power.
- Bad power, good and bad power, people power, choices that other people make for you, and power that we don't know.
- Learning sequences, choices, everything is not your way, standing up for yourself, and what's right and wrong.
- Thinking, bad things with power, change, and you have power.
- Power can be used in bad ways, changing power, different kinds and types of power, and

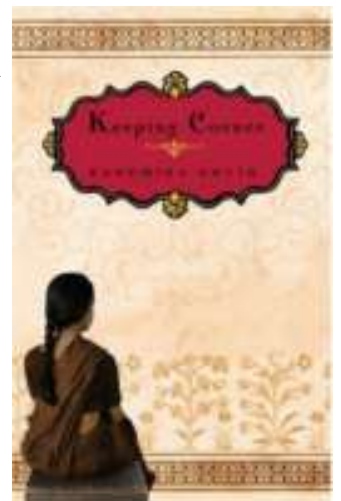
power that doesn't matter who you are.

- Different kinds of power, bad power, power that changes, and people having power.



After this experience, I noticed that the concept of power was embedded in my students' thinking and they brought this idea into many of our literature discussions in class without any prompting from me. As the students read books about hunger, such as [Nory Ryan's Song](#) (Giff, 2000), they talked about power as a root cause of hunger. They noticed that some people had power over land, such as the English who were ruling Ireland. They had power over the streams and didn't allow the native Irish to fish. They also had power over the land because they collected rent and kicked people out of their homes if they were unable to pay the rent. They even had power over the possessions of others because they took livestock if someone was late on rent. The livestock provided food, such as eggs, and so this action caused even more hunger. The students felt that having power went hand-in-hand with having food.

The story of a young Indian widow in [Keeping Corner](#) (Sheth, 2007) again brought up a discussion of power. Twelve-year-old Leela is a young Brahman girl who has a comfortable life. She is spoiled by her mother and loves her glass bangles and pretty saris. She is preparing to move in with her husband as they have already had their marriage ceremony. Everything in her life changes when he is bitten by a snake and dies. She is forced to "keep corner" which means she must strip herself of her precious jewelry, shave her head, and wear only dark colors. In addition, she can't leave her house for one year, except to go to her husband's funeral. The students were outraged at the power adults had over this young girl, and their concerns led to a discussion of having power because of one's gender. Leela notices that if a man is widowed, he is free to go on living his life as he chooses and to remarry, but a woman's life



must, in a sense, come to an end and she is forever shunned as a widow and, therefore, considered unlucky. The students felt that there was great power in being male in this culture. The men make decisions for Leela and she must listen to them. When Leela's brother comes home from college to try and convince his father and uncle to allow Leela to live her life and not be shut up in the house, he is unable to convince them to change their minds and go against tradition. In researching India, students found that often men get to eat more food than women because they go out into the workplace to earn money for the family. Many students decided that the story showed that not only was there great power in being male, but there was also power in cultural customs and the beliefs that had to be followed, no matter what the consequences or the inequity.

Students also found issues of power in picture books and novels about World War II, mainly from books about the Holocaust and the Japanese Internment camps. They were baffled at how someone like Adolf Hitler could gain power over a nation, and yet as they read more about him and about that time period, they realized that there is great power in fear. Instilling fear in others is one way of gaining power over them. Hitler was able to begin his conquest by convincing the German people to fear the Jews for taking their jobs and for being "different." Hitler then turned this fear toward anyone who was different because he could blame them for any problems that the nation was facing. The students also felt that even when people realized that what was happening was wrong, they were unable to take action because they feared Hitler and what he would do to them. A book that was particularly significant was *The Terrible Things* (Bunting, 1989). This book helped them realize that sometimes we don't question power because it doesn't affect us, but if we stand silent then we aren't claiming our own power. They felt that power could be taken away from people like Hitler, but only if others take action.

The concept of power was even evident in writing workshop. Joey wrote that he was very upset about how some people tried to exert power over others and control them. He was particularly incensed about leaders like Hitler who needed to control others and the English who ruled Ireland in *Nory Ryan's Song*. Joey could spend an entire writing session listing what upset him and the root always seemed to be issues of power.

When students began to work on their article about power for the school newspaper, I could see why these ideas flowed so easily for them. In reflecting back over the year, they decided that power means "you have control over people, land, decisions, or food." Power comes from having money and people want power. Their ending thought was that power should be used to "benefit everyone in the world." They understood that power is not inherently evil or bad and can be used in positive ways.

As I read their article in the newspaper, I was struck by how their understandings of power had changed throughout the year and become more complex, reflecting multiple perspectives and

encouraging them to question their everyday experiences. They recognized that power is embedded in every situation, every story. They were aware that power weaves through literature and life and that each encounter provided a chance to develop new understandings and questions. By weaving this concept across the year, not only did students see connections across our different inquiries and read alouds, but they also were able to gradually build increasingly complex understandings of the issues and ideas.

A new understanding for me was the significance of staying with a sustained idea or concept over time so that students are able to move to deep understanding. So much of school involves jumping from topic to topic to “cover” the curriculum, resulting in surface-level understandings and a focus on information. My students did learn information but, more importantly, they also examined the “why” behind that information and considered the larger forces influencing their lives and the world. As they move through life, the information they learn in school will soon become outdated and replaced, but conceptual understandings about the functioning of society and people will continue to be relevant and to provide a frame for asking difficult questions instead of being satisfied to skim the surface of life.

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Getting Past the Social Drama to Engage Fifth Graders with Power

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

Our class began the year looking at the concept of power in the Learning Lab. The idea of power had come up the previous year as a strong connection for our kids and so we chose to explore it more deeply as our conceptual frame for the school year. The Learning Lab is a special place where our kids experience focused lessons around a big idea that is carried over into the classroom curriculum. The work is international in focus and inquiry based. Our goal is to teach about global issues through the world of books. Through story worlds students are invited to gain insights into how people live, feel, and think in their own culture as well as those of global cultures (Short,

2008). Teachers involved in the lab are also a part of an after school study group to explore themes, big ideas, and the wonderings of our students. We are joined each week by a University of Arizona researcher, Kathy Short, who is interested in how kids learn about interculturalism. Kathy collaborates with the teachers involved with the project and is an invaluable resource and an expert in international children's literature. Lisa Thomas, our project specialist, facilitates the lab where our work is guided by the inquiry of students. Students are really pushed to think in new ways in the lab and it is a favorite part of their week.

Fifth graders are a special variety of elementary student. They feel deeply, exude confidence due to their being the oldest kids in school, and are often looked up to by their younger peers, even though there are moments when they revert to being little kids themselves. They know about power. They also have the art of being cool down pretty well out of constant concern about impressing their peers. When you think they are just about to make a breakthrough on thinking about ideas metaphorically or conceptually, they will act like they could care less. After all, they are fifth graders.

Reading and discussing literature in small groups is important because it allows students to position themselves differently in relation to peers, teacher, and text. In every literary practice there are social codes that are manipulated by both teacher and students (Lewis, 2001). Just as context shapes performance, ongoing performances continually shape and reshape classroom context. The meanings of social and interpretive competence are constantly co-constructed by the teacher and students resulting in expectations for appropriate action and interaction. Many times these negotiations for social position occur without teacher surveillance in peer groups. The set of norms within which students have learned to work in the lab often challenge their existing social positions by asking them to work and think deeply with each other. The students are expected to think critically, conceptually, and make connections. The social drama occurring with these kids, however, sometimes interferes with their willingness to engage in thinking with each other in our learning lab experiences.

Traditionally, reading is viewed as a set of psychological skills used to gain meaning from text, thus successful reading is a technical matter that results from skilled teaching and talented students. Recently, reading and writing have been defined differently, as social and cultural practices (Bloome & Katz, 1997). When people are involved in reading or writing, they are creating two sets of social relationships. The first social relationships being established are between themselves as readers and the authors of the books, and secondly among the people present in the reading event itself. According to Bloome and Katz, this second set of relationships is called participant social relationships. These social and cultural practices were interesting to watch with this group as they worked through conceptualizing power. Anyone who witnessed their literature circles and class discussions in the lab would unmistakably see these dynamics at work. Even though students made

significant connections to the concept of power, it wasn't until the end of the study that they were able to work beyond the social positions and roles created by themselves, their peers, and the adults. We noted that particular engagements allowed them to get beyond their participant social relationships into working as members of equal standing on a team because they were so engaged in thinking together about ideas.

In our first day in the Learning Lab, Lisa started our discussion by reminding students about our study of journey the previous year. She reminded them that we started off talking about journeys in the literal sense and then began to think more broadly and in symbolic ways. She talked about the importance of big ideas and that the understandings they developed through our study of journey helped us connect to broader concepts. This year, she explained, we wanted to think about power. She asked them to think about power in their lives, particularly about decisions they make in school and how those related to their lives. Students were clearly interested in thinking about these ideas.

Lisa started off by reading *Big Plans* (Shea, 2008) in which a boy who is in trouble at school is sitting in the corner after filling the chalkboard with "I will not..." sentences as punishment. He is angry about being in time out and makes plans to take over the world. "I have plans," he says, "big plans." The kids listened quietly, chuckling occasionally, and then responded to the book:

Robert: He wants more power in the class. He's the "underkid" in the class.

Robbie: Everything he talks about is in the picture.

Kyra: It says in the story that the President is bossy.

Dakota: He is moving up. He starts out as the kid and then becomes powerful -- the president.

Kyra: He is abusing his power. He orders Idaho to build. He demands Missouri to cheer up.

Dakota: He is powerless. He is imagining his power -- demanding it. It's like a dream.

Lisa asked the students to think about how decisions are affected by power. In their small groups, they made a T-Chart about school. One side showed "Decisions I get to make" and on the other side "Decisions others make for me." Their charts included a range of observations about power in school:

Decisions Others Make

- People tell you who to be friends with.
- We have to wait in computer lab for others, even when you know what to do.
- When to go outside at lunch.
- Who to be partners with.
- Schedule for the day.
- Don't choose the books the school buys.

- Dress code.
- People make us do our work.
- The music we play in Band/Orchestra.

Decisions We Make Ourselves

- Taking care of ourselves.
- Who to hang out with-who to be friends with.
- What instrument we play in Band/Orchestra.
- Choose the books we read.
- What to wear.
- Answers on a test.
- Three choices for lunch.
- What to play on the playground.

At School

Decisions I make myself.	Decisions other make for me.
<p>Close the answer on a test</p> <p>Helping teachers</p> <p>What to do at lunch</p> <p>Making myself come to the library in the morning</p> <p>Take my lunch and eat lunch with me</p> <p>Who to hang out with</p> <p>attitude</p>	<p>Making me save a poster</p> <p>Dakota makes me laugh at school</p> <p>Making me bring money every day</p> <p>Making us do this paper</p> <p>People make me do my work</p> <p>When to go out at lunch</p>

Figure 1. Decisions I make/Decision others make for me.

In circulating around the groups as they were working, Alyssa and I had a conversation about power. She noticed that the things she had no control over were not always in the control of someone directly above her. She said that kids don't always get to choose what they want to learn about. When I told her that I don't always get to teach what I want, and that the Department of Education tells me what to teach, she made the connection that there is a hierarchy of power. When talking with Danielle's group, an attitude of cynicism that was typical of fifth graders became apparent. They noticed that the choices they had available in many situations were limited. For instance, at lunch they could choose from either hot lunch or lunch express, but the choices were limited to only two things. They could choose to drink milk, but the flavors to choose from were determined by adults and limited to only three flavors. This cynical attitude became clear in their class discussion.

As students synthesize what they had charted, they came up with several big ideas about power. Lisa kept a large chart on the story floor to record their big ideas about power and added to it each week right before our class left the lab.

Jake L.: Some people have more power than others.

Robbie: Students do have some power.

Jake L.: We have power in different ways, like the Olympics.

Danielle: Some do, some don't, but we all try to have power.

Alexis: Some choose to have it. Some choose not to have it. Some don't notice they have power. Some have it and don't use it.

Jake L.: I noticed power doesn't always work. You don't have to do something, as long as you're willing to take the consequences. No one can make you do something.

Danielle: You can choose certain things but only from a selection that others have already chosen. You can choose a flavor of milk but can't choose what flavors are offered. There's a limited selection. Others choose for us.

Students were asked to complete a homework assignment that involved a T-chart on the choices they get to make at home and the choices others make for them. They were asked to get their family's point of view as well. As we left the lab, students made a connection between power and homework, pointing out that they have to do homework, but they can choose when to do it.

Name: <u>Zach</u> Teacher: <u>Mrs. Edwards</u>	
Learning Lab Homework Due Monday, September 8	
As part of our exploration of power, please work with your families to gather examples of the following:	
Decisions I make for myself at home:	Decisions that others make for me at home:
1. I choose to do my chores	1. I can only play video games on the weekends.
2. What to buy with my allowance	2. Doing homework
3. How to spend my free time	3. How long I get to stay up.
4. What to read	4. What to do at school.
5. What to do outside	5. What is appropriate to watch.
6. What to eat at restaurants	6. Where to eat out.
7. What to play with	7. When to clean up.

In the next lab session we reviewed our big ideas about power from the previous week and added their new observations about power based on their charting at home.

- Some people don't know how to use power.
- Some people abuse power.
- Some people have power over others.
- Your parents are taking power from you if they don't let you do something.
- Some people try to have power but can't because of consequences.
- When it comes to power/decisions, no one can really MAKE you do anything.
- Everyone has at least a little power.

Lisa read an excerpt from *Hey World, Here I Am* (Little, 1986) titled "About Lovin," a short story that demonstrated how some families show love. She wanted students to understand that families operate in different ways as a framework for sharing the homework. She told the students that all families work well most of the time and that all families have problems some of the time. She encouraged the students not to be afraid to share about the decisions made in their families and asked them not to judge others as they were sharing the homework about decisions at home. If people felt judged, they wouldn't share and be honest.

Students went to tables to share who made decisions about what things in their families and charted their responses. As they were discussing if everyone at the table agreed on who made particular decisions in their families, that decision went in the "All" category, but they had to come to a consensus. The same standards were applied to each category.

Decisions I get to make at Home

All Some do, some don't None

As I went around the room I noticed decisions being added to the charts, including:

- When to practice instruments
- When to go to sleep
- Only child so have more choices
- The larger the group, the fewer the choices
- What to watch on TV
- When you get grounded
- If you get to take showers
- What to do after school
- When to go to bed
- Drink caffeine at night
- Watch PG-13 movies
- Choose position you sleep in
- When to get haircut



Figure 2. Family decision chart.

The kids did a great job of reporting without judging other family's decisions. I was glad of Lisa's warnings and encouragements to be open minded as I found myself silently comparing some of the decisions with those of my own in raising my family and reminding myself that everyone does things differently.

Jake's comments about being willing to suffer the consequences led us to think about power and consequences for our next lesson. Lisa showed the students how to make a flow chart using the story of Dodsworth's life from *The Pink Refrigerator* (Egan, 2007), which was a touchstone book from the previous year with our study of Journey. The students remembered the book well as it was one we revisited time and again. The flow chart showed each decision Dodsworth made and the consequences of that decision. After reading aloud [Fox](#) (Wild, 2001) and having a short discussion, students were asked to choose a character from *Fox* and examine a decision that character made in the story. They worked in pairs to make a flow chart of the consequences of that decision.

Students were really engaged with these flow charts. They put a "D" next to the box that showed the decision and then used arrows to show the consequences of that decision. AJ, Jorden, and Zach H. chose Fox and his decision to take Magpie to the desert. Some of the consequences were:

- Magpie would tell everyone if she survived and Fox would be suspected.
- Dog would go out looking for Magpie and dog could get lost, hurt, or dehydrated. Dog might think he was left by Magpie and be hesitant to make a new friend.
- Magpie would die. Dog would be sad.

Another group also focused on the same decision by Fox, but their flow chart reflected the consequences for Magpie rather than Dog.



Figure 3. Flow chart from Fox.

Lisa asked students to bring these decisions together so that new ideas could be added to the class chart. Students added observations about power, choices, and consequences.

If someone has more power than you, you will probably do what they want, even if you don't want to do what they ask. You might do it because you don't want them to get mad at you.

We were reading novels about China in small groups in my classroom during this time period and I noticed students talking about who had power in the story. They noticed that certain characters held more power than others and that sometimes power shifted over the course of the story. It was exciting to see the kids make this connection between the Learning Lab and class.

We moved into a discussion about how power can shift over time in our next lab time. Lisa shared a story from her childhood in which she had to improve her math scores to stay on the Patrols. Power shifted as Lisa studied hard to do better on her timed math tests but then was accused of cheating by the teacher. Lisa's mother talked to the teacher to verify that she had been studying at home to improve her scores and Lisa was allowed to continue on the Patrol squad. The students discussed the events and connections to power while Lisa created a flow chart focusing on power shifts.

Lisa read aloud [Yoon and the Jade Bracelet](#) (Recorvits, 2008) about Yoon, a recent immigrant from Korea. Yoon is given a beautiful jade bracelet by her mother and a new friend at school manipulates Yoon into letting her wear it and won't give it back. They discussed the story and made flow charts to show how the power shifted throughout the story and to use symbols to represent who had the power in each part of the story.

We noticed that this discussion was not as focused on power and that the kids seemed reluctant to share. We had reached the end of September and the social dynamics of being a fifth grader seemed to be kicking in. Students were more concerned with entertaining each other than in

pushing their thinking. There was definite social drama going on as some of the boys were posturing for more powerful roles. A new boy in our class was getting a lot of attention from the girls. The girls wanted to play it cool in front of him and so we heard nothing from them that day in the discussion. This was not our best discussion; it was clear there was something going on with the girls in how they were positioning themselves as well as allowing themselves to be positioned by others.

Because we were concerned with how this social drama was going to translate into the work that day, we assigned partners to work on the flow charts. This worked out well, even though I don't normally like to assign partners. The discussion wasn't the best, but the flow charts were incredible. Many used symbols to represent the shifts in power along the continuum of the story. Danielle and Robbie created a flow chart that used bar graph symbols for each character to represent the shifts in power as the story unfolds. The key at the bottom of the chart shows the abbreviation on each bar to designate the character such as OG for older girl, YG for Yoon, and T for teacher (Figure 4). It was interesting to watch each pair of students talk about the ways in which power shifted from character to character throughout this story.

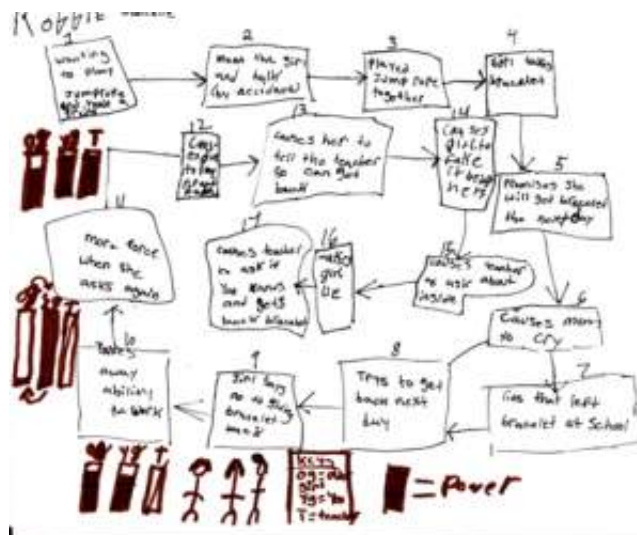


Figure 4. Flow chart from Yoon and the Jade Bracelet.

Students added to the class power chart before leaving the lab:

Dakota: Your power can change when someone has more power than you. Some people think they don't have power, everyone has power.

Robbie: Sometimes you don't realize how much power you have until someone with more power makes you realize it. Manipulation is one way people have power. Frustration makes you realize you have power. When other people are bossing you around, it makes you want to use power.

Danielle: It's like the game Mousetrap, one thing sets off another, and then something else happens. Sometimes you don't know you have power, then suddenly you have it.

In class, students read *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (Coerr, 1977) in preparation for attending a field trip to the play performed by Pima Community College. In truth, I squeezed this novel into the curriculum at the last minute because I felt it would be a great way to prepare the students for this play. I'm so glad I did.

The play was a beautiful production and the cast and director were most impressed by the fact that our entire group (third through fifth grades) had read the book beforehand. The students all made strong connections to the character of Sadako. Our outing included a backstage tour and a question and answer period by the staff. During the Q and A, students from other schools asked questions about the costumes, how long it took to memorize lines, and how long the actors had been performing. Robert cut to the chase when he raised his hand and told the director how powerful the story was to him. He said the story was a clear message about how dangerous nuclear weapons were in wars. The director thanked him for his observation and we launched into a discussion of power while walking backstage.

Danielle told the director that there was a clear power shift in the story. She said at first the atom bomb had the power, then the leukemia had the power, but at the end Sadako held the power. It was clear that our kids were used to discussing issues. He looked at me and said, "What are you teaching these kids at Van Horne?" I told him we were looking at the big idea of power. He was clearly stunned at the students' ability to conceptualize the issues and themes in the story and, shaking his head, asked what other books we were reading. The kids started calling off the titles of the literature circle books we had just finished, [The Diary of Ma Yan](#), [Red Scarf Girl](#), *Chu Ju's House* and others. He didn't know any of the titles, but found it interesting that we were focused on books outside the United States and wanted to know the titles of plays we might be interested in seeing in the future. It was a great experience for the kids, because they were able to make conceptual connections to what they had read at school and in the visual interpretation of the book on stage. I felt so proud of this group of smart fifth graders.

When we got back to school, I finished reading *Hiroshima*, by Lawrence Yep (1996), a short chapter book about the Enola Gay, the B29 that delivered the bombs to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I wanted the students to hear the other side of the story, a different perspective. As I read the step-by-step description of what the pilots were doing as they were readying and executing their mission, the kids were thinking of Sadako and her family on the ground in Hiroshima.

In their discussion it was clear that students felt ashamed of what Americans had done to the families of Hiroshima. They knew of the great losses we had suffered at the hands of the Japanese at Pearl Harbor but did not make the connection between Pearl Harbor and the dropping of the atom bomb. The cause and effect of these events was not part of their background knowledge. Even after talking about Pearl Harbor, the students only thought of Sadako because of the strong

connections they had made to her character. Jose asked me, “Mrs. Edwards, when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, did they know that Sadako was down there?” I was so choked up, I almost couldn’t answer. I told him that as human beings, they were probably trying not to think about it, but as soldiers they were trying to carry out their mission successfully and that they knew there would be lots of civilians killed. The power this character had over my students was striking.

At the beginning of October, we moved from personal power to broader issues of power in other people’s lives. At this point in the year, I noticed social positioning and some shifts in roles, particularly in attitudes that resembled nonchalance and the emergence of definite leaders. Lisa read [Rebel!](#) (Baillie, 1994), a picture book set in Burma about a military leader who marches into a school to announce he is taking over. He is challenged in an unconventional way by a student who is brave enough to rebel. The object of power is a single student who anonymously removes her thong (sandal) and throws it at the general. In an effort to hide the identity of the “rebel,” all the students and teachers take off their thongs and throw them in a pile so the general can not determine who is missing their thong. We wanted to show the students that sometimes power can come from an unpredictable source and to show the power of a group of people who normally are perceived as powerless. The students in my class immediately started to twitter about the word “thong,” which they interpreted as underwear, and completely lost attention to the rest of the details in the story. Being fifth graders, and given their propensity for any opportunities for fun, the discussion took a strange turn.

In the group discussion it was obvious the students didn’t understand the story and wondered why the students threw underwear at the general. Bloome & Katz, (1997) state that people come together to accomplish something. Usually they have an idea about what that something is, however, the explicit purpose may not necessarily be what gets accomplished. The participant social relationships both influence and are influenced by the social action people take and by what is socially accomplished. It was apparent that this was happening here. The students had transformed the purpose into something different than what we had intended.

When asked what they thought of the book, they said it was very interesting, but no one caught who did it. They weren’t sure what went on. They said they needed a second book to find out. They wondered if the thong was thrown on purpose or accidentally. When Lisa mentioned that the children took off their thongs and put them in a pile, the students giggled. They wondered if the thong was thrown by one of the soldiers. Finally someone said they thought it was on purpose and was thrown by a kid. A debate followed.

According to Bloome and Katz (1997), people attempt to socially position themselves in particular ways, but that at the same time others are also socially positioning them. One student who was a poor reader was very outspoken during the discussion, even though it was evident he didn’t

understand the story. He was not discouraged by redirection from the teacher or the other students. He was trying to show his dominance in our class and himself as a leader of the group. He was attempting to socially position himself as a leader in this situation. He felt like the discussion forum was the place to do this because, even though his reading skills were poor, he was comfortable with his verbal skills. Also within the classroom he was respected due to his size and athletic ability. His desire to have fun throughout the day was also admired by many of the boys. Many of his comments lead the group in the wrong direction and they silenced the girls who clearly didn't want to appear to agree or disagree with him.

Initially I wondered why such a straightforward story would confuse students, both in the details and the big ideas. Once I realized why the students were distracted, I revisited the book later during a class read aloud to see if they could do a better job of understanding the concepts of power.

For this lab period, the students went to the tables to do wide reading of picture books about power and then returned to the story floor for a whole group discussion. Some of the books included in this text set were *Night Golf* (Miller, 1999), *17 Things I'm Not Allowed to do Anymore* (Offill, 2006), *My Secret Bully* (Ludwig, 2005), and *Always With You* (Zee, 2008).

Concepts they discussed from these readings were:

- One kind of power is talent.
- You can lose power if you use it in a bad way.
- There is power in choosing your own friends and standing up to others who aren't.
- Soldiers have power over people.
- There is power in love, trust, and memory.

After a second lab period of wide reading they found:

- Power is courage to follow your dreams.
- Courage is power to make friends.
- Bossing people around is forced power.
- Some people think they have more power than they do.
- Racism is an issue of power.
- People are afraid of losing power when they share.
- Some people have power they don't know about.
- Emotions hold power.

The discussions for the next several weeks were impacted by the social practices and positioning that continued to develop in our class. It was a bit of a concern as a teacher to see the girls, who I knew had so much to contribute be silenced by several vocal boys. I also knew that some of the

voices were dominating and not leaving room for others or leading the discussion in nonproductive directions. This social drama was surfacing in classroom discussions as well.

The following week in lab, our goal was to compare, contrast, and categorize our many ideas about power to organize our thinking. Lisa asked students to use their brains to categorize the ideas. They reviewed our class chart about what students had noticed about power each week. Lisa had typed up the ideas so that students could cut the sentences into strips and easily sort them. To help them understand sorting, Lisa used name tags and asked students for ideas on different ways to sort or categorize them, such as the different ways the name tags were written -- color, size, font, number of letters, vowels, etc. She told them they would be sorting the statements by their meaning about power.

Students were asked to:

1. Read the list together at the tables.
2. Cut the sentences into strips.
3. Sort the ideas about power into categories.
4. Have an adult check to make sure they made sense.
5. Glue them onto the chart, and create labels for the categories. (*Must have more than three statements in a category, but no more than seven.)
6. Think together and read aloud.

There were major differences in the way the student groups worked. Some groups thought and worked together, while others had one person who took over and organized the task by giving directions. As the students sorted and created categories, we were surprised by the range of their thinking. As adults checked the categories, students talked about why they chose to group the statements in particular ways. They were able to justify their answers without hesitation, often through dialogue with each other.



Figure 5. Categorizing Power.

Harste says that we outgrow our current selves through dialogue (Short & Harste, 1996). These students went beyond their current understandings of power and knew they were coming to new understandings. It was apparent that they were thinking conceptually about big ideas. They worked at a feverish pitch to finish their categorizing, engaging in negotiation and intense talk about power with each other. They barely finished, working frantically at the end. It was a giant “Aha!” moment for many students and the adults in the room as well.

Our study of power was meaningful to the students. I don’t think they believed they could make new discoveries about a subject they clearly knew so much about already. Lewis (1998) states that a social organization exists in all classrooms that privileges certain social and interpretive ways of being over others. What was evident was that for this work the social drama was put aside as these groups worked as a team. They were completely absorbed in the process, and were not worried about looking cool or the fact that they were the big kids on campus. It was amazing to see them so involved in this process and it was obviously important for them to engage with a lot of thought and creativity. They lost themselves in the ideas and in the excitement of pushing their thinking and forgot just for a moment they were fifth graders who did not want to appear to like school. They were able to engage as equal members of a team in a community of learners and thinkers.

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Experiencing the Way the World Eats

by Lisa Thomas, Project Specialist, Van Horne Elementary School

Like many schools across the United States, our school holds a canned food drive during the winter holiday season. We have been challenging ourselves to support students in taking meaningful action and so began to question this tradition. It became clear that our students were going through the motions of bringing food from their parent's kitchen cabinets to school. The action that they were engaged in was conceived by someone else and the food that they donated was purchased by someone else. At one point, we were forced to entice students to participate by offering free popcorn to those who brought in cans of food. While we recognize that community food banks rely

on these drives, we wanted our students to choose to get involved because they recognized the need within the Tucson community, understood the root causes of hunger, felt compassion and empathy toward those struggling with hunger, and believed that they had the power to address this issue and make the world a better place.

Cowhey (2006) points out that while school food drives are well meaning, they send unintended messages that reinforce stereotypes about the poor, oversimplify the problem and solution, fail to teach an understanding of poverty or local efforts to improve conditions, and further stigmatize low-income children in the school. She states that when children collect canned foods for “poor people,” those efforts make the poor seem like a “predestined, anonymous group” and poverty seem like a “permanent, almost genetic condition” (p. 26). This type of “give the helpless a handout” approach does not help children understand the complex reasons why people are hungry or challenge prevailing stereotypes of poor people as lazy and unintelligent. The solution is oversimplified as simply giving someone a bag of food and the agency and resourcefulness of those who live in poverty and struggle daily to meet their basic needs are not acknowledged.

We knew that our students have good hearts and want to help others, however, they did not understand hunger in a way that would allow them to connect and care. We decided to initiate a school wide inquiry into hunger. We knew that to take more effective and meaningful action, students needed to see hunger as a significant problem in our world and develop a deep understanding of the root causes of hunger. Our inquiry included many invitations for students to think broadly and delve deeply into the complexities of hunger in our world. In developing these experiences, we particularly drew from Kids Can Make a Difference, and their sourcebook, *Finding Solutions to Hunger* (Kempf, 2005), that contains a range of activities and resources focused on understanding the root causes of hunger (<http://www.kidscanmakeadifference.org>).

One of the most powerful experiences was our Global Feast. This simulation, developed by Oxfam (<http://es.oxfamamerica.org/en>), helps students recognize that there is enough food in the world to feed everyone. The common misconception that people go hungry because of inadequate global food supplies is challenged as students experience the unequal distribution of food. This simulation involves the students acting in role as a member of a specific population in the world. This type of drama places students in a fictional role and context to explore and reflect on an issue to generate thoughts, feelings, and language that go beyond typical classroom interactions (O’Neill, 1989).

We intentionally planned the banquet early in our study to provide students with a reference point for thinking about hunger in our community and world. To include everyone in the school, we planned two separate banquets. At each banquet, approximately 100 first through fifth graders filed into the library, anticipating the global feast we had been talking about all week. All the children knew was that an announcement was sent home, saying that they would be eating the way

the world eats and that any contributions to support the feast would be greatly appreciated. Some students were concerned that they might be forced to try foods that they didn't like while others looked forward to a special meal in the middle of the morning.

As the children entered the library, they were randomly given tickets that sorted them into groups. About 12 children in each session received blue tickets, 60 children received yellow tickets, and 28 received red tickets. These numbers roughly represented percentages that exist in the real world related to food and hunger. The children with blue tickets sat at a large banquet tables with fancy plates, napkins, apple juice and flowers. Those with yellow tickets sat at round tables with piles of paper plates, forks and a gallon of drinking water. Children who received red tickets sat on the floor around a tarp with a jug of brownish water and no plates or eating utensils. Each table was labeled with the names of countries where people who fell into that group lived. It was particularly important for us to reinforce with our students that people from all three groups live within the United States, challenging the misconception that people are only starving in other parts of the world.

We welcomed the students to the global feast and reminded them that they would be eating the way that the world eats. We told them that we had very good news -- there is enough food in the world for everyone to eat in a way that will allow them to be healthy. We asked them to keep that in mind during our feast.

Because we work with elementary-aged children we knew that it would be a challenge to instill a sense of the magnitude of the world's hunger problem. We needed to find appropriate ways to ensure that they were able to connect what they learned during the feast experience at school to their world. We would be talking about numbers in the billions with children who were as young as five. We knew that many would have a difficult time conceptualizing a billion -- we as adults have a difficult time getting our heads around numbers of that size. We decided that knowing exactly the size of a billion wasn't necessary as long as children knew it was a lot. To make the idea a little more tangible, we used a page from *How Much is a Million*, by David M. Schwartz (1998).

"How big is a billion?" I read aloud, "If a billion kids make a human tower, they would stand up past the moon" (Schwartz, 1985). It was clear from their "whoa" responses that the kids were able to connect to this description and saw that a billion was a very large number.

We called the children's attention to the large numbers on the red, yellow, and blue signs that had been posted near each group. We asked one person from each group to read their number and told them that this is how many people in the world fell into their group. About 12% of the world's population or 1,000,000,000 people fall into the blue group. About 60% of the world's population, or 4,000,000,000 are in the yellow group, and the rest of the world's population, over 25% or

1,800,000,000 are in the red group.

Then it was time to bring in the food. We began with the food for the blue group. In walked two teachers, each carrying six extra large pizzas. They purposely walked past the red and yellow groups so that everyone would be aware of what the blue group was going to eat. Then they placed all 12 pizzas on the banquet table where only 12 children were seated. The room was buzzing with excited children. They all love pizza -- and they couldn't wait to get their share.

Next, we brought in the food for the yellow group. The teachers entered carrying bowls of rice and red beans. After walking past the red and blue groups, one bowl was placed on each of the tables in the yellow group section of the room. The tone in the room shifted from excitement to confusion.



Finally it was time to bring in the food for the red group. Our school counselor brought in one bowl of plain white rice. She walked around the room to show everyone the bowl and then sat it in the center of the tarp where a group of 28 kids were ready to eat. Before we began eating, we asked the kids to do a quick write about what they were thinking.

The quick writes showed that at this point in the experience, most of the students were concerned

about the inequity of the immediate situation. Sean, a fourth grader in the yellow group, wrote, “I don’t know if it’s fair because they each get their own pizza and red has to share one bowl. I wish we had pizza. I’m mad.” Stanley, from the red group wrote, “The blue group gets the biggest share of pizza for everyone. The red group barely has any. I think the blue group should share.”

Fourth grader Zachary, who was in the yellow group, immediately applied the simulation to the real world. He wrote, “I have one thing to say about the teacher’s earlier statement, ‘There is enough food for everyone in the world to share.’ Dang rich people! They eat at fancy restaurants every day. Others who don’t have homes have bread and rice.” Zachary didn’t seem to realize that he and his family are members of the world’s blue group -- they are those "dang rich people."

Many of the younger children focused on the way they were feeling. Kindergartener Isaac observed, “People are kind of sad and kind of mad.” Sarah said, “I was really sad to get rice and not water or pizza.”



Before the students ate, we took some time to talk about each group. We told the children that the blue group represented the 1 billion people in the world who have more than enough to eat at all times. These people won’t die of hunger and don’t have to worry about where their next meal will come from. On the other hand, the people in this group tend to eat foods that are very high in fat and sugars and will cause many of them to die of heart disease, obesity, and cancer.

We told the children that the yellow group represented the 4 billion people in the world who get just enough food to eat. They usually get the calories and nutrients that they need to be healthy but not necessarily the foods that they want. Sometimes things happen in these people’s lives and they have to go without food for short periods of time.



We explained that the red group represented the 1.8 billion people in the world who are hungry all of the time. Most of these people live in the southern hemisphere but there are people from the red group living in countries all over the world, including the U.S. They never get enough food to be healthy. They often don't have access to clean water. Many die everyday from starvation, chronic hunger, and diseases caused by bad drinking water.

To demonstrate the economic insecurity that many people in our world face, we shared a few examples of how changes in circumstance can cause someone from one group to move to another. We wanted to challenge any assumptions that membership in a group is guaranteed or that someone who is hungry today has no hope of ever finding food security. We asked the child with the name John Drew written on his ticket to stand. John was in the blue group. We explained that John works in an electronics store and has lost his job. He has no family to rely on and no savings to fall back on. Without a job, John has no money for food and so he was asked to move from the blue group to the red group. John was very disappointed. The reaction from the rest of the room was mixed; some students felt badly for him, while others were glad that he too would not be getting pizza.

The student with the name Barbara Baker on her ticket was asked to stand. Barb, the children were told, owns a coffee shop. Because the price of coffee has fallen around the world, she is able buy beans for less but still sells coffee at the same price. Even though Barb is already in the blue group, she is now making more money than ever and so would be able to have two helpings of dinner. Barb was pleased with this development, but the students in the rest of the room didn't like this at all.

The drop in the price of coffee wasn't good for everyone. Al Hernandez from the red group was asked to stand. He works on a coffee plantation in El Salvador and has lost his job because the price of coffee has fallen. He is no longer able to provide any food at all for his family. Without help they only get water. Since Al was already in the red group, he couldn't change groups but he was told that he would only get water.

Finally, it was time to eat. Adults waited on the blue group, pouring their apple juice and passing out pizza. The children in the yellow group pitched in to distribute plates and forks to the people at their small group tables. At some tables the children passed around the rice and beans so that each member could help themselves. At other tables, one person served portions of food, making sure everyone had a share.

The behavior at in the red group was different in the two sessions. During the first banquet, Alyssa served the brown water, making sure that everyone got some. The group passed the bowl around the circle, each child scooping out a small handful of rice in an orderly way. Everyone who wanted rice was able to have a small serving, but they weren't satisfied. Ricky, a kindergardener, wrote, "I was at the red table. I was really sad because we only got rice and brown water. It was not fair. We only got one bowl of rice to share one drink. We had to use our hands to get a handful then pass it."

Three of the members of the red group in the second banquet refused to eat the rice. They sat at the edge of the tarp staring at the pizzas in the blue group. One of the fourth-grade boys grabbed the bowl of rice and brought it over to his friend. The two of them began gobbling rice with their backs to the group, not allowing any rice for others in their group. Out of frustration, Elizabeth, a third-grade girl from the group went over to the boys and took away the bowl, passing it carefully around the circle, but the rice ran out before everyone was given a portion. The other children in this group were outraged and rumors of the boys' selfish behavior spread rapidly throughout the school.



After letting the children eat for 10-15 minutes, we asked them to pause and share what they were thinking. Abby, from the red group said, "This is really sad. There isn't any other food that some kids get to eat. They get flavored food and we get unflavored food and dirty water. We would rather have pizza and not have to use our hands." Manny from the blue group shared, "Logan said we should share. We have enough food to share."

In both sessions some of children from the blue group decided that they had enough to share with the other two groups. After convincing the others in their group, they worked together to pass out a piece of pizza to everyone in the room. Once the children had finished eating their pizza, we asked them to do one more quick-write about what they were thinking and what they had learned from

the experience. These responses provided us with valuable information about their existing understandings and helped us decide where we needed to go next in our work with children on hunger and taking action.

People that don't have enough food will die of hunger. The numbers of people who don't have enough food are huge! There are almost 2 billion people who starve each day. It's sad to know that we can help more than we have over the years. -- Zachary, 4th grade

Some people in the United States are rich like the blue group, but some people are still in the red group. -- Stanley, 4th grade

I have helped the hungry. I feel good and feel it's the perfect feeling. It's a win-win. But I don't get more apple juice. I guess its okay. I'm still happy. -- Logan, 5th grade



In study group that afternoon teachers discussed what they noticed about their students' thinking. Teachers felt the feast was beneficial in helping students begin to recognize the problem of hunger, and in helping teachers identify the stereotypes, confusions, misconceptions, and limitations in students' understandings about hunger and taking action that would need to be challenged during our study.

In reflecting on their students' written and oral comments during the feast and during their classroom discussions following the feast, teachers noticed that the students understood or were beginning to understand a number of things. Many older children recognized the extreme disparity in the distribution of food and were beginning to see the magnitude of the problem. Their discussions focused on waste and on having enough to share with others. Some students were impressed by the number of people who go hungry every day. In one classroom students wondered how it was possible that someone could have a job and still not have enough money to prevent hunger.

There was evidence of compassion and empathy for the others in many of the students' responses. Elizabeth and Alyssa made sure that everyone was served within their groups. Morgan, a first grader, wrote, "I feel sad for people who have to suffer for days." Carah, another first grader, wrote, "I would be heartbroken if I was in the red group."

In his quick write, Logan, a fifth grader, shared an internal struggle, "I'm thinking that it's not fair that only we got pizza, but I get it so I don't care. I do feel sorry that the other people only get rice or rice and beans. The more people, the less food. I get my own pizza. Not everyone can get good food, but I'm lucky and I get good food." It was interesting that his struggle with this moral dilemma mirrored the tensions that privileged people around the world face. Ultimately, Logan was the person in his group to encourage others to share.

In their writings and classroom discussions following the feast, a number of the fifth graders seemed primarily concerned with liking or not liking the food and didn't address the broader issue of the inequity of distribution. While some students recognized that hunger exists in our community as well as in other places in the world they seemed to believe that only the homeless go hungry. We knew that we would need to challenge these students in seeing the issue from other perspectives. Hayden, a kindergartener at the blue table, dictated, "I like the pizza. It feels good sitting at the blue table." He wasn't yet concerned that there were others who didn't feel so good.

There was also concern by the adults that the students from the blue group who shared their pizza with the rest of the students did so with a sense of entitlement. Logan was disappointed that only one person told him thank you as he was sharing the pizza. They saw themselves as benevolent and giving to those in need, rather than from a sense of responsibility and concern with inequity. We would have to find ways to help children recognize that people in the world have little control over the economic situation in which they are born -- those with food are not more deserving than those without -- and that taking action to make the world a better place is a responsibility, not an opportunity to display their generosity for those with less.

The teachers were also concerned that the quick solution -- students in the blue group immediately distributing the pizzas to the other groups -- may have resulted in a missed opportunity to empathize and understand. They felt that the simple and rapid solution was misleading and took away the children's chance to struggle with the tensions that had been introduced.

That same evening, the school had a parent event and so we saw many of our Van Horne families. The parents told the teachers that the kids came home and described the experience in detail. It was clear that the global feast had an immediate impact on students' thinking about hunger.

Following the feast we moved into engagements that allowed students to think deeply about the range of causes for hunger. We personalized the issue for students using stories, videos, and guest

speakers as well as provided them with a range of nonfiction resources that provided facts and statistics. As our study progressed, students made reference to the feast over and over again. They associated the experiences of characters in the stories they read with the group colors and referred to the big numbers that remained posted in the library during their discussions and reflections. When asked to create a sketch to stretch of her understandings about taking action at the conclusion of our study, Elizabeth drew red, yellow, and blue people to express her thoughts about the need for everyone (red, blue, and yellow) to work together to help the hungry, as well as the need for a caring heart and ideas about the causes of hunger.



We believe that the Global Feast was memorable because children engaged in an affective as well as cognitive experience. O'Neill (1989) argues that this type of drama experience encourages children to create and retain knowledge as well as to recall the power of feelings generated during the experience. Drama creates an open space that encourages the movement to critical dialogue around multiple voices and perspectives. By carefully examining these perspectives, students have the opportunity to build understandings of the complex ways in which we live in a diverse society and to consider other possibilities for taking action and living in the world.

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Creating Conceptual Understandings of Hunger

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

Most of the students in our small public school seem to be well-taken care of. They know that they have a roof over their heads, clothes to wear, food on the table and lots of love. So when our parent organization decided to sponsor a canned food drive, we wondered whether the students really understood what it is like to suffer from hunger -- not to be hungry but to *know* hunger.

As the holiday season approached, students collected canned goods for the food drive. In a class discussion, we talked about “tight times” and why families might need extra food. The students kept referring to the “economy” as the reason that people were going through tight times, but didn’t really know what the economy entailed. They were repeating words they had heard from the adults around them without a deep understanding of those ideas. The class did decide that they wanted to collect good food from home, not food that was out of date or that they wouldn’t want to eat themselves, and donate the food to families in need from our school, giving the remainder to the community food bank. Students brought food to donate and placed it on a large table in the hallway that was organized by proteins, grains/rice, and fruits and vegetables. The students were also aware that the student council was selling popcorn each Friday and the proceeds would go to buy additional food for hungry families.

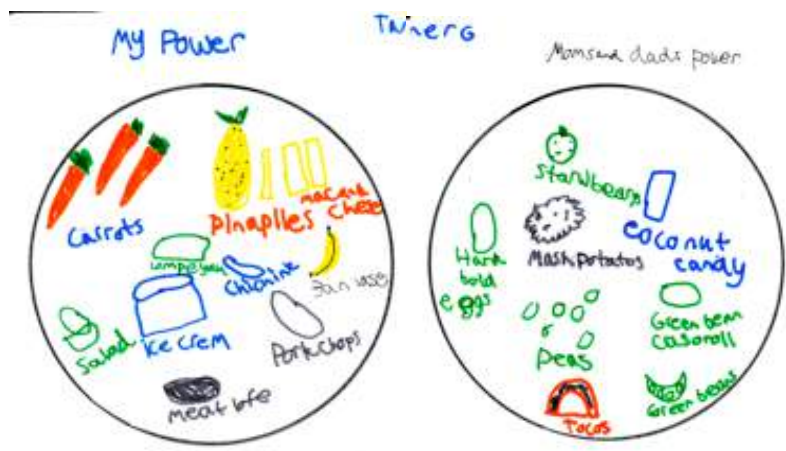
School-wide, students collected a large amount of food. They were proud of their accomplishments but teachers couldn’t help but wonder if students understood the magnitude of the need for food, including people in their own community. To most students, hungry people are the guys who stand on the street corners holding up signs or people who live in other countries that they see on television. Hunger was not an issue that they felt was prevalent in their city or neighborhoods. As teachers, we were uncomfortable with students’ misconceptions about hunger and their lack of understanding about the global and local issues involved with hunger.

When we returned from our winter break we decided to focus on hunger to build stronger conceptual understandings of hunger as a global and local issue. We began by talking about diet, since it was January and there were constant television commercials and newspaper ads about diets. Many students thought diet was a plan to lose weight, but Elizabeth said, “What you eat is your diet. Diet also tells what animals eat. Bird has a diet of berries and bugs.” Evan simply said, “Good food or bad food is your diet.”

We also talked about whether children have power over their diets. We read aloud *Burger Boy* (Durant, 2005) about a boy who only eats burgers until he eventually turns into a burger and is chased by hungry animals and people. He then eats vegetables to turn back into a boy and his mom warns him that he is going to turn into a carrot -- and he does. This book led to discussions about the need for a balanced diet. Mason said that you need to “eat a little bit of everything.”

To think more about power of choice related to diet, the students were given a paper with two large

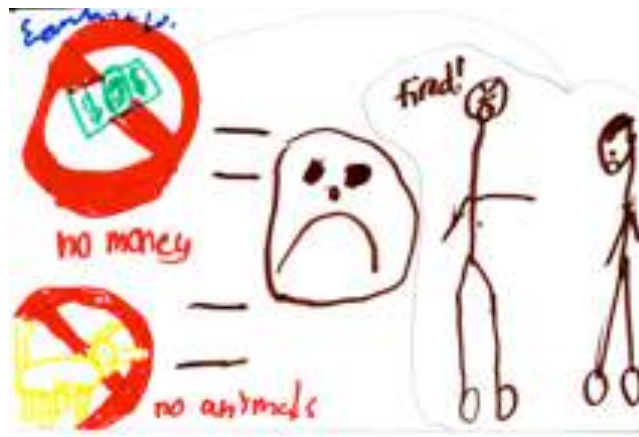
circles. On one circle, students were asked to put all of the foods they would eat if they had the power over their diet, and to put what they would eat if their parents had all of the power in other circle.



We then came back together as a class and created a web showing student thinking about the power of diet. The class decided that if we don't eat what we need, then we face obesity, starvation, or disease. We have to change our diets. The students seemed to be seeing some of the larger issues and not just focusing on food as what they put into their mouths.

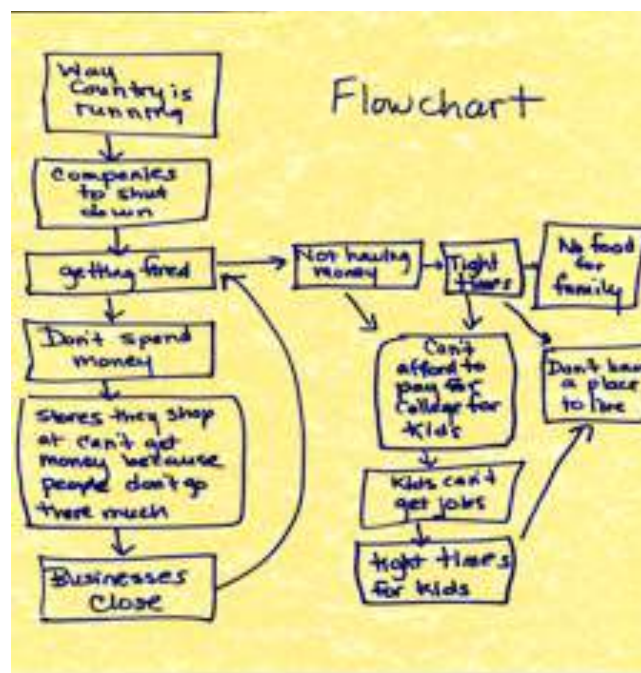


The next read aloud was *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1979) about a family whose father loses his job and, even though mom is still working, they can't afford what they need. Kylie worried about the family because, "If they can't afford vegetables, then they can't eat healthy and they will have a low immune system." Tayler didn't understand why they didn't have money if they had jobs. Each student created a Sketch to Stretch to show the symbolic meaning of the story through visual images and labels. Many created sketches that included a variation of NO \$ = NO FOOD.



Evan said, “I drew a no money sign equals unhappy because they are sad and don’t have food or pets.” Edel commented, “In the first picture the person has enough money to buy food for their family. In the second picture, they don’t have enough money to buy food. The food is less and the bowls are smaller and they’re having very tough times right now.”

In large group, students created a flow chart to show the consequences of tight times. The flow chart traced the way problems in a country can lead to companies closing and people losing jobs and so not having money for an education and not being able to get a good job, eventually leading to people ending up homeless and without food.



What seemed hardest for the students to understand was the idea that children could suffer from hunger in a home where there were two working adults. They couldn't figure out how people could have jobs and still be hungry. We contacted the community food bank and a representative was able to come out and do a presentation that included informing the students that most food bank recipients do have jobs -- they just don't make enough money to take care of themselves. The representative told the students that the other two major groups of people who need food in Tucson are children and senior citizens. The picture of the homeless man in ragged clothes at the stoplight or the child in India seemed to be fading.

A turning point came when students worked in small groups to read sections of *Famine: The World Reacts* (Bennett, 1998) and focused on the differences between hunger and feeling hungry. The information they received from this book helped them understand the difference between rumblings in your stomach and going day after day without enough food to ever satisfy hunger and so always feeling sick, weak, and tired. They also began to understand the difference between chronic hunger where a person has just enough food to stay alive over a long period of time before eventually dying from disease and famine where there is suddenly no food and starvation often leads to a quick death.



Then we held a [global banquet](#) with all of the classes from the school. As the students entered the library, they drew a red, yellow, or blue card. Those with red cards sat together on the floor and represented 25% of the world's population who are experiencing chronic hunger. They only received a tiny amount of rice to share. Those with yellow cards represented 60% of the world who get just enough to eat. They sat at small tables and shared rice and beans with enough for everyone to get a good portion. Those with blue cards represented the 15% of the world who get more than their share. They sat at fancy tables and had tons more pizza than they could possibly eat. During the banquet some students “lost their jobs” and had to switch to another group and one student doubled her income and got double her share of pizza. The experience demonstrated to the students that there is plenty of food in the world to feed everyone, but that it isn't distributed properly.





After the banquet we returned to our room to discuss what happened. I tried to get the students to think about what the banquet represented by asking “why?” to their complaints about not being in the blue group. After much discussion, they decided that location plays a huge part in food availability. They realized that they were fortunate to be born in a location where so many foods are available. They also felt that parents’ jobs and incomes make a big difference in what kind of “hunger situation” kids face. Evan seemed to sum up our thinking when he said that, in the real world, people don’t share their abundances and so others face horrible hunger. Engaging in this drama experience helped students understand that hunger is often the result of factors over which people have no control and to feel frustration over being in the wrong place and so not getting the food they needed or wanted.

Our explorations of hunger continued through read alouds, such as the novel [Nory Ryan’s Song](#) (Giff, 2000), the story of a young girl’s experience of hunger in the Irish Potato Famine, along with picture books that provided a range of perspectives. These books put a human face on the misery that accompanies hunger so that the students would see hunger as more than numbers.

The students decided that they needed to take action to help those suffering from hunger, in particular they wanted to help a country in Africa. We did some research on various Web sites, and students wanted to focus on raising money for food and water for refugee camps. They practiced learning the different countries in Africa and the states in the United States. Then they asked family members to sponsor them for our “map-a-thon” and they studied the maps each night! After the test and the donations had been collected we had raised almost \$300. The students had worked on their own to raise money to help fight hunger. The most valuable lesson they learned was that children can make a difference and take action. They just had to come together to work for the cause.

Through these many experiences, the students began to develop a conceptual understanding of

hunger and of the causes and prevalence of hunger in the world and in their community. Most adults, when asked to define hunger, would refer to the charitable organizations that ask for sponsors of starving children across the world. They would say that hunger is an issue faced by other countries, particularly in times of drought. It's not a surprise, then, that our students have these same misconceptions. Hunger is right in their neighborhoods as well as a real problem all over the world. We may have enough food available to feed the world's population, but without a more complex awareness of hunger and its causes, nothing will change. As teachers, we need to develop deep conceptual understandings of global and local issues like hunger or we risk maintaining the status quo -- feeling pity for those who are in need without any sense of responsibility for understanding that need or taking action for social change.

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Challenging Stereotypes of Poverty through Children's Literature

by Kaye Wingfield, Fourth/Fifth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Many children accept society's stereotypes of the poor as dirty, dishonest, lazy, and dependent on free handouts from hardworking citizens. These stereotypes are so pervasive that children cling to them even when presented with contradictory evidence, and even when their own families could be viewed as poor. The sociopolitical issue of poverty and economic difficulty was particularly relevant and poignant in Spring 2009 when many families in our school experienced changes in their lifestyles due to the economic crisis in the United States. Children from a range of backgrounds, including middle class and working class families, were struggling and experiencing "tight times," not just the families previously viewed as "poor." Our students saw their own parents, friends, and family members struggling with financial difficulties or heard news reports about people in Tucson who were losing their jobs and worrying about their homes and feeding their families. They had previously assumed these events only happened in faraway places, not in their own families and community. We realized that this context provided an opportunity to challenge students to push their thinking and critique some of the common stereotypes associated with people living in poverty.

We wanted children to realize that many people, including themselves, experience "tight times" and difficult situations, despite working hard and often due to no fault of their own. They needed to

see themselves as connected to the conditions that can lead a family to experience poverty, instead of viewing the “poor” as somehow different and inferior. At the same time, the tight times experienced by families do vary greatly, and might mean anything from delaying a trip to Disneyland or the purchase of a new toy to not having enough to eat or a place to sleep. We wanted children to recognize the significant differences between delaying “wants” and not meeting basic “needs.”

We had explored conceptual issues of power during the fall semester, and had begun talking about the power of diet and food within our school. Lisa Thomas, our Learning Lab instructor, connected to these ideas as a way to move into a discussion of tight times. Lisa reminded students of a previous activity where they documented what they would eat if they had the power to choose anything they wanted versus if their parents had the power to force them to eat only the things that they thought were good for kids. This activity included a discussion of power and diet in our world and in our lives. She also reminded students about the canned food drive at the school before the Winter Holiday. Students talked about the times in people’s lives when things are tight and how tight times can lead to situations where there is not enough food or families can not buy extra food or go out to restaurants.

Lisa read aloud a book about what causes tight times in one particular family. *Tight Times* (Hazan, 1979) is a story about a young boy who desperately wants a dog, but his father says no because of tight times. Examples of tight times in the book include eating generic cereal because of rising prices on name brands, playing in the sprinkler in the yard instead of going to the lake, eating lima bean soup rather than roast beef, and coming home from school to a babysitter because the mother needs to work. One day, the father comes home early because he has lost his job. When the boy goes outside while his parents talk, he hears a cat crying in trashcan. He brings the cat home, getting it milk with the hope that his parents will agree to let him keep the cat. His plea brings tears for the whole family. The father agrees to keep the cat as long as the boy promises not to ask about a dog again. In reply, the boy decides to name the cat Dog.

Lisa encouraged the students to talk about the book while she and I took notes about their comments. The students were aware that they did not have to raise their hands to speak during discussions, but they needed to wait for the person before them to finish. We had also been working with them on listening to and acknowledging previous comments.

Kaitlynn wondered why everyone in the family cried when they saw the cat drinking the milk. Zachary responded that they cried because the cat would be one more stressor and they would have to worry about having money to buy cat food. Abbey commented that they may not have been crying about the cat specifically but about the dad losing his job. Some students were interested in trying to figure out why the dad lost his job. Several wondered whether the tight times might not

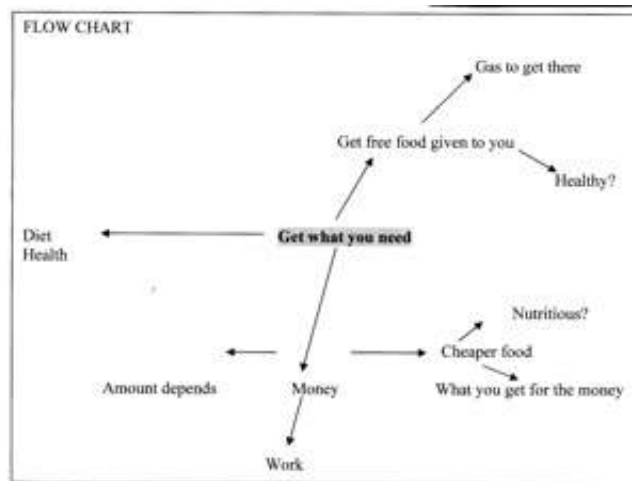
just be affecting this family but others as well. Maybe the company had to lay off lots of their employees like all the people at the Tucson city newspaper who were losing their jobs at that time. Also the babysitter in the book lost her job because the dad would now be home. A number of children were concerned about why someone would put the cat in the trash can. One child wondered whether the cat got in the trash can because it was looking for food. Lisa asked why the dad changed his mind about getting a pet and let the boy keep the cat. Logan and Jacob thought that maybe he thought the cat was little and needed help or wanted the kid to stop asking for a dog or cat.

After this discussion, each student created a sketch to stretch on the most significant meaning of this story. The students were asked to go to a table and work silently, independently, and focus on listening to their brain. Instead of talking, they were to think and then draw, using visual images and symbols to express their ideas, rather than sentences. Words could be used as labels for these visual images, but they were primarily to use visual images to reflect on the meanings of the story. Their sketches reflected common threads of issues, such as the father losing his job, the family having little money, and connections to pets. Adrianna's sketch went further with her words and symbolism focusing on emotions, such as stress and depression. Sean used the symbol of a rainbow going from bright colors and happiness to more somber colors and tears of sadness.





After completing their sketches, the students returned to the whole group and created a flow chart of their thinking about the possible consequences of tight times for food/diet and health.



During the discussion about getting free food, Frank said his family had been to the Community Food Bank to get a food box because his mom's hours had been cut at work and there just wasn't enough money for food. He was worried about his mother having enough to eat. Sometimes students associate laziness and the expectation of handouts with people who are poor. There is also a disconnect between people that students perceive as poor and themselves. Frank's comment indicated that students were becoming comfortable with sharing their experiences and not being ostracized by the group because of an economic situation. His comment helped other students realize that there were classmates in their midst who were experiencing what they thought was happening elsewhere. Through personal experience, books, news reports and class discussions, students seemed to be moving away from some of the more common stereotypes and were beginning to understand that everyone experiences these tight times to some extent.

During Learning Lab the following week, students were encouraged to think about the differences between needs and wants and consider how the consequences of tight times can differ from family to family in significant ways. Lisa had the students review a book they had previously discussed,

The Lady in the Box (McGovern, 1997) which Kygatheo summarized as a story about a homeless lady who needed shelter, food, and blankets. Lisa also asked them to revisit *Tight Times*, which Terrell summarized as a book about a boy who had to do without a pet he wanted. Terrell pointed out that the boy had food, just not the kind he wanted. Lisa reminded the class that we had been discussing food and the issues of tight times and that we wanted to think more about these issues, in particular by talking about how tight times can mean different things to families, including doing without, waiting and/or getting help from others.

Mary Cowhey (2006), author of *Black Ants and Buddhists*, finds it powerful to draw on personal experiences or experiences that are public knowledge when talking with students. Consequently, Lisa talked about a current news report in the United States about the executives who run the car companies and make millions. They were asking for tax dollars to help their plants stay open because they were in trouble, but then got in private jets and flew to Washington to meet with Congress to ask for that money. People in the country were upset and wondered whether the government should spend money to help these companies. The next time the auto executives had to go to Washington, they drove in cars, showing that even they were being affected by the economy, however, the debate continued about whether they really needed the help.

Lisa asked the students to work with a partner to read a book and think about the causes of tight times. The characters in the books make decisions about what they need and what they want and students were to infer the causes of the tight times and think about what the characters were doing without or had to wait for as well as whether that was a need or a want. Lisa asked the students to fill out a sheet answering two questions: Why are there tight times? and What do they have to do without? Students were to consider different possibilities and think about who struggles more in tight times, people with needs or people with wants.

Each partner chose one book to read together from a text set that included: *Beatrice's Goat*, *Fly Away Home*, *A Shelter in Our Car*, *A Castle on Viola Street*, *Peppe the Lamplighter*, *Those Shoes*, *The Hard Times Jar*, *Bothers in Hope*, *A Chair for My Mother*, *If the Shoe Fits*, *Homeless*, and [Four Feet, Two Sandals](#). They read together and then talked through and wrote their responses to the questions.

Students noted a range of reasons for why people experience tight times:

- War leads to lack of food (leave their homes/refugee camps may not have enough food)
- Losing jobs (not enough money for medicine/food/shelter)
- Sickness (parents sick/can't work/no money for food or shelter)
- Both parents working but jobs don't pay enough to cover food/shelter/clothing
- Too many bills to pay
- Business not selling enough merchandise so can't afford much food or clothing

- Can't replace things that break

Students also noted a range of things that people do without in tight times:

- Shoes and clothes
- House/Large enough house to fit large family/Repairs in a house
- Money
- Education
- Car
- Books
- Pets
- Friends
- Family





After reading the books and recording their thoughts, students returned to the whole group and shared a short summary of each book and talked about the needs and wants evident in the books. During the discussion, Max shared that he was saving for some Bionicle toys and instead gave his money to his mom because they had run short on food for the week. The students did not directly comment on what he said, but in looking around the room, it was evident that this gesture tied directly into what they were reading and made it relevant to their lives.

Finally the group worked through where to place the books on a continuum between doing without needs and doing without wants. For each book, they had to decide where it would go on this continuum between needs and wants in relation to the other books, requiring some difficult and complex thinking and distinctions. They clearly understood that doing without food and shelter was definitely a need and doing without a new or popular pair of tennis shoes was a want, but placing books in the center of the continuum involved a great deal of discussion and negotiation. They agreed to put the family where the mom still worked and the dad had lost his job in the same spot as the family where both parents were working but did not make enough money to support the family with the appropriate housing and food. They put books where both parents were working but not making enough money to meet the family needs slightly to the right on the continuum towards doing without wants. To the left on the continuum, they put books where the parents were not able to work due to war, illness, and job loss as well as books where children did not have parents to support them.



The students did not blame the victims in these circumstances and didn't fall back on stereotypical judgments that sometimes are connected to these situations. For example, when they encountered a family that was doing without things, they didn't write or say, why don't these parents get a job? If there wasn't enough money to support the family, they didn't say, why did they have so many children? or why did they spend their money on this item instead of that item? They seemed to grasp the concept that these issues are deeper than just the individual family unit and that these situations happen for many reasons around the globe. This discussion reflected a major conceptual shift in their thinking and recognition of complexity in the functioning of societal systems.

The students continued to make connections about the concept of needs and wants throughout the rest of the semester. One such time involved a discussion that followed our Global Feast, a school-wide simulation of food distribution and hunger around the world. Each group of students represented a percentage of the world and reflected how food is distributed -- those who have more than their fair share of food, those who have just enough to eat, and those who never get enough food to stay healthy. The food they received ranged from an abundance of pizza to just enough beans and rice for each small group to one small bowl of rice for a whole group. The students who had just enough beans and rice for their small group to eat realized that they wanted pizza, but it wasn't a necessity. They could survive on their portions, while the large group that had only one small bowl actually needed more to survive.

Another situation involved the Scholastic Book Fair that occurs twice a year at school. Students usually rush in during the preview time and list all sorts of books, toys, and posters that they want to buy. During the spring, I noticed a few students looking at the toys and the posters and telling each other that, with money being an issue for their family, they were going to spend some of their own money and ask their parents for less. They were going to limit themselves to one book and one poster, even though they wanted more than that. Some even commented that they didn't need any of the merchandise. Nate said he needed to get a book for his book report and Colton replied that he could actually get a book from the library. Jeremiah commented that the PTO needed the students to buy books to help with their fundraising.

These comments and distinctions between needs and wants indicated that students had taken on a new awareness about needs and wants as part of their thinking and actions. By starting with personal connections to tight times, students were able to look at their everyday lives and community from a new perspective and not just locate economic struggles as a problem that was

“out there” away from their own immediate worlds. Literature provided a safe way for them to make these connections without revealing too much about their own family situations, unless they chose to do so. Literature also provided a way to look at multiple family contexts and societal situations that might cause difficulty, so that they did not reduce tight times to a narrow view of the causes and consequences. Through the literature, they came to recognize the complexity of these causes and the range of possible consequences, as well as to develop empathy for those who struggle with tremendous needs, not just wants. These understandings of causes and consequences, in turn, provided students with ways of thoughtfully taking action. Instead of holding onto stereotypes, they took an important step away from blame and charity to considering how to make a difference in the world.

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Helping Young Students Think Conceptually: An Inquiry Study of Hunger and Power

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

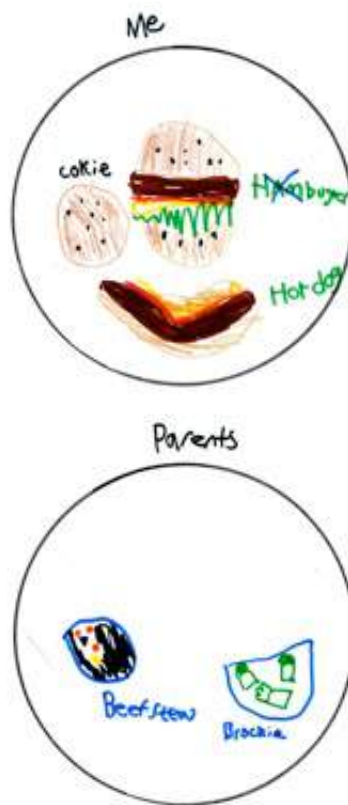
One of the consequences of shifting to an inquiry-based approach in my teaching has been a shift in how I plan curriculum. Instead of following a predetermined set of theme units and lesson plans, I look at larger chunks of time and am constantly involved in examining student thinking and questions in order to determine where we might go next in our learning. I still have a plan and a

focus for our inquiry, but find that I need to spend time carefully examining student work, reflecting on my observations, rereading my teaching journal, and talking with colleagues to create that plan for curriculum.

Having explored a school-wide concept of power for the fall semester, I met with my colleague, Jennifer Griffith, to consider where this inquiry might go during the spring semester. Jennifer and I had worked together closely the previous year, but this year we were teaching a combination class of first and second graders, sixty students total. After reflecting over the fall semester, one tension stood out for us. Each year during the holidays our Student Council organizes a food drive for the Community Food Bank. We realized that our students were not making a meaningful connection to this effort. They did not get to see what happened to that food and where it went after they gathered it, and we had not offered them opportunities to understand the significance of this endeavor. The relationship between the students' efforts to support the Community Food Bank and our inquiry into power sparked a realization that we could deepen their conceptual understanding of power by thinking broadly about the Power of Food.

Reflecting now on our work, I realize that the journey our students took prompted a real shift in understanding. Initially our students brought in canned food for the food drive during the fall because they were asked, but by the end of the spring semester, they brought in canned food because they understood the needs of families and identified with the reasons behind why we donate to the Community Food Bank. Short and Harste (1996) argue that inquiry should always begin with connections to the concept based on children's life experiences before broadening understanding of the issue. Instead of starting our inquiry so far away from the children as had been done with the food drive, we wanted to start this time by having children think about food in their own lives and what it means to have tight times as a family. Because of the economic crisis in the U.S. and our community, we felt these were powerful points of connection for children.

Lisa Thomas, our Learning Lab teacher, started the process of thinking about food with our students. She read [*Burger Boy*](#) by Alan Durant (2005), a story about a boy who eats so many burgers that he turned into one! After a short literature discussion, Lisa asked the students to think about diet and food, and the power that food has in their lives, continually asking students to ponder the concept of power. Each student was given a piece of paper to show what they would eat if they had the power to choose their food. On the other side of the paper, they drew what their parents would choose for them to eat if their parents had all the power. This engagement proved to be helpful in setting the foundation to help students understand "The Power of Food."



The next Learning Lab session provided students with a touchstone text. Lisa read *Tight Times* by Barbara Shook Hazen (1979), a book about a boy who wanted a dog, but his family couldn't afford one because the father had lost his job. It was apparent from the literature discussion that our students made strong connections to this book.

Bailey: I have a connection because we sometimes go through tough times, but we always get through it.

Maria: My cousin doesn't have much because her mom doesn't have much because her dad doesn't pay money.

Justin: My dad has hard times because he quit his job.

Ysabel: My mom has hard times because she quit her job. We don't have many toys either.

Haley: Do you have a car?

Ysabel: No, it broke down.

Bailey: I have a connection to Ysabel because my mom quit her job, and I don't get to see my dad much because he works from 4:00 in the morning to 5:00 at night. I miss my dad.

Nick: My mom, sister, dad and me had a tough time because we got a dog from the pound, and he got sick. He had to be put asleep.

Connor: I have a connection with Bailey because my dad works overtime now.

Maria: I have a connection with Connor because my dad has to work more to work on the planes.

Our discussion about tough times continued into our next Learning Lab session when Lisa asked the students, "What are tight times?" The students' responses were:

- not much money
- not much food or money
- may not have houses
- may live in shelters
- no money to go to school, and can't have dogs or cats

When asked to be more specific, “What are tight times when we’re talking about money?” Justin stated, “It’s like if you get some money and you want a game but you don’t have food. You should buy the food.” Justin continued to reflect, “It’s what you need, not what you want.” Dewey (1938) argues that the beginning of instruction shall be the experience learners already have; that this experience and the capacities that have been developed during its course provide the starting point for all further learning. At this point, it was clear that our students were making connections to issues related to tight times and that they were ready to build upon that knowledge. We decided to shift their thinking to explore the root causes of hunger so that they could build strong understandings of why people suffer from hunger and the different kinds of tight times that families might experience.

We talked together as a staff about the kinds of invitations we might offer students in order to engage them in productive learning that would encourage them to develop new understandings and take them beyond their life experiences. It was at this point that we introduced the students to the terms hungry, hunger, and famine in the Learning Lab. Every student had felt hungry, and so Lisa described hunger as a feeling you have when you’re hungry for a very, very long time. We asked the students to describe what hungry and hunger might feel like. They described hungry as feeling bad, feeling mad or cranky, and feeling like you are going to be sick. Hunger was described as a feeling of sadness for yourself and your family, an empty feeling, and a feeling that you are broken down. Lisa helped them grasp the term famine by describing that it was when thousands and thousands of people in an area experience hunger.

Hungry	Hunger
Feels bad	Sad for yourself and family
Tummy is empty	Could die - want survive
Stomach Talk	Wouldn't feel good
Like you are going to be sick	Bones would turn weak
Sad	Nauseous and dizzy
Stomach saying, "I want food"	Sick - even more
Don't have energy	Feel like you are shrinking
Gonna throw up	Feel empty
Mad - Cranky	Wouldn't run or play - broken down

In the same Learning Lab session we hoped to push their thinking when we introduced the non-fiction book *Feeding the World* by Janine Amos (1993). This book gives examples of causes of hunger, such as drought and war. By using selected parts of this text we hoped to give the students information that would support their understandings of the causes of hunger and famine. This Learning Lab session was important because it pushed the students to think about things that were uncomfortable, things that they had not experienced before, and things that would be important to their understanding in later engagements.

Around this time, during a Study Group session, we explored a book by Stephanie Kempf (2005), *Finding Solutions to Hunger: A Sourcebook for Middle and Upper School Teachers*. After thoughtful discussions and careful consideration we decided to modify an engagement from this book so it would be appropriate for our elementary students. "Eating the Way the World Eats" allows students to experience firsthand how unfairly food is distributed in our world. Three different meals are prepared in advance -- each representing one of the three groups in the world: those who have more than their fair share of food, those who have just enough, and those who never get enough food to stay healthy. By sheer "luck of the draw" students are randomly assigned to one of these groups (Kempf, 2005). We held a school-wide banquet to simulate this activity. Our first and second graders attended the banquet with other students in grades three to five. Each student was given a ticket with a color that represented a percentage of the world's population; yellow represented 60%, blue represented 15%, and red represented 25%. The students were simply told that they were going to eat the way the world eats. We delivered pizza, enough pizza to feed everyone present, to the blue group. There was excited chatter and a sense of anticipation in the air at that point. Then we delivered community bowls of beans and rice to the yellow tables. The yellow group was divided into ten tables of six students. Each table received a community bowl. The red group was given one community bowl for all 25 students, who were sitting on the

floor. To simulate natural movement due to changes in circumstance we then moved several students from one group to another due to changing economic factors. We anticipated a mixed reaction from the students, and that is exactly what happened. It was important to us that the banquet not create anger or hostility within the groups. Our goal was to elicit thinking and further our students' conceptual understanding of power, specifically food as connected to issues of power. Therefore, in the end, after everyone had the opportunity to experience how the world eats, each student got to eat pizza.

Jennifer and I were uncertain as to the significance of the banquet and how it affected our young students' understandings, however, the conversation we had with our students immediately following the banquet helped to put aside some of our uncertainty. Students made a range of comments:

Jordan: I was happy when I walked in, but I got scared because there were a lot of people there.

Carah: When I got a ticket and sat down I got excited, but then I felt angry because we got beans and rice. I didn't want beans and rice.

Reid: You should feel lucky you got pizza from us.

Abbey A.: We should be lucky and grateful that we even got food.

Abby G.: I think I disagree. When I came in and got a ticket I wondered what it was all about. Then I smelled the pizza and thought we were going to get it, then the blue table got it and I was mad.

Morgan: I felt sad for other people in Tucson because we live in the desert and there's not much food in the desert. I feel sad for people who have to suffer. That's lots of days to eat just beans and rice.

Carah: I'm heartbroken because the red group sounds so sad.

Morgan: In real life people actually suffer. Maybe the people who have lots of food could share.

Dewey (1938) suggests that we create environments that have the most potential for tension. Morgan's comment was significant because we could sense that our students were experiencing tension over the fact that there are people in our world who do not have enough to eat. We perceived those tensions as opportunities to move our students beyond learning and into deep understanding. Now that our students were on the edge of knowing about the distribution of food and the power of food we were excited to expand our work into the classroom.

Jennifer and I wanted to offer a progression of experiences that would be appropriate to engage our students in productive learning. We hoped to enhance the work being done in the Learning Lab, in which Lisa was helping the students to understand root causes of hunger, such as poverty, economic failure and food distribution. Therefore, in the classroom we began exploring examples of children in other countries who have enough food to eat. At first this idea may seem odd since our goal was to help our students understand hunger, however, we knew that we needed to start

with our students' own life experiences, and since none of our students had experienced hunger or famine we wanted to start with having them examine the food they eat in families and how that differs for other families around the world. We relied heavily on Beatrice Hollyer's book, *Let's Eat! What Children Eat Around the World* (2003). This non-fiction text describes the daily lives of six children, each from a different country. We decided to chart what we were learning about the location, weather, food, home and school life, special occasions, and any questions that still lingered after reading a section of the book on a particular child. This book was very engaging because it allowed students to make connections to children from around the world who were their same age. The students engaged in many conversations related to how the children from the book lead lives that are both similar and different from their lives. We took several weeks to read, discuss, and chart our students' understandings. Finally, we created a comparison chart so the students could think about their lives compared to the lives of the children in the book.

Jordan in France		Power of Food	
Location	Weather	FOOD	
		They Grow	They Eat
Village - St. Germain SW France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cold cheeks • Long sleeves • Rainy (moss, mushrooms) 	mushrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mushrooms • Charcuterie • Charcuterie cake • Bread • Chicken • Steak • Fries
Home	School	Special Occasions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village • Linobish • Restaurant • Bread 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat a 3 course meal for lunch 	mushroom hunting	

What are our questions?

- Why does Jordan get up late and rush to eat?
- How does he know how to make cake?

Thembu in South Africa		Power of Food	
Location	Weather	Food	
South Africa • East Coast • Outside city of Durban • In the hills	Warm hot	They grow lemon mango corn	They eat porridge + fill their up meat - thupha have a lot
Home	School	Special Occasions	
cook on a fire walk to school valley to get water carry water in clay pot on head no sweets in house no electricity no running water mom + dad live in separate village	They have a vegetable garden • sell vegetables or take it home if family needs it	• Wedding • Soda was something they drank • men get to eat the best pieces first women ate leftovers in a bowl	
Questions we still have?			
Why can't they make electricity? Why do they eat separately? Why do her mom + dad live in a different village? Why don't they have jobs?			

	France	India	S. Africa	Mexico	U.S.A.
What They Grow	• Mushrooms • fruit	• veggies • fruit	• corn	• tomatoes, beans • peppers • corn	• tomatoes • eggplant
What They Eat	• lots of bread • soups • cheese • vegetables • meat	• Cookies • and milk • for breakfast • Veggies • Fruit • banana, pineapple • papaya	• porridge (pudding)	• tortillas • peppers • cheese • beans • salsa	• pizza • french toast • hamburger • apple pie • chicken (chicken)
What are their homes like	• live in houses • lots of trees • in a village • no electricity • no running water	• Don't eat • meat on • Tues • garden • apartment	• Doesn't live with • mom + dad • cook alone • on fire - no • stove • carry water • from valley to • house	• they have to go • to share everything • because no money • no running water • only had to come • to their house	• lots of room • in houses
What is school like?	• eat a 3 course • meal	• snack is • called duffin • go home for • lunch	• garden • don't bring food • because of • it's too far to • go to school	• Brush twice • teeth a school • (washing hands • at school)	• long at day
What is the weather like?	• sunny but • not too hot • some rain • some snow	• cold (cold)	• hot - sunny • Not much • rain / Dry	• Sunny • not much rain	• hot • not too hot
What are the foods they eat at special occasions	• Mushroom • hunting	• Halwa • (special • dessert) • almonds • cookie shape	• Coca Cola • Orange juice • pudding • chocolate • when get big • men + women • women + kids • eat this	• In the time • they eat sweet • bread and fish • Flakes	• ice cream • (birthday • cake) • yellow cake • (birthday)

Because our students easily made connections to other children from around the world by exploring their daily lives, we were ready to shift their thinking so they could explore their tensions over the fact that there are people in the world who do not have enough food to eat. We discovered two non-fiction texts that were critical in helping our students understand that many children around the world do not have enough food to eat. These two books, through their text and powerful

pictures, helped our students see what hunger and famine look like. As with *Let's Eat! What Children Eat around the World*, we read *Out of the Dump* by Kristin Franklin and Nancy McGirr (1996), and [*The Lost Boys of Natinga: A School for Sudan's Young Refugees*](#) by Judy Walgren (1998) over many days. *Out of the Dump* is a compilation of photographs taken by children living in the garbage dump in the center of Guatemala City. Accompanying each photograph is a piece of writing that describes the photograph, also written by the children living in the dump. *The Lost Boys of Natinga: A School for Sudan's Young Refugees* discusses the lost boys arrival, the history of the lost boys, and their life at Natinga, including school, food, church, health, and recreation. Because the entire text was not appropriate and would have overwhelmed our young children, we used only the portions that would be of benefit to our students' understanding of the power of food.

Even though both books were significant to student understanding, perhaps the most powerful engagements were the school visits from Amanda Morse of the Community Food Bank and Abraham Deng Ater, a lost boy from Natinga. The opportunity for the students to hear first-hand accounts of hunger solidified their understanding of the power of food. Amanda Morse first asked the students what they had already learned about food issues. Some of their responses were:

- when some people have food and others don't
- sometimes you send so much food out of a country that you don't have enough food in the country
- famine
- how food is transferred-transportation
- where food comes from
- what the difference is between hunger and hungry
- sometimes people don't have enough money to pay for food

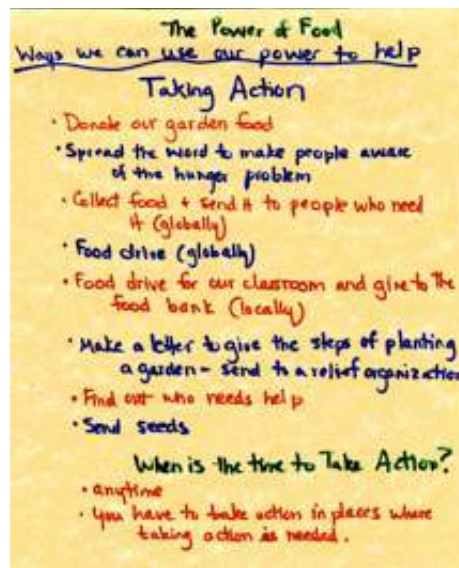
Amanda described the difference between food secure (safe access to food for a healthy life) and food insecure (don't have food or safe access to food). She also described the purpose of the Community Food Bank and the populations that they serve. The students were surprised to learn that 40% of the people getting food from the food bank are kids! To end her program she stated that donating food is a short-term solution, but teaching people to plant their own gardens is a long-term solution. Our students immediately made the connection to our class garden. We had already planted a garden and were making all kinds of discoveries, such as which plants grow faster, how much water and sunlight is required, etc. Amanda's presentation furthered our students' understanding of the power of food.

Abraham Deng Ater described his journey from the Sudan to Ethiopia to Kenya and finally to the United States. He shared his experiences with having little or no food. He described how he felt and helped students grasp the difference between hungry and hunger, which had always seemed a difficult concept for them. We knew the students had made the connection when they began asking

questions that were particular to the book that we had read about the lost boys, such as “Did you know anyone who ate poisonous leaves and died?” We had read about how children in Natinga had become so hungry that they would forage for leaves and would sometimes eat the wrong (poisonous) leaves and die.

All of these engagements created a context through which students could conceptualize The Power of Food. Since we had based our journey on our students’ life experiences, they were able to build their understandings and add to them as the year progressed. Because Jennifer and I had worked closely the previous year, bringing together our first and second graders, we were able to give the students opportunities to take action in our community. This year’s second graders benefited from that knowledge of taking action. Roger Hart (1992) argues that, “Children need to be involved in meaningful projects with adults. It is unrealistic to expect them suddenly to become responsible, participating adult citizens at the age of 16, 18, or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved” (p. 5). This kind of thinking pushes us as educators to constantly challenge our students to become better individuals. We also recognized that power is tied to action because it is the ability to influence an outcome. Our thinking was that kids need the opportunity to take action in order to understand power. Therefore, we did not impose our thinking onto students but thought with them and provided structures that challenged them to think more deeply about their understandings of the power of food. We asked them two guiding questions, “How can we use our power to help?” and “When is the time to take action?” Our students said that any time was the time to take action and that we had to take action in places where action was needed. It was obvious that our students were thinking both globally and locally when deciding how to use our power to help.

As this chart indicates, the students wanted to help by donating food from our garden, having a food drive, and spreading the word about hunger to make people more aware. The students decided that our first step had to be to find out who needs help. Ultimately our first and second graders decided to take action locally by collecting seeds, gardening tools, and food to deliver to the Community Food Bank when we visited for a field trip. Our students worked hard to create posters for the school and also to take home. Students even made posters for their parents to take to work! In the end we delivered 674 pounds of food along with packets of seeds to the Community Food Bank. I have always been particularly drawn to the work of Vivian Vasquez (2004), who has shown that even very young children are capable of creating change in their world and taking action on issues that are significant in their lives. In the last several years, I have made some of these same discoveries when working with young children. This year’s class was no different.



After having time to reflect and analyze the journey we took in understanding the power of food, I think the student engagements allowed a flow of experiences that enabled students to better understand the concept. By starting with the students' life experiences, inviting students to reach out globally to create understandings, and then bringing the concept back to their own lives to take action, students gained a broad and deep understanding of the power of food. These experiences, in turn, provided me with new understandings about curriculum and helped me create a framework that will be beneficial to future planning because it is not specific to this one learning experience. This flow of experiences as a frame for curriculum is one I can use to think about my planning in other areas of instruction. I gained a conceptual understanding of inquiry and curriculum, just as my students gained a conceptual understanding of power and hunger.

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Taking Action as a Process over Time

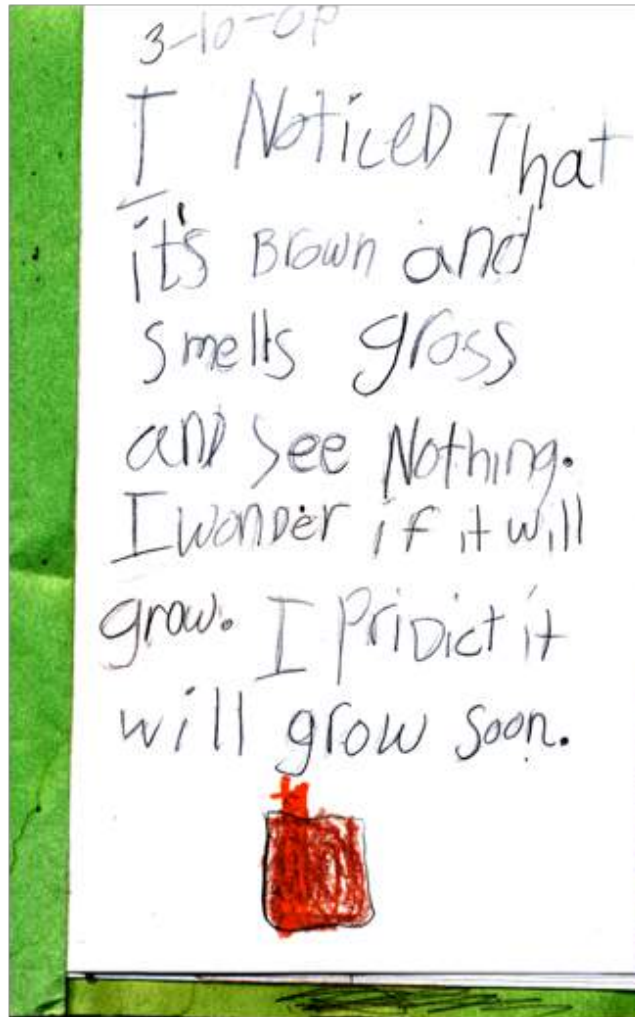
by Jennifer Griffith, First Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

The teachers at our school decided to focus on the concept of power and food/hunger during Spring 2009 to continue our professional learning about ways of meaningfully engaging children in global issues and social action. Jaquetta Alexander and I team taught first and second grade with 60 kids and so we met to discuss ways to bring our conceptual thinking about these issues into our classroom. We had always wanted to create a community garden at the school and realized that gardening would fit nicely into our look at the power of food.

One of our resource books, *Let's Eat! What Children Eat Around the World* (Hollyer, 2004), shows what typical kids eat on an average day from South Africa, Mexico, Thailand, France, and India. The illustrations and descriptions are written in a kid-friendly way. We decided to use this as our touchstone text to encourage our students to think about what kids grow and eat in other parts of the worlds. We believe in providing a visual tool for our students to record their thinking, and so created a chart to use as we read about each country. The book provides insights into the location, weather, crops, foods, homes, and school lives of the children in these countries and so these areas were recorded on the chart along with our kids' questions as we focused separately on each child in the book. Our hope was for the kids to explore what people grow around the world to give them a better understanding for what we might grow in the desert.

Thembu in South Africa (Power of Food)			
Location	Weather	Food	
South Africa near coast outside city of Durban in the hills	warm with	they grow lemons mango corn	They eat potatoes, pumpkins at the home just meat, but they also have a lot
Home	School	Special Occasion	
live in a small house with a garden or valley to get water carry water in clay pot on their heads no lights in the house no electricity no running water just with the waterline up to, and then it comes out in a tap	They have a vegetable garden • Sell vegetables or take a bowl of food to eat it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No eating School was something they drink They got to eat the best things First, they were brought some special things in a bowl and eaten 	
Questions We Still Have??			
Why can't they make electricity? Why do they eat separately? Why do her mom + dad live in a different village? Why don't they have jobs?			

We decided to have a guest speaker talk to the kids about gardening in the desert once they had learned about growing food in other parts of the world. Andrew Baker, our classroom assistant's husband, volunteered his time. He kept the kids engaged and taught them about the soil in the desert as well as shared ways to keep our garden eco-friendly. The kids planted their vegetables with Andrew so they could work the soil alongside an expert. While some were gardening, the remainder decorated their "power of food" journals, making their first entry about what they thought their plant would do first.



We planted a variety of vegetables including broccoli, lettuce, radishes, snap peas, and eggplant. After the planting frenzy, we focused on the life cycles of their plants so the kids knew what to expect and could keep track of the progress of their vegetables. We continued observing our garden, responding in our "power of food" journals and exploring the concept in Learning Lab with an emphasis on understanding the differences between hunger and hungry and the causes of hunger. During Learning Lab, the kids usually listened to a read aloud and then discussed their thinking and responses to the book. Our kids seemed to grasp the idea that food gets damaged by weather and were intrigued with the process food takes to get from one place to another. We watched a short film, *Farm to Table*, and the kids talked about where food comes from. Their ideas included:

- Crops -- get soil ready, plant, get plenty of water
- Orchards
- Farms

They discussed what could go wrong and their ideas naturally switched to weather. Our work with understanding the world around us and how different things grow in different climates helped their thinking. Their responses to what could go wrong included:

- Food could get bruised
- Weather could prevent the food from growing or damage it
- Equipment on farm could break down
- Bad weather could keep food from the store
- Other weather could affect food, like rain, flood, drought, lightening, storms

As we continued with our gardening and "power of food" inquiry, it was obvious that we needed to push the kids further in their thinking. They had grasped the idea of how to plant, understood the cycle of a plant, read literature about food and hunger, and learned about kids and food from around the world. The school year was coming to an end and so we wanted to move into thinking about how to take action in regards to the power of food and deciding whether to take action locally or globally. We had gone through this process of taking action locally the previous school year and knew that young kids need ample time to explore and engage in meaningful dialogue around what taking action is and looks like. Jaquetta and I knew kids needed time if they were to really understand taking action.

A guest speaker from the Tucson Community Food Bank came to the school to share about the hunger problems in our community. This was a huge event for our kids because they had been looking at hunger problems in the world, and now realized that that there was a hunger problem in our own city. The presentation was moving and resonated with the kids who continued to refer back to this experience. She told them that 40% of the food bank users are kids who are hungry, creating a shocked look on the faces of our students. They also learned that the food bank offers several programs; one of them a food production program with a demonstration garden to show people how to grow food in Tucson.

As a staff, we had read the professional book *Black Ants and Buddhists* (Cowhey, 2006), the story of a first/second grade teacher who works to help her kids understand their role in making the world a better place. Mary Cowhey talks about making the conscious decision to teach critically, knowing that young kids are capable of amazing things. We believed this as well and strived to shift our teaching to encourage our kids to be compassionate and take action for social change.

We had created a chart in our classroom on "What We Are Learning about the Power of Food" to record our thinking as we moved through various experiences. We returned to that chart as a way to synthesize our learning before moving to action. Cowhey (2006) points out that children need to take action from a point of knowledge and understanding and so we needed to assess where our kids were at in this process. Students made comments such as:

Abby G.: You need to food to grow and live.

Haley C.: Drought causes hunger.

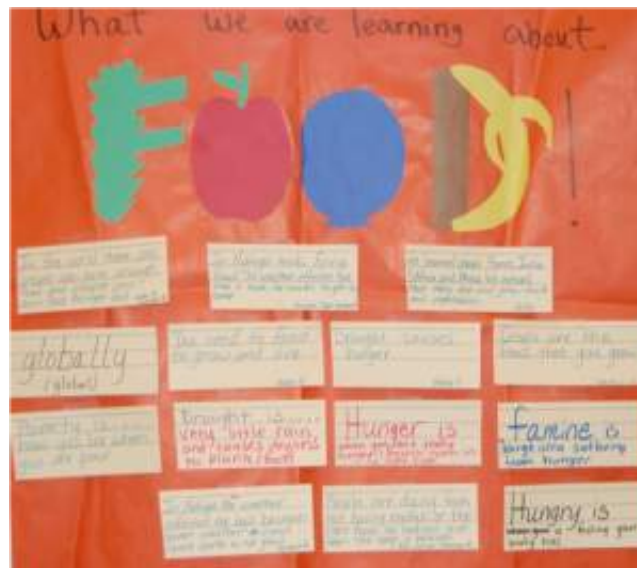
Destini: Crops are the food that you grow.

Riley: We learned about France, India, South Africa and Mexico. We noticed that they eat and grow fruits and vegetables.

Hunter, Jace, & Morgan H.: In Natinga trucks bring food. The weather effected the time it took for trucks to get to camp.

Abby G. & Morgan H.: In the world there are people who have enough food and people who don't have enough food.

Ben, Connor, & Morgan H.: People are dying from not having enough or the right food. We learned that from the boys in Natinga.

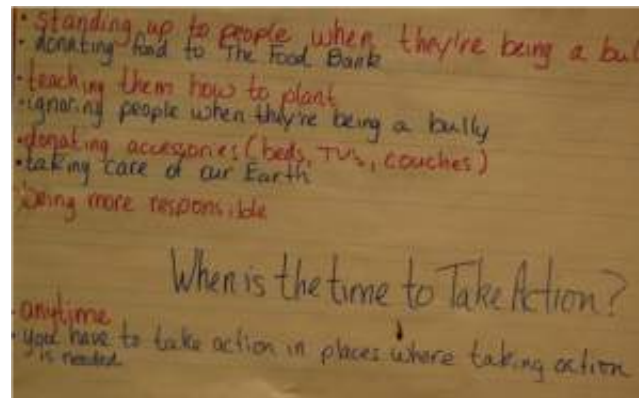


Our kids had a good grasp on thinking locally and globally about food, the process food takes, and the causes of hunger. We were ready to bring these pieces together and think about taking action and what that means and looks like. Jaquetta and I planned a field trip to the food bank after seeing how much our kids were intrigued with the demonstration garden. Our hope was that they could take action by helping out the food bank, but we knew that they needed to take ownership in this process in order for the action to be authentic. Cowhey (2006) notes that teachers often choose projects that demonstrate caring and engage kids, but argues that kids need to think critically about each project and be part of the decision making, not just be told what to do. Our goal was to think critically with our students, not for our students.

We began by recording their responses to complete the statement, "Taking action is...." One response was, "Taking action is helping people or friends in need of food, money, seeds, water, home, clothes, and shoes." I thought this particular response was interesting because the list came from our work in the classroom and lab. In the Learning Lab we had talked about money and poverty as a cause of hunger, our gardening unit had focused on the cycle of a plant, and our exploration of kids around the world had included several children who did not have running water. This response indicated to me that kids were transferring their knowledge to thinking about what taking action looks like. Other responses included:

- Taking action is telling people not to litter and throw trash
- Taking action is making and hanging up posters
- Taking action is picking up trash
- Taking action is spreading the word that people need help
- Taking action is helping people in an emergency
- Taking action is donating food to the food bank
- Taking action is teaching people how to plant

It was awesome to see the kids make connections between what we had explored in the classroom and the Learning Lab, as well as with our guest speakers. They had strong understandings about taking action. We challenged them to think about when they should take action. They felt strongly that taking action can happen any time and that action should occur at any point where there is a need.

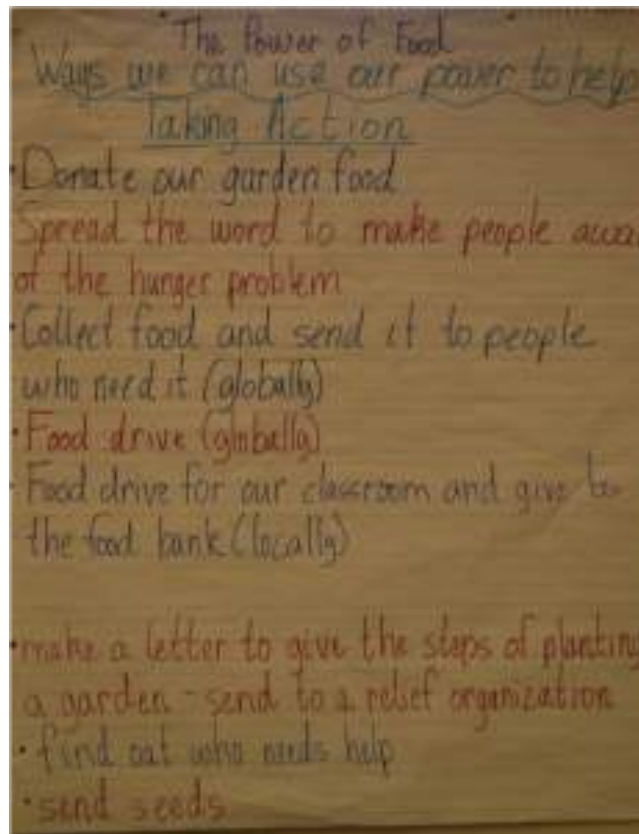


Jacqueta and I could see that taking the time to understand the concept of taking action had paid off. Often teachers rush from experience to experience in school, feeling the pressure of standards and tests, never giving time for kids to really dwell on any one idea. We had taken the time to synthesize their thinking and to provide tools to pull their experiences together to understand what it meant to take action.

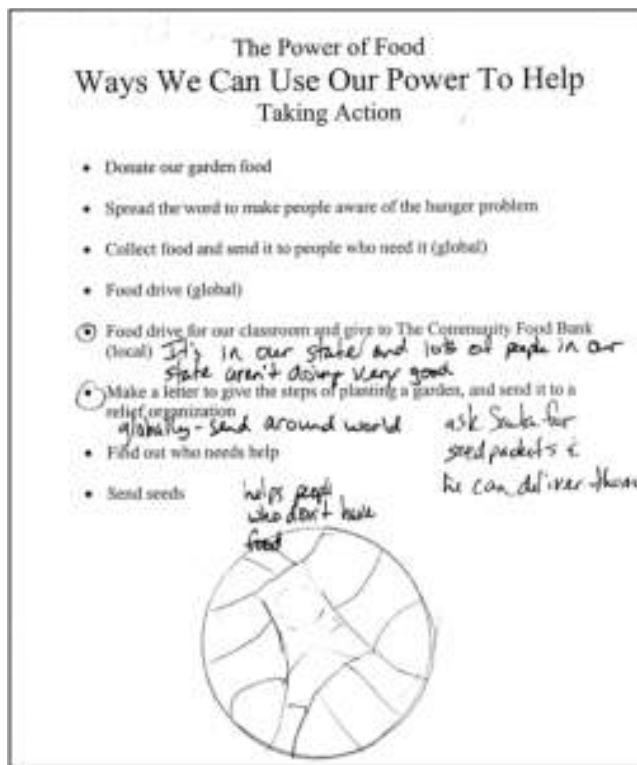
We knew we needed to push them to identify a problem to move forward with taking action. We reviewed our journey through inquiring into the power of food and asked the kids to think about

what they considered significant. Many kids mentioned gardening, growing food, the global feast, our inquiry about the ways kids eat in different parts of the world, and the discovery that there is enough food in the world but not everyone gets some of that food and so goes hungry. The kids felt strongly about the inequity of food distribution and decided that this was a problem they wanted to take action on as first and second graders. Once we posed our problem, we created a class chart to look at how we could use our power to take action on this issue. Some ideas included:

- Donate our garden food
- Spread the word to make people aware of the hunger problem
- Collect food and send it to people who need it both globally and locally



The next day Jaquetta and I typed up the list the kids had made of ways to use our power to take action. They met in small groups to discuss what they felt were the top two choices. Based on our work from the previous year we knew that everyone needed to have their voices heard within this process and that discussion was the key to consensus on our taking action project. The groups engaged in great conversation. Riley, Destiny, and Ethan wanted to spread the word to make people aware of the hunger problem and explained that if people hear about the problem they will be inclined to help. They also wanted to do a local food drive to help people in need. Morgan, DJ, and Isabella wanted to send seeds because they said that people can have food and stay alive with a garden. They also wanted to write a letter to give steps in planting a garden because they were concerned that people know how to garden so they can grow their own food.



After working in small groups we came back together as a class to see if we could reach consensus. We made a new chart with the top choices of each group and opened up the floor for discussion to help us select an action project as a class. Carah felt passionate that if we spread the word to others, people would hear and want to help. Bryce felt that if we were able to provide people with supplies they could garden. The issue of local and global action came up. Abby shared that she changed from global to local after hearing that it might be difficult to get food to another country and learned about the importance of helping people in our own community and making people aware. We had narrowed our decision to writing letters and sending seeds. After more discussion and thinking about our upcoming field trip to the Community Food Bank, we decided that we could collect food and seeds to take to the food bank when we went on our trip. The kids were excited to actually be able to deliver these items themselves.

Cowhey (2006) states that often mixed messages are sent when schools do food drives -- that we reinforce stereotypes about poor people, oversimplifying the problem and the solution, failing to teach an understanding of the causes of poverty and further stigmatizing low-income children in the school. It was important that our kids understood our project wasn't about giving a handout to the poor. Between the Learning Lab and the classroom we had done a lot of work exploring the causes of hunger and understanding the immensity of the hunger problem in our world. We had also discussed tight times and the reasons why families might experience difficult times and need some support.

We talked as a class about what to do next in order to carry out our project. The kids liked the idea of making posters and felt that posters would spread the word. They decided to make posters to

hang at home as well as around the school. Representatives from our classroom went to other classrooms in the school to spread the word by letting them know that the Safari Class was taking action and needed their help in collecting food and seeds to take to the food bank. The kids were excited to hear their project announced on the morning school announcements.

Now it was in their hands to bring in canned foods, seeds, gardening tools, and money. We had several weeks until we went on our field trip but the end of the year was only four weeks away, so we decided to collect until then. The donations trickled in and were not as large as we had anticipated. As I reflect on why we didn't get a large influx of donations, I wonder if the end of the year is a hard time to engage families in donations because so much else is happening. Our kids were distracted by end-of-the-year events and plans. We did have donations but certainly could have had more.

In returning to Cowhey (2006), I am reminded that taking action is not about the size of the donations or efforts, but the ways in which action can be a vehicle for changing kids' thinking. Cowhey states that taking action in thoughtful ways can:

- Challenge stereotypes
- Teach understandings about the complexity of the causes of social problems
- Introduce local activists and organizers as role models addressing needs and working for long-term solutions
- Empower children to take responsibility in their community
- Remove the stigma of poverty

Looking at this list helps me realize that we did encourage kids to do this type of thinking through our work in the lab and classroom. So although our donations may not have been enormous, our work with thinking critically about action was successful.

By the time we went to the food bank we had filled up several bins of canned food and seeds, and the kids were excited to deliver them. Our field trip was definitely educational and eye opening. The kids were impressed with the many programs at the food bank and how their system worked. The demonstration garden was a hit; the kids enjoyed seeing a real garden and hearing more about how they help families learn to grow their own gardens so that they don't have to depend on others for food.

The school year was coming to a close and so we wanted to do some final reflection on the meaning of taking action for children. In the classroom, we had the kids take a blank piece of paper and finish the sentence, "Taking action...." Their responses were extremely thoughtful for young children. One student talked about taking action as helping people who don't have food, saying "When they live in poverty, you can give them food or seeds to grow their own food so they don't go

hungry.” Morgan H. said, “Taking action is when we spread the word. The word we can spread is to donate food to the food bank. That's a good thing to do.”

I was encouraged by how many of the kids pulled their thinking from across our power of food inquiry and other events at school. Abby not only talked about our own classroom action project but also about helping out a family as we had done as a school at Van Horne. She even used the term "tight times" and said that the most important part of taking action is helping and how people take action every day. Bella also went beyond what we had done in our classroom and described taking action as a visit to someone who might be lonely or sick or who had lost their house. At the end of school, our garden was still going strong and so their last entry included sketching their final observations and writing their final reflection.



No. 1
 Taking Action is...
 Sometimes its standing up to each other
 Taking Action is Doing a Big thing
 like we are going to make posters
 that say Donate Food to Vanhome?
 and then we are giving it
 to the community food bank!
 Taking Action is Helping
 People for example in our school
 a family is in tight times so
 we are donating money by getting
 lemonade and chips also by
 the money we give to student
 council when getting other Pops

and Popcorn! most important
 is to help people take action
 every day

Their final reflection took place in the Learning Lab where Lisa Thomas asked them to create a sketch-to-stretch to what taking action meant to them. Many students created sketches that reflected on our action project of going to the community food bank and on engaging in some act of giving out of a sense of caring.





Our explorations of the power of food and the concept of taking action helped us as teachers engage in meaningful dialogue about our project. Using Cowhey (2006) as a touchstone and a way to think about how to engage our students in critical thinking helped us as teachers remain focused on the need to meaningfully engage kids. Knowing they made a difference had a huge influence on children's understandings about taking action. Even though our project may have not produced all of the results we wanted, our kids understood our project and had lived through, and so also understood, the process of thinking and decision-making that leads to action.

Taking action with young children can be challenging but so rewarding. It was exciting to take this journey with our group of sixty kids and see them become compassionate and excited about taking action and making a difference. I love the quote Cowhey (2006) uses to introduce the concept of action from the Dalai Lama, "It is not enough to be compassionate. You must act."

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Creating a Change that Keeps on Giving

by Teryl Ford, Second/Third Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

One of our inquiries as teachers at our school is how to engage children in taking action in meaningful ways. Often what we do in school takes the form of charity -- the adults in the school decide on a particular cause and a fund-raising strategy for how students will raise money for that cause. The decisions are made by adults, and children have minimal, if any, understanding of the issues. They may know they are bringing cans of food from their parent's cupboards because people need food, but they don't know the causes of that hunger, nor do they feel any personal

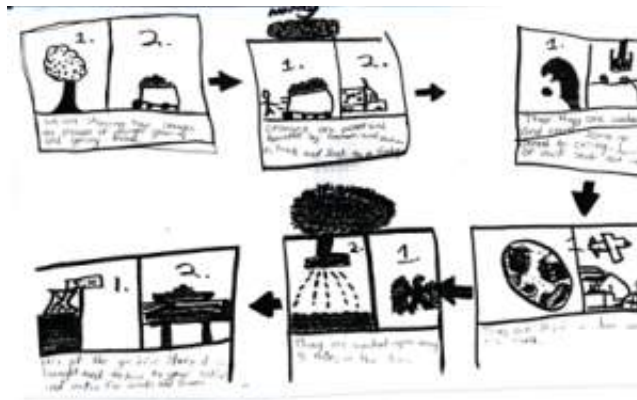
involvement with the people who are the focus of that effort. In fact, often these efforts reinforce stereotypes of giving handouts to those who are “helpless.”

We worked at taking action in meaningful ways through a range of strategies. We wanted students to understand the root causes of the particular social problem, so that their action would reflect an understanding of why these problems exist and address those deeper issues. We also worked to collaborate with our students throughout the process in making decisions about taking action instead of imposing a particular fund-raising cause onto them. Another issue was sustainability and considering whether a contribution enables the person receiving that gift to take their own action and to sustain that action over time, for example, instead of only contributing a food box which is gone once it is consumed, helping a family plant a garden so they can grow their own food and take action for themselves.

Sustainability requires children to understand interdependence and the ways in which one action connects to other actions and leads to a range of consequences. Second and third grade students often find these interconnections between causes and consequences difficult to understand and so these connections became my focus.

Our school-wide inquiry on taking action was focused around tight times and hunger because of the economic crisis in our community and country during Spring 2009. We explored various causes for tight times and the different consequences of those tight times for families in relation to whether their needs or wants were being affected. We particularly focused on hunger and the reasons why families experience hunger, such as poverty, war, and the economy. In addition, we looked at food security and possible breakdowns in the system of how food goes from the farm to someone’s table. Throughout these studies, we made extensive use of different kinds of flow charts so that the kids could explore interconnections. The combination of flow charts and the focus on the system of growing and delivering food to the people who need it was significant in helping my students develop conceptual understandings about interconnections.

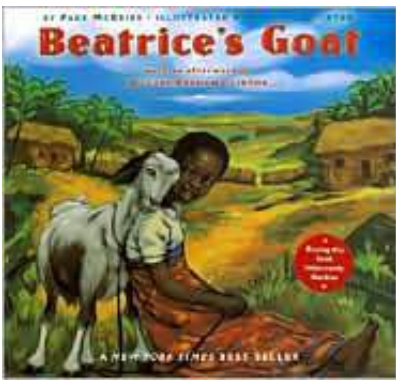
After seeing an educational movie, *From Farm to Table*, my students became aware of the importance of the system and the interconnectedness of how food gets from the farm to their table. They worked on flow charts to show all the steps that are taken for them to get the food they eat. In looking at the charts, I noticed that some skipped right from planting the food to selling it in the store, while others understood each of the smaller steps.



For most students, this experience helped them realize that one thing can lead to another and that a breakdown at any point can lead to hunger -- a new understanding. They had never considered that hunger could come from reasons other than a person not having the money to buy food. They talked about reasons for why the chain might breakdown such as bad weather ruining the crops, mechanical problems in the factory, contamination of food, or transportation problems. Their list of factors that could lead to a breakdown included:

- Farmers don't have enough money for seeds to grow food.
- Bad weather like hailstorms or too much water could ruin the crops.
- Truck could run out of gas or break down.
- Factory could break down or not be able to find workers.
- People could quit their jobs and go on strike.
- Food could rot or get germs.
- Grocery store could close because they can't get good food.

They became aware that the farmers and field workers are part of the process and that they need the work to get money to feed their families. A breakdown in the system meant that the person waiting on the food at the end of the chain might have money but still not be able to get food and that that the person at the beginning of the chain might also be affected and go hungry. One example that intrigued students was a newspaper article about weather affecting the amount of coffee that was growing. As a consequence, some people were not able to get jobs because there was less coffee to harvest.



Two books that I read aloud for class discussions were particularly significant for my students in thinking about sustainability and interconnectedness in taking action. [Beatrice's Goat](#) (McBrier, 2001) is the story of a young girl who fulfills her dream of attending school in her small Ugandan village after her family is given an income-producing goat. The book is based on the Heifer Project and information is given about their focus on sustainable small-scale farm projects that help people lift themselves out of poverty, instead of creating dependence on

handouts. The students talked about how Beatrice needed to prepare for the gift of the goat by planting certain foods and building a barn and then care for the goat once it arrived. The gift of the goat and her work led to the entire family having milk to drink and to the birth of baby goats whose sale made money for the family to buy more of the things they needed. Eventually, this chain of events results in Beatrice finally getting to go to school. Students were intrigued that the gift of one goat changed the life of an entire family.



The second book we read together was [One Hen](#) (Milway, 2008), the story of how reaching out to give one small loan to a person can have a big impact, not just on that person, but on a whole community. Kojo's family along with all the people in his village in Ghana do not have enough money to buy what they need. The villagers decide to each put a little money into a fund that can be used by a specific family for a project, and that family would then pay back the money into the fund, so it can continue from family to family gradually over time. Kojo borrows enough money to buy one hen and then uses the money from her eggs to invest in more hens. In time he grows up to employ many of the villagers in his poultry farm, thus bettering their lives. He also loans

out money to other villagers who want to start a business and so the gift keeps giving. In the end Kojo owns the largest poultry farm in West Africa and uses his money to build the many things needed in the village.

The students were astounded that all of these events started from the money Kojo borrowed to buy one hen. They noted that if someone had just given food to Kojo's family, that gift would only have lasted for a meal and then they would have been hungry again. They could see that giving a goat or chicken provided a way for the family to make their whole lives better in many different ways. This book powerfully demonstrated the concept of sustainability in ways that my students understood and found compelling.

The book had such an impact that students wanted to take action to help a family like Kojo's by giving an animal to make their lives better. They wanted to raise money so they could be part of

these changes in people's lives. They did not want to make just a one time difference, but a change that kept on giving.

Students researched agencies that provide a way for people to give money for animals and other needed items in various countries. They located several agencies through internet searches from a list of organizations in *Finding Solutions to Hunger* (Kempf, 2005). As teachers, we used this sourcebook for ideas of activities related to the causes of hunger and to locate innovative programs that focus on creating sustainable work.

My students were particularly interested in Kids 4 Kids, the Heifer Project International, and Save the Children, because they all had programs where they could purchase an animal that would have an on-going contribution. In addition, these programs teach the family how to care for the animal and use it effectively and efficiently. Students were adamant about providing an animal that would help a family take action to feed themselves and make their lives better. They were excited to learn that the animals given to the families are pregnant which enables the family to quickly be able to sell one of the babies and make more money.

As a class we brainstormed ideas on how they could raise the money. One idea that we had discussed as teachers was a World Map-a-thon because this fundraiser fit with our focus as a school on global inquiry. Students learned the names of countries and then collected pledges from family and friends based on the number of countries correctly identified during the Map-a-thon. My students studied but most were not interested, and when we did the test only a few students brought in pledges. I realized that the Map-a-thon did not work because it was my idea and most of the students didn't buy into it. The project felt like homework and they had to ask for pledges from family and friends at a time when many families were feeling financial uncertainty.

We continued brainstorming ways to raise money for an animal and it became clear that they were interested in selling things as they named ideas ranging from having a lemonade stand to much larger items. The Student Council had previously sold Otter Pops at lunch and that had been popular and so we decided take on this project. Most of the students were really excited about being a part of this project. They were willing to do the work, even though some were shy about selling to other kids. They willingly gave up their play time at lunch in order to sell the otter pops. Soon, even the initially reluctant students were engaged and eager to be involved. They started selling more often and were excited about the money they were raising and the good they would do with that money.

Students wanted the animal they selected to keep on giving to that family and to other families and wanted to be sure that the families would be taught skills on how to care for the animals properly and to use them in their farming. They were consumed with deciding on the kind of animal to buy

and considered rabbits, goats, chickens, geese, heifers, pigs, and water buffalo, as well as many more animals that were too expensive.

When the last day of school came around, we looked at all the choices and the amount of money we had raised and they decided on a water buffalo because it could be used to give milk and to produce babies to sell. In addition, the water buffalo would make it possible for rice farmers to do more work in their fields in less time, which meant they could grow more rice. They could also rent the buffalo out to other families to use in their rice fields, thus helping those families while providing extra income for the original family. Students felt that the water buffalo could contribute in a range of ways and so would make a bigger difference than some of the other animals.

In addition to the water buffalo, students decided to buy a flock of geese, a flock of chickens, and one flock of ducks because they could affect three other families that way. They could have purchased one other large animal but liked the idea of the smaller animals so they could reach more families. The geese, chickens, and ducks also had multiple uses -- eat the eggs, hatch the eggs and sell the babies, or use the animals as protein.

Students were amazed that they would be able to change the lives of four families all because they sold Otter Pops for 25 cents. They told their families and others about their excitement on making a difference in someone's life through giving an animal that would help that person or family take care of their own needs.

During the last week of school, students reflected on the meaning of taking action and each created a sketch to stretch on what taking action meant for them. Some students still saw taking action as charity and their sketches were about donating money or food to feed the homeless. It was clear that some still had a stereotype of the "helpless poor." Others focused on taking action as raising money for an animal and for a gift that kept giving.

Linzie said that taking action means raising money by selling something like lemonade and then using that money to buy an animal for children. Kanai's sketch reflected his belief that one person can make a difference. He said that one person can decide to help the world and that person's action then affects lots of other people.



Skylar could not contain her sketch on just one side of her paper and drew multiple ways for action. She understood the many ways in which action might be evidenced, from giving money, blankets, or food directly to someone to raising money for an animal that allows that person to help themselves.





At the end of the year, every classroom in the school contributed an article for a school-wide newspaper on our inquiries across the school year. Lisa Thomas, our project coordinator, worked with students from each classroom, reviewing the year in terms of what the students had been learning and working on, and then asking them to choose one idea they saw as significant to write as a class article. I thought that the students would focus on issues of power and control. I knew that they had strong feelings about the decisions in their lives controlled by friends, parents, and teachers and the decisions where they had control. Instead, the students focused on the project to raise money for an animal and they wrote an article describing the project. The article ended with this statement, “We hope that what we donate will keep creating food for hungry people for a very long time.”

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Taking Action in Tight Times

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

Sometimes kids will surprise you. Just when you think they just don't get it, they rise to the occasion and make you aware that they understand in ways you could never imagine. I observed my students move from a position of powerlessness to one of possibility through taking action for social justice. They were able to develop a deeper understanding of taking action for social justice because they were presented with real opportunities to address social issues that deeply concerned them (Wade, 2007).

In January our class shifted from exploring the broad concept of power to examining the power of food to influence our lives. The students had many connections to the word diet, particularly in relation to losing weight, since the TV was full of advertisements from Jenny Craig, Subway, and Nutrisystem in the post holiday season. We wanted them to talk about diet globally and locally as well as consider issues related to the power of diet and how food affects people's lives. Our goal was to encourage them to take some kind of action to challenge their experiences of collecting canned food at Thanksgiving as requested by adults at our school. We wanted them to have a chance to come up with their own ideas about taking action that were not imposed by adults.

This semester-long project led us to understand diet, root causes of hunger, poverty and economic failure, the differences between wants and needs, and problems in the food system in our world. To make this issue real to our students we staged a [global feast](#), where not everyone who attended got enough to eat, while others had more than they could possibly eat. Students learned that our planet produces enough food for everyone to survive, but inequitable distribution causes 30,000 children to die each day from starvation. We explored the mortality rates of different countries and even counted the calories we each ate for three days to see what it takes to maintain our health. We invited members of the Community Food Bank to speak to our students about what it means to be food secure as well as food insecure and ways they could help. We also hosted Abraham, one of Sudan's lost boys who had relocated to Tucson, to tell his compelling story. The students kept a Hunger Journal where they noted the various causes of hunger based on these experiences, and, of course, we read and responded to books.

We explored the word diet by reading *Burger Boy* (Durant, 2005), a picture book about a boy who eats nothing but burgers until one day, he turns into one. Students loved this book and the discussion afterwards was fun and informative as the lesson hit home. Variety is the spice of life.

We read *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1979) about a family who is experiencing difficult financial problems and discussed the choices the family has to make between wants and needs. Students created flow charts that showed the consequences of tight times. They learned that hard times can bring hope for a better future as well as sadness and the loss of hope. Students engaged in Sketch to Stretch (Short & Harste, 1996), using visual images and symbolism to explore their thinking about what can happen to a family during tight times. In his sketch, AJ shows the economy crashing, writing on the back, "My picture is explaining the economy crashing. The people represent the U.S. The one flying means some people get hit harder."



Arianna's Sketch to Stretch shows a family happily in their home in the before picture and the same family on the street holding a sign that says "Need money" in the after picture. Arianna writes, "What I did is a before and after which means maybe you can be really rich one day, then some day else you can end up homeless."



To further explore the difference between wants and needs, the students worked with partners to read picture books containing a range of perspectives on these issues. Afterwards they came together and discussed each book with the whole group. Thinking together the books were placed on a continuum between wants and needs. As the books were laid out, the students had to justify whether or not they belonged closer to the wants side or the needs side of the continuum. As new books were added, the books already on the continuum were shifted based on students' discussions. The books they explored included [Beatrice's Goat](#) (McBrier, 2001), *Fly Away Home* (Bunting, 1991), *A Shelter in our Car* (Gunning, 2004), *A Castle on Viola Street* (DiSalvo, 2001), *Peppe the Lamplighter* (Bartone, 1993), *Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2007), *The Hard-Times Jar* (Smothers, 2003), [Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan](#) (Williams, 2005), *A Chair for My Mother* (Williams, 1984), *If the Shoe Fits* (Soto, 2002), *Homeless* (Wolf, 1995), and [Four Feet, Two Sandals](#) (Williams & Mohammed, 2007). Students engaged in a great deal of negotiation and really had to think together as they debated where each book fell on the continuum between wants and needs.



Bread, Bread, Bread (Morris, 1989) was read aloud to introduce the Food Journal. The kids made many connections to the book related to the different types of breads that are eaten around the world. Students learned that calories are the energy that food provides and are needed to move and function and that protein is important as the building block for growth. They learned that food is measured in calories and protein is measured by grams. They were told that to study food around the world, they needed to study themselves first to understand what others needed to function. They were given a journal to keep track of everything they ate for three days and to record the calories and grams of protein as well. We showed them how to use the chart to determine how many calories and grams of protein are in each food item. They were also asked to add up the totals for each day. When we later examined their food journals, they discovered that they ate between 1,800 and 3,000 calories a day and that a healthy adult needs between 2,000 and 2,500 calories a day.

In February we held a Global Feast in our Learning Lab/Library. The large room was divided up into three areas. The Blue group (15 kids) represented 15% of the world's population and got more than enough to eat. This group was served pizza and apple juice. The Yellow group (60 kids) represented 60% of the world's population and got just enough to eat. This group was served warm rice and beans along with water. The Red group (25 kids) represented 25% of the world's population and did not have enough food to go around. This group got one bowl of cold rice and dirty (food coloring) water. This simulation got an astonishing response. Kids realized that the world produces enough food for everyone but the food does not reach everyone fairly due to famine, war, politics, and economics. One of the biggest surprises was that hunger doesn't just happen in other places; it is present in the United States as well. This was a huge eye opening experience for students.

Along the way students were developing a sense of responsibility and an understanding of the root causes of hunger. They were starting to understand that hunger and poverty are not the result of laziness. Homeless people are not hobos and are not all trying to pull scams. These were misperceptions students had referred to earlier in the year. Another misperception was that hunger only exists in other countries and that we should pity these people. Students realized that tight times and hunger can happen to anyone.

In March we learned about child mortality rates and the difference between chronic hunger and

starvation. Scientists determine the child mortality rate from the number of children who die of hunger by the age of five out of 1000. For comparison, the children learned that the U.S. has a child mortality rate of eight per 1000. This led us to explore the root causes of hunger. To connect hunger to economic failure and poverty, we showed the students several short clips from the movie *Cinderella Man* about the Great Depression. The students reacted strongly as they watched the mother add water to the milk to stretch it out and the father give his small share of the food to his kids. Especially poignant was a scene where the little boy steals a sausage because he is afraid his parents will be forced to send the children to stay with wealthier relatives and so doesn't want to ask his parents for food.

Later in March we looked at food systems, reading the book *Famine: The World Reacts* (Bennett, 1998) as one example of what might go wrong to prevent people from getting enough food. We looked at each of the steps food takes to get from the field to the table and what has to happen to ensure this delivery. Students charted the possibilities that might cause the system to fail and discovered that many things could happen at each stage of the food system.

In reading *Sami and the Time of Troubles* (Heide & Gilliland, 1992), we looked at war and violence as causes of hunger. Earlier in the year we had read books by Deborah Ellis that highlighted war as a cause of hunger in Afghanistan and so students had insights about this cause of hunger. The students also reported on newspaper articles they had been bringing on food and diet. Some of the articles were about drought in Argentina, salmonella in peanut butter, farm foreclosures, and truckers who couldn't afford gas.

These discussions led students toward taking action. They researched organizations on the internet to see what others were doing to help fight hunger and became excited about choosing an organization to partner with in some way. They liked the Save the Children website because of the personal connection of adopting a child and talked about ways they could earn money. I did not want to dampen their enthusiasm, but was a bit worried about how we could maintain the adoption commitment after the school year ended. As it turns out, the students solved this problem for themselves.

It was about this time that a devastating event happened to one of our families. A boy in our class whose dad was out of work and had lost his health insurance suffered a major seizure and died. Many of my students knew this father because of his involvement with Boy Scouts. He picked up his son everyday on the playground after school and was a reliable chaperone for all of our field trips. The mother had recently lost her job, and was not having any luck finding a new job. On top of the emotional loss for this family, they were now dealing with serious financial difficulty. Not only was the family in danger of losing their home, they had car repairs and a family of four to feed. Loss of a breadwinner was an issue that the students immediately recognized as a cause of hunger.

Our class met several times that week to discuss what had happened and talk about why their classmate would not be at school for a while. Students were concerned about him and many attended the funeral. Our counselor talked with the whole class and later with a small group to help them process this loss. We about changes that occur in families and how we can help kids and families get through difficult times. We talked about what to say to this young student once he returned to school and what would make him feel better. Our counselor shared what other kids had told her was not helpful after they had experienced similar losses.

When it became known that this family was struggling financially, the adults in the school started to take up collections and rally some monetary support. The kids heard about these efforts and started to think about what they could do. A small group who were meeting with our counselor formulated a plan. All of these kids had suffered significant loss and were in a position to understand what our little guy was going through. One boy, Joel, who was not known for being particularly caring of others, and who was not a model student, came up with the idea of selling chips and lemonade at lunch to earn money for the family. He organized the class and created a plan. He got his dad to donate the chips and diligently followed through each day, scheduling who would be manning the table, who was in charge of the money, and who was on the clean up detail. The kids made posters, wrote advertisements for the morning announcements, and discussed strategies for maximizing sales, but it was clear that Joel was in charge. This was the most engaged and excited I had seen him that entire year. This young man was not particularly looked up to for anything except goofing off at school. He was not academically a top student and struggled with peer relationships. Taking action seemed so completely natural to him because it was personal and touched him directly. The plans for contributing to Save the Children were pushed onto the back burner. This was so much more important to our kids because there was a personal connection to the family.

Another student was so touched by this loss that he and his mom walked their neighborhood and collected donations for the family. Mark told the story of what had happened to his friend and asked his neighbors if they could help. He collected over \$1000 that day. These two examples of taking action by kids were really significant. Many times adults organize events and kids witness others helping but rarely is the action kid-centered and organized completely by children.

As others at the school worked to contribute to this family, these efforts snowballed into a major event. The local natural foods store held a fundraiser for organizations once a month on Saturday called “A Buck a Burger.” A BBQ was held in the parking lot and members of an organization could buy supplies at cost and take whatever profits they made from the sale of the burgers. The store had never done a benefit for just one family but they were willing to help. The school had to supply tables, chairs, awnings, condiments, paper products, and labor. The market supplied burgers, lettuce, tomatoes, onion, and the grill at cost. We also held a bake sale in conjunction with the

[illegible]

May 18, 2004

Dear Save The Children,

Our class has been studying the root causes of hunger. We raised money by having a Map-a-thon. We learned all 48 countries in Africa. We want to donate this 100 dollars to help fight malnutrition and purchase nutrition. Please use this money wisely.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Edwards 5th grade class
Van Horn Elem.
Tucson, Arizona

Meanwhile the students were still busy selling chips and lemonade at lunch. The first thing they did each morning was to check with Joel to see who was scheduled to work that day. It was such a central part of what was important in their last few days in fifth grade. Joel kept them supplied with a variety of chips to sell, never running out and never forgetting to bring them. I only wish he could have been so reliable in turning in homework! In the end, they raised several hundred dollars from their lunch sales. This experience was significant because the action was initiated and carried out by the students themselves.

Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) point out that informed action is based in expanded understandings and perspectives. They argue that unless students have critiqued their everyday lives, considered multiple points of view, and examined sociopolitical issues and systems, the action often remains superficial and adult-directed. In our case, students had the opportunity to connect literature to issues of poverty and hunger and to consider the consequences of tight times on the needs and wants of families. These understandings provided a basis for taking action when the need arose, instead of just feeling sorry for their classmate. They took action in ways that were personal and much more meaningful than just making a contribution to Save the Children. In reflection, I realize that they did adopt a child -- one of their own classmates who needed their support and caring in a time of need.

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