

eJournal of Literacy and Social Responsibility

Volume 6 Number 1 Fall 2013



International Reading Association
The World's Leading Organization of Literacy Professionals

eJournal of Literacy and Social Responsibility, 6 (1), 2013

<i>ejournal of Literacy & Social Responsibility</i> contents.....	2
Members of the Board	3
Literacy & Social Responsibility Officers 2011-2013	4
Editorial Review Board	5
Message from the Co-Editors <i>Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell & Tynisha Meidl</i>	6
Invited Submission “And a Cricket for Grandma”: Parents and Children Construct Content during a Shared Writing Task <i>Renée Casbergue, M. Susan Burns, Angela Love, Martha Jane Buell ...</i>	7
At the Crossroads of Critical Literacy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy <i>Kathy Christensen & Sharon Earle</i>	19
Motivating Readers: A Journey with “The Freedom Writers” <i>Kristin Webber</i>	34
Progressivism and Social Responsibility in the 21st Century Elementary Classroom <i>Rebekah Kelleher</i>	44
Picture books with Deaf Characters <i>Andrea Karlin, Jean Andrews, Stacy Bumstead, Zanthia Smith, Tynisha D. Meidl....</i>	53
Book Review: <i>High Stakes: Poverty, Testing and Failure in the American Schools</i> <i>Katherine Laley</i>	67
An Interview with the Author, Bonnie Johnson <i>Tynisha D. Meidl</i>	71
A Little Lagniappe	74
Call for volume 7 of <i>ejournal of Literacy and Social Responsibility</i>	75
Submission requirements <i>ejournal of Literacy and Social Responsibility</i> ...	76
Literacy and Social Responsibility Social Justice Award Announcement..	77

Literacy & Social Responsibility

The Literacy and Social Responsibility Special Interest Group (L-SR SIG) is comprised of members of the International Reading Association (IRA), who study and promote practices which foster literacy development *and* social responsibility in students of all ages. We invite members of IRA to join our SIG (and if interested in our group but not yet a member of IRA, please consider joining so you can also join our group). There are no dues to be a member of this SIG.

Literacy & Social Responsibility

Members of the Board

Alma Flor Ada, Emeritus	University of San Francisco
Eleanor Black Eskey	California State University, Los Angeles, CA
Isabel Campoy	Author and Speaker, CA
Dolores Fisette, Retired	Ukiah Unified School District, Ukiah, CA
Adria Klein,	St. Mary's College, CA
J. Cynthia McDermott	Antioch University, Los Angeles, CA
Greta Nagel	California State University, Long Beach
Tim Rasinski	Kent State University, OH
Marsha Thicksten	California State University, Long Beach, CA

Current officers are also members of the board of directors.

What we do

This Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association provides a forum for educators, authors, researchers, and the public to present their insights and to interact with others who share similar concerns at our annual meeting at the IRA convention as well as online on our website and through our eJournal.

Visit our website at

<http://www.csulb.edu/misc/l-sr/ejournal/ejournal.html>

Please help us locate lost issues. Volumes 1 & 2 of the *ejournal of Literacy and Social Responsibility* were “lost” when a website was dismantled. If you have a copy of either volume, please contact the editors.

LITERACY and SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OFFICERS 2013-2014

President (2011-2014)	Patricia K. Dean
Past President	Melanie Goodman
Program Co-chairs (2013-2014)	Andrea Karlin
	Kenneth J. Fasching-Varner
Webmanager	Kaye West
Communication (eList/Facebook)	Rebekah Kelleher
eJournal Co-editors	M-M Sulentic Dowell
	Tynisha D. Meidl
Newsletter Editor	Susan Speer-Powers
Secretary	Beth Breneman
Treasurer	Melanie Cohen Goodman
Chair, Student Service Award	Denise Stuart
Co-chairs -	Carolyn Cook
Social Justice Literature Award	Aimee Rogers
	Kenneth J. Fasching-Varner
Chair, Literature of Social Justice	Aimee Rogers
Chair, Instructional Strategies	Beth Breneman
Chair, Research	Melanie Cohn Goodman
Chair, Event Planning (2014)	(vacant)

e-journal of Literacy and Social Responsibility
Editorial Review Board v 6 (1)

Co-Editors

Dr. Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell
Louisiana State University

Tynisha D. Meidl
St. Norbert College – Wisconsin

Reviewers

Carolyn L. Cook
Mount St. Mary's University – Maryland

Gerlinde Grandstaff-Beckers
Southeastern Louisiana University

Holly Bell
Tulane University - Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities

Bonnie L. Hoewing
GateWay Community College – Arizona

Anne Katz
Armstrong Atlantic State University – Savannah, GA

Rebekah D. Kelleher
Wingate University – North Carolina

Wilma Kuhlman
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Leah Katherine Saal
Arkansas State University at Jonesboro

Jolanta Smolen Santana
Independent Consultant
Denver, Colorado

Message from the Co-Editors

We are excited to bring this 6th volume of *ejournal of Literacy and Social Responsibility* to you as co-editors, literacy colleagues, and now, good friends! It has been a joy to combine our skills and share our editing talents as we sifted through 19 submissions for this call and ultimately selected the five you find in this volume. These manuscripts represent a variety of views, perspectives, and re-visitations of seminal issues such as: early writing, adolescent literacy, Dewey and the progressive movement, images represented in children's literature as well as a book review that re-visits a classic text on standardized testing, all issues that coalesce around the overarching theme of literacy and social responsibility. We invite you to read, think, and share!

The invited submission is the third in a series from authors, Renée Casbergue, M. Susan Burns, Angela Love, and Martha Jane Buell, who returned to data collected in the mid-1990's and re-examined it with an updated lens of early children's writing theory. It is a fascinating culmination to two previous publications, exploring the role of parents, caregivers, and adults who help young children mediate talk and writing. We are honored they selected the *ejournal of Literacy and Social Responsibility* as an outlet for their three part, three year examination.

Florida educators, Kathy Christensen and Sharon Earle, collaborated on an investigation in a rural south Florida school community. The results of this study demonstrate how culturally responsive pedagogy is an essential framework for critical literacy work with students. Kathy and Sharon present an action research study centered on the use of critical literacy with a group of adolescent girls that illustrate the need for creating positive teacher-student relationships and investing in community building intersecting critical literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy.

From Kristin Webber we received a moving piece of action research that chronicles her first year as a middle school teacher after years spent in early childhood and primary classrooms. Webber's moving account reminds all of us of the relentless drive of veteran teachers. It is a poignant piece of scholarship about how, as a teacher, she relearned how to place her students at the center of her teaching while challenging her thinking and decision-making as an educator.

Ruth Kelleher offers readers a fascinating re-visit of the Progressivist Movement and its connection to literacy and social responsibility. She recommends that educators can still look to Dewey's works for direction and educational models especially in a context of ever-increasing standardization and accountability. Kelleher claims we must recognize that our role as educators expands beyond the academic and that we must embrace, and help reluctant colleagues embrace, our role as social educators.

The final manuscript in this volume comes from four co-researchers, colleagues, and educators from Lamar University as well as co-editor, Ty Meidl. In this inquiry, the authors explore multicultural texts to understand how pre-service teachers responded to texts when the characters were Deaf. The study was designed to determine the views of post-secondary students regarding Deaf culture in children's storybooks. It is an highly informative piece of scholarship.

Classroom teacher and first time author, Katherine (Katie) Laley, a former 4th grade teacher in Louisiana, reviews Johnson & Johnson's seminal text, *High stakes*, comparing the authors' experiences with her's as a teacher in a high stakes grade. Her honesty is refreshing.

In a twist of fate (we think it's more) co-author of *High stakes*, Bonnie Johnson, joined Ty Meidl at St Norbert's in Wisconsin. Ever the opportunist and scholar, Ty shared Katie's review with her new colleague, Bonnie, and interviewed her regarding her thoughts.

“And a Cricket for Grandma”: Parents and Children Construct Content during a Shared Writing Task

Renée Casbergue
Louisiana State University

M. Susan Burns
George Mason University

Angela Love
Auburn University

Martha Jane Buell
University of Delaware

Key words: early writing, early literacy, literacy development, verbal narration, composition, funds of knowledge, family literacy practices

NOTABLE QUOTE

Results compel us to reject a deficit perspective regarding low-income families’ inability to offer support for preschool children’s literacy learning. Instead, these findings impel us toward a strengths-based orientation that seeks to recognize the “funds of knowledge” families have to support children’s achievement.

Abstract

Despite increasing awareness of the importance of all aspects of writing to children's overall literacy development, writing is often under-addressed in early childhood settings and might stem from the belief that young children are not capable of composing their own ideas. In this study, a total of 20 transcripts of parent-child interactions were purposively drawn from an archival sample, collected in the mid-1990s, of writing interactions between preschool children and their parents or primary caretakers. Adult-child dyads for this analysis consisted of mothers and daughters, mothers and sons, and one grandmother with a granddaughter. Positing that composition begins as verbal narration, the preschool children in this study were quite capable of creating content with the support of their parents or caregivers. Families included in this study possessed a wealth of knowledge about literacy that they shared with their children.

Introduction

That families have significant potential to impact their children’s emergent literacy prior

to formal schooling has been well established in the research literature (National Institute for Literacy, 2008; Manz, Hughes, Barnabas, Bracaliello, & Ginsburg-Block, 2010). Beginning with early studies of young children who arrived at school already reading without formal instruction (Durkin, 1966) and parents' accounts of children's early writing development at home (Schickedanz, 1990; Snow, 1983) parents' language and literacy interactions with their children have continued to be of great interest to literacy researchers. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning heightened consideration of how children co-construct knowledge with more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978), affirming the importance of parent-child interactions to children's early literacy development.

Family routines that have proven to influence children's literacy include joint reading, singing, storytelling, drawing, and writing (Bus, Van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Deckner, Adamson, & Bakeman, 2006; Farver, Xu, Eppe, & Lonigan, 2006; Hammett, van Kleeck, & Huberty, 2003; Haney & Hill, 2004; Hood, Conlon, & Andrews, 2008; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2005), with the aforementioned mediated language activities related to improved preschool language and literacy outcomes including print knowledge, interest in reading, oral language, letter sound knowledge, and later word decoding. Mothers' attempts to draw children's attention to specific aspects of language have been shown to be associated not only with language development, but also with letter knowledge and understanding of concepts of print (Deckner *et al.*, 2006). Studies of home literacy environments have documented that children with high levels of print knowledge were directly involved in activities that included printing, reading, and writing (Levy, Gong, Hessels, Evans, & Jared, 2006).

Parent-Child Literacy Exchanges

While many studies have examined the extent of preschoolers' engagement in joint literacy activities with their parents, fewer have examined the specific literacy exchanges that occur within these activities, particularly in the context of writing. In an early study of parent-child interactions during a joint writing activity, Burns and Casbergue (1992) focused more explicitly on the literacy interactions of middle- and upper-income preschoolers. That study demonstrated that the literacy focus of parents' and preschoolers' talk about the friendly letter they produced as well as the degree to which parents directed the activity, influenced the nature of the children's writing. More recently, these literacy researchers have extended that work to explore writing interactions among lower-income preschool children and their parents (Buell, Burns, Casbergue & Love, 2011; Burns, Love, Buell & Casbergue, 2012).

In both of those studies, featured in volumes 4 and 5 of this journal, documented interactions contradicted commonly held deficit perspectives regarding low-income and/or non-native English speaking parents' ability to support their children's language and literacy development. The first study (Buell *et al.*, 2011) demonstrated that children who were dual language learners, defined as children who acquire two or more languages simultaneously and learn a second language while continuing to develop their first language, were aided by their parents in developing both early writing skills and a "theory of mind" (Wellman, 1991) understanding of the motivation and actions of others. Theory of mind is posited to be a critical component of high-level comprehension of both oral and written language. These qualitative findings suggested that being a dual language learner might actually be an advantage in developing such understanding since, in the context of writing a letter to someone, a child would have to consider which language to use depending on that of the intended recipient.

The second study examined the interactions between low-income parents and their

preschool children whose native language was English as they engaged in the same letter-writing task (Burns *et al.*, 2012). Analysis of the interactions revealed that parents and children shared information related to description of what was being written, conventions about the writing system itself, and broader notions of the conceptual meaning of writing. Verbal interactions between parents and children documented that parents both initiated discussion and responded to their children's initiations, and that children's utterances were divided almost equally between initiation and responses to the adult. This study also included analysis of the relationship between parents' verbal interactions and the literacy focus of the talk surrounding the writing. Findings highlighted the richness and variability of parent-child exchanges, and underscored how similar these low-income families were in their strengths and support of children's early literacy to families participating in other studies (Burns & Casbergue 1992; Cummins, 2004; DeBaryshe, Buelle, & Binder, 1996; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Teale, 1986).

The third and final investigation reported here is focused explicitly on control of the content of friendly letters composed during the joint writing activity. For the first time, standards for the literacy development of children as young as kindergarten include competencies focused on their ability to engage in *composition*, including creation of opinion pieces and informative/explanatory texts, in addition to narration of events (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) (See: <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/statement-national-governors-association-and-state-education-chiefs-common-core->). This is in sharp contrast to more common expectations in the past that focused almost entirely on young children's knowledge about and use of print, with an emphasis on conventions of writing such as letter formation and spelling. The *Continuum of Children's Development in Early Reading and Writing* that was included in a joint position statement regarding early literacy from the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (IRA/NAEYC, 1998, p. 15), for example, listed the following expectations for kindergarten children:

- enjoy being read to and themselves retell simple narrative stories or informational texts
- use descriptive language to explain and explore
- recognize letters and letter-sound matches
- show familiarity with rhyming and beginning sounds
- understand left-to-right and top-to-bottom orientation and familiar concepts of print
- match spoken words with written ones
- begin to write letters of the alphabet and some high-frequency words

The emphasis here on beginning print knowledge is evident. Only "use of descriptive language to explain and explore" begins to approach the concept of composition (See <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSREAD98.PDF>.) Given increasing demands for composition as children begin formal schooling, we sought to find evidence of the manner in which parents and children created content when engaged in a joint writing task. The extent to which parents support children to express their own ideas and to determine what they want to say to the recipient of their letters may be related to how comfortable children will be with the demands placed on them for composition when they enter kindergarten. Specifically, we posed the following questions:

1. To what extent do parents versus children determine the content of a jointly written friendly letter?
2. How do parents support their children's message creation?

Methods

This study used cases drawn from a larger study of parent-child writing interactions. Here we present description of the participants and delineate data sources and analytical methods.

Data sources

The primary data source for these studies was transcripts of video recordings of a parent-child writing activity. In the current study, each initiation of content for jointly constructed friendly letters was coded as either the parent's or the child's contribution following standard procedures for content analysis of interactions as reflected in the transcripts of verbal exchanges between parents and children (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The coded transcripts were examined for patterns of content creation. We were interested in exploring strengths evidenced by these parents who supported and scaffolded their children's emerging composition abilities. Examining the contexts in which and how parents supported the child's contributions to content as well as those contexts in which the parent offered content to the letter-writing activity, shed light on such evidence.

Participants

Transcripts of parent-child interactions examined for this study were purposively drawn from an archival sample, collected in the mid-1990s, of writing interactions between preschool children and their parents or primary caretakers who volunteered to participate. Participants were all solicited from prekindergarten classrooms serving low socioeconomic status families in a major urban public school system in the southeast. We asked that the children's primary caretakers participate. The 20 transcripts selected for analysis of construction of content included those that represented high levels of literacy information exchanged between parents and children. By selecting those transcripts in which parents shared significant amount of information about conventions of writing and spelling, we were able to examine how parents also supported children's message creation. Note that in all of the transcripts, names used by the parents and children have been changed to pseudonyms.

Adult-child dyads for this analysis consisted of mothers and daughters, mothers and sons, and one grandmother with a granddaughter. For the sake of convenience, we will refer to all adults as "parents." We were interested in examining parents' support for composition among this group of families that placed a premium on traditional early literacy skills, including conventions of writing such as upper case and lower case letter formation, left to right / top to bottom directionality, and spelling.

Procedures

The studies from which this sample is drawn replicated a letter-writing task used in previous studies (Burns & Casbergue, 1992; DeBaryshe *et al.*, 1996) because it provided a context for writing that would be familiar to most participants. Parents and children's joint writing of a friendly letter was videotaped in a room in the child's school. Blank paper and a variety of both thick and thin black and primary-color markers were placed on a table with children and parents sitting side-by-side.

We asked parents to engage their children in writing a letter to someone either they or the children chose, informing them that others had written to relatives, friends, or make-believe characters. We also explained that either the child or the adult could do the writing and that letters might include drawings, pretend letters, or conventional writing. Based on prior research, a 10-minute time frame was established for completion of the activity. This represented a

relatively long period for sustained activity for a preschool-age child. The average duration of the session's focus on the writing task was eight minutes.

Findings

As might be expected during any writing interactions, we discovered a range of parental support for children's creation of content. As in our earlier studies, the resulting friendly letters included children's drawing, scribbling, and emergent writing using alphabet letters, as well as parents' writing. (For examples of the written products, see Burns *et.al.*, 2012.)

Child Initiated Content

Some parents allowed the children almost complete control over the content of their messages, suggesting very little content. As can be seen in the following two excerpts typical of those interactions, while parents allowed children to determine content, they offered significant support for other aspects in writing the letter.

Parent-Child 1

C – (after deciding to write to his grandmother) I love you grandma.

A - You want me to help you? Let's see, if we write Dear, what letter we start with?

C - D

A - D. E

C - E

A - A

C - A

A - R

(Interaction continues in this manner through spelling of “ Dear grandma”)

C - I want a basket. I'm gonna get a basket.

A - You're going to draw a basket for Grandma?

C – (Begins drawing an Easter basket.)

A - You want to say what it is in your letter? Would you like to write the word basket on it?

(Parent helps child spell “basket.”)

C - And a cricket for Grandma. (Child continues drawing and talking about features of his drawing as he adds them.)

In this excerpt, the parent offered help to put the child's content into the form of a letter, suggesting that it should begin with “Dear Grandma,” and then assisting the child in adding words to his picture. The child's concept of letter writing obviously entailed drawing pictures for a loved one. Yet the parent scaffolded the child's knowledge to include a convention of letter writing (beginning with a salutation) and the addition of conventional writing in the form of a label for the picture the child drew.

In another case in which the child completely controlled content, the parent did most of the writing, taking dictation from the child.

Parent-Child 2

C - I want to write to my dad. Daddy dad. Daddy dad. I gonna write by myself.

A - You said you are going to write to your dad. I love...

C - the best

A - daddy

C - in the whole world.

(Adult writes as child dictates.)

C - I wanna write my grandma and my sister. My sister. I love my sister very much. My sister black! Color her black. She always - I wanna color her black because she always kissing the baby. I love you sister because she the best sister.

A - Is that an I?

C - I

A - I. Love

C - Love

A - L - O - V - E (spelling aloud as she writes)

C - I wanna write her name. And my grandma's name.

A - OK - (spells aloud "Cindy" and "Geraldine" for sister and grandmother as she writes).

C - I want to write her nickname.

A - What name is that, Tuesday?

C - Yeah, I wanna write her name Tuesday.

In this case, the parent again followed the child's lead regarding the content of the letter. As the child watched her mother write she saw a demonstration of how to put oral messages into print, and also heard words spelled aloud as the mother wrote them.

Parent Initiated Content

In other cases, the content of the letter was controlled entirely by the parent. Even so, there was still significant literacy information exchanged, as in the following example.

Parent-Child 3

A - Let's write a letter. Wanna write a letter to Alvin? We're going to start with Dear Alvin. We're going to make a capital D. Capital D. E, small E... A... R. Capital A... L... V... I... N... What do you want to say? You don't want to write I miss you?

C - I

A - Capital I. Okay. Miss. Small M... I... S... S.

C - How do you make it small? (parent demonstrates)

A - You miss him. So that means you want him to do what? Come where?

C - Home.

A - Come home? Okay. Let's ask him to come home.... (Helps child spell "come" and "home"). We want him to come right now. So why don't we write the word ...the word soon? S ... O... O... N.

In this case, the parent determines content while the child is guided through writing the letter. The parent spells each word for the child, directing the child to write upper and lower case letters according to spelling conventions. The parent occasionally demonstrates how to form letters at the request of the child on a separate piece of paper.

Jointly Constructed Content

While children or parents independently created content during some interactions, in the majority of cases content was co-constructed, with sometimes parents and other times children suggesting the message at various points within the ten minutes allotted for the task. The following excerpts exemplify how parents helped shape children's ideas into messages to be sent to others.

Parent-Child 4

C – To Jackie.

A – To Jackie. All right, to Aunt Jackie. This say, “Dear Aunt Jackie” (reading what she had written to begin the letter). What you want me to write to her?

C – I want a toy.

A – (writing) I would like for you to buy me a toy. A toy for what?

C – For, for me.

A – ...What would you like her to buy you a toy for... uhm...

C – To go outside to go play.

A – All right. I would like for you to buy me a toy that I may go outside to play with. What else?

C – Buy me an airplane.

A – Ok. She bought you an airplane for Christmas. Aren’t you gonna ask Aunt Jackie how she’s doing?

C – How’s she doing.

A – Ok. How are you. How are you doing? What else?

C – That’s all.

In this interaction, the parent began by using the salutation of a typical friendly letter, and then initially deferred to the child for the content of the message. The child watched as her mother wrote and read back parts of the letter before asking for additional content. Note that the mother significantly extended the child’s simple utterances into complete sentences and elicited additional information to extend the child’s contribution, as when she asked the child to say how she will use the toy she is requesting. When the child suggested writing a request for a toy she had already received from her aunt, her mother changed the topic, guiding the child to construct a message typically seen in friendly letters – an inquiry about the well-being of the recipient.

Similarly, the following interaction exemplifies another parent’s support for the child’s creation of content as the child constructs a letter to Mickey Mouse. It is interesting to note that, as in the letter to Aunt Jackie, this child too begins by asking Mickey to buy presents. Perhaps the children were drawing on previous experience writing letters to request toys from Santa. Regardless, the interaction contains content initiated by the child as well as ideas suggested by the parent.

Parent-Child 5

A – What do you want to tell Mickey?

C – Buy me a Goofy and Minnie.

A – Ok. But first of all we got to say Dear who?

C – Dear Mickey.

P – Ok. Buy you a... Will you please ask him please? Will you please buy me (writing as she speaks)...

C – A Minnie and a Goofy.

P – Ok. A Minnie Mouse and Goofy. Ok. You want to tell him your name?

C – Juaquella... (child dictates her first, middle, and last name).

P – My name is Juaquella(repeats child’s full name as she writes it). And what else would you like to tell Mickey?

C – Uhm – Donald Duck.

P – Oh, you want him to buy you a Donald Duck? A Donald Duck. And what else? Let’s tell

him about the skating. Remember you went to see *Holiday on Ice*? Let's tell him about it. Now, what you gonna say?

C – I'm a say, I seen you on *Disneyland on Ice*.

P - (Parent repeats and writes.) And what else did you see?

C – I seen you dancing.

P – (Continues to elicit recall of other characters in the performance, including Roger Rabbit and Duck Tales) And what was all them doing? They all was what?

C – Skating!

P – Skating. Very good. And what else you want to tell him you like about it. You want to tell him you liked it? (Child nods) You tell him you had a really good time. Want to tell him that? (Child nods again) Juaquella had a really good time.

This interaction again demonstrates the manner in which the mother supported and extended the child's suggested content. Like others, this mother steered the child toward using letter writing conventions, including the salutation, and in this case the use of polite language when she asked the child to say, "Please" in her request to Mickey. This mother also skillfully referred to an experience she and the child had shared to help the child generate additional content. By talking Juaquella through the performance they had attended, she was able to encourage more elaborated content for the letter.

Discussion

The interactions excerpted here exemplify the variety of ways that parents supported their children's attempts to construct messages for inclusion in a jointly written friendly letter. Only in two cases overall did parents control all of the content, instructing children about what to say. In each of those cases, parents spent considerable time helping their children encode the messages, dictating spelling of each word, and helping the children form upper- and lower-case letters correctly. While those children did not gain much experience creating content of their own during the observed letter writing interaction, the parents did keep the children's focus on what to say to the intended recipient, maintaining an emphasis on content even if it wasn't the child's.

In four of those cases, the children took the lead in suggesting all of the content of the letter. Interestingly, in some of those cases much of the resulting product was drawing, with children's verbal contributions taking the form of description of what they were drawing. This connection between drawing and writing mirrors a finding from Burns & Casbergue (1992) that letter products characterized by more emergent writing (including drawing and scribbling) were associated with higher degrees of child control over the interactions. Children have long been observed to engage in drawing as part of their writing process by enacting content through drawing, even as they also use more conventional forms of writing (Calkins, 1994). Drawing affords children a way to rehearse or plan out what they want to say through their writing. For the youngest children, the drawing itself is sufficient as the written product. In the current study, even though the letters resulting from child-controlled content included relatively less conventional writing as compared to others in the group, the children maintained their focus on content by devoting attention to the recipient of their letters and what it was they wanted to share with them.

Alternately, content that was entirely controlled by the child was occasionally associated with a letter completely written by the parent while taking dictation from the child. While there was less overt discussion of mechanical aspects of writing such as spelling and letter formation

when the parent did the writing, parents who engaged in letter writing as a dictation task supported the process while the child observed and engaged in self-talk that made overt the construction of sentences and the spelling of words.

In the great majority of interactions, both parents and children contributed to the content of the letters. Some children were able to immediately construct a message, while others required encouragement and support from their parents to begin. Some were able to sustain message creation for much of the 10-minute interaction, while others needed to be prompted by parents to include more content or to elaborate on simple utterances. In many cases, parents shifted children's focus to new content when the child's contributions became repetitive, as was the case in excerpt 4 when the child appeared poised to continue listing items she wanted her aunt to buy for her, or in excerpt 5 when the child persisted in naming Disney characters.

In all cases, parents demonstrated significant strengths in the ability to support their children's writing of friendly letters. Parents were evidently aware of their children's writing capabilities, either offering lots of explicit direction regarding content or mechanical aspects of writing, or accepting their children's drawings and approximations of conventional writing for the valid attempts at writing a friendly letter that they were. Most parents scaffolded children's efforts at message creation to maintain focus on the content to be conveyed to letter recipients.

Implications

Teachers and those who create early literacy curricula recognize that a focus on creative content is often at odds with more explicit instruction related to mechanical aspects of writing. In juxtaposition, Schickedanz and Casbergue (2008) have noted that writing ability develops simultaneously along four separate continua – movement from pictures to writing, movement from scribbles to conventional print, increasing sophistication with word creation (including spelling), and increasingly complex message creation. Skillful teachers know that they must assist children's development in each area. In the era of new standards for the English language arts, helping children to compose their own messages has taken on added importance for young children and those who teach them.

Despite increasing awareness of the importance of all aspects of writing to children's overall literacy development, writing is often under-addressed in early childhood settings (Connor, Morrison, & Slominski, 2006; Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). This may be in part because earlier standards and curricula for young children did not emphasize composition for preschoolers. A lack of attention to writing may also stem from the belief that young children aren't capable of composing their own ideas. Yet composition begins as verbal narration in the preschool years (Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2008). The children included in this study proved to be quite capable of creating content with the support of their parents.

The interactions examined here illustrate that parents from low-socioeconomic backgrounds can support their children's emerging literacy across the four continua of conveying messages through writing, print knowledge, spelling, and message creation. Collectively, the series of studies reported in this journal (see v 4 and 5; [index](#)) illustrates that such parents are able to support their children's development of a Theory of Mind, an important skill for comprehension, and can scaffold their preschoolers' learning of all aspects of writing, including letter formation, spelling, message creation, and even conceptual understanding of what writing is and the purposes it can serve.

The results of these studies compel us to reject a deficit perspective regarding low-income families' inability to offer support for preschool children's literacy learning. Instead,

these findings impel us toward a strengths-based orientation that seeks to recognize the “funds of knowledge” families have to support children’s achievement (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzales, 1992; Moll, & Gonzalez, 2004).). Our findings across all three studies make clear that families do have a wealth of knowledge about literacy that they share with their children, and that even as expectations for school literacy change, parents are well situated to help their children reach those expectations.

References

- Buell, M.J., Burns, M.S., Casbergue, R., & Love, A. (2011). ¿Ques mas le va a decir? Preschoolers who are dual language learners write a letter with a parent. *e-Journal of Literacy and Social Responsibility*, 4(1), 8-37.
- Burns, M. S., & Casbergue, R. (1992). Parent–child interaction in a letter-writing context. *JRB: A Journal of Literacy*, 24, 289–312.
- Burns, M.S., Love, A., Buell, M., & Casbergue, R. (2012). What do you want to write to Grandma? Richness and variety in shared writing of prekindergarten children and parents. *e-Journal of Literacy and Social Responsibility*, 5(1), 177-212.
- Bus, A. G., van Ijzendoorn, M. H., & Pellegrini, A. D. (1995). Joint book reading makes for success in learning to read: A meta-analysis on intergenerational transmission of literacy. *Review of Educational Research*, 65, 1–8.
- Calkins, L. (1994). *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Connor, C., Morrison, F., & Slominski, L. (2006). Preschool instruction and children’s emergent literacy growth. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(4), 665-689.
- Cummins, J. (2004). Language and literacy in bilingual children. *Journal of Child Language*, 31(2), 424–429.
- DeBaryshe, B., Buell, M., & Binder, J. (1996). What a parent brings to the table: Young children writing with and without parental assistance. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 28, 71–90.
- Deckner, D. F., Adamson, L. B., & Bakeman, R. (2006). Child and maternal contributions to shared reading: Effects on language and literacy development. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 27, 31-41.
http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/620199/description#description
- Dickinson, D., & Tabors, P. (Eds.). (2001). *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.
- Durkin, D. (1966). *Children who read early: Two longitudinal studies*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Farver, J. M., Xu, Y., Eppe, S., & Lonigan, C. J. (2006). Home environments and young Latino children’s school readiness. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21, 196–212.
- Glaser, A. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Gonzalez, N., Moll L. C., & Amanti C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Florence, KY: Taylor & Francis.
<http://www.psyppress.com/funds-of-knowledge-9780805849189>
- Hammett, L., van Kleeck, A., & Huberty, C. (2003). Patterns of parents’ extratextual interactions during book sharing with preschool children: A cluster analysis study. *Reading Research*

- Quarterly*, 38, 442–468.
- Haney, M., & Hill, J. (2004). Relationships between parent-teaching activities and emergent literacy in preschool children. *Early Child Development and Care*, 174(3), 215–228.
- Hood, M., Conlon, N., & Andrews, G. (2008). Preschool home literacy practices and children's literacy development: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 100, 252–278.
- International Reading Association/National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998). *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*. (author).
- Levy, B. A., Gong, Z., Hessels, S., Evans, M. A., & Jared, D. (2006). Understanding print: Early reading development and the contributions of home literacy experiences. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 93, 63-93.
- Love, A., Burns, M. S., & Buell, M. (2007). Writing: Empowering literacy. *Young Children*, 62, 12-19.
- Manz, P. H., Hughes, C., Barnabas, E., Bracaliello, C., & Ginsburg-Block, M. (2010). A descriptive review and meta-analysis of family-based emergent literacy interventions: To what extent is the research applicable to low-income, ethnic-minority or linguistically-diverse young children? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25(4), 409–431.
- Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31, 132-141.
- Moll, L. C., & Gonzalez, N. (2004). Engaging life: A funds-of-knowledge approach to multicultural education. In J. A. Banks & C. A. McGee Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed.) (pp. 699-715). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). *Common Core State Standards*. National Governors Association for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers. Retrieved from http://www.ccsso.org/News_and_Events/Press_Releases/NATIONAL_GOVERNORS_ASSOCIATION_AND_STATE_EDUCATION_CHIEFS_LAUNCH_COMMON_STATE_ACADEMIC_STANDARDS_.html
- National Institute for Literacy. (2008). *Developing early literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy. <https://www.federalregister.gov/agencies/national-institute-for-literacy>
- Scarborough, H. S., & Dobrich, W. (1994). On the efficiency of reading to preschoolers. *Developmental Review*, 33, 245–302.
- Schickedanz, J. A. (1990). *Adam's righting revolutions: One child's literacy development from infancy through grade one*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Schickedanz, J. & Casbergue, R. (2008). *Writing in preschool: Learning to orchestrate meaning and marks*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Snow, C. E. (1983). Literacy and language: Relationships during the preschool years. *Harvard Educational Review*, 53, 162-189.
- Teale, W. H. (1986). Home background and young children's literacy development. In W. H.

Teale & E. Sulzby (Eds.), *Emergent literacy: Writing and reading* (pp. 173–207). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674576292>

Weigel, D. J., Martin, S. S., & Bennett, K. K. (2006). Contributions of the home literacy environment to preschool-aged children's emerging literacy and language skills. *Early Child Development and Care*, 176, 357-378.

Wellman, H. M. (1991). From desires to beliefs: Acquisition of a theory of mind. In Whiten, A., (Ed.), *Natural theories of mind: Evolution, development and simulation of everyday mindreading* (pp. 19-38). Cambridge, MA, US: Basil Blackwell.



Renée Casbergue is Professor of Early Literacy and Interim Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research at Louisiana State University where she holds the Vira Franklin and James R. Eagle Professorship in the College of Human Sciences and Education. Her research interests focus on early literacy, with emphasis on children's writing development supported at home and in early childhood educational settings, and the influence of professional development on preschool teachers' ability to impact early language /literacy development. Renée's contact: rcasberg@lsu.edu.



M. Susan Burns is a Professor of the Early Childhood Education at George Mason University. Her research centers on the development and learning of young children (preschool through Grade 3). Her work includes all children: those with diverse abilities (children with disabilities), those living in poverty, and those from multi-lingual and multi-cultural backgrounds. Of particular interest are young children's approaches to learning, cognition, and language. Correspond with Susan at: mburns2@gmu.edu.



Angela Love, faculty member in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching and Program Coordinator of Early Childhood Education at Auburn University, focuses on teaching and learning in the early years, among low-income children. Her research interests are: adult/child interaction during literacy events, use of the arts & aesthetic education in early oral language/literacy learning, and teachers' beliefs regarding culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate practices. Angela can be reached at: angela.love@auburn.edu.



Martha Jane Buell, member, Early Childhood Education faculty and professor, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, University of Delaware. Her research centers on improving early care and education programs seeking positive outcomes for all children especially those with diverse abilities, living in poverty, and with multi-lingual, multi-cultural backgrounds. She examines ways adults support young children's learning, cognition, and language. She is director of the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood (DIEEC) at U Delaware. Contact Martha Jane at: mjbuell@UDel.Edu.

At the Crossroads of Critical Literacy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Kathy Christensen
University of Florida

Sharon Earle
University of Florida

Key Words: critical literacy, culturally responsive pedagogy, empowerment, inquiry, children's literature, inclusivity, social responsibility.

NOTABLE QUOTE

Changing demographics across our nation demand a re-culturing of classrooms and schools. As literacy leaders we have a responsibility to facilitate and engage in these crucial conversations regarding race, power, and equity in our school communities.

Abstract

This article presents action research centered on the use of critical literacy to help a group of sixth-grade girls, ages 11 to 13, who hailed from homes that can be described as low socioeconomic and representative of various ethnic groups. The article continues to explore topics including empowerment, inclusivity, social interactions and personal responsibility. This study took place in a rural south Florida school community over a three month period in 2012. The authors share how the use of culturally relevant literature and culturally responsive teaching fostered a sense of community that allowed for honest social interactions and personal growth. Themes that emerged from the data include: the importance of creating positive teacher-student relationships, investing in time for community building, and the interaction of critical literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Critical Literacy Theory

Critical literacy has been referred to as a mindset and a sociopolitical approach to examining text and multimedia (Carter, 2011; Jones, 2006). Teachers who engage in critical literacy see literacy teaching and learning as more than literacy skills and strategies. They recognize that critical literacy can neither be described as a method nor a prescriptive approach for teaching literacy. Rather, participants explore issues of power and learn to question whose interests are being served, whose are not, and the reasons behind those answers (Carter, 2011; Jones, 2006; Powell, Cantrell, & Adams, 2001).

As teachers adopt a critical literacy stance, they do so with the understanding that text is rooted in perspective, reveals notions of power, and contributes to social and political positioning (Jones, 2006). Teachers and students move from the traditional transmission approach in which the teacher dispenses knowledge to one in which teachers, students and families engage as co-learners. Together, they explore through deconstruction and discussion, the social, political, and ideological statements within text that convey ideas of what others assume to be acceptable, desirable, and true, as well as other beliefs about the world and the way it does and should work (Carter, 2011).

Jones (2006) refers to critical literacy as a tool for exploring and deconstructing media and text by questioning the voices that are privileged and those that are silenced. Through this process, students from all backgrounds begin to recognize and connect the stories of their lives with the experiences of others. Once readers begin this process of recognition, critical literacy work emboldens them to question how power is exercised, the way it shapes action, and as a result, promotes a desire to challenge the status quo through questioning (Jones, 2006; Carter, 2011).

As students begin to recognize the power of action against oppression, they enter into a stage of self-reflection and critical analysis that allows them to reflect upon their own actions toward others (Powell *et. al.*, 2001). These reflections allow for critical problem solving and lead to empowerment. These students then, tend toward a desire for pushback after examining inherent injustices and social inequities which often leads further toward negotiation and change. This reflects the beginning of the reconstructive process, a part of the critical literacy learning which enhances transformation.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy is described in the literature as teaching within a framework that honors the lived experiences and cultural wealth students bring to the learning environment (Garcia, Arias, Harris Murri, & Serna, 2010). When culturally responsive teachers recognize the value of student experiences and cultures, they also recognize the value of using this information to connect the learning of the classroom to the lives of their students (Flint, 2008). This expands the notion of prior knowledge exponentially (Fairbanks, Cooper, Masterson, & Webb, 2009). In doing so, teachers make the learning relevant and meaningful, thereby enhancing the likelihood of successful learning.

Characteristics of a culturally responsive classroom include attention to the cultural knowledge of students and implementation of various instructional practices that match student learning styles. Culturally responsive teachers recognize literacy as a socially constructed activity as opposed to traditional transmission models (Flint, 2008). Multicultural books and materials are evident and integrated within the entirety of the classroom curriculum. The perspectives of various cultures and world views are validated as worthy of respect and help create a sense of

community and promote an ethos of care. All of these make culturally responsive teaching empowering and transformative, resulting in increased academic achievement (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Charney, 2002; Powell & Rightmeyer, 2011; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003).

The Intersection of Critical Literacy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Much like a photographer frames a photograph, Jones (2006), in her discussion of the way text is framed, points out in a very compelling way that meaning framed within a text is far too complex both within and outside its borders to ever be considered truth. Recognizing the inevitability of framing, however, is of critical importance. It is impossible to create a text of any form that does not frame something or someone in some manner that meets the needs or interests of the author. Jones (2006), therefore, cautions teachers that in order to avoid the stereotyping or ascription of assumed characteristics attributed to culturally defined groups inherent in framing, we must know the person, the context, the history, the challenges, and the hopes of the framed subject. This includes our students. Knowing them informs our teaching and allows us to connect the socio-political work of critical literacy to their lives (Carter, 2011; Jones, 2006; Powell *et. al.*, 2001). It is here that we find the intersection of critical literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Methods

This paper describes the inquiry work of a literacy coach and co-author of this paper, who explored critical literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy as tools to engage a group of adolescent girls in discussions revolving around issues of power, position, and perspective (Jones, 2006; Powell & Rightmyer, 2011). The results of this study demonstrate how culturally responsive pedagogy is an essential framework for critical literacy work with students.

The circumstances in which the teacher inquirer came to know the girls emanated from the voiced frustration of teachers who deemed the girls' behavior inappropriate, if not outright defiant. The girls were often disrespectful in class and displayed mean behaviors to one another and their classmates often resulting in in-school suspensions.

The Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in a Title 1 school located in a small, rural community within an expansive south Florida county. The school enrolls 640 students (75% Hispanic, 22% Black, 1% Native American and 1% White). Languages other than English are spoken at home by 81% of the students. Approximately 97% of the student population is economically needy as indicated by qualifying for free and reduced breakfast and lunch, and 44% are from migrant families. Forty percent of the faculty is non-White; the principal is African-American, and the assistant principal is Hispanic. The school is located across the street from a subsidized housing community for migrant families and adjacent to an Indian reservation.

Student participants were recruited following grade level Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings in which teachers were expressing concerns about student behavior. The six students were identified by 6th grade teachers because they regarded the girls as disruptive, antagonistic, and unkind to one another. The academic and behavioral challenges of these students were a continual topic of discussion during monthly PLC meetings. Despite efforts on the part of the teachers, the girls' lack of positive progress continued to be problematic. They had divided themselves into two groups. One group included three girls who were Black—two Haitian and one African American. The other group included two Hispanic girls and one biracial (Native American and Black) girl. Their continual conflicts were challenging.

The authors are part of a doctoral cohort through the University of Florida. Their studies of critical literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy led to the research of one author and the collaboration for this article as a collegial reflection on the intersection of practice and theory. When this study occurred Kathy and Sharon were literacy coaches for their districts and each had over eighteen years of teaching experience.

Cultural Disconnect

Important to note is the possibility that at least a part of the problem between these teachers and students might be attributed to cultural disconnection (Garza, 2009; Monroe, 2009). Cultural disconnection occurs because of differences between teacher and student backgrounds, and teacher expectations that typify a cultural norm reflective of a Eurocentric White middle-class culture (Howard, 2010; Tatum, 1997). Each of these girls is from a culture outside the dominant White culture (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Yosso, 2005). Though students of color make up 99% of the student population in this school, all students' behavior was expected to meet the "norms" of a dominant ideology typical of educational institutions in the United States and required in this district. Dominant socio-cultural school norms often fail to consider or build upon the cultural wealth and experiences students of color bring to the school setting. A disconnection such as this often results in decreased student self-confidence or a growing sense of anger leading to "acting out," aggression, and/or dissociation from school and school personnel (Tutwiler, 2007).

In this paper, we examine the data from a three-month inquiry project in which the coach worked with this group of adolescent girls two to three times weekly during their lunch period to deconstruct messages and images of strong females. The goal of this inquiry project was to use culturally responsive pedagogy as a framework for fostering self-reflection and relationship building in the context of a critical literacy "lunch bunch." We reflect on the lessons learned from embarking upon this critical literacy journey within a culturally responsive environment.

In this study, the coach sought to validate and make visible the lived experiences of the girls, while helping them adopt a wider and more inclusive view of others within and outside their cultural groups (Clark & Whitney, 2009; Jones, 2006). The identities of these girls and their families have likely been "challenged, punished, or even used as examples of how *not* [emphasis in original] to be successful in our society" (Jones, 2006, p. xvi). This is often the result of the demands of a school environment in which the values and beliefs of teachers and other school personnel are closely aligned with those of the dominant social group.

A primary goal of literature instruction in schools is to help students develop intellectual and literacy skills to become effective citizens. However, when the pedagogy encourages students to uncritically accept someone else's determination of what is right or important, that democratic goal is unrealized (Hinchey, 2010). Culturally relevant children's literature was utilized for the purpose of developing critical thinking skills while reading about positive female exemplars with which the girls could identify. The literacy coach hoped that the examination of strong female protagonists would enable the students to begin to recognize how power, perspective and positioning affect relationships.

Through lunch time discussions surrounding text, the coach and "her girls" explored issues of gender, social class, race, and identity. The coach hoped the discussions would lead to positive social interactions and an increased sense of social responsibility. Faculty decided the coach would meet with the girls three times a week to hold book discussions during the girls' lunch period due to teacher concern regarding missed academic instruction during regular class

time.

Origin of the Inquiry

Our research question emerged out of teachers' perceptions of challenging classroom behaviors of this group of students and the understanding that critical literacy can be a vehicle for examining power, knowledge, language and ideology (Jones, 2006; Powell & Rightmyer, 2011). The intent was to develop strong teacher-student relationships and promote collaboration within the group as a step toward developing a reflective stance. This would allow the girls to challenge texts and question the status quo while considering what accounts for positive traits in strong women. The coach hoped that discussions related to positive feminine traits from literature as well as problem-solving work related to school relationships would positively affect the girls. The coach wanted to position herself as a co-learner with the intention of building among these girls a sense of community (Shiller, 2008).

School connectedness is associated with reducing a multitude of adverse factors, such as drop out, drug use, and sexual activity. Various researchers, including Boykin and Noguera (2011) assert that many teachers hold deficit views of poor students. As a result, teachers place the burden of improvement upon these students and their families. The coach was cognizant of this deficit view. In an effort to help the girls value their own culture and the culture of others while developing school connectedness, the coach purposefully selected culturally relevant literature to ameliorate the effects of marginalization and invisibility. This rationale was selected in order to avoid double-consciousness, the sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others and measuring self-value based upon others' deficit views (Givens, 2007).

Additionally, the coach hoped to initiate an exploration of the topic of power and how women can develop personal power without it being at the cost of others. This necessitated considering oppression from the viewpoint of the oppressed (Freire, 1970). The goals of reading involve gaining a deeper level of critical consciousness by examining social conditions (Freire, 1970) and engaging in transformative action (Damico, Campano & Harste, 2009). To that end, the coach sought to facilitate conversations about the cost of oppression.

The guiding inquiry question for this study was, How will the use of a critical literacy stance affect the relationships and behaviors of a group of 6th grade girls? Important sub-questions included the following:

1. What will be the effects of discussions related to power, perspective and positioning?
2. What effect will various texts have on student social development?

The Experience

In total, the girls read and critically explored four texts. The topics explored included discrimination, familial capital, perseverance, relationships, individuality, and peer pressure. Data collected included the coach's journal entries, the students' reflective writings, and participant interviews. The inquiry work began with an exploration of *Kate and The Beanstalk* (Pope Osborne, 2000) and ended twelve weeks later.

Through *Kate and The Beanstalk* (Pope Osborne, 2000), the girls identified characteristics that might be attributed to a strong female protagonist. An innovation of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, this picture book portrays the main character as a clever and independent girl who outwits the giant. After reading, the girls created a colorful graffiti-style word splash using dry erase markers on a table surface (See Appendix A). This activity challenged the girls to collaboratively name the character traits of the protagonist resulting in one of the first successful community building activities.

The True Story of Ruby Bridges (Coles, 1995), an historical fiction picture book about one of the first African American students integrated into a southern school, was the next text the group examined. The girls explored the concepts of inclusivity and perseverance. After both recognizing and responding to the White hatred portrayed, the girls were quick to express appreciation that "things are not like that now." Realizing the exclusion inherent in Ruby Bridges' story, the girls then began to consider their own actions of exclusion within their home and school community. As a group, the girls decided to each make a conscious effort to be more inclusive with specific classmates they had previously shunned. A significant result was that they learned it was not always easy to repair the damage done, and would require significant perseverance in their efforts. The coach noted that inclusion "took on a life of its own" with the girls as it resurfaced many times over the following weeks.

The next book was *Talkin' About Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman* (Grimes, 2002), an award-winning book written from the perspective of various people in Bessie Coleman's life. Each girl was responsible for reading and sharing the perspective of a person in Bessie's life. What was significant about this particular book study was that the girls began to deeply reflect on the ways others in their lives might perceive them. They journaled about these relationships with passion. The intensity with which they wrote was reflected in their reluctance to share their thoughts with the group, but later led to discussions regarding the "rules" of relationships and their own positive and negative contributions to relationships in their own lives.

The inquiry concluded with a realistic fiction novel, *Stargirl* (Spinelli, 2000), about a non-conforming high school girl. In this novel, the girls explored the ideas of individuality and peer pressure. Each week, they critically examined the social justice dilemmas experienced by the protagonist. The coach purposefully utilized discussion protocols to promote reflective responses to the reading (nsrfharmony.org). These discussions resulted in the girls' examining their lived experiences with relationships and promoted problem solving of their own conflicts and dilemmas.

Data Collection and Analysis

Three methods of data collection were used to triangulate data. Data sources included the coach's journal, the girls' reflective writing journals, and participant interviews.

Data Sources

The coach's journal was used to track the progress of the work, note personal insights and observations, and record anecdotal accounts of the sessions. This enabled the coach to chart progression through the books and the girls' corresponding behaviors and attitudes. The girls kept reflective journals that at times were interactive. Though the coach set the expectation that writing would be a part of each session, the students were given the choice of sharing their writing with the whole group, sharing only with the coach, or folding the page over to indicate their writing was private and not to be shared with anyone. At the end of the study, each student participated in an individual interview comprised of four reflection questions that were transcribed and analyzed for perspectives and themes. Reflection questions included:

- As part of our girls' group, what do you think has helped you the most?
- Which book was the most thought provoking or inspiring to you and why?
- Have you changed because of this group? If so, how?
- If we could go back in time and start this group again, would you want to participate?

Why or why not?

The responses were highlighted and annotated to identify commonalities and differences in the participants' thoughts.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and coded for similarities, differences, and emerging themes. A content analysis involved sweeping through the journal entries, noting patterns, topics, and types of responses while utilizing a loose framework of *a priori* codes. When using *a priori* coding, categories are established before the analysis, co-researchers and colleagues agree on the categories, and the coding is applied to data (Weber, 1990). The writings were coded through multiple readings using *a priori* codes (Weber, 1990) which identified whether the entries were: a) solely about the text, b) a connection between text and discussion, or c) personal reflections. The tallied results were as follows: 22 text responses; 12 text-to-self entries; and 20 times the girls wrote solely about themselves.

Findings

A beginning analysis of the data from the researcher journal indicated the coach met with the girls an average of twice per week (twenty eight times over three months). The coach rated each session from 3 to 1 (see table 1). A score of 3 indicated the majority of the girls participated in a positive, problem-solving manner. A score of 1 denoted that the majority either did not participate or displayed counterproductive behavior, such as disrespect toward one another. It is essential to note here that the coach was not looking for compliant behavior, but rather behavior that promoted group cohesiveness and personal growth. The following table displays a summary of reflections from the coach's journal.

Table 1 Summary of Coach's Journal

Week of:	# of days met	Overall rating (1-3) & possible factors	Books & topics that emerged from discussions
Jan 10th	3	(2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> novelty continued animosity with one another growing trust of coach sense of self-satisfaction with viewing themselves as "sneaky" (clever) like Kate 	Kate & The Beanstalk -bravery -independence -cleverness
Jan 17th	3	(2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> possible shift in group dynamics because one girl was absent 	-personal identification with Kate's character traits
Jan 24th	2	(3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> topic touched upon 	The True Story of Ruby Bridges -discrimination

		<p>their sense of unfairness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sense of gratitude that “things aren’t that way now” 	
Jan 31st	2	<p>(1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • defensiveness about their own exclusive behavior • surfacing of negative emotions about times when they felt excluded or abandoned 	<p>-idea of exclusion and efforts to be more inclusive</p> <p>-familial capital</p>
Feb 7th	3	<p>(1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in personal journaling between girls and coach, an overall lack of support systems revealed 	<p>-perseverance</p> <p>-support systems</p>
Feb 14th	2	<p>(2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • girls intrigued by the format of the text 	Talkin’ About Bessie
Feb 21st	3	<p>(2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal reflections regarding views of others toward each girl were surfaced through private journal reflections between coach and girls 	-perspectives - how others view us and how we perceive others
Feb 28th	2	<p>(1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outside negative classroom events carried over into sessions leading to significant problem solving unrelated to the text 	-what we may (or may not) choose to do influences how others perceive us

Mar 6th	2	(3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive response to book given as gift • highly engaged with the story from start • problem-solving of the prior week led to greater cohesiveness and sense of community 	Stargirl -individuality -peer pressure
Mar 13th	2	(3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive feedback about behavior from classroom teachers surfaced 	-relationships
Mar 20th	2	(3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continued growth of cohesiveness and sense of community 	-relationships -Stargirl's traits and actions -Stargirl's influence on others -tolerance
Mar 27th	2	(3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • girls' sharing of personal recognition of empowerment leading to increased voice 	-celebrations and decisions

The results of this study demonstrate how culturally responsive pedagogy is an essential framework for critical literacy work with students. Upon initial analysis of her journal, the coach noted that the girls' behavior and engagement were highest at the beginning of a new book and that there was a cumulative effect of community cohesiveness over time. Reflecting on this observation, the coach first considered whether future work with individual texts should be shortened in length to decrease what appeared to be waning engagement. After further reflection of the events recorded and data collected, the authors noted and considered other factors that might have contributed to session ratings (see table 1).

Three themes emerged from the researcher journal data: the importance of creating positive teacher-student relationships, the importance of investing in time for community building, and the interaction of critical literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy. The coach demonstrated concern for the girls' social/emotional and academic growth, provided dedicated time and space for safe exploration of social justice issues, and promoted the critical examination

of text within a culturally responsive environment. These themes formed the whole of the experience that lead to positive growth and interaction and are detailed as follows.

Teacher-Student Relationships

The importance of fostering positive teacher-student relationships was paramount to successful co-learning. The coach was mindful of not steering the direction of conversations, as was evidenced at the beginning of the inquiry project. Although the coach's original intention was to encourage the girls to consider female power in a male-dominated society, the coach allowed the girls to drive the direction of the exploration of issues. She was cognizant of the importance of establishing herself as a co-learner rather than a director of learning. This was evidenced when the girls latched onto the topic of character traits rather than gender in relation to the book, *Kate and the Beanstalk*. They were more interested in their connection to personal traits of the character than whether or not the character was a strong female. The coach allowed them to take this direction. Powell and Rightmeyer (2011) argue that critical literacy calls for challenging established views and structures. In this case, the coach recognized the importance of stepping back while creating a safe environment conducive to the reflective conversations critical for this work.

Later, when reading *Stargirl* (Spinelli, 2000), there was a discussion about names when the girls realized Stargirl had created her own name. Interestingly, the girls began to offer names they would select if given the opportunity to rename themselves. One of the girls said she would choose "Isabella" because it was what her father wanted to name her. This was followed by another student responding that Isabella sounded like a "White name." It became uncomfortable when the girls began to tease her, asking her why she wanted a "White" name. The coach then teasingly said, "Hey, you all know I'm White, right?" and everyone started laughing. A significant shift occurred later that day when one of the girls approached the coach and said, "Sorry about the White name thing." Interesting to note, this particular girl was sensitive to the possibility of having offended the coach/teacher, as she was typically the ringleader in teasing and ostracizing others. This incident, though small, became a clear indication of personal awareness and growth. It was also encouraging to witness the student's overtures because this reflected growing teacher-student relationships that are critical for young adolescents.

The coach's role as facilitator and co-learner became a vehicle for enhancing students' self-efficacy and proved to have a powerful influence on student achievement, engagement and confidence for further learning (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). By mindfully monitoring her role and participation within the group, the shift of responsibility allowed the girls to take control of the conversations as the coach strove to project confidence in the girls' capacity for self-monitoring, self-control, and engagement.

The Issue of Time and Community Building

The element of time was critical for creating a climate in which a reciprocal effect allowed the girls to drop their hardened personas as they developed more individual authenticity and group trust. During the initial reading of *The True Story of Ruby Bridges* (Coles, 1995), the girls identified the theme of discrimination. As closer reading of the text ensued, the girls discussed exclusion, inclusion, and shared personal connections to their own familial and church community capital. In their reflection journals, three of the girls mentioned their church families, and all of the girls mentioned at least one of their family members as a support system. Time spent as a group during the reading of the novel *Stargirl* (Spinelli, 2000) continued to contribute to meaningful discussions around the literature fostering deeper and more numerous connections with one another's lives. For example, at one point the girls' recognized the manner in which

Stargirl responded when others treated her unkindly. They were struck by and appreciated the way she reacted with kindness despite the way she had been treated. As trust and tolerance evolved, so did students' genuineness and cohesiveness as was evidenced during the novel study. As the weeks and chapters progressed, the girls appeared to align themselves very closely with Stargirl. They were attentive and highly involved in discussions at points where she was struggling. The girls were disappointed when Stargirl tried to change to fit in, recognizing relinquishment of power to the dominant group, although they understood her motivation to do so. They were happy when the protagonist returned to her authentic self, despite the shunning she received from the other characters in the book. The shunning angered them, leading to a discussion of "shades of shunning" as levels of bullying behavior.

This discussion about bullying would never have occurred early in the inquiry process. It was only after the group's collective investment of time together that this depth of conversation could have occurred. The time spent discovering these connections was of utmost importance for addressing complex issues and for the building of relationships (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

The Intersection of Critical Literacy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The third theme, the intersection of critical literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy, was woven throughout the inquiry project from the pre-planning stage through culminating celebrations. Critical literacy is based upon the notion of learning how to question text while providing impetus for empowerment and action. Readers are called upon to read, analyze, and deconstruct texts leading to discussions on tolerance and power. This regularly occurred with the girls as the texts were catalysts for examining power and considering how to treat others more fairly. The intersection of the work of critical literacy through questioning and a developing empowerment, as well as the tenets of culturally responsive teaching with regard to relationship building and time, made this inquiry work a constructive and beneficial experience. After analyzing the data, Kathy and Sharon clearly recognized that critical literacy as a process would not have been as effective were it not for the foundation of a culturally responsive teaching environment.

Since learning is influenced by social and cultural constructs, it was imperative that this critical literacy work be framed within culturally responsive pedagogy while honoring what the girls brought to the learning (Fairbanks *et.al.*, 2009). The coach intentionally created a responsive environment for this inquiry. Recognizing their divisive and counterproductive behaviors, cultural back grounds, and disconnected relationships within the school community, she capitalized upon her knowledge of the girls to purposefully select culturally relevant literature that would be meaningful to them. Though the girls continued to have preferred friendships, their increased tolerance and inclusivity provided evidence of the successfulness of this project.

Students' Perspectives

The coach analyzed the journal entries through multiple readings, noting patterns, topics and types of responses. The writings were coded as to whether the entries were solely about the text, a connection between text and discussion, or personal reflections. The coach recognized that the journals were an essential tool that allowed the girls to be reflective and to interact with her about topics they were reluctant to share with the group.

The participants unanimously reported that the time and space to discuss topics and issues contributed to their ability to resolve personal conflicts. Four of the six girls selected *Stargirl* (Spinelli, 2000) as the most influential piece of literature, all commenting on the

importance of “being yourself” and of finding ways to deal with being excluded. Five of the girls discussed how they perceived themselves as “nicer now.” A sense of empowerment emerged for all of the girls; either the personal power to remain “true to yourself” or the power to change. Three of the six girls discussed finding their own voice. One girl discussed having better self-control, while another shared how she could now make better choices about friendships. All girls said they would participate again if given the choice.

Discussion

What began as small group work with a group of adolescent girls to deconstruct texts and images of strong females resulted in personal empowerment that grew from their realizations about their own actions toward others. The authors believe that the empowerment was a result of connections to texts due to discussions in a culturally responsive community setting. The coach endeavored to know her students to better help them examine their own challenges and hopes as they worked toward constructing a wider perspective of the world. The elements of coach as co-learner, following the interests of the girls, and creating a safe environment while maintaining high expectations about involvement and reflection, all contributed to the girls’ learning about collaboration, inclusion, and literature. School connectedness and better social relationships were increased as the girls examined texts about oppressed characters and made connections to their own lives and those around them.

This inquiry work resulted in the girls’ increased self-awareness and confidence in their own ability to find their voice and make independent decisions. The girls all shared how they felt stronger in dealing with peer pressure and found themselves more accepting of others who previously were not in their social circles. The authors believe this inquiry project, based on the culturally responsive pedagogy of socially constructed activities (Flint, 2008), nurtured their capacity for self-reflection and helped them develop a greater understanding of themselves and others.

Looking Ahead

The majority of the critical literacy work of this inquiry project centered on the deconstruction of text and social action, with little time spent on reconstruction (Jones, 2006). The reconstruction component might have given the girls a deeper understanding of marginalized people and perspectives, especially if the coach had selected more texts with multiple viewpoints. Further reflection revealed the possible implications of using more texts that were representative of the girls. While half of the texts were about African American females, it may have been beneficial to use books with Hispanic heroines in order to validate the cultures of those girls in the group who were of Hispanic heritage. Greater use of reconstruction as a component of the critical literacy process might also have led to deeper and sustained praxis. Due to the growing diversity of current school populations, the authors can envision how critical literacy work and culturally responsive pedagogy will continue to be a focus of their ongoing practice as literacy leaders. Changing demographics across our nation demand a re-culturing of classrooms and schools. As literacy leaders we have a responsibility to facilitate and engage in these crucial conversations regarding race, power, and equity in our school communities.

References

Boykin, A. W., & Noguera, P. (2011). *Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

- Carter, Y. G. (2011). Sociopolitical consciousness and multiple perspectives: Empowering students to read the world. In R. Powell & E. C. Rightmyer (Eds.), *Literacy for all students: An instructional framework for closing the gap* (pp. 233-257). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Charney, R. S. (2002). *Teaching Children to Care: Classroom Management for Ethical and Academic Growth, K-8*. Turners Falls, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc.
- Clarke, L., & Whitney, E. (2009). Walking in their shoes: Using multiple-perspectives texts as a bridge to critical literacy. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(6), 530-534.
- Damico, J., Campano, G., & Harste, J. (2009). Transactional theory and critical theory in reading comprehension. In S. Israel & G. Duffy (Eds.) *Handbook of research on reading comprehension*. (pp. 177-188). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fairbanks, C., Cooper, J., Masterson, L., & Webb, S. (2009). Culturally relevant pedagogy and reading comprehension. In S. Israel & G. Duffy (Eds.) *Handbook of research on reading comprehension*. (pp. 587-606). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fairbanks, C., Cooper, J., Masterson, L., & Webb, S. (2009). Culturally Responsive Instruction and the Impact on Reading Comprehension. *Handbook of Research on Reading Comprehension*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 587-606.
- Flint, A. S. (2008). *Literate lives: Teaching reading and writing*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Garcia, E., Arias, M. B., Harris Murri, N. J., & Serna, C. (2010). Developing responsive teachers: A challenge for a demographic reality. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1-2), 132-142. doi: 10.1177/0022487109347878
- Garza, R. (2009). Latino and White high school students' perceptions of caring behaviors. *Urban Education*, 44(3), 297-321. doi: 10.1177/0042085908318714
- Givens, M. B. (2007). Construction of blackness: A white woman's study of whiteness and schooling. In S. Books (Ed.), *Invisible children in the society and its schools* (3rd ed., pp. 141-156). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Hinchey, P. (2010). *Finding freedom in the classroom: A practical introduction to critical theory*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Howard, T. G. (2010). *Why race and culture matter in schools: Closing the achievement gap in America's schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Jones, S. (2006). *Girls, social class, and literacy: What teachers can do to make a difference*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2005). Foreward: They're trying to wash us away: The adolescence of critical race theory in education. In A. D. Dixson & C. K. Rousseau (Eds.) *Critical race theory in education* (pp. v-xiii). NY: Routledge.
- Monroe, C. (2009). Teachers closing the discipline gap in an urban middle school. *Urban Education*, 44, 322-347. doi:10.1177/0042085908318716

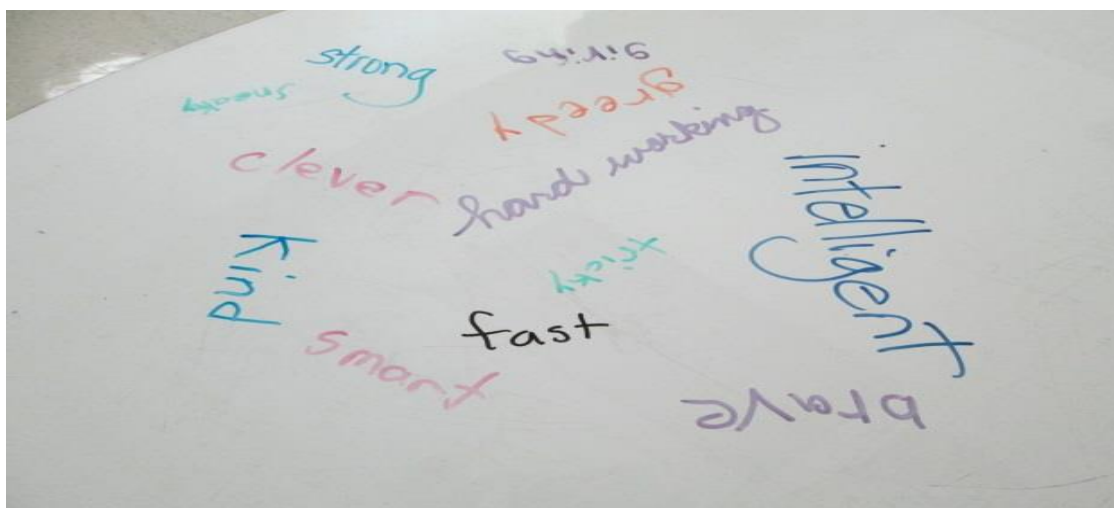
- Powell, R., Cantrell, S. C., & Adams, S. (2001). Saving Black Mountain: The promise of critical literacy in a multicultural democracy. *The Reading Teacher*, 54(8), 772-71.
- Powell, R., & Rightmyer, E. C. (2011). Literacy for all students: An instructional for closing the gap. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Shiller, J. (2008). "These are our children!" An examination of relationship-building practices in urban high schools. *Urban Rev*, (41), 461-485.
- Tatum, B.D. (1997). Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Tutwiler, S. W. (2007). How schools fail African American boys. In S. Books (Ed.), *Invisible children in the society and its schools* (3rd ed., pp. 141-156). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Weber, R. P., (1990). *Basic content analysis*, 2nd ed. Newbury Park, CA.
- Weinstein, C., Curran, M., & Tomlinson-Clarke, S. (2003). Culturally responsive classroom management: Awareness into action. *Theory Into Practice*, 42(4), 269-276.
- Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.
- doi:10.1080/1361332052000341006

Children's Literature Cited

- Coles, R. (1995). *The true story of Ruby Bridges*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc.
- Croser, N. (2004). *Jack and the Beanstalk*. WINGS.
- Grimes, N. (2002). *Talkin' about Bessie: The story of aviator Elizabeth Coleman*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Pope Osborne, M. (2000). *Kate and the beanstalk*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Spinelli, J. (2000). *Stargirl*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc.

Appendix A

Word Splash Example 1



Appendix A (continued)

Word Splash Example 2



Kathy Christensen has been a classroom teacher or reading coach for thirty-four years, and is currently serving as a district literacy specialist working with teachers and coaches in Title 1 schools. She anticipates completing her doctorate degree from the University of Florida in August, 2014. She is interested in teacher inquiry as a way to examine and improve teaching practice, especially in regard to literacy work with children of poverty. Kathy can be reached at:

christka@collierschools.com or **christka@ufl.edu**.



Sharon Earle has been an educator for eighteen years. Her experiences include classroom teacher in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades, Reading Recovery ® teacher, teacher of English for Speakers of Other Languages in grades K-5, and district literacy coach. The challenge of ongoing professional learning has always been a passion for her. She is currently working on completion of her Ed. D. in Curriculum, Teaching, and Teacher Education through the University of Florida. Sharon can be reached at **earles@pcsb.org** or **earles@ufl.edu**.

Motivating Readers: A Journey with “The Freedom Writers”

Kristin Webber
Edinboro University

Key words: adolescents, reluctant readers, writing, responsive teaching; motivation, engagement, building classroom community, middle grades teaching

NOTABLE QUOTE

It was time to abandon the basal reading book and empower my students to grow as readers by letting them choose what they were reading.

Abstract

About a one teacher’s journey as an educator during a year spent learning about herself, students, and teaching through a set of unique yet universal circumstances, this study is a reflective exploration. Through her experiences as an action researcher and reflective practitioner, the author relearned how to place her students at the center of her teaching as she challenged her thinking and decision-making as an educator. Using a novel that depicted popular culture and striving for their “reading zone... the place where readers go when they leave our classroom behind and live vicariously in their books” (Atwell, 2007), this author/teacher and the students enrolled in her class learned the importance of interest and collaborative reading practice. Findings included reaffirming the notion that educators need to find out what their students consider to be great books and then begin to match books to readers. This researcher exemplified the power of choosing to teach literacy, not teach to the test. The results were significant; 41% of my students passed the Sixth Grade Ohio Achievement Test in Reading, an increase of 17% over the previous year’s scores.

Prior to "The Freedom Writers"

I still can feel the shudder that went through me when I was told I would be teaching sixth grade for the upcoming school year. My previous teaching experience was in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and first grade. This position would be a huge change, and I spent that whole summer panicking. I kept asking myself, “How am I going to effectively teach reading to eleven and twelve year olds that have no apparent interest in school let alone reading? That fall, I met my new students and discovered that my fear had been confirmed. I was responsible for teaching reading to a class of students who expressed little desire to learn. I spent the majority of the first half of the year learning how to deal with the different needs and behaviors of middle school students. I felt like I was in a “sink or swim” situation.

This is a story, my story, about a year spent learning about myself, students, and

teaching. Teachers should be action researchers, and through a set of circumstances, I was forced into that role. My previous 15 years of teaching was set in early childhood classrooms teaching children ages 3-7. Now is this new setting where I was teaching 12-13 year old adolescents, I began to see cultural differences that were very different from my own experiences as a White woman who grew up in a small rural town. This new teaching situation was about to challenge my thinking and decision-making as an educator.

My students lived in an urban city in Northeast Ohio. There were 19 children in my class and all were of minority decent, primarily African-American and Puerto Rican. Most of my students came from single parent homes and all received free lunches. They were both physically and verbally aggressive in and out of school. They often argued with each other and occasionally resorted to physical violence. One child was expelled for verbally threatening to shoot me. Many of my students witnessed tragic events in their young lives. For example, one of my girls watched her mother die in the arms of her father. She was only eight years old. Another boy witnessed a shooting right in front of his house. Several other students often talked about the crimes that their family members have committed and told of how their parents were in jail.

Academics were not an apparent priority for many of my students. These students came to me with only 24% of them passing the Ohio Achievement Reading Test in fifth grade. Their fall baseline reading assessments revealed grade-level reading equivalents ranging from second grade all the way to tenth grade. In addition to their wide range of reading ability, there was a wide range in their confidence and esteem as students. Many of them simply did not believe that they could succeed in school. They would rather not even try than to fail. One of my biggest challenges was keeping them focused and engaged in learning. I was often met with statements like "Why do we have to read?" or "This is too hard for sixth grade." Complaining that it was too long, my students would literally refuse to read a twelve-page short story in their reading anthology.

They would throw their book on the floor and refuse to complete the assignment. Often then they would become a distraction to those who were actually trying to read and end up as a discipline referral. I was spending more class time managing than I was teaching, and it had to change. I looked for anyway to bring my class together as a community of learners and also build an interest in reading. I resorted to the strategies that had been successful in my previous primary classroom settings. I conducted daily read-alouds during which I was often ignored. I also tried cooperative learning groups and literacy centers but quickly learned that these students did not possess the collaborative social skills to work in groups unsupervised. I was beginning to feel desperate for a way to reach them and teach them.

Teaching Tolerance

One evening during a graduate class in which I was enrolled, I watched a video clip of Erin Gruwell and her students, *The Freedom Writers* on ABC's *Primetime Live*. Instantly, I saw my class in that video clip. I knew that this could be a vehicle for change and a chance to build a learning community within my classroom. That weekend I purchased a copy of the DVD, *The Freedom Writers*, and watched the movie making notes of how those students resembled my own students. I made a plan to show the movie to my class and begin to point out the similarities between Ms. Gruwell's Room 203 and our Room 204. I was hoping that if I could get the behavior under control, then I could focus on teaching.

The following Monday we watched the film. Afterwards, I had students reflect on what

they saw. They were asked to write about how the class from Long Beach, California, was similar to their own, which student had changed the most during the movie, and how change within our own class would be possible. The class went on to make posters for change and participated in several of the activities that Gruwell had done with her class. One such powerful activity was called The Line Game.

In preparation for The Line Game, I pushed all the desks to the sides of the classroom and divided the room with a strip of wide, blue painters' tape. The students then divided into two groups on either side of the line. I began to ask questions. I told them that if the question pertained to them, then they were to step on the line. I began with asking very general questions to get them comfortable such as "Do you have any siblings?" and "Are you a Cavalier's fan (we were in the middle of basketball season!)" Gradually, I moved to more personal questions ranging from having their utilities shut off, to abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual), to gang violence. I was particularly careful to word the questions in a "Have you or someone you know..." format so students' privacy was not compromised. This was a very powerful exercise because it allowed students to see that they were not alone. Many students were experiencing the same things. For example, many of my students had witnessed violence in their homes and neighborhoods and many of my students had had their utilities shut off at one time in their lives. Having students share their life experiences outside of school allowed for more empathy and compassion among classmates. This was the first step in creating our positive learning community.

Kent and Simpson state that "a positive classroom community for middle level learners helps create an environment in which students can be open to learning, care for themselves and others in the community, and solve problems in a productive manner" (2012, p. 28). It is important to remember that a positive learning community is not created automatically. It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to cultivate a classroom community in such a manner that students grow ethically, academically, and socially (Kent & Simpson, 2012). Thus, the Line Game was my first step in assuming my responsibility in fostering and cultivating the collaborative social skills that I intended to evolve into a classroom community.

In the midst of doing these tolerance-building activities, I noticed that my students were getting more and more interested in *The Freedom Writers*. I had purchased additional copies of the movie so students could take one home and share it with their families. There were waiting lists to organize who would take the DVD home next. I also purchased the book (Gruwell & The Freedom Writers, 1999) and began to read it aloud to them. These daily read alouds became a magical time. Instead of previous read alouds that were characterized by inattention and interruptions, my students entered the classroom every morning excited to hear the next installment of *The Freedom Writers Diary*. Several students bought the book themselves or checked a copy out of the library and followed along as I read. All I needed to do was sit in the chair, open the book, and I instantly had their attention. They would gather around me in chairs and on the floor, each assuming a comfortable position so that they could focus all their attention to the story.

Because of the sensitive material in the text we had to lay some ground rules as a class. After obtaining parental permission to read the book, we decided that what was read and discussed would remain within the walls of our classroom. We also discussed how these topics are serious and real and that we must address them with a mature, young adult attitude. One student in particular took these ground rules to heart. One day we had guests from another

classroom, right before I began reading, Brock (all names are pseudonyms) stopped me and asked to explain the rules to our guests. He was adamant in explaining that there may be some swearing and sensitive issues discussed, and that we “must be mature and not laugh and that whatever we talk about stays in the classroom.” Even though I knew the reading for that day did not contain any controversial issues, I was very proud of how Brock and his classmates took ownership of this activity.

As we continued through the chapters of the book, I began to witness my students becoming more tolerant of each other. They were identifying with the characters in the story and beginning to see that change within them was possible. One incident in particular stands out in my mind. One morning a boy entered the room with a foul smell about him. Before I had a chance to intervene, several girls began making fun of him. What happened next was something that I would have never expected. Regina was a twelve year old girl that I would classify as a bully. She was very loud and threatening and had been suspended numerous times for fighting. Regina was the last person that I would have ever expected to come to the aid of a fellow classmate. When the other girls began picking on Grant, she immediately came to his defense and warned them to stop. When they didn’t stop the teasing, she made good on her warning and shoved one of the girls against a locker. Although Regina didn’t handle the situation appropriately and resorted to violence, I was proud that she took a proactive stance to stop the teasing. This action showed me that she was willing to change her behavior, and now I had to work on giving her the appropriate tools to manage her behavior. More tolerant of others and at the same time, they were growing as readers and writers.

Students were beginning to see the power of literature and how books can provide powerful connections and create an intrinsic desire to read more. For example, one theme that is prevalent all through the book is the Holocaust. As Gruwell’s students explored this horrific tragedy, I noticed some of my students also becoming curious about these events. They began asking for *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Zlata’s Diary* which is a story of a young girl that survived the War in Sarajevo, Bosnia, and kept a diary of her experiences. When “The Freedom Writers” wrote about their connections to books they read like *Durango Street* and *The Wave*, my students were asking for copies of these books. As I examined these titles further, I noticed that they had characters and themes that my students could identify with. In *Durango Street*, the main character, Rufus, gets out of work camp and returns to Durango Street where he is faced with the decision of whether or not to join a gang. From doing The Line Game earlier, I knew that my students have had experiences with both jail and gangs, whether it was themselves or someone else that they knew. I sensed that they would be able to connect to the content of this story. I came to understand that if I provided reading material that was relevant and meaningful to my students, then they would want to read. From here I began to fill my class library with books that would get my students reading. Authors such as Sharon Draper, Jacqueline Woodson, Patricia McCormick and Walter Dean Myers made their way from my book shelves into the hands of my students. I was thrilled that my students were reading more on their own and really becoming engaged in their reading. They provided evidence that they comprehended texts much more deeply than before. Rather than simply telling me a summary of what they read and whether they liked it or not, they offered their connections, thoughts, concerns, and questions.

More events in history were discussed as we delved further into reading *The Freedom Writers*, and I realized that my students were unfamiliar with these events because many of them occurred before my students were born. Events of the last several decades, such as the Los

Angeles Riots, The Oklahoma City Bombing, and The Columbine School Massacre began to pique my students' interests. As these topics surfaced in our reading, I wrote them on the whiteboard. Later these topics became the subjects of their end-of-the-year research projects. Many students chose the three events mentioned above and others chose their own topics such as the Japanese Internment Camps from World War II, Gang Violence, the Detroit Riots, and the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. All of these topics were relevant to the time period and themes addressed in *The Freedom Writers Diary*.

Students' research projects consisted of a written report with at least four credible sources (two in print and two online) and a multimedia presentation that would be the anchor to an oral class presentation on their findings. In pursuing these projects, students had to tackle expository reading which was different from the reading for pleasure that they had been doing (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2013; Galda & Graves, 2007; King-Shaver & Huter, 2009). They were required to search the Internet for information and read hypertext, both of which bring a new set of challenges to readers. For example, they had to navigate web pages with links, graphics, and sound to determine what information was of value and what was not. They also had to evaluate websites to make sure the information they were retrieving was accurate. Students were very successful in researching their topics and completing their projects. Classroom observations and student comments led me to attribute this to being motivated and having a personal interest in their topics.

The Research behind the Practice

Reading Motivation and Engagement

Motivating adolescents to read and keeping them engaged in reading has been a long time struggle for teachers. Motivation is defined as "an internal state or condition that activates, guides, and maintains or directs behavior" (Kostelecky & Hoskinson, 2005, pg. 438). Guthrie & Alao (1997) define engagement as "the motivated use of strategies for reading" (pg. 439). Based on these definitions one would expect a motivated and engaged reader to choose to read on his own for his own reasons and possess the reading strategies to comprehend the text and think critically about it.

Students that I taught during the first half of our year together were not motivated readers. They were not choosing to read for their own purposes or to pursue their own interests. I attribute this to my belief that most students' prior experiences with reading came in the form of required reading by the teacher. I also speculate that the purpose of this required reading was to complete worksheets and to take an end of the unit comprehension test. When we engaged in reading *The Freedom Writers Diary*, my students began to see that reading was more than worksheets and tests. They learned that when they were motivated and engaged readers, they wanted to find books that were relevant, meaningful and interesting.

My ultimate goal as a middle school reading teacher was to create an intrinsic motivation to read within my students. I wanted them to read voluntarily. There are several classroom practices that can be employed to help achieve this goal. First, students need to have choice in what they are reading. Given a choice, they gain responsibility and control over their learning situation. Second, social collaboration is effective in creating intrinsic motivation. When students work together in groups they are giving each other support and are able to accomplish more than if they were to work alone. Finally success is imperative. A student's perception of completing a task successfully promotes intrinsic motivation (Pachtman & Wilson, 2006).

During our reading we were engaged in collaboration as we discussed the events in the

book. That collaboration expanded further as children began to choose their own books to read and discussed events within those stories with each other. During our research projects, many students chose the same topics, and those students worked together to share information and discuss their viewpoints and opinions. Ultimately my students experienced success in their reading and writing projects. I particularly remember how excited Denzel was when he finished a lengthy novel that he had self-selected to read. It probably was the first time that he had voluntarily completed a book and, because he was successful, it motivated him to want to read more.

The “Reading Zone” and Finding the Perfect Book

My initial goal in using *The Freedom Writers* was to teach my students tolerance. I saw the students in Ms. Gruwell’s class as potential role models for my students in an effort to change their behavior. What eventually came out of this activity was so much more than what I had planned. I had created a class learning community where my students were willing participants in reading and writing activities. What I had done unintentionally in my classroom was to enable kids to get into their “reading zone.”

Atwell (2007) coined the term “reading zone” and defines it as “the place where readers go when they leave our classroom behind and live vicariously in their books” (pg. 60). She further describes the conditions for getting into the zone which include:

- Encouragement, guidance, and advice from the teacher.
- Blocks of time set aside for reading during class.
- A classroom library stocked with great books.
- Absolute silence, to help being transported into the book.
- Book talks and sharing to recommend great books.
- Comfortable cushions and pillows with room to stretch out.

As I was reading aloud to the class, all of the above factors were present. In essence, my class was transported to their own reading zone. During our daily class readings, I was able to provide the necessary support for them to comprehend the text. Children were given the freedom to get comfortable and fully enjoy the experience. Silence during reading time was a must. The students took charge of this and monitored themselves and others to make sure everyone was quiet. As interest in reading increased, I made sure that my classroom library contained books that would attract my readers. Having these conditions present during a whole class reading experience allowed students to willingly move into more independent reading with self-selected reading materials. They were also beginning to possess the confidence they needed to be successful readers.

One of the reasons this learning sequence was so successful was because I knew my students and listened to what their interests were. I knew my students would like titles such as

The Battle of Jericho by Sharon Draper because they have had experiences dealing with gangs (which I noted when playing The Line Game). When Jade began asking about Anne Frank, I immediately found her a copy of *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl* to read during independent reading time.

One revelation and lasting lesson I experienced was that what I may consider to be a great book may not be considered a great book by my students. Educators need to find out what their students consider to be great books and then begin to match books to readers.

Drawing upon Louise Rosenblatt's reader transaction theory, Beers (2004) states that it is not the number of stars next to a book review that makes a book great; it is the reader's interaction with the text that makes a book great. Students need to learn how to choose books based on links between the available reading material and their own experiences. When this occurs, they will find great books.

As educators, it is up to us to guide students into finding these links and creating matches. Interest inventories and reading surveys help in finding books but often result in a wide range of choices that need to be narrowed further. Beers suggests two strategies to get students more focused on their book choices: 1). Ask students, "If you absolutely had to read a book what would it be like for you to enjoy it?" and 2). Provide students with a checklist of text features that will help them zero in on the perfect book. Checklist items may include questions about genre, literary elements (plot, character, setting etc.), book length, text features (photographs, illustrations), fiction/nonfiction, and past, present, or future events. (Beers, 2004, p.121)

I confirmed through my experience exactly what research in the field stated. It was time to abandon the basal reading book and empower my students to grow as readers by letting them choose what they were reading.

Moving Forward

Reading *The Freedom Writers Diary* ignited a passion for reading in my class that I did not think was possible at the beginning of the year and yielded a transformation for me and for the students. There was no more fighting with my students to get them to read substantially during independent reading time. There were no more questions about why they had to read. They had a purpose for reading whether it was to find information on a topic of interest or for the sheer pleasure of just enjoying a good story. They were able to find the perfect book and get into their reading zone.

As we put *The Freedom Writers Diary* to rest, my class was ready to move on to other literacy activities. I felt that they were ready to begin using book clubs to engage in deep discussions about the books that they were reading. I decided that our first experience with this would be with a novel that the whole class would read. I chose this strategy to offer support during this new activity much like the whole class support that was provided during *The Freedom Writers*. After much discussion and debate, *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen was the first book club choice. We worked our way through the text together; they read independently, in pairs, and sometimes listened while I read to them. When it came time to discuss our reading, students were put into small groups that led to whole class discussions. Not surprisingly, *Hatchet* was contagious and students wanted more. I added more Gary Paulsen books to our library including the *Hatchet* sequels. I am pleased to say that there were waiting lists for these books as students chose them for their independent reading material.

After a successful attempt at a class book club, it was time for the students to take charge of their own book clubs. I chose four titles: *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, *Journey to Jo'Burg* by

Beverley Naidoo, *The Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E.L. Konigsburg, and *Miracle's Boys* by Jacqueline Woodson, based on content I felt would be appealing. These selections were also selected based on their various reading levels and for practicality: my school had multiple copies of these titles. Students were given time to preview each selection and write down their top three choices. They were then placed in their groups. During their first meeting, they were given a schedule of the meeting dates and as a group they had to divide the reading and determine which chapters would be due at each meeting date. Based on previous instruction, they knew their roles and what they were responsible for each meeting.

Each meeting date, I randomly chose one or two groups to sit in on, listen, and observe. The first group I observed was *Miracle's Boys*. I felt tears welling up in my eyes as I listened to their discussion. They were discussing text on their own, they were prepared, and they were engaged in critical thinking about their story. They were discussing story events and making connections to their own lives. We had come full circle. We had become a learning community of motivated readers and writers.

Socially, we came full circle also. My class would have never been able to come together as a learning community without the lessons learned from *The Freedom Writers*. These lessons gave us a new appreciation for each other and the ability to celebrate our similarities as well as our differences. *The Freedom Writers* ends with Erin Gruwell continuing to move on with her class and teach them together for their final two years. Similarly, students I had taught did not want to part at the end of the year either. Rachelle stated it best as she said "At first we thought this class would be lame but we have become like a family and we want to stay together." What an attribution to the power of literature and how connecting students and books can create lifelong readers. I had accomplished my goals.

It was everything that I could have wanted in my first year of teaching middle school. I could not help wonder how this would all translate when it came time to take "the test." Following leading researchers in the literacy field, I chose to teach literacy not teach to the test. The results were significant; 41% of students passed the Sixth Grade Ohio Achievement Test in Reading. It was an increase of 17% over the previous year's scores.

The New Journey

As I reflected on my past year, I began to eagerly look towards next year. This time the decision to stay in sixth grade was voluntary. As I wondered about a new class of students in the fall, I also thought about my new approach to teaching reading. What I had stumbled upon unintentionally last year would be purposely planned the coming year. What I learned from my previous students was that they were definitely interested in literature that related to social issues with which they could identify. This type of reading provided a purpose and motivation for my students. They saw it as reading for meaning and not just to pass a comprehension and vocabulary test. As Wolk (2009) writes,

Authors do not write books for readers to answer comprehension questions or to do "exercises" to learn "reading skills." They write books because they want the reader to enjoy a good story and think about the important ideas that they write about (p. 664).

Tovani (2005) posits "in reading *purpose is everything*" (p.24). When I decided to use *The Freedom Writers* in my classroom, my purpose was to help shape my class socially. What I found was that the students really connected to the characters and the content. This experience showed them, maybe for the first time in their lives, what having a desire to read is and what it is like to become so engaged with a book that you do not want to put it down.. They learned that

reading is enjoyable.

It was summer and the new school year was approaching rapidly. This time I looked forward to what was to come. I had already heard that this class was the “worst behaved fifth grade ever” and their Achievement Test scores weren’t very promising either, but all that did not matter to me anymore. I now knew it is possible to engage reluctant readers into building a positive learning community. I spent the next several months adding to my literature collection. I took advantage of book sales to find titles that would invite my future students to find their reading zone. I welcomed my new students and all of the challenges of a new class with open arms. I know I have the power of literature to shape my students into thoughtful, compassionate young adult readers and thinkers ready to tackle the world.

References

- Alvermann, D., Gillis, V., & Phelps, S. (2013). *Content area reading and literacy: Succeeding in today's diverse classrooms (7th Edition)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson
- Atwell, N. (2007). The pleasure principle. *Instructor*, 116(5), 44-60.
- Beers, K. (2004, May). Bold books for innovative teaching: Hearing Zach: Matching reluctant and struggling readers with books. *The English Journal*, 93(5), 119-123.
- Galda, L. & Graves, M. (2007). *Reading and responding in the middle grades*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson.
- Guthrie, J., & Alao, S. (1997, March). Engagement in reading for young adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 40(6), 438-446.
- Kent, A. & Simpson, J. (2012). The Power of Literature: Establishing and Enhancing the Young Adolescent Classroom Community. *Reading Improvement*, 49 (1) / Spring 2012, 28-34.
- King-Shaver, B. & Huter, A. (2009). *Adolescent literacy and differentiated instruction*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.
- Kostecky, K., & Hoskinson, M. (2005, Spring). A “novel” approach to motivating students. *Education*, 125(3), 438-442.
- Pachtman, A., & Wilson, K. (2006). What do the kids think? *Reading Teacher*, 59(7), 680-684.
- Tovani, C. (2000). *I read it, but I don't get it: Comprehension strategies for adolescent readers*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Wolk, S. (2009, May). Reading for a better world: Teaching for social responsibility with young adult literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52(8), 664-673.
- Writers, F. The (with Gruwell, E.).(1999). *The freedom writers diary: How a teacher and 150 teens used writing to change themselves and the world around them*.

Adolescent Literature Cited

- Bonham, F. (1965). *Durango street*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

- Draper, S. M. (2003). *The Battle of Jericho*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster. com.
- Filipovic, Z. (1995). *Zlata's diary*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Frank, A. (2010). *The diary of a young girl* (Vol. 333). Random House Digital, Inc...
- Goodrich, F., Hackett, A. & Frank, A. (1956). *The diary of Anne Frank*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Gruwell, E. & The Freedom Writers. (1999). *The freedom writers diary: How a teacher and 150 teens used writing to change themselves and the world around them*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Konigsburg, E. (1967). *The mixed-up files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*. New York, NY: Antheneum.
- Lowry, L. (1993). *The giver*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin
- Naidoo, B. (1988). *Journey to Jo 'Burg: A South African story*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Paulsen, G. (1987). *Hatchet*. New York, NY: Bradberry Press.
- Rhue, M. (1981). *The Wave*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.
- Woodson, J. (2000). *Miracle's boys*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons.



Kristin Webber is Assistant Professor in the Department of Early Childhood and Reading at Edinboro University where she teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in literacy. Kristin is Program Head for the Graduate Reading Program. Her research interests include the New Literacies, instructional technology, adolescent literacy. Contact Kristin at **KWEBBER@edinboro.edu**.



Progressivism and Social Responsibility in the 21st Century Elementary Classroom

Rebekah Kelleher

Wingate University

Keywords: Progressive Education, Educational Philosophy, Social Responsibility

NOTABLE QUOTE

In a context of ever-increasing standardization and accountability for results we must celebrate, advocate, and perpetuate the learner as the center and focus of all educational endeavors.

Abstract

From a 21st century social responsibility perspective, this paper examines the 20th century progressivist movement in education, as represented in the works of educator and philosopher John Dewey. Dewey's conception of social responsibility, the school's role in its development, and an examination of the sociopolitical cultures are reviewed. Progressivism as a response to the challenges of 21st century classrooms is discussed. Results from a study by the author are presented and framed within the context of social responsibility. The study examined the influence of the 20th century progressive movement on educational attitudes, policies, and practices in contemporary elementary schools. Finally, the author provides implications of Dewey's ideas for contemporary educators and others who are concerned with issues of social responsibility.

Introduction

Progressivist education in the United States (US) developed around the turn of the 20th century within the context of a larger progressive socio-political movement. Progressivism aimed to promote and preserve individual freedom and welfare in a time of intense population growth and industrialization (Olson, 1999b). Arguably the most influential voice shaping education during this period was that of philosopher and educator John Dewey (Westbrook, 1993; Olson, 1999a). Dewey, an American philosopher of the first half of the twentieth century (Westbrook, 1993) and the father of progressive education (Columbia University, 2004) spent much of his career as a teacher, prolific writer, and political activist. His work spanned three generations, from the 1890's to the 1950's, and his impact on educational practices throughout the century was significant and often controversial (Westbrook, 1993; Columbia University, 2004; Schechter, 2011).

Rocha (2012) notes, given Dewey's enormous body of work, it is difficult to articulate his philosophical position without resorting to oversimplification. A recurrent theme throughout

Dewey's work is his commitment to democracy. Schechter (2011) similarly identifies two lifelong concerns in Dewey's work: (1) child development and (2) social change in a democratic society. Dewey promoted child-centered learning through experimentation (Columbia University, 2004) and defined the learning process as an ongoing transaction between learner and environment (Biesta, 1996). Dewey encouraged students to grow continuously throughout life rather than simply following a roadmap to the place where education ends (Jackson, 2012). Dewey viewed experience as central to the educative process. Cunningham (1995) of the John Dewey Society, sums up Dewey's educational ideas at the turn of the 20th century as follows: he criticized traditional viewpoints towards education and challenged those who believed in curriculum as subject matter to be presented to the child. Further, he viewed education as preparation for life rather than a process of living.

An Historic Literature Review

One of Dewey's earliest works, *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897), established his beliefs about the interrelationships of education, schooling, the learner, and society. Dewey's work stimulated interest in a fresh approach to education and provided an alternative to disciplined, step-by-step instruction, which positioned the learner as passive receiver of the curriculum (Westbrook, 1993). In contrast to the traditional teacher-focused, content-centered classroom which had characterized American public education since its inception, Dewey's conception of the classroom was that of a cooperative community (Harms & DePencier, 1996) built around the interests of the learner and the social life of the community (Ravitch, 2001). While at the University of Chicago, he put his educational theories into practice by pioneering the laboratory school where children participated in experiences drawn from community life (Olson, 1999a).

Within a learner-focused context, Dewey defined social responsibility as acting morally in interaction with the social environment (Dewey, 1922). Dewey believed that all morality is inherently social and that "all actions of an individual bear the stamp of [the] community" (p. 316). He called this concept "social saturation" (p. 317). Therefore, morality is not developed by memorizing and blindly following predetermined rules but by engaging students in "mutually intertwined activities" (p. 329). Social responsibility arises out of "active connections of human beings with one another" (p. 329). Educators guide students to true intelligence, which Dewey defines as the ability to "[foresee] the future so that action may have order and direction" (p. 238). Dewey's emphasized reflective experience as the fundamental method of social progress (Westbrook, 1993) and as the means for achieving social justice (Schechter, 2011).

Dewey's writings on the political, social, and moral philosophy of schooling helped to shape the progressivist practices, which would later become widely implemented in classrooms throughout the 20th century (Ecker, 1997; Ozmon & Craver, 1999; Ravitch, 2001). In contrast to the traditional classroom characterized by passive students engaged in memorization and drill, the progressivist approach included active classrooms, student-centered pedagogies, and interdisciplinary learning (Olson, 1999b).

Progressivism reached its height of popularity in the pre-WWI era as "new" immigrants were pouring into the United States in record numbers (Ravitch, 2001). Arriving after the "old" immigrants from Britain, Germany, and Scandinavia, this influx of Russians, Poles, Jews, and Italians represented new language groups and cultures. New immigrants were subjected to racist

labels such as “undesirable. . . illiterate, criminal, dependent, and ill-fitted” (p. 65). Emphasis was on the “Americanization” of these immigrants, assimilating them as quickly as possible into the cultural mores of the dominant society (Carlson, 1975). Among educators, questions arose as to what type of education was most appropriate for the children of the new immigrants, and whether the traditional curriculum focusing on verbal studies and academic subjects would meet these students’ immediate needs or prepare them for the industrial jobs they would likely fill as adults (Ravitch, 2001). In response, progressives supported a program focused on practical studies and vocational courses.

Though progressivist practices had many strong supporters, they drew equally strong opposition from traditionalists, including many “new” immigrant parents who believed that vocational courses would deny their children the right to higher education and keep them in factory jobs (Ravitch, 2001). The progressive vs. traditional debate fueled political tensions as exemplified by the riots surrounding the 1917 New York City mayor’s race. The turmoil resulted in the election of a candidate who overturned progressivism in the schools, thus returning to a traditional education.

Despite opposition, by the late 1930s progressive practices had spread throughout the country (Ozmon & Craver, 1999). However, the debate between progressivism and traditionalism continued. Many saw progressivism as radical and anti-American and believed that traditional education promoted American patriotism and competitiveness. By mid-century, those calling for a “back to the basics” approach to education criticized progressivism’s “lack of patriotic and religious fervor, its emphasis on change and relativism, and its excessive freedom and lack of discipline” (1999, p. 163). According to Ozmon and Craver, anti-progressive sentiment was intensified by the Soviet Union’s 1957 launch of Sputnik, which many perceived as a sign of America’s loss of pre-eminence as a world power. As a result, Congress passed the 1958 National Defense Education Act, aimed at restoring American competitiveness by giving millions of federal dollars to schools for science, math, and foreign language programs. Fueled by anti-progressivism rhetoric, schools looked to traditional education to restore America’s intellectual and moral supremacy. Yet at the same time those promoting civil rights and individual welfare and freedom looked to progressivism for answers to real life concerns, such as health, social, and community issues. Traditionalists strove to preserve a system of education that had worked in the past, while progressivists believed education needed to change to fit the changing times. Ozmon and Craver note, throughout most of the 20th century progressive practices existed simultaneously with traditional ones, with one or the other taking precedence depending on the sociopolitical climate of the particular setting.

Throughout the century, Dewey’s work and influence continued to be cited in debates by educational reform supporters and detractors (Westbrook, 1993). In 1935, the John Dewey Society was founded to preserve Dewey’s “commitment to the use of critical and reflective intelligence in the search for solutions to crucial problems in education and culture” (John Dewey Society, n.d.). The society maintains an active membership and website, blog, and other online resources which keep Dewey’s ideas at the forefront of contemporary educational inquiry.

The demands of contemporary society have brought about significant changes to the educational system in recent years. Today, US schools educate a very diverse populace with differing backgrounds and diverse needs (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2006). Emphasis on

accountability (Ediger, 2000) has led to state and federal mandates for common standards in literacy and other curricular areas and an increase in standardized testing and other assessment measures. These changes raise the questions of whether Dewey's ideas are still relevant in today's accountability-driven classroom and whether his work can still inform our quest to raise educated, socially responsible individuals. Exploration of these questions may be informed by the results of a study of progressivism by Leonall and Kelleher (2010).

Study Context and Methodology

The study informing this discussion resulted from a grant for intra-institutional collaborative research between faculty and undergraduate students (Leonall & Kelleher, 2010) at a small private university in the southern United States. The purpose of the study was to examine teachers' and administrators' educational philosophies and practices and to determine the degree of correlation between those philosophies and practices and John Dewey's progressivism. The methodology of the study involved online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators in the university's partner school district. The district studied serves an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse population, includes non-English speakers, and encompasses urban, suburban, and rural schools. Though the district does not release demographic data on teachers, observations at school sites indicates the teaching population is less diverse than the student population. At the elementary level the teaching staff is predominantly female and majority White. The seven schools chosen for the study have clinical partnerships with the education program at the university. They serve students in kindergarten through grade five, and three of the seven schools have a majority of the student population in the free and reduced lunch program and receive federal funding to help bridge the gap between high-income and low-income students.

Data Collection

John Dewey's essay, *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897), outlines many characteristics of progressivism. These attributes were used to a basis for developing tools to collect data. The online questionnaire consisted of six statements from this work.

The questionnaire was distributed to participants via an online survey program, Survey Monkey (Finley, 2007). Questionnaires were sent directly to teachers and administrators at the selected partner schools through their school e-mails in late May of 2009. Approximately 350 surveys were sent, and responses were returned by thirty-eight participants yielding a return rate of just over ten percent. Participants represented each of the seven schools and had varying years of experience as professional educators, ranging from four to thirty. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with each of six statements on a scale of strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree and to assess how well the statement described their classroom or school practices on a scale of strongly not characteristic, not characteristic, characteristic, or strongly characteristic. Also they were asked to determine, on a scale of strongly not characteristic, not characteristic, characteristic, or strongly characteristic, how well the statement described their classroom or school practices. They were encouraged to respond to open-ended comments for each statement. For the purposes of this article, three of the six statements, those which resulted in responses related to social responsibility, were chosen for discussion.

In the second phase of data collection, interviews were conducted with seven individuals, all teachers and administrators in the partner district, for follow-up and triangulation of the data. The research grant's requirement that the study be completed in the summer months when most classroom teachers are not readily available posed a limitation to the study. As a result, interviewees were selected from a convenience sample. Participants represented a range of four to thirty years of experience in the profession and included a district administrator in charge of K-5 curriculum, two K-5 school administrators, and four K-5 teachers. Each interviewee represented a different participating partner school. The semi-structured interviews were conducted at the workplaces of the participants. The statements from the online questionnaire were used as a protocol to guide the interviews. Interviewees were provided with the statements on index cards and asked to read and respond to each statement's relevance to their beliefs and practices. They were encouraged to speak freely. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Interview responses and open-ended responses were analyzed by both researchers using constant comparison to identify commonalities. As the researchers read and reread the responses, they noted phrases, topics and areas of agreement which recurred across participants. These topics are addressed in the discussion of the three selected statements.

Statement One: "School is primarily a social institution, and the teacher is engaged, not simply in the training of individuals, but in the formation of the proper social life."

A large majority of participants were in agreement with this statement (44.7% agreed and 42.1% strongly agreed) and believed the statement to be characteristic of their classrooms (47.4% chose characteristic and 39.5% strongly characteristic). Responses suggested that many agreed with Dewey's assertion that schools are the fundamental method of social progress and reform. Open ended responses note the importance of teaching morals in the context of social situations such as: "getting along, working out problems"; of "[teaching] appropriate behaviors in different environments so that [students] interact appropriately and carry [such behavior] over into their life outside of school"; and of non-didactic instruction such as "[being a] socially responsible role-model because the students are always watching."

Relevant comments included "Many parents lack the skills needed to teach their children to be responsible and respectful citizens . . . it is left up to the school to teach beyond academics;" and "Schools today must step in and "fill the gap" left by parents who for whatever reason fail to teach social skills." One comment suggested some educators may see the school's role as primarily academic, and accept their role as social educators only reluctantly:

I feel that my job is to prepare them for the career world. I would rather not have to teach them manners and social matters. That is what their parents are for . . . [but they] do not prepare their children for the real world socially and we are stuck having to teach and be their parent.

Statement Two: "School should be process of living and not a preparation for future living."

The majority of participants disagreed with this statement, with 44.7% disagreeing and 10.5% strongly disagreeing. Comments indicate that most teachers felt schools must serve both

functions. Open-ended responses supporting this sentiment include “Our experiences [shape] . . . [both] who we are and who we become”; “I think that the school should be a mixture of both. I am responsible to meet the student’s needs in the present but also look ahead and set learning goals”; “The whole purpose of education is to prepare students for the future, but teachers also have to focus on engaging students in the living of right now”; and “[I] have to make [school] dynamic in the present, [but also] prepare them for what they’re coming up on, otherwise, I’m not doing my job.” One respondent said that though she agreed with the statement and felt that it should be characteristic of schools, the statement is not in keeping with the “current model.” Participants mentioned the current emphasis on preparing students to do well on standardized tests, to meet technological challenges, and “to be able to compete globally.”

Statement Three: “It is the business of the school to deepen and extend [the students’] sense of the values bound up in his home life.”

The “agree” and “disagree” responses were divided on this statement, with 57.9% agreeing or strongly agreeing and 42.1% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. About 60% of respondents said the statement was characteristic or strong characteristic of their classroom/school. Remarks indicated that teachers “do not expect children to shed their home values and beliefs when they come through the door”, and that they do draw on home values “through socialized learning. . . [Students] share their own points of view . . . based in home/family values.”

Most participants who chose to comment on the statement questioned the appropriateness of extending home values in today’s schools where there often is a diversity of home beliefs, some of which may conflict with those of classmates or with those of the dominant society or the individual school or teacher. Respondents said, “What if the values . . . are not those of the school or society in general?” and “My students and their families might not have the same values and ideas that I have.” Teachers indicated that they resolve this issue by seeking common values: “I teach my students that we are to treat other people the way we want to be treated and foster a sense of fairness and acceptance.” Others teach students to consider the perspective of others: “I do try to help them consider how others might feel and what . . . options they have in different situations.” One teacher commented: “[School experiences] should allow children to experience . . . diversity and grow in awareness of everybody around them.” Some teachers are not comfortable extending home values when some students’ families are very religious. One teacher said that she avoids religious topics because “everybody is touchy [about religion].” She allows students to “say their piece if it’s not going to offend anybody,” but if a student brings up a religious issue she ignores it and “does not try to expound upon it.”

Objection to extension of home values was particularly strong when teachers saw home values as racist or intolerant. One teacher noted that in some of her students’ homes and communities, adults “support segregation and belong to the Ku Klux Klan.” Comments indicated that in cases where teachers see home values as negative, schools promote “the values of middle class individuals . . . work ethic, responsibility, community, and a sense of fairness.” One teacher raises the concern that some may interpret this emphasis on dominant values as “white middle class women forcing their values on people” but defends the practice if it shows students “how something could be . . . better, or a different way of doing things.”

Several remarks reflected the earlier-noted theme of reluctant acceptance of responsibility for social aspects of education in 21st century schools. Respondents said:

Although I believe that it is the parents' job to teach their child values in the home, in today's society, parents are so busy that they don't teach or enforce the values that are necessary for all students to succeed in life.

And

I have seen many changes in the past 30 years . . . values are a thing of the past in many homes today . . . the school has had to play [the social responsibility] role with the students.

Implications for Social Responsibility

When John Dewey wrote his pedagogical creed, the primary aim of schools was to "Americanize" students by imposing the language, customs, and values of the dominant majority (Carlson, 1975). Schools aimed to produce good American citizens with a sense of social responsibility in their industrial society. America in the 21st century is composed of diverse people (NCES, 2007). Students possess varied and sometimes conflicting values. In today's schools, according to Richards, Brown, & Forde (2006), differences are celebrated rather than downplayed and students are taught to value their fellow human beings. Though our post-industrial global society may seem different from Dewey's America, it remains a worthy goal of schooling to ensure that students are not only textually and technologically literate, but socially responsible as well.

In our quest to fulfill this goal, educators can still look to Dewey's works for direction and educational models (Schechter, 2011). In a context of ever-increasing standardization and accountability for results, we must celebrate, advocate, and perpetuate the learner as the center and focus of all educational endeavors. According to Jackson (2012), external aims such as grades and test scores actually hinders the capacity for continuous growth and leads to evasion of, rather than engagement in, educational activities. As we establish and maintain child-centered learning environments, we can look to Dewey's concept of social saturation (Dewey, 1922) to remind us that morality and social responsibility can only be learned through genuine interaction with others. We must recognize that our role goes beyond the academic and that we must embrace, and help reluctant colleagues embrace, our role as social educators.

We must examine our instructional strategies. Active, cooperative, and collaborative learning, "mutually intertwined activities" (Dewey, 1922, p. 329), must take precedence over lecture, worksheets, drill, and other pedagogies which promote student passivity. The transmission model of teaching is inadequate because it assumes activity on the part of the educator and passivity on the part of the child (Biesta, 1996). We must recognize that experience alone is not enough; it must be accompanied by transformation, the making of new meanings through directed reflection (Schechter, 2011).

An examination of classroom and school environments reveals that many are characterized by the "herd mentality" (Dewey 1922, p.4), in which social responsibility is interpreted as obedience to predetermined rules in order to avoid artificial consequences such as "pulling tickets" or detention. Teachers must guide students to look at how their actions impact

themselves and their relationship with others through guided reflection, conflict resolution, and other “active connections of human beings with one another” (Dewey, 1922, p.329) which help students bring “order and direction” (Dewey, 1922, p. 238) to their actions.

Such meaningful participation will result in greater awareness of issues of social justice (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2006). Students must be taught that if the world is to be a better place where everyone is treated fairly, then they have to work to make it so. This is their responsibility as citizens of their country and inhabitants of the earth” (p. 11).

In our current era of high-stakes testing and teach-to-the-test mentality, students are often overlooked in favor of decontextualized data (Ediger, 2000). John Dewey offers a more humanistic alternative. He presents an education that is of, about, and for the students’ and community’s best interest. A progressivist education not only addresses individual student needs and interests but also teaches the learners how to work and live together in a community. This is genuine social responsibility.

References

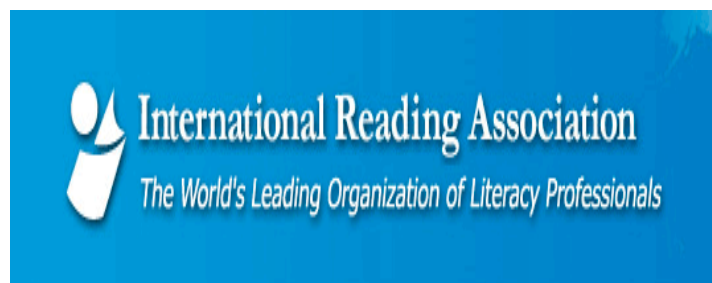
- Biesta, G.J.J. (1996). Education, not initiation. In *Philosophy of Education Archive*, pp. 90 -98. Retrieved from <http://ojs.ed.uiuc.edu/index.php/pes/article/download/2247/942>
- Carlson, R. A. (1975). *The quest for conformity: Americanization through education*. New York: Wiley.
- Columbia University. (2004). *John Dewey. Columbians ahead of their time*. Columbia 250. Retrieved from http://c250.columbia.edu/c250_celebrates/remarkable_columbians/john_dewey.html
- Cunningham, C.A. (1995). *Some notes on John Dewey (1859-1952)*. Retrieved from <http://cuip.uchicago.edu/%7Ecac/deweynotes.htm>
- Dewey, J. (1897). My pedagogic creed. *School Journal*, 54. 77-80. Retrieved from <http://dewey.pragmatism.org/creed.htm>
- Dewey, J. (1922). *Human nature and conduct: An introduction to social psychology*. New York: Carlton.
- Ecker, P. (1997). John Dewey: 1859-1952. Retrieved from <http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/acs/1890s/dewey/dewey.html>
- Ediger, M. (2000). *John Dewey versus current educational trends: An evaluation*. ERIC Document ED445063.
- Finley, R. (2007). Survey Monkey. Portland, OR: SurveyMonkey. com.
- Harms, W.& DePencier, I. (1996). *100 Years of Learning at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools*. (Electronic book). Retrieved from <http://www.ucls.uchicago.edu/about-lab/history/index.aspx>
- Jackson, J. (2012). Reconstructing Dewey: Dialectics and democratic education. *Education and Culture*, 28(1), (62 -77).
- John Dewey Society. Website Homepage. Retrieved from <http://doe.concordia.ca/jds/>
- Leonall, H. A. & Kelleher, R.D. (2010) . *Progressivism and the 21st Century elementary school: Is John Dewey relevant today?* Presented at the 28th Annual North Carolina Teacher Education Forum, Raleigh, NC, September 23-23, 2010.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (NCES). (2007). Table 7.1. Percentage distribution of public elementary and secondary school enrollment, by locale and race/ethnicity:

- 1993, 2000, and 2003. Retrieved from
http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/tables/table_7_1.as
- Olson, L. (1999a). Dewey: The progressive era's misunderstood giant. *Education Week*, 18(32), 29.
- Olson, L. (1999b). Tugging at tradition. *Education Week*, 18(32), 25.
- Ozmon, H. A., & Craver, S. M. (1999). *Philosophical Foundations of Education*. (6th ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.
- Ozmon, H. A., & Craver, S. M. (1999). Marxism and education. *Philosophical foundations of education*, 316-348.
- Ravitch, D. (2001). *As American as public school (Introduction)*. In Mondale, S., & Patton, S. B. (Eds.), *School: The Story of American Public Education* (63-70). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Richards, H. V., Brown, A. F., & Forde, T. B. (2006). *Addressing diversity in schools: Culturally responsive pedagogy*. Arizona State University: NCREST. Retrieved from http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Diversity_Brief.pdf
- Rocha, S. D. (2012). Who gets to be a philosopher? Dewey, democracy & philosophical identity. *Philosophical Studies in Education*, 42, 62-72.
- Schecter, B. (March 2011). Development as an aim of education: A reconsideration of Dewey's vision. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 41(2), 250-266.
- Westbrook, R. B. (1993) & John Dewey (1859-1952). *Prospects: The Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*, 23(1/2), 277-291. Retrieved from <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/publications/ThinkersPdf/deweye.PDF>



Rebekah Kelleher, Assistant Professor of Education at Wingate (NC) University, teaches courses in foundations, curriculum, and pedagogy and serves as coordinator of K-6 education. She received her doctorate in Curriculum Studies from Georgia Southern University. Recent research projects include helping teachers implement common core standards and integrating new technologies into classroom instruction and assessment. Prior to becoming a teacher educator, she spent twenty years as an elementary and middle school teacher in Louisiana and Georgia. She is married to a science educator, and they have two grown children and an adorable granddaughter. Contact her at

rkellehe@wingate.edu



Picture books with Deaf Characters: A Comparison of Readers' Responses with Resources for Teachers and Students

Andrea Karlin
Lamar University

Jean Andrews
Lamar University

Stacy Bumstead
Lamar University

Zanthia Smith
Lamar University

Tynisha D. Meidl
St. Norbert College

Keywords: multicultural literature, deaf children's books, Readers Response Theory

NOTABLE QUOTE

We recommend that high quality picture books featuring authentic Deaf characters and that avoid stereotypes should be included in all public and school libraries including university libraries and books stores for the public.

Abstract

Sixty university students in undergraduate and graduate programs read children's picture books, which featured Deaf characters. Students filled out a 16- item opinion survey to understand readers' sensitivities towards Deaf cultures. Differences were found between responses of the Deaf education majors compared to education majors on only four of the books. The results are interpreted in light of Readers Response theory, and multicultural literature. Recommendations are made to teachers and students use books with Deaf characters to teach about different cultures including the Deaf culture.

Introduction

Picture books with multicultural themes are valuable resources for teachers who incorporate disabilities, multiculturalism, diversity and social justice in elementary, secondary and postsecondary classrooms. Picture books that tap into multicultural themes written with strong story lines and illustrated with artwork are highly motivational for adult, teen and child readers (Galda & Beach, 2001; Galda, Ash & Cullinan, 2010). Often times, multicultural picture books are explored across lines of race, gender, ethnicity and religion.

Multicultural texts that include Deaf culture where the characters portrayed as culturally

Deaf are scant. Deaf characters are often times inaccurately portrayed in children's literature (McDonald, 2010; Andrews, 2006; Bailes, 2002) when characterized. There is an overemphasis on Deafness as a disability rather than language and cultural assets. Tunnell, Jacobs, Young & Bryan make a compelling observation.

...of the one-half million people in the U.S. who are Deaf (capitalized to indicate they belong to the Deaf culture, not just that they do not hear) are represented by only a smattering of books for young readers. With so few titles available, others have less opportunity to get to know and understand the Deaf (2012, p. 194).

However, over the past ten years, the numbers of published books featuring Deaf characters has increased, as have the number of authors and illustrators of children's literature, who are Deaf (Andrews, 2006).

The Deaf community considers itself to be a minority group. We define a person who is Deaf as an individual who cannot use hearing to comprehend speech even with advanced level amplification (Andrews, Leigh & Weiner, 2004). Deaf people are often described within two paradigms: the first is the *cultural-linguistic* view, which provides Deaf people with a language (American Sign Language) and a culture (Andrews and al., 2004). The second view is the *medical-audiology* perspective, which is concerned with ear and hearing health, diagnostics and auditory assistive technology. Many picture books with Deaf characters contain stereotypic examples illustrating the medical-audiology model rather than the cultural-linguistic perspective (Andrews and al., 2004). When texts only portray the medical-audiology perspective, it may work against a teacher's goals to introduce open views toward deafness, cultural diversity and social justice in the classroom (McDonald, 2010; Andrews, 2006; Bailes, 2002).

We have observed that what exists on the bookshelves are many picture books with Deaf characters that contain stereotypic examples illustrating the medical-pathological model rather than the cultural perspective. As a result we sought to understand how pre-service teachers responded to children's books that included Deaf characters. The purpose of this study was to introduce eight children's picture books to hearing and Deaf undergraduate and graduate students to determine how they would respond to each book using a 16-item reader-response survey. We chose college students who were majoring in Deaf education as well as college students who were non-Deaf education majors but may have had interaction with Deaf students on campus or in the community. The college students' responses were examined using Reading Response Theory as the theoretical framework.

Reading Response Theory

The basic notion of the Reading Response Theory is that the reader plays an important role in the construction of meaning of the text (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1991). Rosenblatt's reading response theory suggests that each time a reader approaches a book or other printed material; the reader brings his/her own personal experiences, purpose for reading, and mental state to the reading material (Rosenblatt, 1978). This interaction helps to create personal meaning, which the reader-gains from the text through the mental filter made up of his or her prior experiences. This "transaction" helps to solidify understanding between the author and the reader (Rosenblatt, 1978). Constructing personal meaning is the definitive goal of reading a text (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Reading Response Theory has guided literature-based instruction on K-12 settings. Rosenblatt (1991) claims that when reading a text readers take two positions. One position is that the readers focus their attention on internal feelings, beliefs and attitudes about the text, called

the reader's *aesthetic stance*. The other position is that the readers take an *effereent stance*, where they narrow their attention to the text to carry away meanings as in informational texts (Cox & Many, 1989; Rosenblatt, 1991). When the reader takes the efferent stance, the reader is focused primarily on gathering information from the text. In addition, the reader brings several factors to the reading situation (Cox & Many, 1989). For example, each reader relies on his or her own experiences with language and texts (Rosenblatt, 1978) and conversely, these experiences create motivation for the act of reading.

These stances have been contextualized in studies that support the use of literature-based reading instruction (Galda, 1990; McGee, 1992). For example, they have documented how children respond to literature, their motivation to read and their performance on reading assessments and these studies provide new insights in how teachers and researchers can use literature-based instruction in the classroom (McGee, 1992).

Rosenblatt (1978) hypothesizes that each reading situation is unique. Moreover, each time a text is read by a reader the interpretation differs with each reading of the text by the same reader. Although Rosenblatt suggests that no two readers are the same, the efferent stance allows the readers to arrive at a shared consensus of meaning because this stance focuses on factual and literal information located within the text, which does not lend to personal interpretation. In contrast, meaning is not as easily consensual with the aesthetic stance. Because each reader contains his or her own personal "lived through" experiences, each text elicits unique feelings and emotions within the reader. Thus, when the aesthetic stance is utilized, each reader comes away with a different meaning (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Multicultural Children's Literature

Multicultural children's literature, that is culturally authentic, is an excellent resource for classroom teachers (Tunnel, Jacobs, Young, Bryan, 2012; Beatty, 1997). According to Beatty (1997, p. 183), "exposure to multicultural literature provides a mirror into one's own world and a door into the culture and lives of others." Multicultural literature includes realistic stories that depict members of diverse cultures such as African-American, Latino, Native American and Deaf Americans who have a different culture than mainstream Anglo-American culture which has traditionally and historically dominated children's literature.

In this study we define "culturally authentic" as literature that represents the culture and does not portray stereotypes. For instance, African-Americans were traditionally portrayed in children's literature as passive, helpless and dependent on Whites. Similarly, Deaf characters are often portrayed as disabled and less intelligent or able as their hearing peers. Such multicultural literature allows students and teachers to become aware of the global community and world (Smolkin & Young, 2011). Bishop (1990), in Smolkin & Young (2011) stated:

It is the central tenet of discussions of multicultural children's literature that all children deserve to have access to books in schools that are reflective of their cultures. Such books are seen as self-affirming mirrors for children of a given culture and as windows into other lives for children of given culture and as windows into other lives for children outside a given culture. Both are important factors in developing empathy and understanding in cross-cultural interactions (p. 217).

It is important to find multicultural literature that is culturally authentic and age appropriate. The texts need to tell a credible interesting story and be an honest believable experience regardless of content, and avoid stereotypes and biases (Tunnel, Jacobs, Young, Bryan (2012, p. 195). This is often a daunting task because of the lack of culturally sensitive,

well written quality children's literature (Keifer, 2012; Hancock, 2004). Readers of all ages should have the opportunity to expect authenticity in the multicultural books that they read (Steiner, Chase & Son, 2011). When children have an opportunity to see people of their same color, culture or heritage in a text, he or she may feel more valued by his or her own group and others (Smolkin & Young, 2011; Pratt & Beaty, 1999). Readers are also able to make connections between their own experiences and of others in literature that is authentic and credible (Smolkin & Young, 2011). The more familiar a reader becomes with others from different cultures through literature, the more difficult it may be to grow up with prejudices because of the understanding gained through high quality children's books (Norton, 2009).

Multicultural literature can be a means of emphasizing commonalities among people—hopes, dreams, expectations, and emotions (Keifer, 2010, p.182). Currently, there seems to be a greater understanding about the importance of accuracy in literature pertaining to diverse cultures (Steiner, Chase & Son, 2011). However, one must be cautioned not to “accept poor literary quality just to have something in the classroom or library” (Bishop, 1992, in Keifer, 2010, p. 86).

Deaf Culture

Deaf culture is not the first thing that comes to mind when discussing multicultural literature, however, literature depicting the culture of the Deaf community has burgeoned within the past ten years (Andrews, 2006). The Deaf community is culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse. The Deaf culture is composed of individuals who have their own culture and cultural norms, language (American Sign Language), art, literature, organizations and schools and visual ways of learning and experiencing the world (Holcomb, 2013).

The Deaf community is often categorized as having two types of identities (Moore, 2007). How the Deaf community sees themselves is integral to understanding the deficiencies in children's books that represent the Deaf community. Cultural identity focuses on how the Deaf community accepts itself as a unique entity that celebrates its differences from the hearing community through the acceptance of the condition of deafness, the celebration of Deaf history and heritage, and the use of American Sign Language (ASL) and visual ways of knowing and learning (Andrews et.al., 2004).

The other identity, not accepted by Deaf people, refers to the medical and pathological model in which deafness is defined as a deviance from normal hearing; a condition that must be fixed or cured. This pathological identity type is described using a lower case letter d. Within this identity the goal of the individual is to become as hearing as possible and to assimilate into the hearing society, without embracing Deaf culture. The pathological view measures deafness through its affect on oral communication. This model has filtered into children's literature.

We have found few picture books that incorporate Deaf culture in them. Some picture books emphasize the pathological or medical view of deafness. In these storybooks, the focus is on characters who cannot hear and must be *fixed* with hearing aids or cochlear implants. The focus is on what they cannot do (hear) rather than all the activities they can do as a young child. The story plots over emphasize the efforts of Deaf individuals to fit into and interact within the hearing society rather than just be “themselves” and use sign language which functions perfectly well as a language for them to communicate and make friends. These stories are intended to convince the reader that the Deaf character desires to emulate hearing people rather than their own Deaf identity.

Children's storybooks that accurately demonstrate the Deaf culture are considered to

accurately reflect Deaf persons' reality (Andrews, 2006), and thus constitute an important addition to multicultural literature in general, and Deaf cultural literature in particular. Texts similar to, *The Silent Lotus* by Sherry Garland demonstrate for the reader the fullness of the Deaf experience, and what skills can be learned without hearing such as dance. For instance, in this story, a young girl is praised and encouraged for her dancing abilities. The fact that she cannot hear is mentioned but the authors do not emphasize what she can't do. Instead, they tell the story of what an outstanding dancer she was and how she pleased the court with her dancing talents.

While not all Deaf people identify with the Deaf culture, but many do (Leigh, 2009). But for these children that do identify with the Deaf culture, there is a lack of reading materials for them to develop healthy identities (Andrews, 2006). Children's storybooks that accurately demonstrate Deaf culture and Deaf "ways of knowing and being," (Valente, 2011), the acceptance of deafness as a way of life, more accurately reflects Deaf persons' reality, and thus constitutes an important addition to multicultural literature in general, and Deaf cultural literature in particular. We view Deaf culture as part of multicultural literature, which consists of literature depicting the culture of the Deaf community (Andrews, 2006).

Methodology

The goal of this inquiry was to explore, using multicultural texts to understand how pre-service teachers respond to texts when the characters were Deaf. This study was designed in an effort to determine the views of post-secondary students regarding Deaf culture in children's storybooks. Through interviews an understanding of how pre-service teachers made sense of these texts were analyzed using reading response as the theoretical framework. A qualitative, descriptive methodology was utilized to identify university students' opinions/judgments about children's books with Deaf/Deaf characters. Participants were asked to respond to an opinion/judgment questionnaire after reading. The following questions guided the inquiry: (1) Is there a difference in readers' responses about Deaf characters in children's books between education majors (Deaf studies vs. non-Deaf studies)? (2) Is there a difference in readers' responses about Deaf characters in children's picture books from college students 18 years to 25 years and 26+ years?

Participants

A convenience sample of 60 adults enrolled in a university in southeast Texas was utilized. We gathered demographical information from each participant that included: (a) whether they were Deaf or hearing, (b) undergraduate or graduate, (c) Deaf education major or non-Deaf education major, and (d) age ranges (18 to 25 years and 25+ years and above). College participants who majored in Deaf education and those who were non-Deaf education majors were asked to participate in the study. The survey was given in the students' classroom. Each student filled it out answering the above questions during class time. Sixty students filled out the demographic questionnaire.

Non-Deaf education majors were selected because they did not have extensive experience working with Deaf persons and were generally unfamiliar with Deaf culture. Students were stratified according to major and age. For instance, participants were divided into Deaf education majors and non-Deaf education majors. Age groups were also divided out into two groups: 18 years to 25 years and 26+ years.

Instrument and Procedures

Participants were all university students. They were asked to choose 3 to 4 picture books that were displayed in the classroom. The picture books were read in class by each

student. After participants read the picture book, they were given a 16-item survey. Each statement asked the participant to respond to a particular belief statement after a picture book. The participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale of 5 (strongly agree), 4 (agree), 3 (neutral), 2 (disagree) and 1 (strongly disagree).

	Statement
1	Illustrations accurately portray the characters.
2	Illustrations avoid Deaf stereotypes.
3	Hearing characters are convincing.
4	Deaf characters are convincing.
5	Deaf characters strengths accurately portrayed.
6	Hearing characters strengths accurately portrayed.
7	Deaf characters weaknesses accurately portrayed.
8	Hearing characters weaknesses accurately portrayed.
9	Behaviors characteristics authentically consistent with ages and background.
10	Deaf theme overpowered storyline.
11	Book tells a good story.
12	Story avoids stereotypes.
13	Deaf characters portrayed authentically and realistic story.
14	Book explores being Deaf accurately and in a sensitive manner.
15	Book positively contributes understanding of Deaf culture.
16	Deaf characters portrayed as individuals rather than stereotypes

Table 1.1 Participant Survey

Choosing Picture Books

We chose eight picture books, which had illustrations and featured Deaf characters in stories. The text covered a variety of genres: an alphabet book, an historical fiction book, a family memoir, and stories which covered the arts: music, and dance. The books were written by seven hearing authors and one Deaf author and illustrated by one Deaf artist. We chose books that the college students could reasonably read in a class period time and eliminated chapter books with Deaf characters.

Title	Author	Genre	Synopsis
Some Kids are Deaf	Lola M. Schaefer	Non-fiction	This informational picture book covers the topics of deafness, auditory and visual technology aids such as pagers, TTYs and Fingerspelling posters. It has a glossary and list of Internet sites. The story plot is weak. The orientation of this book follows the medical-audiological model with little information on Deaf culture and American Sign Language.
The Deaf Musicians	Pete Seeger and Paul Jacobs	Fiction	This book tells an intriguing story about a musician who suddenly loses his hearing. Lee, the Deaf musician decides to visit a school for the Deaf and there he learns sign language. Lee made a Deaf friend, Max and they composed music on their fingers on the subway. Then the invited Rose a women on the subway to join their band. Then Rose introduced the band to, a hearing woman Ellie to be the singer in their band. The band continued to play their music on the subway.
Handsigns: A Sign Language Alphabet	Kathleen Fain	Non-fiction	This is an alphabet book that presents the 26 handshapes of the manual alphabet paired with 26 letters of the alphabet. It features a new animal for each letter and manual handshape. The illustrations are endearing, bright and vivid. The book is also informational as it presents notes on American Sign Language, a timeline of the invention and use of the manual alphabet and a glossary of the animals featured in the book
I Am Deaf	Jennifer Moore-Mallinos	Fiction	This story is about a ten year old Deaf girl who leads her friends in a discussion about her deafness, her hearing aid, the use of sign language, her teacher's FM system, the limitations of lipreading, the use of TTY

			technology and how the future looks bright for Deaf people. There are activities for kids and parents in the back of the book. The book is more of an instructional guide created in story format rather than a piece of creative fiction. The authors claim their purpose is to create a Deaf character who bridges the gap between Deaf and hearing worlds of children
I Have a Sister, My Sister is Deaf	Jeanne Whitehouse Peterson	Fiction	This picture book story has engaging line drawings and its overtone tone is somewhat melancholy and wistful but has whimsical twist in the story with engaging protagonist, an older hearing sister of a Deaf girl. The story line is informational for the most part. Told from the voice of an older sister, she documents what her Deaf sister can't do (play the piano, sing, hear tunes, hear shouts, hear the telephone ringing, hear garbage can lids clanging, hear thunder) and what she can do (dance, leap, tumble, roll, climb). The older sister also tells the reader that her Deaf sister can lipread, use sign language. The older hearing sister tries to simulate Deafness by plugging her ears. She also tells the reader that she gets her deaf sister's attention by stamping her feet and touching, which are two acceptable Deaf culture behaviors.
Secret Signs: An Escape Through the Underground Railroad	Anita Riggio	fiction	This engaging story has two storylines. A Deaf character named Luke is called upon to assist in a very dangerous activity, protecting slaves who are escaping using the Underground Railroad. The text is presented in American Sign Language in caps and the spoken language is presented in regular typeset. The watercolors are lovely and dreamy in some pages and realistic in other pages. Important information is transmitted through delicate sugar eggs that Luke is on a mission to deliver. Inside the sugar egg are the directions for the runaway slaves to get to safely. The book also contains a narrative afterward that provides a brief history of the Underground Railroad.

Silent Lotus	Jeanne E. Lee	Fiction	This picture book is charming and has stunning watercolors and drawings depicting a young Deaf ballet dancer performing the thousand year old Cambodian ballet. The book was published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 1991. Lotus, was born Deaf to her hearing parents in a quaint village by a lake. Lotus never learned to speak and grew up lonely and friendless. When she went to the town with her father one day, she observed graceful dancers and began to imitate their dancing. Her grace and emerging potential was noticed and she was soon given dancing lessons by a elder dancer in the palace. She learned to express the tales of the gods and kings through her graceful dancing. She danced for the king and because of her skill, she became the most famous dancer in the Khmer kingdom performing for the king's court and in the temples of the gods. She also made many dancer friends and no longer was she sad
Deaf Culture: A to Z	Walter Kelley	Fiction	This book written by a culturally Deaf author Walter Kelley and illustrated by a culturally Deaf illustrator Tony MacGregor breaks new ground. Each of the alphabet is linked to a person, object or concept that is related to a Deaf person's experience such as A for American Sign Language, B for a bed vibrator (vibrating alarm clock), C for captions, and so on

Table 1.2 Selected Texts

Data Analysis and Results

We found that both Deaf education and non-Deaf education majors agreed about the authenticity of the Deaf characters in the picture books. They also agreed as to whether the illustrations accurately portrayed the Deaf experience. In contrast, the older participants (26 + years) favored books with stronger medical-audiological modeling rather than the Deaf cultural modeling, and they could not differentiate between the two paradigms.

We elected to present our findings by storybook. We present our findings by storybook as we could find no uniform trend in the books as a whole.

Some Kids are Deaf

This picture book which was termed by our research team as following the medical-

audiological, disability view. The Deaf and non-Deaf majors agreed on the 16-item statement list. More non-Deaf majors believed the “Deaf characters’ weaknesses were accurately portrayed,” while the Deaf majors were neutral on this statement. There was more variation between the two age groups. Among the older (26+ years students), they believed more strongly that the illustrations avoided Deaf stereotypes, hearing characters were convincing, Deaf characters were convincing, Deaf and hearing characters strengths were more accurately portrayed, hearing characters weaknesses were accurately portrayed, and behaviors were consistent with ages. The older group also believed the book told a good story, the story avoided stereotypes, the Deaf characters were portrayed authentically, and the book explored topics in a sensitive manner and that Deaf characters were not presented as stereotypes.

Deaf Musician

This story was labeled as showing the medical-audiological view of deafness. More than 50% of the Deaf education majors and the non-Deaf education majors agreed with all 16 items on the survey. There were no significant differences among major groups. The only significant differences found were that the older students agreed that the story avoided stereotypes.

Handsigns

More than 50% of respondents and even on many of the items as high as 100% of those who responded by saying they perceived to be neutral on all 16 items. This may be because this was an alphabet book and did not portray Deaf characters but animals and objects. Only one Deaf education major was queried on this book we could only look at group differences between Deaf and non-Deaf education majors. Most young (18 to 25 years) and older (26+ years) had similar beliefs on the 16-statement list. However, the older students expressed strongly agreed that the illustrations portrayed the characters accurately, the Deaf characters were convincing, and the hearing characters’ strengths were adequately portrayed.

I am Deaf

The authors of this paper labeled this book as presenting the audiological-medical view of deafness. On all 16 items, more than 50 % of the Deaf education majors and education majors agreed. In other words, no differences in perceptions were detected with this picture book. There were no significant differences between these categories. Readers of this book had similar beliefs about the 16 statements.

I Have a Sister, She is Deaf

The authors of the paper labeled this book as having an audiological-medical view of deafness. The two groups agreed on 15 of the statements. However, the Deaf education majors perceived that the story avoided Deaf stereotypes while the education majors disagreed. There were no significant differences between non-Deaf versus Deaf majors’ responses to the 16 item nor were there any significant differences between the younger group (18 to 25 years) and the older group (26+ years).

Secret Signs

The authors labeled this book as following the Deaf culture view as sign language was used in this story to assist the main Deaf character in using his wits to accomplish a secret mission. More than 50% of the Deaf majors stated they agreed that the Deaf and hearing characters were portrayed convincingly. Moreover, more than 50% of the Deaf education majors agreed that the book explored being Deaf in an accurate and sensitive manner. The other significant difference between these two groups was that the Deaf education majors disagreed

that the Deaf theme strongly overpowered the storyline. There were no significant differences in belief statements within the two age groups.

Silent Lotus

The authors categorized this picture book as medical-audiological approach as it did not include sign language or elements of the Deaf culture. The students who read this picture book agreed with the 16 items in the survey. There were no differences between the perceptions of the Deaf education majors and non-Deaf education majors. Both groups generally agreed in the belief statements. Differences across belief statements that reach statistical significances were as follows. The non-Deaf majors more strongly believed that the illustrations avoided Deaf stereotypes, that the book told a good story, that the book had a positive contribution to Deaf culture and that Deaf characters were characterized as individuals rather than stereotypes.

Deaf Culture: A to Z

More than 50% of the Deaf education majors agreed that the Deaf characters were portrayed authentically and honestly in the storybook and that Deaf characters were presented as individuals rather than stereotypes. Deaf education majors more strongly agreed than non-Deaf education majors that the Deaf characters were portrayed authentically and honestly in the storybook and that Deaf characters were presented as individuals rather than stereotypes.

Summary

As the Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978) hypothesizes, it is the readers' comprehension of and interest in a story that is strongly influenced by their prior knowledge and interest of the topic of the story. Thus, if a reader has prior knowledge about Deaf culture and Deaf people, this will influence their comprehension and scrutiny of the story. Findings suggests, older individuals showed more stereotypic views of Deaf characters versus their younger peers

The Deaf education majors and education majors generally agreed on their opinions of the book based from the findings on 16 item opinion survey after reading the eight children's books with Deaf characters. Viewing the Deaf community as a cultural entity certainly warrants placing children's literature with Deaf characters under the umbrella of multicultural picture books. Like the children's literature related to African-American, Native-American, and Hispanic-American cultures, those books with culturally true Deaf characters should be included in any collection of multicultural picture books. However, it often ignored and it rarely appears in listings of or discussions about multicultural picture books.

The 8 books selected for this study did not provide clear and distinct differences in perceptions of the Deaf education majors and education majors. Perhaps because many of the education majors attended classes with Deaf students that they learned about Deaf culture from classmates rather than taking a formal class in sign language or Deaf culture. The two picture book alphabet books were not useful in determining differences of perceptions. The two books, *I am Deaf*, *Kids are Deaf* were surprisingly perceived as telling a good story and not representing stereotypes even though the authors of this paper noted they were based on the audiological-medical view of deafness. Perhaps the Deaf education majors perceived these books to be helpful in their future careers working with Deaf students and their families and not culturally offensive even though they stressed the disabilities model. More studies are needed with a wider variety of books to capture these two views: the medical-audiological view and the cultural-linguistic view.

Instead, these picture books featuring Deaf characters have been placed in the medical or rehabilitation literature which does not authentically represent Deaf individuals from the United states (US) on how they want to be represented. Deaf individuals prefer to be represented as

members of a vibrant community with its own culture, art, language, heritage and pride. For instance, in the picture books above, the Deaf community prefers authors to emphasize what Deaf people can do such as dance, or deliver messages to help African-American people, or being president of a university rather than being depicted what they cannot do such as hear and talk. In these medical/audiologically oriented books, Deaf characters are presented as persons with medical problems who need to be “fixed” or “cured” by the medical and audiological professionals.

Conclusions

Overall we found that the more the students knew about Deaf culture and the older they were, the more critical they were on analyzing the picture books as being Deaf culturally authentic. In other words, how they critically analyzed the book as accurately portraying Deaf characters who live in Deaf culture and use sign language depended on their experiences.

Several of the books portrayed the medical-audiological factors about the characters such as: gender, secondary disabilities, age of onset, extent of hearing loss, use of auditory technology, auditory factors and genetic background. All of these factors affect a Deaf person’s identity. A Deaf person’s identity can be influenced by socio-cultural-linguistic factors such as: culture, ethnicity, family and educational experiences, the presence of Deaf community supportive networks, communication and language preferences, and the use of visual technology.

As more authors write stories about Deaf characters we hope they include more characters who are members of the Deaf culture rather than focus on the medical-audiological factors. Some of the texts used in this study advocate for such a view.

Students at the university level can benefit from reading these kinds of books in their Children’s Literature class to expand their awareness of other cultures, like the Deaf culture. Children’s books with Deaf characters who represent the values of the Deaf community are also needed in our libraries and book stores in order to provide the public with information by way of quality children’s books in fiction and non-fiction form. We recommend that high quality picture books featuring authentic Deaf characters and avoid stereotypes should be included in all public and school libraries including university libraries and books stores for the public. We also recommend that these books be included in Children’s Literature classes at the undergraduate and graduate level in universities and colleges. Finally, we recommend that public and school libraries invite Deaf storytellers to read from these books in sign language with a voicing sign language interpreter so that hearing children and youths and their families get exposed to the Deaf culture from members of the Deaf community.

References

- Andrews, J. (2006). Deaf culture values through children’s literature. *Multicultural Review*, 5(1), 25-36.
- Andrews, J., Shaw, P. & Lomas, G. (2011). Deaf and hard of hearing students. In the *Handbook of Special Education*. J. M. Kauffman & D. Hallahan (Eds.). (pp. 233-246). New York: Routledge.
- Andrews, J., Leigh, I. & Weiner, M. (2004). *Evolving Perspectives in Psychology, Education and Sociology*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

- Bailes, C. (2002). Mandy: A critical look at the portrayal of a deaf character in children's literature. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 4(4), 3-9.
- Beaty, J. J. (1997). *Building Bridges with Multicultural Picture Books*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Cox, C , & Many, J. E. (1989, March). Reader stance towards a literary work: Applying the *65ransact- tional theory to children's responses*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.
- Galda, L., Ash, G. & Cullinan, B. (2000). Children's literature. In M.L. Kamil, P.B. Moshental, P. Pearson & R. Barr (Eds.). *Handbook of Reading Research* (pp. 361-379). Vol. 3. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Galda, L., Cullinan, B., Sipe, L. R. (2010). *Literature and the Child 7th Edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Hancock, M. (2004). A Celebration of Literature and Response—Children's Books and *Teachers in K – 8 Classrooms 2nd Edition*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Keifer, B. (2010). *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature 10th Edition*. New York: McGrawHill Higher Education.
- Marshall, J. (2000). Research on response to literature. In M.L. Kamil, P.B. Moshental, P. Pearson & R. Barr (Eds.). *Handbook of Reading Research* (pp. 381-402). Vol. 3. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- McDonald, D. (2010). Not silent, invisible: Literature's chance encounters with deaf heroes and heroines. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 154(5), 463-470.
- Norton, Donna E. (2009). *Multicultural Children's Literature—Through the Eyes of Many Children 3rd Edition*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon/Pearson.
- Pajka-West, S. (2007). Perceptions of deaf characters in adolescent literature. *The ALAN Review*, Summer, 2007, 39-45.
- Pratt, L.& Beaty, J. (1999). *Transcultural Children's Literature*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Smolkin, L. & Young, C. (January 2011). Missing mirrors, missing windows: Children literature textbooks and LGBT topics. *Language Arts*. National Council of Teachers of English, Volume 88, No. 3, pp. 217 – 225.
- Stallworth, J., Gibbons, L., Fauber, L.(2006). It is not on the list: An exploration of teachers' perspectives on using multicultural literature. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. 94 (6), 478 – 489.
- Steiner, S., Chase, M, Son, Eun, H. (January 2011). Multicultural literature, literally. *Book Links*. 20(2), 32 – 35.
- Tunnel, M., Jacobs, J., Young, T., Bryan, G. (2012). *Children's Literature, Briefly 5th Edition*. Boston: Pearson.
- Wilding-Diaz, M. (1993). Deaf characters in children's books: How are they portrayed? Unpublished master's thesis, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.



Andrea Karlin is a professor at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. She is a past state president of the Texas Association for the Improvement of Reading and remains active with that organization and IRA. She is also Program Co-Chair for the IRA Convention in 2014. Andrea can be contacted at karlinar@lamar.edu



Jean F. Andrews, Ph.D. is a professor of Deaf Studies/Deaf Education at Lamar University where she teaches and conducts applied language and literacy research with deaf individuals. She is the author of "*High Tides, Low Tides: The Story of Leroy Colombo*" published by Lamar University Press in Beaumont, Texas. You can correspond with Jean at Jean.Andrews@lamar.edu



Stacey Bumstead is an assistant professor at Lamar University. Stacey currently works closely with undergraduate students while teaching reading methods courses in a unique collaborative school partnership. She is also a former elementary teacher who enjoyed teaching reading and writing. Stacey can be reached at: sebumstead@my.lamar.edu



Zanthia Y. Smith is an Associate Professor at Lamar University. She teaches in the Deaf Studies/Deaf Education Department and is the Lead Instructor for the BA-American Sign Language program. Zanthia's contact information is zanthia.smith@lamar.edu



Tynisha Meidl is an Assistant Professor of Teacher Education at St. Norbert College. Meidl teaches undergraduate literacy courses aimed at helping pre-service teachers enter the classroom as proficient literacy teachers. Her research includes curriculum planning for linguistically and culturally diverse student populations, academic service-learning, as well as Freirean Based approaches in the classroom. You can touch base with Ty at: tynisha.meidl@snc.edu

Book Review

by

Katherine Laley

Johnson, Dale D. & Johnson, B. (2006). *High Stakes: Poverty, Testing and Failure in the American Schools*. 2nd Ed. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc,

For over a decade, fourth and eighth grade students have been taking Louisiana's high stakes test, the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program, known as the LEAP Test. The LEAP has increased the amount of stress and pressure put on children and teachers, especially those teaching 8th and 4th grade. The harsh realities of this assessment in Louisiana are what Dale and Bonnie Johnson capitalize on in their book *High Stakes: Poverty, Testing and Failure in the American Schools*. "Louisiana is currently one of the only eight states in the nation that mandate failure and grade repetition for elementary and middle school students who fail the state's high-stakes achievement tests, although other states are heading in that direction" (Johnson, 2006, xv). It is this reality for teachers and students that defines *High-stakes*.

In the spring of 1999, the LEAP test was administrated for the first time and only assessed knowledge in English, language arts (ELA) and Mathematics. Science and Social Studies were added in the spring of 2000. Today, four content areas make up the assessment: ELA, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. The purpose of the assessment is to measure student knowledge attained during the academic year. Student performance is evaluated using the ranking of Unsatisfactory, Approaching Basic, Basic, Mastery, or Advanced for each section. Students are required to pass the ELA and Mathematics components of this test with scores of basic or above, or they can get an Approaching Basic and Basic in one of the two areas. If students do not pass these two parts of the test with appropriate scores then they will fail the grade no matter what their report card states. *High Stakes: Poverty, Testing and Failure in the American Schools* highlights what is "at stake" for students and teachers when teaching in a high poverty school district in Louisiana.

Dale and Bonnie Johnson were professors on the collegiate level, teaching future teachers skills of becoming a teacher. Their students would come back to them telling them that they felt as though their information was outdated and they had not been in the classroom recently to understand what it was like to be a student or teacher. In response to this, in 2000, they both took a sabbatical from the university they were teaching at and started teaching a Redbud Elementary School (pseudonym). By doing this they were hoping to learn what it was like for teachers who were teaching students on a poverty level with mandated high stakes tests. Bonnie Johnson became a third grade teacher and Dale Johnson became a fourth grade teacher in Deerborne Parish (pseudonym), Louisiana. Both the school name and parish name in Louisiana have been changed to protect the students and parish in this book. I immediately identified with *High stakes* as I read, "This is the story of Redbud Elementary as viewed through our eyes in 2000-2001 as we brought with us our prior knowledge and our many years of experience in public education" (Johnson, xviii).

In the beginning these two teachers wanted to just observe and keep a journal so that their young college students, whom were becoming teachers, could see some real-life accountability situations about life in high poverty schools. As the year progressed, the Johnsons came to the realization that the story of Redbud Elementary, a struggling school with high stakes testing needed to be told nationwide. This book chronicles the trials, love, and affects these two people had on their students and school during the course of a year while dealing with the stresses of an underprivileged school and the powerful LEAP test.

Teaching at Redbud Elementary

Redbud Elementary is a school that is located in the northern part of Louisiana in Deerborne Parish. "In 2001, when the book was written the school consisted of 611 students, 95 percent whom qualified for free breakfast and lunch" (xv). The majority of the children came from very poor living situations as exemplified by conditions such as a lack of running water and electricity on a daily basis. Many of the children came from homes with a single-parent, an aunt/uncle, or grandparent running the home. Their guardians normally worked in minimum-wage jobs and several students did not receive the medical or dental care they needed due to lack of family income. Several of the students lived in fear of violence and shootings in the neighborhood on a daily basis. *High Stakes: Poverty, Testing, and Failure in American Schools*, takes into account what it was like for elementary students in these living conditions, who were in the third and fourth grade, to take the LEAP test and Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) test. At the time the book was published, third graders were required to take the ITBS test; currently in the state of Louisiana, accountability as represented by high stakes testing has drilled down to lower grades as second graders are given the IOWA test and the I-LEAP test (a hybrid of LEAP and ITBS) is administered third graders.

This book provides a weekly account on the successes and happiness and trials and obstacles these students and teachers encountered as they prepared themselves for the powerful impact that high stakes assessments have at Redbud Elementary. Each chapter is identified by the months in the academic calendar, starting with September. A sub chapter is given for each week and organized by either third or fourth. Each chapter gives an account of the challenges and difficulties of teaching in a poorer area and how children and teachers are fighting every day to overcome a system in which both students and teachers are doomed to fail from day one. Johnson and Johnson illustrated this by the following:

In Louisiana in 2001, 18 percent of fourth graders failed the English language arts test, 24 percent failed math, 16 percent failed science, and 22 percent failed social studies. In 2003, students must score at the basic level of achievement in order to pass the LEAP test. This year, students who scored approaching basic passed the test. The percentage of fourth graders in Louisiana who did not achieve at the basic level in 2001 included 42 percent in English Language Arts, 47 percent in math, 49 percent in science, and 45 percent in social studies. If the 2003 criteria had been in place, nearly half of all fourth graders would have failed. It seems clear that the test should be examined more closely – not the children and teachers of Louisiana. (165)

Each year, teachers are forced to teach concepts focused around the test. Throughout the school year, there is an undue emphasis placed on making sure children pass in math and ELA. These

subjects are being taught for over a longer period of time over the course of the day short shifting science and social studies. As illustrated in *High stakes*, for the past decade these tests have been forcing teachers to drill the concepts of ELA and math into students brains, sometimes without the proper resources to do so. What happened to the well rounded student? Did these concepts get tossed out the window when high stakes testing came into effect in Louisiana?

Teaching in Louisiana: Tales of a Fourth Grade Teacher

At the time I submitted this review, I was in my fifth year of teaching fourth grade; I also student taught in a fourth grade class during the LEAP test. I have administrated six LEAP assessments, five of which were in my personal classroom. The school I have taught at for the past five years is located in East Baton Rouge Parish, in Louisiana, and is currently a Title I school. Title I is a federal funding program for schools and school districts with a high poverty population; class size has ranged from twenty-one students to twenty-five students.

This book was a very hard book for me to read because it struck an emotional chord within me. What these two educators went through at Redbud Elementary as third and fourth grade teachers for one year, I live with on a daily basis with my fourth grade students in East Baton Rouge Parish.

As I write this, we are taking the LEAP test in my classroom, and it is very hard for me to watch students answer questions knowing that there is the strong possibility they will not pass the test; therefore, will not pass fourth grade without summer school. My students are not dumb; rather, they are bright, inquisitive, and energetic. From my perspective, they try their hardest throughout the year and in the end according to a standardized test, their hardest is not good enough to pass. This current year the majority of my class qualifies for free lunch. They come from loving families, but many are in crisis; half of them have parents or someone they know in jail. Such circumstances add stress to my students' lives.

Every year, Louisiana students are forced to take the LEAP test, no matter what the circumstances of what has been going on in their life in the previous months. High stakes test add manufactured stress to already stressful young lives. As an illustration, one of my students suffered from a stroke in third grade right before she took the ILEAP test. She was passed on to fourth grade, and started my fourth grade class in January 2012. She ended up transferring to a couple of different schools before she ended up at my school. Due to the amount of time she was in my classroom we were not able to get her the accommodations she would need for the LEAP test. She ended up failing the LEAP test that spring and was placed back into my classroom the following school year because of the rapport this student and her family had with me. In November 2012, this same student's family lost their house due to a fire. My students rallied together to get supplies for her family, left with barely anything. I have also taught students who have lost everything in past due to Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Gustav. Despite personal stressors, these same students were administered the LEAP test regardless of personal issues.

Dale and Bonnie Johnson stated that they noticed that children of poverty tend to look after each other and help each other out. I see this every day in my classroom, because in the end sometimes the only constant these students have is each other; school and me are often the

structure in their young lives. How do you tell a child at the end of the year, who has tried their best even while living in the poorest of conditions, I'm sorry but your best was just not enough?

Governmental and educational officials have no clue what it is like to give a child a letter stating that they are not good enough for the next grade because they aren't smart enough or didn't try hard enough according to a test; mind you not their report card, but a test. The two authors of this book experienced this first hand and beautifully convey this heartache in Chapter Ten, titled "May:"

We teachers know our students' abilities better than any standardized test score can reveal. We know which children are ready to move to the next grade. We teachers are the experts, but our expertise is brushed aside by the accountability processes. (168)

Sadly, it seems as if it is only getting worse in the state of Louisiana for teachers as their jobs are impacted by fourth graders' LEAP scores. How do you convey to an eight, nine, or ten year old child that they have to pass a test because your career depends on them? Every teacher can tell you that all classes vary from year-to-year based on student ability, discipline, and environmental situations. In 2010, my second year of teaching, I had thirteen students fail the LEAP test out of twenty-five students in my class. In 2011, year three, I had only one student fail the LEAP test out of twenty-four students. Then again, in 2012, I had five students fail out of twenty-three students. I tend to think that I got better as a teacher and delivered quality teaching experiences. I worked hard each year and so did my students, but for some, that effort failed them. Despite my best efforts as a teacher, some students had tremendous emotion challenges they could not overcome. Where is the equity when you hold students and teachers responsible for something that is out of their control?

Even though this book was very difficult for me to read, this was an outstanding book. I would recommend it to anyone that wants to see what it is like for students and teachers facing the LEAP Test and other high stakes standardized tests on a yearly basis. There is nothing more heartbreaking then standing outside of your classroom door at the end of the year, handing your students a white envelope with their scores for the LEAP test in it stating whether they passed or failed the test/grade. You will tell your students until you are blue in the face not to open the envelope until they are at home with their parents and families, however, they still will have it open as they go down the hall and realize that they have failed. As a fourth grade teacher, I live the nightmare of standardized testing described by the Johnsons every year with children enrolled in my classroom.



At press time, Katherine (Katie) Laley was currently a fifth grade teacher, employed in an urban district in Louisiana. She has been teaching for the past six years; five of those years being in fourth grade. Ms. Laley obtained her Bachelors of Science in Elementary Education from Louisiana State University in 2008. Currently, she is pursuing a Master's in Education focused around Elementary Education, Curriculum & Instruction, at Louisiana State University. Contact Katie at klaley2@tigers.lsu.edu.

An Interview with Bonnie Johnson, Author



Revisiting *High Stakes: Poverty, Testing and Failure in American Schools*

By
Tynisha D. Meidl

“I think, probably, the most telling thing of what has happened since we wrote *High Stakes*, other than nothing has changed with the schools, [is] there just seems to be more and more of the mentality that if you make it harder and harder and harder for the teachers and students, they call it rigor, which is nonsense, then something will give. So they’ll do better. You know it’s like the old, I hate to use this analogy but, you know, the more you beat the horse the faster it will go. And you know as an educator, that children don’t learn under those kinds of circumstances.”

Dr. Bonnie Johnson, personal interview, 2013

This piece is a response to the book review that appears in this volume and is written as tribute to the late Dr. Dale Johnson, the co-author of *High Stakes: Poverty, Testing and Failure in American Schools* and past IRA president. I was fortunate to be able to engage in a thoughtful discussion with Dr. Bonnie Johnson revisiting the book, *High Stakes: Poverty, Testing and Failure in American Schools*. Our conversation focused on the major themes of the 2nd edition of book, which was published in 2006. One of the initial statements by Dr. Bonnie Johnson, co-author, was “if I were to try and write that book today, it would look pretty much the same as it did then, 2000-2001 school year. There really haven’t been changes.” In almost 15 years, things have not changed. What does this mean for our schools who serve low-income students of color in urban and rural settings? What is our responsibility as teachers and as citizens? Using the aforementioned questions to frame the conversation with Dr. B. Johnson, we were able to engage in a candid conversation about testing, the realities of teaching in low-income schools, and the fate of many of the students she served when she taught at Redbud Elementary.

It was impossible to discuss the book without mentioning test scores. Dr. Bonnie Johnson made it very clear that she is “not a fan of test scores,” and the tone of the *High stakes* makes it

clear that test scores are more than a number. The book, *High Stakes*, problematizes the ways in which a single measure impacts teachers, students, and families. Readers may wonder, how has Redbud Elementary been doing on the iLeap and LEAP tests? As of 2011-2012, Redbud scored an “F” on its report card. In reality, Redbud is not doing any better than it was 10 years ago with Drs. Dale and Bonnie Johnson, left their faculty roles to teach elementary school for an entire year. The unfortunate part is that in 2009-2010, Redbud Elementary received a “D” on its report card. Bonnie Johnson made it very clear schools that have shown academic growth are being rewarded, monetarily. As follow up to the year they spent at Redbud Elementary, Johnson continues to receive the parish newspaper where Redbud is located. This keeps her abreast on what is happening in community and schools. For example, she shared with me a clipping of two principals who received rewards in 2013 for getting their school to a “C” on their report card. She shared this to emphasize a point about testing.

The report cards were not part of the equation for rewarding or penalizing schools when the Johnson’s wrote the first edition of their book. However, when comparing the report cards of the schools who have shown growth, there are stark differences. Redbud for example, has a school population of 80% African American with 82% of the students coming from families that qualify financially speaking, to receive free or reduced lunch. The schools that are demonstrating growth are between 40 and 60% African American and between 60-70% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. This does not mean that students at Redbud are not capable but it does indicate that there are other factors that must be analyzed and addressed for students at Redbud.

In addition to money some schools are eligible to receive as part of testing regimens, we also discussed the role of poverty at Redbud. Money and poverty are intertwined. Dr. Bonnie Johnson pondered just how the money was spent for the principals who received monetary rewards. Additionally, Redbud along with many other schools in the state of Louisiana are eligible to receive Title 1 or Title 4 funds. The misappropriations of these funds are of concern. In relationship to these concerns about how money is spent or allocated, Dr. Johnson related the a story of the Parish where Redbud is located and how the Parish used Title funding to pay for a motivational speaker *help* students pass the iLeap test. The absurdity of such an expense was thought provoking. A motivational speaker is not going to help students but good teaching will and innovative curriculum will be a start. We discussed the notion of “throwing money at the problem” which has failed miserably to solve issue surrounding the teaching of poor rural children. Dr. Johnson also discussed at length the amount of Parish dollars that go to paying for test prep materials and the assessments themselves versus reducing class size by paying for another teacher or two.

Aside from the school needing additional funds, the children who attended Redbud lived in poverty. Dr. Johnson made it very clear that families were gainfully employed but worked at low paying jobs, reporting that many adults were working multiple jobs to make ends meet. She also indicated that many of her students came to school ill because of inadequate health care. However, ironically, the sick child could not stay home because the parent or guardian had to work. Given this knowledge of the financial status and working status of families whose children attended Redbud, what emerged as most disturbing is that the Parish did not budget a salary for a full time nurse at Redbud. According to *High Stakes* the nurse was only onsite one day a week, to serve 611 students, at the time.

Simply put, poverty and illness impacts students learning. Dr. Johnson, in her curiosity wanted to know “what affects learning, what are some conditions that need to be in place for

children to learn” and if there was any medical research done in this area. She quoted from the third edition of the *Mayo Clinic Family Health Book*, which identified three factors that affect learning: illness, emotions, and motivation. The students of Redbud had many worries or concerns that many children don’t experience. For instance, children were concerned about their safety or if their basic needs were going to be met. Motivation, aside from the infrequent speakers coming to the school and leaving, was not the motivation the Mayo Clinic meant. Dr. Johnson specific stated “the conditions they live in, and the conditions they must endure in school,” are not motivating. Also, she shared, how can students be motivated when their local Boys and Girls club closes because there is not enough money to maintain it? This was the place where students could get homework help or could be a part of an organized activity afterschool and on school holidays. It was a safe place, and it was taken away, adding to the stress many children at Redbud experienced.

At one point during our conversation, I was hoping to hear a few positives and there were some mentioned, but she continued to offer more insight into to the poverty and highlight de-motivating factors that appeared to consume the children who attended Redbud. For instance, in 2006 the local Wal-Mart closed and left those who were working low paying wage jobs with no job. The unfortunate stereotype that most people in the United States have of people living in poverty is that these individuals are lazy and don’t want to work. Bonnie Johnson stated that the opposite was true from her experience. “All of my students’ parents or guardians worked except for one grandmother who was visually impaired and could not work, and she was raising the grandson.” The reality is that the students’ sense of hope for something better is not visible. The Mayo Clinic’s advocacy for three condition to ameliorate poverty, illness, emotions, and motivation, were absent at Redbud and in the surrounding community. A test will not change their community and their poverty status. At least, in Johnson’s perspective, despite political framing of the efficacy of high stakes testing, this hasn’t happened at Redbud Elementary.

Despite the time that has elapsed since the Johnsons first published the book, *High stakes*, Dr. B. Johnson has maintained communication with some of the students who attended Redbud while she was a teacher. Some of her students have become part of prison system, which is unfortunate. As Dr. Johnson put it, reflecting on a study she did comparing vocabulary of those attending affluent schools and those in low-income schools, what students see as their models and opportunities are different. For example, students from affluent communities did not know what *food stamps* were while students from low-income communities did not know what an *orthodontist* was. This dissonance demonstrates what communities possess cultural capital and which do not. She concluded this part of our conversation with the following as she referenced more clippings from the local paper that she still receives:

Here are some of the clippings, I didn’t bring all of them. It was too overwhelming to bring all of them, but I brought some clippings on what has happened to our children. They were so full of hope, and so eager to learn when we taught them. They had a sense of humor and were kind to one another. They shared things. They were endearing. They wouldn’t hurt one another.”

My excitement at interviewing Dr. Bonnie Johnson, and being able to discuss the issues presented in *High stakes* were tempered by her assertion that a fairly simple solution – support is what was needed at Redbud when she and Dale Johnson wrote *High stakes*, and her conviction that that support is still what is needed today. She stated:

If you ask me, and from what I’ve said since we’ve started, I think they’ve [high stakes

tests] created problems. If we had had that money to put one more teacher in every one of those classrooms, and give those children a decent place to go to school where they weren't squashing roaches half the time. And give them activities after school, so they had something to do. If we had had a reading teacher or a literacy coach to help that little guy I showed you who is now in prison for 30 years. How much money would that have taken to save a life?

After spending two hours discussing the realities of teachers, poverty, and high stakes testing, we both sat shaking our heads wondering what's next. The conversations about how to address the issues created by children who live in poverty must continue, and we as educators concerned with literacy and social responsibility, must continue to write about what is happening in our schools. We have to get the story out because it is going to take more than a set of standards, one test, or even a good teacher to address the social issues produced by poverty.

My take-aways from this encounter were many. The interview renewed my views that real reform must occur before schools and teachers can do the hard work of teaching and learning. The system of high stakes testing has to change. But the system is not just the school itself and the policies that are created as a result of schools. Everything from adequate health care for children, jobs that pay a living wage, to communities that have grocery stores must be addressed. We ended our conversation discussing the most troubling reality is that teachers, who have the least political capital are the ones being blamed. Often times they are the only ones outside of the families of the students who see the hope and potential of the students that a test will never be able to measure. The reality is we have people making decisions on what they think will be best for kids and forget the children we serve in our schools are people who will one day either fill our prisons or run our country. Unfortunately, it seems, some communities and some children are poised to do one over the other.

A little lagniappe from your Co-Editors...

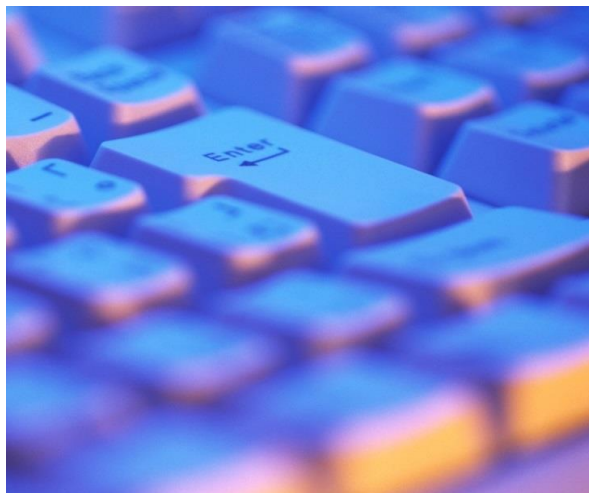
In keeping with the themes and issues in this volume's book review, *High Stakes: Poverty, Testing and Failure in the American Schools*, we invite you to visit the following websites:

FairTest	<u>http://fairtest.org/</u>
Rethinking Schools	<u>http://www.rethinkingschools.org/index.shtml</u>
Susan Ohanian	<u>http://www.susanohanian.org/</u>
Teachers for Social Justice	<u>http://www.teachersforjustice.org/</u>

We also invite readers to visit the following websites which highlight both literacy and social responsibility as it impacts the environment:

Project Wild	<u>http://www.projectwild.org/</u>
Sharing Environmental Education Knowledge	<u>http://www.seek.state.mn.us/</u>
Terrain for Schools	<u>http://ecologycenter.org/</u>

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS



Literacy and Social Responsibility, a special interest group of the International Reading Association, is accepting submissions for their electronic journal, *ejournal of Literacy and Social Responsibility*.

This independent, peer-reviewed ejournal provides an open forum presenting practices promoting literacy development that reflects social responsibility among all learners. Co-Editors seek manuscripts highlighting quality programs advocating community engagement, service-learning, informed and participatory citizenship, social responsibility, activism, and stewardship reflecting an appreciation for diversity. Book reviews of professional literature and children's literature and relevant poetry submissions are also considered.

Deadline for manuscripts and book review submissions is:
May 1, 2014; next issue publication date is October 2014.

Submit electronically, attaching a *Word file* to *both* Co-Editors:

Tynisha D. Meidl @ tynisha.meidl@snc.edu and
Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell @ sdowell@lsu.edu

For more information about Literacy and Social Responsibility SIG of IRA, visit our website @
<http://www.csulb.edu/misc/l-sr/>

Submission Requirements

Literacy and Social Responsibility, an electronic journal of the Literacy and Social Responsibility SIG of the IRA

Independent, peer-reviewed ejournal providing an international forum for educators, authors, and researchers at all levels presenting practices promoting literacy development that reflects social responsibility among all learners. Manuscript focus should highlight quality programs advocating community engagement, service-learning, informed and participatory citizenship, social responsibility, activism, and stewardship reflecting an appreciation for all forms of diversity. As an electronic journal, interactive submissions with active links are particularly sought.

Full-length manuscripts should not exceed 5,000 words excluding all references, figures and appendices (approximately 20-25 pages). Submissions should be blinded: 1) remove author names and affiliations from bylines, 2) references to your own and to coauthors' published work can remain in text and in reference list, 3) mask any city, state, institutional affiliation, or links to personal websites. All submissions should conform to the style outlined in the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Text should be presented double-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman font, in Microsoft Word; images should be submitted in jpg format. Authors of accepted manuscripts must also provide written permission releases for use of material from another source (including student's writing samples, text or figures excerpted from another published work, etc.). Releases must also be provided for use of any person's words, likeness or images. Authors agree to submit a current photo and bio.

Book reviews of professional literature and children's literature are typically 1,500 words and can focus on a single text or multiple, related texts. Reviews of children's literature should suggest themes relating literacy instruction to community engagement, service-learning, informed and participatory citizenship, social responsibility, activism, and stewardship, reflecting an appreciation for all forms of diversity.

Relevant poetry submissions will be considered.

Submit electronically, attaching a *Word file* to *both* Co-Editors:

Tynisha D. Meidl @ tynisha.meidl@snc.edu and
Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell @ sdowell@lsu.edu





The Literacy and Social Responsibility Special Interest Group
First Annual Social Justice Literature Awards
Carolyn L. Cook, Kenneth J. Fasching-Varner, and Aimee Rogers

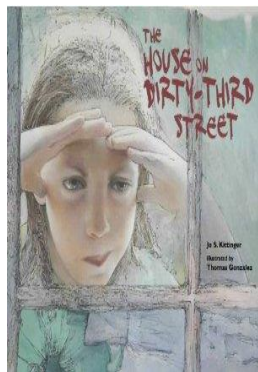
The Literacy and Social Responsibility Special Interest Group (SIG) awarded the first annual Social Justice Literature Awards, at the International Reading Association's 2013 meeting in San Antonio, Texas. The Award was given to two books: Best Picture Book - Jo S. Kittinger (author) and Thomas Gonzalez (illustrator) for *The House on Dirty-Third Street*, and Best Non-Picture Book - Adrian Fogelin for *Summer on the Moon*.

The Literacy and Social Responsibility SIG created this award to highlight children's and young adult literature that illustrates qualities of social justice. The award is the result of a year-long process of the SIG. This process included selecting co-chairs Carolyn Cook, Kenneth Fasching-Varner, and Aimee Rogers; developing criteria for evaluating nominated texts; reviewing all entries; and coming to a final decision. The main categories created were Picture Books and Non-Picture Books with the potential subcategories of poetry, narrative and nonfiction. The committee was supported by the generous mentoring of Alma Flor Ada and Isabel Campoy, both of whom have experience with similar book awards.

The award committee selected the top 10% of the nominations received from publishers. In reviewing texts the committee considered two principles: recognition of the literary and artistic qualities of the text, as well as the reader response. With respect to literary and artistic qualities, texts were evaluated on how they fostered respect and understanding of diverse populations, promoted social responsibility (including equity, justice, and peace), presented social issues in their complexity, and addressed social responsibility towards individuals, communities, societies and/or the environment. With respect to reader response, books were evaluated for the extent to which the text invites reflection and socially responsible action by the reader. Furthermore, in the reader response the committee judged how the text encourages the analysis of past injustices showing possible alternatives and/or challenges and how the text opens the reader's imagination to other possibilities. Lastly, the committee considered the appeal of the text to the targeted readers.

Selected Picture Book

***The House on Dirty-Third Street* by Jo S. Kittinger and illustrated by Thomas Gonzalez.**
 Peachtree Publishers, 2012, 32 pp., ISBN-13: 978-1561456192. Age Range: 4-8.

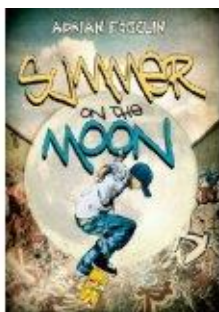


In *The House on Dirty-Third Street*, a mother and her daughter have just moved into a different house to get a new start. As a result of limited income, it is located in an uninviting neighborhood. They spend much time and energy cleaning the house and yard, but they are discouraged because there is so much work to be done. People appear to paint and repair the house. Through the help of the community the house soon lives up to the visions mom had when she bought it. The double-page illustrations pull the reader into the emotions of the story. The illustrations are rendered in dull colors which gradually brighten as things improve for the mother and daughter. The reader understands life as a single mom and sees the power of faith and a giving community.

Selected Non-picture Book

***Summer on the Moon* by Adrian Fogelin.**

Peachtree Publishers, 2012, 256 pp., ISBN-13: 978-1561456260. Age Range: 9-12.



In *Summer on the Moon*, summer vacation is just beginning for Socko and his best friend Damien. The first problem is dealing with Rapp, the leader of the local gang and neighborhood bully. However the best the friends can do is to postpone, but not solve the problem of Rapp. The next problem comes when mom unexpectedly moves Socko away from this bad neighborhood to Moon Ridge Estates, a half-built housing development. Socko is lost without Damien and the comfort of his former neighborhood. He spends his time taking care of his grumpy great-grandfather, the General. With this new responsibility and his deepening understanding of the situation at Moon Ridge

Estates, Socko discovers that it is not where one lives that determines one's character, but rather one's actions. In addition, the reader learns with Socko the power found in family and friends no matter where you live.

2014 Social Justice Literature Committee and Award

The Committee is currently taking nominations from publishers for the 2014 award. Please contact Carolyn (cook@msmary.edu), Kenny (varner@lsu.edu), or Aimee (aimeearogers@gmail.com) with book submissions or questions. The 2014 committee will consist of Sarah Harrison-Burns, Patricia Dean, Zanthia Smith, Denise Stuart, and Joyce Wheaton. Nominations for the 2015 committee are also being taken. The committee will proceed with members rotating off after a multi-year commitment.

For more information about
Literacy and Social Responsibility Special Interest Group
of the International Reading Association,
visit our website @
<http://www.csulb.edu/misc/l-sr/>