

LITERACY PRACTICES OF

3RD GRADERS

by

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study:

When children read from a critical stance it refers to reading and analyzing text for the author's message, the intended audience, and any potential biases. The purpose of the study is to examine students' literary responses when they have increased opportunities to read and respond to many genres of literature from this critical stance.

Procedure:

Twenty-three students in 3rd grade were part of an eight week study in which they read multiple books that lent themselves to a critical analysis. They were required to identify and discuss various aspects of the book in small groups, as well as the larger group. Responses were written in journals and occasionally audio taped. Additionally students completed a culminating project to assess their understanding of the book.

Findings:

Students had varied responses to the many books they read. The length and depth of student responses increased throughout the study. In addition, the stronger the connection between the subject of the book and the child, the more that child would write. The conversations between students became more authentic and meaningful as the study progressed.

Conclusions:

Teaching students to read from a critical stance is an important addition to a daily language arts program. It is also important that what students are reading reflect the students' life experiences and their culture. These opportunities for exploration and discussion allow students to practice skills needed for a democratic discourse.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Reading has always been an activity I would choose to do over almost anything else. I have been an avid reader since elementary school. I always have a book to read and spend a lot of time at the library choosing books and sharing books with friends. Books offer experiences I may never have and adventures, romance, and excitement that engage and entertain me. They also inform me in a way that allows me to participate in discussions on a variety of topics. Reading provides many opportunities to broaden my knowledge and offer glimpses into many different situations I would otherwise not have.

I have taught for 20 years at an elementary school in Northern California where I currently teach third grade. Many of the students come from economically disadvantaged homes, and over two-thirds of them are English language learners for whom Spanish is the home language. This population presents a certain set of challenges for teachers, such as students and parents learning a new language, parents that work and are unable to help much with school work, and limited educational background of the families. These issues are not insurmountable, but require an understanding and appreciation that many of these students come to school with a unique set of needs.

In the spring of 2007, I began in the Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning masters program. I did this for two years but I felt I didn't have a focus. After taking the summer academy class where graduate students are teaching small classes reading and writing, I began to feel I'd found what I was looking for. I knew I loved reading and I wanted to share that excitement and experience with students. I switched to the Reading and Language program and knew that was the right choice.

Reading and Language

Once in the Reading and Language program, I began to look more closely at students who were able to decode words but had little understanding of what they have read. Moreover, students did not have the background knowledge in order to connect or understand many of the stories we have read. We would read stories, and have conversations about them, yet when any the end of selection test was given, students would not do well. My colleague and I looked at how the questions were worded and frequently changed them to ask the question how we had taught the skill or concept. Still many students scored poorly. I had many conversations with our Title I teacher and the principal. I wanted to help these students have more confidence and ability to read and enjoy books, but I was not sure how. I had a number of questions but there was not a clear cut solution.

I took a course on children's literature that included reading instruction strategies using literature. We were required to read 36 children's books and this was like a gift! I read a number of wonderfully written children's books on a multitude of subjects. It seemed that there was a book for every type of reader and every level. How fantastic to know that every reader could enjoy some sort of book.

Rosenblatt's (1937) transaction model argues readers make meaning from text by bringing in their own experiences with language and life. Because meaning is made, it then becomes a transaction between the text and the reader. Meaning is not in the text or in the reader, but a unique meaning potential is realized in the transaction between the two (p. 7).

Smith (2006) discussed how visual and nonvisual information operates in the act

of reading (p. 11). The visual information has to do with what the information that is picked up by the eyes. Smith maintains that the information provided to the eyes is not how one makes sense of what is being read. Nonvisual information is the understandings a reader already has acquired through their experiences. This includes being familiar with a subject area and having some ability to read (p. 11). The more visual information provided, the less nonvisual information is needed. By the same token, the less visual information presented the more nonvisual information that is needed (p. 12).

Rosenblatt talks of two different stances in reading. One is the efferent stance which means “carry away”. This is when a reader focuses on accumulating what is to be carried away at the end of the reading. The other side of the continuum is the aesthetic stance. This means to “sense” or to “perceive”. This is when a reader creates a new experience is shaped or lived through (Rosenblatt, 1982).

Comprehension then becomes the intricate interaction between what is already known and what is learned from the reading. It is also related to their motivation and desire to know more. Good readers will unknowingly ask questions or make predictions about text. In the process of reading these questions will be answered or new ones will arise. In addition, predictions will be confirmed or modified based on the information presented.

It is important for children to have experiences with a variety of literature genres that have some interest to them or connection with their lives. Many of the books children choose are realistic fiction. Our school library, as well as my own classroom library, is filled with this genre. Children come to school with a vast amount of experiences, some positive and some negative. Finding literature, whether that is stories,

poems, or books, that they can relate to on some level is a much better way to get them engaged and increase their understanding. Rosenblatt states that when literature is selected for students, teachers must look for books that have links to their past experience and what they are going through now (1938). Basal reader stories are often uninteresting to me when I think of all the different books I have read. Even more than that, some stories have little relevance in my students' lives. The students find it hard to relate or understand characters or their actions. For example, one of our stories is about the Pilgrims coming to America in the 1700s. The story *Across the Wide, Dark Sea*, describes the journey of a young boy from England to Massachusetts in the 1700s. When the students write about their background in relation to a story, some appear to have little or nothing to write. Is this because they are reluctant writers or they truly have no background knowledge about it? Either way, the meaning they make is limited.

In addition to the experiences, the interest can come from the teacher. Depending on how it is presented students will pick up on the teacher's feelings about what they are reading. I read every day when my students silent read. I write a response about what I am reading, share it with my students, and model both asking questions about what I am reading and making predictions. I love reading and I know I communicate that through my actions and attitude in approaching literature.

It takes a skilled teacher to weave connections in and promote deeper experiences with characters and their actions. It requires more thinking on the students' parts by analyzing and evaluating these characters and their actions with the goal of clarifying their own beliefs. This is shown through my self-talk and group discussions. It is also important that the teacher look beyond his or her biases and select, not only books that

are relevant to the students' experiences and lives, but books that have a range of social issues and opinions for a broader literary experience (Rosenblatt, 1938).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine students' literary responses when they have increased opportunities to read and respond to many genres of literature. I want to provide experiences with literature that were not available in the daily curriculum provided by the district. Many of the stories in the anthology had little connection to my students' lives, such as rich Hispanic families living on a huge ranch when many of my students are living in economically challenging conditions or the history of the Pilgrims sailing from England. Those are situations that few, if any, of my students have experience with. I want the stories they read to be a reflection of who they are and what they do. I want them to see themselves in what they read. This helps them to connect to their background knowledge and heightens their interest and participation in the process.

In addition I want to provide demonstrations and an understanding of how to read and respond critically to text, teaching them to use their language to exercise their power. This entails reading along with them and asking authentic questions in the beginning and gradually backing off to let it become more student lead. Students will have opportunities to engage in dialogue with their peers and challenge their own beliefs as well as others. The conversation between students enables them to share their beliefs and opinions in a safe environment. It will give them the chance to practice listening and respecting differing thought. They will be asked to be active participants in their own learning and constructing their own meaning.

I also want to look at how these experiences affect their lives and their engagement in reading. Do these experiences influence their book choices and enjoyment of reading? Are they able to use their knowledge of themselves and others to be part of a more rich and meaningful discourse? As a teacher who feels strongly about reading and wanting to ignite the passion for literature in my students, this information could inform my teaching and transform my program.

We need to look at what we are asking students to do and why. For many years my teaching of reading often consisted of reading a story and answering questions at the end of the story. I followed the program and made the assumption that someone else with more experience in teaching reading had thought out the questions to ask. It was essentially a recall of facts rather than using any higher order thinking skills. When approaching the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), such as synthesis or evaluation, many students were unprepared for sharing their thoughts and opinions. They were seldom asked to think that way and had little experience doing it. With practice and experience, I hope to see a greater level of confidence and opportunities to find their voice. When students feel empowered with chances to challenge their beliefs as well as others', engage in meaningful dialogue with their peers, and broaden their knowledge of life and its challenges, it will help them be an active participant in, not only their own learning, but that of others as well.

My Question

At my school, I am required to use the adopted language arts program. However, I would like to incorporate a more in depth literature study which includes getting beyond

the basic levels of Bloom's Taxonomy and into higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom, 1956). This will give students practice making decisions based on their own feelings and judgments while supplying a justification. We are asked to make a variety of decisions on a daily basis. Being more clear about what one feels and why, can perhaps lead to making decisions through dialogue and mutual understanding.

I feel fortunate in that, at our site, teachers have been encouraged to supplement the adopted language arts program. Both the principal and the superintendent understand the need to look beyond the basic basal program to provide a richer and more diverse literature experience.

What I would like to know is what happens when third graders are taught to read and respond to literature critically? This is quite different from what normally happens in our school. What kinds of questions do they ask? Does it influence their book choices or engagement in reading? Are they able to take a more critical stance, such as questioning characters' actions and outcomes, through literacy? Are they more motivated to push for social justice? If they felt someone was marginalized, or not treated fairly, would they want to do something about it? Would they simply accept the status quo of inequity? What changes do I notice?

Students can become better readers and more critical readers by reading more. They need to practice questioning ideas and actions. They are learning to have a voice and not accept the written word as gospel. They have conversations with others and also have an opportunity to hear opinions and respectfully disagree. I want to provide opportunities for my students to read a variety of meaningful texts and genres and show

students we value reading by doing it.

Giving children experiences with a multitude of stories should start at an early age. Children need to be read to. It serves to model language and gives them access to a range of vocabulary. It can also stimulate conversations that help with acquiring new vocabulary. I know with my own two children we read a lot of picture books, wordless books, predictable texts, and rhyming books. We would read the same books over and over. They were able to tell me the story by looking at the pictures. There were some books that were reread many times because of a certain line or phrase. If there was something they did not understand they asked. It got them excited about print.

As a classroom teacher for many years, I had been feeling over the last few years, that my reading program I was providing left something lacking. Students were not excited about literature and many did not read books outside of school. In addition, there needs to be a reason to read. If reading a text or story is simply an assignment and there is no follow up, the interest is very low. Following what the basal reader outline is what I learned as a young teacher but that does not mean it is interesting or the students are interested in it. I was not sure how to make it more interesting. It takes a certain faith and willingness to risk to try something different than the publishers prescribed and, in some cases, scripted lessons. It takes more advanced planning and at times, skipping the basal reader altogether. There has to be some meaning for the students, some connection that makes them *want* to read or learn more.

I have also become increasingly concerned that so much emphasis is put on finding the “correct” answer, not only from the publishers but on the state mandated standardized test as well. Our adopted series in language arts is a perfect example. Most

all of the questions that are asked of students have them finding and regurgitating factoids from the text. Stories in school are seldom read for enjoyment or for aesthetic reading, but for “comprehension” or efferent reading. As Rosenblatt states, “One of the most troubling instances of the confusion of stances is the use of stories to teach efferent reading skills” (Rosenblatt, 1982). As a teacher I spent too much time trying to *teach* them elements of reading and interpreting text, instead of letting them experience it.

In the Literature and Literacy class I did a project on critical literacy. This entailed finding a book outside of the required curriculum that dealt with a social issue. I read a book called *I Wish I Were a Butterfly* by James Howe. It is about a cricket that thinks it is ugly and wishes it could be beautiful like the butterfly.

The students worked with the book for two weeks. The book was read to them to begin with. Small groups had the chance to read the book and ask questions about anything that was not clear to them. They had experiences with small group and whole group discussions, asking questions of each other, and defending their opinions. Doing this project brought new life into my language arts class. Finally we were reading books that had more of a connection to my students’ lives and were definitely more interesting.

Achieving a certain level of understanding is the goal of any language arts program. In my experience though, simply reading a story because a publisher picked it does not make the practice engaging or meaningful. My hope is that when given the opportunity to have a voice in what is being read, more control over how the experience is perceived, and engaging in more peer discussions students will begin to take a more active role in their learning. When students feel they have a purpose for reading, such as entertainment and are getting something out of it, such as examining their beliefs, they

are more likely to participate. I want to create circumstances in which students practice leading and taking part in a discourse to clarify their thoughts, challenge their beliefs, and encourage them to explore possible solutions to a variety of problems facing them in a society today. Literature has the power and ability to help them achieve that goal.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

According to the Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools (2007), by third grade students are getting less instruction on phonics and more emphasis is directed toward vocabulary acquisition, comprehension strategies, text analysis, and writing. The goal is to focus instruction on main idea, background knowledge connections, and inferential and literal comprehension (p. 94). All of these skills are needed in order to read and understand more complex texts that are part of subsequent grade curricula.

At my school, third grade students have historically scored below the state average on the state mandated standardized test. Over the last four years we have seen improvement with our English language learners (ELL) and Economically Disadvantaged (ED) but many are still not proficient on the test. Last year, in the 2008-2009 school year, 44% of California 3rd graders were proficient or advanced on that test. At my school, 35% of ELLs and 36% of ED students were in the proficient or advanced range. The previous year, the 2007-2008 school year, 38% of California 3rd graders were proficient or advanced on the test while at my school the numbers were 23% for ELLs and 22% for ED students (California Department of Education, 2009). We had a population of students that were unable to show proficiency on this state test.

After the 2007-2008 scores came out the third grade scores, again, were among the lowest of all the grade levels. Our Superintendent met with all the 3rd grade teachers to discuss the need to look at our curriculum and make necessary changes to help better

meet the needs of these subgroups, as well as all of the 3rd grade students. If these students were unable to achieve proficiency he wanted us to look at what we already do that works and anything we may need to change in order to get them to that level. The three 3rd grade teachers at our site met to brainstorm ideas on what we could do differently. We looked at the Reading/Language Arts Framework but felt it did not give us enough ideas or direction.

There were guidelines given under the general heading of Comprehension and Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text. The standards listed included asking questions and supporting answers with prior knowledge and using the information from the text, identifying answers in the text, and recalling major points in the text to make or modify a prediction (p. 106). These are skills we explicitly teach and practice. Yet, our students are still not able to read and respond consistently on assessments given for the story. Sometimes it was simply facts from the story, other times it is an inferential meaning that was missed.

One of the standards relevant to our 3rd grade team was “ask questions and support answers by connecting prior knowledge with literal information found in, and inferred from, the text.” (p. 106). This struck us because many of the stories we have in our basal reader seem far removed from the experiences of many of our students. Rosenblatt (1937) states that readers bring their own memories and past experiences, present needs and desires to a text to create a unique interaction. Perhaps what was missing in our program was literature that our students had some background knowledge about.

From there, I began to think of restructuring my program. I had been following

the curriculum as it was written. We would introduce the story, go over vocabulary, read the stories a couple of times, and respond in writing to questions. I wanted to include a variety of genres and topics that I thought my students could connect to or that had relevance in their lives. What I would like to know is what happens when 3rd graders are taught to read and respond to literature critically? This is quite different from what normally happens in schools. What kinds of questions do they ask? Does it influence their book choices or engagement in reading? Are they able to take a more critical stance through literacy? Are they more motivated to push for social justice? What changes do I notice?

I knew I was working toward incorporating critical literacy into my program. First, I felt it was important to define what literacy was, what critical literacy was, and how it looked in the classroom.

What is literacy?

The word literacy has become one of the latest buzz words in education. People use it in many different contexts with myriad of different meanings. Some are simple and easy to understand and others are quite complex. It usually is associated with reading and writing and includes basic skills in those areas.

The army in World War II coined the term functional literacy to indicate “the capability to understand written instructional directions necessary for conducting basic military functions and tasks ... at a fifth grade level” (de Castell, Luke, and Egan, 1986). The government then adopted the term to mean a minimum standard to be considered literate in the United States (Sharon, 1973). However, from there many definitions have

emerged that attempt to explain a term commonly used to describe a basic reading ability.

Literacy is frequently explained within a socio-cultural context (Erickson, 1984; Gregory, 2002; Gee, 1992). This approach looks at the link between learning and social interaction (Vgotsky, 1934/1978). He describes learning as being part of social events and it occurs when children interact with people and their environment.

This theory contrasts with the idea that literacy consists of decontextualized linguistics such as the sound of letters or phonemes and that, by learning these isolated skills, one will become literate. Rather, a sociocultural framework is seen as a contextualized, functional, and socially appropriate activity in which families participate on a daily basis (Ortiz, 2004). It is an interactive and dynamic process that happens when people transact with the sociocultural environment. It is the making of meaning from printed text that occurs in the environment (Perez, 1998).

In following with the sociocultural approach, McCarthey and Raphael (1992) believed the definition of literacy changes as a result of the consensus of the members of society. In looking back, in the 1800s literacy was defined as the ability to recognize and pronounce words. By the 1920s students were expected to read passages silently and be able to answer comprehension questions.

Literacy can be thought of as a set of changing cultural practices dictated by social institutions, social classes, and cultural interests (Luke and Freebody, 1999).

They considered literacy to be range of practices learners engage in with reading and writing. They are:

- (a) code breaker- recognizing and using features such as sounds and spelling;
- (b) meaning maker- to be able to understand and compare meaningful written,

visual and spoken texts;

(c) text user- knowing about and acting on the functions of various texts;

(d) text critic- being able to critically analyze and transform texts using understanding that all texts have particular points of view and should be critiqued.

As a more socially exclusive process, Courts (1991) noted that literacy is a way of interacting with reality to create a world that is beneficial and has meaning. Included in that definition are three types of literacy. There are “print” literacy, which alludes to making sense of one’s environment through reading and writing, “oral” literacy which means making sense of one’s environment through speaking and listening, and “media” literacy which refers to making sense of one’s environment through a combination of visual-audio and tactile media. All these imply interactions that help one to understand and know oneself as well as others.

Carver (2000) also believed there were three parts or levels to the definition of literacy. He referred to the first level as Literacy Level I. This was a beginning reader who would learn to read and comprehend written text at a 3rd grade level. Literacy Level II describes an intermediate reader who has mastery of the spoken language in order to understand the words, concepts, and principles contained in 3rd grade texts. Included in this level is the ability to read the words correctly with understanding at the same rate as if it were read to them. The last level is Literacy Level III which is characterized as an advanced reader. All the previous skills are expected to be applied but at an 8th grade equivalency. He believed spelling and the rate of reading would be included in the definition of literacy and being proficient at the 8th grade level would enable one to be a literate person.

Most of the research implies that literacy involves more than just basic skills in reading and writing. Moll et al. (1992) talk about “funds of knowledge” that refers to information, knowledge, and skills that are accumulated over time and is developed culturally. These bodies of knowledge and essential skills help households and individuals function in society.

Louise Rosenblatt (1938) argues that a person becomes a reader by establishing a relationship with the text. What is read becomes meaningful to a reader because a reader makes meaning from it. Rosenblatt asserts that the text and the reader are both important to the transaction. Whatever a reader’s experiences are, that’s what is brought forward to the text. It gives each individual a chance to make their own meaning from what is read (Creighton, 1997).

Critical Literacy

As with the definition of literacy, attempting to define critical literacy proves equally challenging. Learning to read and write at a basic level is essential for success in the 21st century. However, according to Paulo Freire (1970), reading is not just the decoding of the written word or language. It is a process that involves our previous and subsequent knowledge of the world. If one is to read critically, it implies an understanding of a relationship between the text and the context. Freire believes that to read the world comes before reading the word, and by reading the word he suggests that one is continually reading the world (p. 25).

Rosenblatt (1938/2005) spoke of readers having a “stance, or selective attitude, bringing certain aspects into the center of attention and pushing others into the fringes of

consciousness” (p. 10). The two stances she discusses are the efferent stance and the aesthetic stance. They are part of a continuum and the purpose for reading falls somewhere between these two stances.

The efferent stance is a term referring to the getting of information from a text. The focus is on what will be ‘taken away’ or learned from reading the text. This information can be used presently or stored away for some future use (p. 11). Reading an owner’s manual or textbook would be examples of reading with the efferent stance. The aesthetic stance is on the other side of the continuum. This involves using the senses, feelings, or intuitions. The reader focuses on these senses and feelings, living through the experience and enjoying reading for its own sake (p. 11). According to Rosenblatt, the reading and experiences gained from texts fall somewhere along that continuum.

Critical literacy reflects the idea that students learn to read by surrounding themselves with literature that is authentic and has some relevance in their lives. Students engage in dialogue and are taught to look at critically at texts and challenge the ideas and discourses in the texts (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2002). This is in contrast to classrooms focus almost exclusively on basic reading skill instruction with a concentration on teaching sound and symbol correspondence. This requires a certain amount of skill and drill. Cadiero-Kaplan (2002) refers to this as functional literacy. She acknowledges that basic skills are important and necessary, and that they should be incorporated into a critical pedagogy.

In literacy instruction, one important element is helping students develop the ability to take a critical stance when reading (Stevens and Bean, 2007). This involves students becoming more aware of their views and how these views influence how they

interpret and react to the world around them. Hall and Piazza (2004) believe critical literacy is “an active involvement in a text in ways that allow for multiple interpretations of texts and that reject the view that meaning is fixed or neutral” (p. 33).

Furthermore, Rosenblatt (1938) states that it is important for students to have a better understanding of themselves. Readers seek to be in another’s experience to be someone or somewhere they may never have to the chance to otherwise. In addition, many lessons can be learned vicariously through the text. Students are able to see consequences and alternatives from both sides of a story without being in the middle of it. It can enable them to get a different perspective than they had considered before.

Because of the population I work with, attention needs to be focused on how to help English language learners (ELLs) be part of this process. Cummins (1986) discussed a way to evaluate the efforts of schools in providing situations where minority students can be empowered. His four structures were (a) the inclusion of minority students’ cultures and language, (b) insertion of minority communities in the education of their children, (c) pedagogical assumptions and practices operating in the classroom, and (d) the evaluation of minority students.

Critical Literacy Practices

There are a wide range of activities that can show what readers know or take away from the text after they have read it. The goal is to give students an opportunity to show what they know in a more non-traditional mode. This is referred to as sign systems. Sign systems incorporate aspects of music, art, math, drama, or language (Leland and Harste, 1994). It is a way to express a different and unique perspective. Leland and

Harste go on to say that by moving through and among different sign systems, students are transmediating. This refers to taking meaning or understanding in one sign system and being able to express it in another sign system. It allows learners to reflect and make new or different connections.

One way to establish a relationship to a text is it to make a connection to it or reflect on a past experience that is similar. A reflection of a text gives a person the possibility of raising his or her awareness of previous held beliefs. It may lead to a closer look at those beliefs and the possible rethinking, exploring, or changing of them (Silvers, 2001). Reflections, because they are individual by nature, can be a product of our own biases and beliefs. Dialogue may be one way to challenge those assumptions.

According to Whitmore et al. (2005), through talk children reveal what they know. Discussions allow children to share their interpretations of literacy with their peers. It has the potential to help all members clarify or rethink their own meaning (p. 301). Dialogue can be a tool used for students to make themselves heard and define who they are (Creighton, 1997).

In addition, students can show their understanding of text in a variety of ways. Drawings provide a vehicle for expressing more detail and a deeper understanding than can be communicated in writing (Whitmore et al, 2005). Pictures can include more minute information about setting, character, or plot that is not easily expressed in words. Color, texture, size, or placement of details can have significant meaning that conveys a more complete idea. Drawings may also encourage more discussion as they are more easily understood than writing (p. 301).

Dramatic play may also aid children in being able to express their feelings and

understanding. It gives them an opportunity to be outside of themselves and into the characters of the story (Whitmore et al, 2005). By acting out parts of the story, children can show their level of understanding and their interpretation of characters actions and dialogue. It can be from a perspective they don't necessarily agree with but they can safely try it out.

In choosing books for critical literacy, Leland et al, (1999) suggest the following criteria:

They do not make difference invisible, but rather explore what differences *make a difference*;

They enrich our understanding of history and life by giving voice to those who traditionally have been silenced or marginalized;

They show how people can begin to take social action on important social issues;

They explore dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society to position people and groups of people;

They do not provide "happily ever after" endings for complex social problems.

Strategies. Critical literacy can be defined in many ways. Coming up with a definition is the first step in incorporating this practice into a classroom. From there the next challenge is figure out how to do it.

One of the goals of critical literacy is providing opportunities students' may have little or no experience with. Edward Behrman (2006) came up with six definitions of critical literacy and what those practices might look like in a classroom. The first practice he talks about is the incorporation of supplemental texts into the regular curriculum. It is important to include texts that deal with social issues. He also suggests

that the literature choices should consist of teen books, songs, movies, and nonfiction. Some textbooks used in classes are purposely not controversial.

Next he recommends reading multiple texts. It is one way to compare different authors' interpretation of the same situation. Some authors may choose to ignore or focus on certain aspects of the story which is in contrast to others. An example of this is all the various versions of Cinderella. Most of the books in some way center around Cinderella being poor but kind. However, in some stories such as *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* by John Steptoe, the competition for the prince is between two sisters and not stepsisters. The main character's patience and kindness are directed to animals and the needy.

The third suggestion is to read from a resistant perspective. This has to do with approaching a text from a different identity. If it is a boy, he might read as if a girl. If the child is Hispanic, she might read as if she were African American. If children can adopt an unfamiliar identity, it gives them an alternative frame of reference.

Producing countertexts is yet another approach to critical literacy. Students look at writing a narrative, or journal article as part of a marginalized subgroup. This would be a group that is not typically represented in the mainstream perspective. The students then are adopting that identity and responding to a topic from this perspective. It can allow them to find a voice by giving it legitimacy.

Another activity to consider is doing a student choice research project. The emphasis is on student choice. Teachers may want to narrow the possibilities but within parameters, students would get to choose something they are interested in. The difference between this activity and other research projects is that students must go

beyond a basic report. They must select a topic that poses a problem that has some affect on them. From there they must be able to reflect on the social and cultural forces that help or hurt that problem.

Finally, the last step is to take social action. The students need to look at how they can make a difference not only in their own lives, but the lives of others. It should move them beyond the classroom to the larger community. They may have been successful, or they may not. What is important though, is the reflection piece. If they are able to look at what worked and what did not on their project and actions they took, then they will be able to make more informed decisions next time.

According to Behrman, these six practices are often integrated. The teacher provides the structure and the guidelines but the student is pushed to take more responsibility.

Johannessen (2003) created a list of seven strategies to establish the context in which students can have authentic conversations. He believes teachers can begin to set up classrooms differently so there is less teacher talk and more inquiry driven conversations.

The first strategy is for the teacher to create some kind of controversy. This entails finding an issue that the students can relate to and are interested in but does not have only one way to address the situation. There may be multiple ways to look at the problem and as many possible solutions.

His second suggestion is to use small group collaboration. This gives students a chance to think about their position on an issue and share it with a smaller audience. It provides an opportunity to “try it out on others” to see if it makes sense and fits the

student's beliefs.

Once an issue has been selected, the next step is to pose questions that have no easy answer. By doing this, it encourages multiple perspectives. Students are forced to think outside of the box and think of possibilities they may have likely never thought of before. Often times when students are allowed to discuss possible solutions without fear of judgment ideas flow and students will begin to use each other for a springboard of additional ideas.

In using questions that have no easy answer, it is also important that these questions have some relevance to the students' lives. This helps to engage them in the conversation because it has a connection with what they are experiencing. The challenging part is to make sure they are questions that are important to the students and not just questions the teacher thinks are important. In addition, it is important to tap into prior knowledge on a subject. The connection between what they are learning and what they know about it increases not only their engagement but their motivation to do it.

Lastly, Johannessen rounds out his suggestions with an effort to make sure the questions posed truly require critical thinking. Students need guidance in being able to develop higher level thinking skills. When students are provided these opportunities with appropriate questions, they are given the chance to hone these skills and be able to apply them in other situations. It is also imperative that students be given time to respond. Answers to complex questions can not be quickly given. It takes time to think about and formulate a thoughtful answer.

Literature circles. Literature Circles is one approach that helps students in the process of exploring a book critically. Through dialogue and peer conversation, readers have the opportunity to look at and refine their understandings and beliefs. They are able to hear other interpretations and begin to form a deeper meaning of a text (Short and Harste, 1996).

Literature Circles also encourage reading as a transaction by having students bring to the group their background knowledge and experiences (Rosenblatt, 2005). There is not one correct answer or meaning but students come to the circle ready to share their thoughts and perspectives. It is through these interactions that they begin to look beyond their status quo and find new meanings or gain new insights in their lives and their literacy (Short and Harste, 1996).

The process is fairly simple. Students are given an opportunity to select a book that is of interest to them and are assigned a group to work with based on the book selection. The books can be read as a group, individually, or aloud by the teacher. When students come to the circle they are processing open-ended questions such as, “What do you think of the book?” rather than teacher generated questions. These discussions eventually lead to students taking more responsibility for their learning and gaining a deeper understanding of what was read.

Vasquez (2003) shared a series of mini lessons developed by Lee Heffernan. It involves six steps to help students work critically with picture books. The first step is to read the story aloud. Secondly, the students have time with the book and do a picture walk. They go back through, look at the pictures, and discuss what they notice. As they do this, they are encouraged to answer questions about what is important to remember

about the book and write down any questions the students have. From there it moves into small group discussions talking about the questions that were generated and this eventually moves on to a whole group discussion. In the next session, students are asked to find an illustration that they feel best represents the topics that had been discussed. The final step is for students to write about any connections they have made from the text. This may be used at a later time to develop into a more detailed writing piece.

Responding to literature can take many forms. Depending on what piece of literature and what the goal is in reading it, many choices are available. Providing students with the opportunity to read with a more critical stance enables them to look beyond the surface level of a text. This process encourages them, through practice, to develop questioning skills that may not come easily to them. It allows for more student participation and response with acceptance of different points of view. These skills have the potential to be far reaching and valuable as they become part of new and different social groups.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

In this study, I gave students an opportunity to read additional literature beyond the district adopted reading program. I also instructed and demonstrated how to read from a more critical stance and encouraged them to have more in-depth discussions and questions. In addition, I went through a process called BOOKMATCH (Wutz and Wedwick, 2005). BOOKMATCH is an acronym that stands for steps that teach students how to ask questions of themselves in choosing books for enjoyment. It draws their attention to different aspects of a book helping them make better decisions about the books they choose to read.

The questions guiding my research were:

1. How do literacy responses change when students are provided with increased opportunities to read and respond to many genres of literature that lend themselves to critical interpretations?
2. Do these experiences influence their book choices?
3. What do I notice about my teaching and my class's conversations that follow interactions with this practice?

Learning to read with a critical stance is not part of a typical reading program. Most publishers do not include procedures or instruction on how to instruct students in this process. Many teachers I have talked with and worked with acknowledge that students should be able to look at literature from a critical standpoint but most of them are not sure how to do it or where to begin. What I wanted to know, though, was how

students responded when given the chance to read critically and how would conversations be different between students. What types of questions would they ask? How would they feel about the process?

My journey began with a desire to teach language arts in a more meaningful way. I felt like we read stories and talked about them but in a superficial capacity. Students seldom seemed able or willing to look beyond the surface meaning or message of a story and were quite literal about it. For example, when we read the story *My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Seuss, which suggests that different colors can be used to show different feelings, many students focused primarily on what their favorite color was but not on how colors could depict how they were feeling. I decided to make critical literacy part of my program and explicitly provide opportunities for practice and reflection.

Carving out time for critical literacy in the daily schedule presented some challenges. Our usual schedule was to have language arts from 10:35 until 12:00. I switched students with another teacher during this language arts block. I had to be aware of the time and the content because we were both teaching the same curriculum and keeping a pacing schedule. We used a two week block to teach the story and subsequent skills that were identified as part of our essential standards. I was responsible for teaching the same stories and content as we had common assessments that we were required to give. However, I had some flexibility on how I approached this. As long as I covered the required material, I could provide an additional critical literacy experience to my students. Because the other third grade teacher had a higher needs group, she had more guided instruction where my group was more independent. This allowed me to alter the structure of my day. What I chose to do was take the last twenty five minutes of

the block and focus on critical literacy using children's picture books.

There are two third grade classrooms at our site. My team teaching partner and I divide up the students based on their initial reading assessment, fluency rate, how they scored on the STAR test from last spring, and their California English Language Development Test (CELDT) score. We used those measurements to make more homogeneous groups to better meet their needs. I took the larger, more capable group of students and my partner had a smaller, higher needs group. I taught this group because I had a similar group last year and my partner and I had agreed we would stick with one level for at least two years.

Subjects

My class is full with 26 third grade students. All of them had scored proficient on the initial reading assessment, were in the range of beginning third grade with their fluency scores, and were proficient or advanced on the STAR test in 2nd grade. I have seven students who speak only English. However, the others' CELDT scores ranged from Intermediate to Early Advanced. Intermediate is a level where students are still trying to get a grasp on the English language and its usage. From our experience and interactions with these students, we determined that they have enough English to converse and understand much of what is said or happens in a classroom but they are still somewhat limited in their understanding of more complex texts because of their lack of vocabulary.

The students are part of a K-7 charter school in northern California where approximately 410 students attend. The school has sixty-eight percent are on the Federal Government's Free and Reduced Lunch Program. Fifty-four percent are considered

second language learners with Spanish being the primary language for most of them.

Methods

Reading an additional book beyond the adopted program's anthology has been part of my language arts program for many years. When I had taught 4th and 6th grade there were stories in the basal reader that were only excerpts from a particular book. This seemed disconnected and left out so much of the context, and, I felt, the enjoyment. I thought it was important to give the students experiences with an entire book. It was a way to promote daily reading as they were responsible for having a certain amount of pages read each day, and to encourage group discussions to clarify what happened or to understand the text better. For many students, they remember this part of the language arts program more than any other part. When I moved to 3rd grade I simply continued that practice.

I often have groups of five to six students reading the same book, when titles were available. For example, last year, groups of students read *Mathilda* by Roald Dahl, *Wayside School is Falling Down* by Louis Sachar, and *Ramona the Brave* by Beverly Cleary. These books were chosen based on interest and how many copies I could find. They would have group discussions based on questions I had developed in hopes of gaining a deeper understanding of the book and have a chance to present varied opinions about characters and events. The discussions were typically led by students of that group but responses were not always written down or recorded. When the books were finished, the students are typically responsible for a project to show their level of understanding and what they enjoyed about the book.

For this study, some changes were made in this process. The books chosen were based on the students' interests and from selections that lent themselves to a more critical stance. All books used were children's picture books. I decided to use picture books because I wanted high interest literature and an accessible reading level so students would be able to focus on the content more than the vocabulary and length of the book.

Most of the books were read and discussed in a two week period. *Just a Dream* went longer as I had more activities planned around that story. Because my team teaching partner and I don't exchange our students on Wednesdays, it meant approximately eight days per book. The language arts block was one hour and a half with the critical literacy time being the last twenty-five minutes each day.

All the reading and group activities were done in that twenty-five minute time period. None of the preparation for their groups or assignments was done outside of the class. If discussions or activities went too long for a single time period, we simply carried it over to the next day. The goal was to enrich the experience within the classroom but to not add additional work outside of the classroom.

The schedule was somewhat similar each time we read a book. On the first day, students would respond to a prompt designed by me to get them thinking about their background knowledge with regards to the story. They would have time to write before they were asked to share their responses in a small group. These discussions would often spark a variety of thoughts and memories as students made additional connections. After the small group discussions, students are invited to share with the larger group. Most students want to share with the larger group but none of them were required to, only in the smaller group. After that discussion, I would preview the book or books with a quick

introduction and how it related to the theme we were working on.

Days two and three were typically reading days. If they finished it and had extra time, they were encouraged to go back through and look more specifically at the pictures. Day four was when they would write down any questions they had about the story or anything that was unclear. I would take their questions and type them up to be answered the next day in small groups. Days five and six usually involved responding to the questions or reflecting on the story read. After the questions are answered individually, again students are to meet in small groups and talk about their responses.

Days seven and eight were spent working on their projects for the book. I kept the guidelines purposely vague so they could respond in a way that made sense to them. Students were required to share the finished product with the class and answer questions about their interpretation.

Most times the groups students were in were chosen at random. If students were all reading the same book, I would pull a stick with the students' name on it and assign them to a group. If students had different books, they would sometimes meet with the others who also read that book, and at times meet with students who had read a different book.

In the discussions between students I did not step in as the leader of any of the groups. I often let the group choose the leader or I assigned one if they could not come to some agreement. I had spent some time at the beginning of this critical literacy process demonstrating how a group meeting should go. I used examples of what not to do, such as put someone down because their ideas might be different than others, or how it affects the group when others are being disrespectful to the leader or other members. I then

followed that up with what helps a group be productive with everyone having the chance to participate and feeling listened to.

As groups met, I walked around the room listening in but offering few comments on what they were sharing. I only stepped in if there was a disagreement which they were having trouble resolving. They were to come to the group with some reflections or questions that they had already had time to think about and respond to. This facilitated a more productive conversation between students.

While students met and shared ideas, I sometimes would take notes on what was said or certain student reactions. Other times I had them record themselves with a tape recorder while I was not present. Once they had time to meet in small groups we would come back together as a whole group and share. There was typically a prompt asking them to think about the message of the story or questions they might have had while reading or other times it was the questions they had generated and were answering as a group.

At the end of the day, I would reflect on what was shared and how the process went. I found this writing helpful in determining what aspects went well, and what changes I might make in subsequent lessons or days. It was an opportunity for me to put thoughts and feelings down on paper that may have otherwise been forgotten. Often times when I began writing about the day, ideas or impressions came flowing back that I might have overlooked had I not taken the time while the activity was still fresh in my mind.

Before we got too far in this process, I surveyed the students about topics that were of interest to them or important to them as I wanted the reading material to reflect

this interest or concern. It was a graphic of a head and I asked them to write down the types of things they think about, worry about, or simply like. I encouraged them to reflect on what they find themselves thinking about. I gave a couple of examples such as bullying since we had already read *Hooway for Wodney Wat* by Helen Lester and taking care of the Earth as we had just had our Eco-Week activities that were primarily based on being Earth friendly. I was careful to not give too many suggestions so the topics would be more student-generated.

Literature Groups

The two areas I wanted to focus on in this study were providing opportunities for additional reading in literature and creating a safe environment in which students could share and learn about themselves and others. In order to create that type of environment I first had to establish rules about what interactions would look like and sound like. The students shared ideas about what they thought it should be like. We made a list of people's suggestions. From there we talked in more detail about why we should or shouldn't include certain rules. When we finished we had established the following rules:

1. Give everyone a chance to speak. Many of the students realized that in group discussions not everyone was always given a chance to speak.
2. Ask questions if you do not understand. They may clarify what someone is saying or give that person a chance to explain their views in more detail.
3. Disagree in a respectful way. Put downs were not allowed and if they disagreed the student would have to say why.

4. Do not dominate the conversation. This was a big one because most students, at one time or another, had experienced a situation where one person speaks more than anyone else. They all agreed they did not like this so they felt it was important to put in.

These rules were agreed upon by both the students and me. They were also practiced in small groups, as well as, the whole group.

Literature Books

There were a variety of texts used for data collection. The first book I chose was *Hooway for Wodney Wat* by Helen Lester. I chose this book as a starting point because it dealt with bullying which many of my students had experienced at one time or another. I also liked that the illustrations were colorful and prominent on each page and the amount of text on the pages was not intimidating. In addition the story was presented in a humorous way. This was read by the whole group as I could get twelve copies of the book.

The second book we read was called *Just a Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg. This is a book about the environment that I felt was appropriate based on the fact that our school had recently become an Eco-Literacy charter school with our focus being on ecological issues. Again, I was able to get many copies of this book so it was read by all of the students either independently or with a partner.

The next area of study was sibling rivalry. Based on the survey I had given, a number of students stated that this was something that they had been bothered by or had an interest in. For this particular topic I was unable to find multiple copies of any one

book so I had thirteen copies of various titles. Each one had some conflict between siblings to some degree. Students could self select books but were required to read at least two different titles. Since there were a number to titles the requirement to read additional books ensured there would be groups of at least two who had read the same book. For third graders who are relatively new to the process of critical conversations it helps facilitate discussions when they have read the same story.

Speaking two different languages was also a topic that showed up on the survey. The books I selected were about how children either acquired a new language or communicated with someone who spoke a different language. As with the previous topic of sibling rivalry, I was able to find a variety of books but few were the same title. There were some about children learning English, some about kids who had challenges in navigating their way through the American culture, and two about children wanting to communicate with grandparents who spoke a different language. Students again, were required to read at least two different books from the selections available for the same reasons as stated above.

Culminating Activities

For each topic of literature study, students were required to share with the class how they made meaning of what they had read. It was not evaluative, in that it did not earn them a grade, but was meant more of a means of communicating what they had taken away from the book. There were few limitations on how students demonstrated this other than it was not necessarily a written or verbal response to a given story. Choices ranged from drawing or painting to role playing or singing. As Rosenblatt

(2005) states, it can reveal what has been meaningful to the reader. It can be a positive or negative reaction.

These activities can also become a springboard for additional conversations among students. When reactions to a text are markedly different it becomes a chance to examine why or how others interpreted the meaning differently. This reinforces the idea that people understand and relate to text in unique ways drawing meaning based on personal connections and experiences.

All of final projects were shared either with the whole class or in small groups depending on if the students worked independently on it or in a group. If the majority of the students worked independently on an activity, then they were shared in small groups in the interest of time. When students worked with partners, they shared with the whole group.

Once a student or group had presented, other students had the opportunity to ask a relevant question for clarification or comment on something they particularly liked about the project. After all the projects were shared the students would do a brief reflection in their journals on the book and the activities. It gave them the chance to write if they liked a book or not and why. This was also where some of them would discuss what they noticed about different responses and opinions. This led to a follow up discussion on multiple interpretations and valuing differences. It did not always happen after a story, but when it did it facilitated a deeper conversation.

Student Evaluations

As the final part of this study I surveyed the students at the end of the eight week

study about their interest in the process. They were asked to evaluate what they liked about incorporating critical literacy into the daily schedule and what they did not like. They were also asked to think about what book they enjoyed the most and why. The survey was purposely kept short to have the focus on answering honestly.

As with this entire process, I want the students to have a voice and to know that they are listened to. I value their opinions and feedback because it helps to know how to proceed.

A more in-depth analysis will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this project was to observe how students responded when given the opportunity to experience literature that allowed for a critical response as part of the daily language arts curriculum. The questions guiding my research were:

1. How do literacy responses change when students are provided with increased opportunities to read and respond to many genres of literature that lend themselves to critical interpretations?
2. Do these experiences influence their book choices?
3. What do I notice about my teaching and my class's conversations that follow interactions with this practice?

As I went through this process I kept detailed notes about interactions between students, interactions between students and myself, as well as my impressions and observations that would help inform my teaching.

My research was conducted with my language arts group. In the first week of school, the other third grade teacher and I divided up the students based on their initial reading assessment, fluency rate, how they scored on the STAR test from last spring, and their California English Language Development Test (CELDT) score. We used those measurements to make more homogeneous groups to better meet their needs. We meet four days a week for ninety minutes. Of that time, I used the last twenty-five minutes each day for our literature exploration.

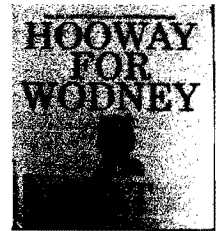
My research lasted approximately nine weeks. I was able to do four different areas of study. We read books about bullying, taking care of the environment, sibling

rivalry, and people who speak two languages. For some of the topics I was able to find enough books that students could partner read, and for other topics I found copies of multiple titles that were relevant to the theme

Each student was given a Literature Response Journal, which I created with lined paper stapled between a piece of construction paper, to record thoughts, feelings, and connections. At the beginning of each story I had the students reflect on the topic of the story and write about what thoughts or feelings they had in relation to it. Throughout the story students would record opinions and insights about characters or events. These reflections were used as a springboard for class discussions.

Hooway for Wodney Wat

The first book we worked with was *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. I chose this book because most children, at one time or another, have experienced some form of bullying. It also appeared on a list of social issues books compiled by Christine Leland. In this book, Rodney Rat is teased relentlessly at school because he can not pronounce his R's correctly. He eventually becomes a hero as the bully, Camilla Capybara, ends up leaving and not coming back because she mistakenly follows Rodney's directions which are misunderstood because of his speech.



The first activity included some quiet thinking time to reflect on a time each student had felt bullied. I also asked the class to think about if they had in turn been a bully themselves. Responses were written in their journals. Students were invited to share if they wanted to. Many spoke of older siblings or relatives treating them unkindly.

Everyone stated that they didn't like it but few of the students felt like there was much they could do about it.

As for bullying someone else, a few of the students honestly admitted that they had bullied someone else, usually a smaller sibling. I did not ask them why they did it, as the idea was more to have them reflect and be honest with themselves.

I had multiple copies of this book that I was able to get from the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE) so on the second day students partnered up and read it silently to themselves. As they read I could see how engaged they were as it was quiet with only the sound of turning pages and an occasional giggle. The illustrations were humorous and I watched their eyes go from the text to the pictures to back to the text again. The book entertained them and they were enjoying the experience.

The next day we met, I had the students meet in small groups and go back through the book and do a picture walk. This entails going page by page and discussing the story line while looking at the illustrations. As students worked on this activity I suggested that they keep in mind the picture they each felt was most important to the story.

On the fourth day I had them do a critical response sheet (see Appendix C) independently then they met in groups to discuss it. As they were sharing in their groups, I walked around listening in on conversations. The first asked what messages they got from the story. There were some varied responses.

- Bryan- to defend yourself
- Marta- people are being mean
- Art- Just because you're little doesn't mean you can't help.

The second question was "What do you think the author wants us to know by reading the book?"

- Maggie- He wants to show you to not be a bully
- James- So we won't be a big, fat bully.
- Abigail- Even though there's a bully he can still be himself.
- Cole- He wants to show kids how not to be a bully.

The third question was "Is this is a problem in our community (classroom, neighborhood, etc.)?"

- Rosie- at my other school, Bellevue
- Mateo- It happens at the park because no teachers are around.
- Sandy- It happens at the mall. One kid was being mean to me trying to hit me. I told him to stop.
- Juan- It happened at a friend's house. A friend punched me in the nose and it started to bleed.

This fourth question was "What could be done to help?"

- Rosie- I would tell people not to bully.
- Julia- I would tell the bully that it's not good.
- Maggie- I would scream, "Stop it!" so others can help.

This next question was "Who do you think might get upset by this story?"

- Auggie- It might bother people that are being mean bullies.
- Joel- Some little kid might get bullied.
- Colby- Bullies might be bothered. Little kids might make him upset.

Lastly, "What would you say to them?"

- Bryan- Stop it!
- Betsy- Go away!

It took two days to get the response sheet answered in the small groups and shared with the whole class. Meanwhile, going back to their picture walk activity, I asked my students to find the page they felt was most important to the story. I made a list as they were finishing up their sharing and made copies later for our next meeting.

There were many different pages copied. The task for this day was to write an explanation as to why that particular picture was important to the story. Although many

students had chosen the same pictures, the information was all slightly different. This was how the story was interpreted by each individual student. It showed me that the students all had a good grasp of what the story was about, in terms of the bullying, but took something somewhat personal from it. That was what I was hoping to see.

After our six days with this story, I gave them an opportunity to create a project or activity based on what they felt was important about the story. The directions were simply to think of a way to show or communicate the message of the book. I wanted them to think about how to share that message with others. Usually when projects are assigned there are explicit directions given and a lot of questions asked. I had kept my directions purposely less directed. It was an interesting process to watch. Many initially felt uncomfortable because they were required to make their own interpretations and were not quite sure how to do it. Without definite guidelines given by the teacher, students were worried they would not do it right. Obviously, there was a feeling of needing to know exactly what was expected. For many this was a new experience. I had no samples prepared, no visuals to look at. There were some confused looks and murmurs between students, but knowing they were not getting specific directions from me, most made a plan and moved forward.

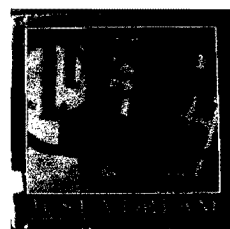
Most of the students opted to do a poster. On the posters they illustrated different parts of the book. One group picked the parts of the book they thought were the funniest, not necessarily depicting the pictures that showed how the bully was dealt with. A couple of the groups also drew the last few pictures showing the bully going off to the west and not coming back.

This type of interaction with a book was a new process for these third graders and

me, as their teacher. It was clear there was some discomfort on both of our parts. I often spend more time guiding my students on what I feel is important in a story. I had to let some of that control go and allow these readers the freedom to interpret and experience the story in their own way. With the final project, in particular, I stepped back and tried to not have a certain expectation of what my students should do. It was not easy but I felt this was a good first experience for both the kids and me.

Just a Dream

This story is by Chris Van Allsburg. It is a story about a boy named Walter. Young Walter is a careless boy who tosses trash on the grass, thinks recycling is a waste of time, and makes fun of his neighbor, Rose, for her delight in the tree she has just received for her birthday. Walter longs to live in the future, which he imagines to be full of robots, tiny personal planes, and machines that make life easier. One night when he falls asleep, his wish to live in the future comes true. However, his dreams carry him into a future not filled with the robots and machines he believes will make life better, but instead ravaged by the careless mistakes of the past. When he wakes up, he is a changed boy. On his birthday, he asks for a tree, which is planted near Rose's birthday tree. When he falls asleep that night, he dreams of the future again. In this dream, he is shown a different version—instead of a world of robots and machines, laundry hangs on the line, a man mows his lawn with a motorless mower, and Walter is delighted to see that the two little trees have grown tall and strong in the clean air.



I chose this book because we had just had Eco-Week, which is a week long focus on ecology and literature that the whole school was involved in. I had read this book

many times with my own two children because Chris Van Allsburg is one of my favorite children's authors. I remember enjoying the illustrations and liking the message about taking care of the environment.

As a prompt on the first day, I asked them "What do you know about taking care of the environment?" Most had some general understanding of recycling, conserving water, and saving energy. Picking up garbage, not littering, and not cutting down trees were also mentioned.

- Hilary-It is the saddest thing if our earth died because we could die with it.
- Julia-You never trash the Earth because the other planets don't have life on them, just Earth does.

As with the previous book, the students shared what their understanding was of the theme before they read the book. Again, I was able to get multiple copies of this title so students were able to read the book in partners. The second day was simply reading the book because it was a longer book and within my class I have many different reading rates. As the students read I encouraged them to make notes about anything that was unclear or that they thought was worth remembering.

On day three I had them read the book again. This book was not only longer than the first book but had more subtle detail that may have been missed on the first reading. I wanted to give the students an opportunity to reread, look more closely at the illustrations, and look for any connections they could make to either their own lives or what we had recently studied in Eco-Week. I was hoping this would generate some conversations about what they are doing or not doing to help protect the Earth. It did not turn out that way.

We have been writing about connections to reading all year long. The students

are familiar with text to self, text to text, and text to world connections. Many of them said they had had dreams while they were sleeping. Two students wrote that they had planted trees like Walter did. Some of the responses showed an ability to really compare their experiences with what happened in the book.

- James- *Just a Dream* reminds me of when I read a book called *Garbage Trucks*. I saw a big ugly landfilled and big machines.
- Maggie- When I read the book *Just a Dream* the boy was in his bed flying in the sky. That reminds me of when I went on a ride in Disneyland and I was flying.
- Julia- In the book *Just a Dream* a boy named Walter travels in his bed at night but I don't. I like that my bed doesn't travel because it is nice at home.

The next day I tried a different approach. I had developed a Critical Response sheet using the outline from Lee Heffernan. I modified it from the sheet I had used with *Wodney Wat*. I took out the question that asked about what they thought the author wanted them to know (see Appendix D). I took this out because I thought question one and questions two were somewhat similar. Questions one got at the same idea, asking what message they got from the book, but with a more direct question. I also streamlined the page because some of the students got confused with the difference between the questions. The difference between the questions is subtle but the goal is to get them thinking about what the book is trying to say, not to confuse them.

I had students work in small groups of four or five to answer the questions together. At one point as I was walking around listening to people, Mateo and Julia were having a disagreement on what the message was from the story. Mateo thought it had more to do with Walter and his flying bed but Julia felt certain that the message had to do with polluting. Mateo did not like that Julia was trying to tell him what she thought the

message was. He looked at me and said next time he did not think they should be in the same group. On reflection, it could have been an opportunity for both of them to get the book and defend their argument. It may have helped clarify it for both of them.

Looking over the responses, about half of the students had the general idea of the book, which is if we do not take care of the environment terrible things could happen. Two of the students focused on the dream of the future and the fact that Walter wanted to initially go the future but then realized he did not want to. This was somewhat correct but it appears to miss the deeper meaning of the horrors he experiences in the future when people are not being environmentally responsible. One student responded about the message being to not be mean, and another wrote that the message was to not steal. Both of these students were high level English language learners so it made me think that there was some misunderstanding in their reading. It would have been a good time to question the students and have them give me more detail. It may have been that what they wrote did not adequately reflect what they thought.

The next two questions asked “Is this a problem in the community (classroom, neighborhood, etc?)” and “What could be done to help?”. Almost all of the students responded with saying litter and pollution are a problem in our community. They went on to say that people should not litter and should recycle more. Many children also responded with writing that more people should pick up trash.

Doing the critical response page took longer than I had hoped. It went into two days and I think that was because the students still were relatively new to the process so it took some time and extra discussion. That, in and of itself, was not a problem. I was more concerned about some of the responses that seemed to miss the main message. I

decided to try another response sheet I adapted from Lee Heffernan to see if there were aspects of the story that did not make sense. I thought this might give students who were not making a connection with the theme of taking care of the Earth a chance to ask questions so I could better understand what parts of the story seemed confusing to them.

The next day I introduced a different page (see Appendix E). The sheet I produced had only two areas of response. The first box asked the students to write down any questions they had while reading the book. The second box asked if anything surprised them in the book. I had them go through the book again and fill in the sheet. At the end of the period I collected them. I made a master list of questions based on what they had written. If the question was a duplicate I only included it once. Some questions were similar but if they were worded differently enough to alter their meaning, I included them as well (see Appendix F).

The following day, the students were grouped to answer the questions together. Each student took turns reading a question and the students in that group took turns answering it. I monitored the groups by walking around but I did not sit in on any of them.

I asked the groups to think about how much each question was talked about. If it seemed like most of the group had something to say about a question, then I wanted the leader to make a mark next to that one. If there was not much to be said about a question, then that one would not be marked. There were some lively conversations. The students had more to say and were more on task than the previous activity. The questions that were marked were then discussed as a whole group. Many of the students answered each question in the same way, perhaps changing a word or two of their response, but the basic

meaning was similar.

Providing more structure with having the questions already typed out made it easier to generate a response. The critical response sheet initially used needed more explanation. It would have been better to go through that sheet with the whole class, modeling how to think about the answers. The second sheet was more straightforward and allowed them to answer based on what they knew from the story instead of being confused with how the questions were worded.

For the final activity many of the students chose a different project than before with *Wodney Wat*. Some did posters but two groups did puppets with props and backgrounds. One group wrote a song and sang it. It was exciting to see the different ways the students chose to show their understanding of the theme.

As I think back on it now, I can see that more detailed connection with Eco-Week, our school wide focus on ecology and literature could have been helpful. I could have provided some additional background with a movie or visits to miscellaneous web sites that deal with environmental issues. It might have helped to begin with more guiding questions about the environment instead of just giving them a prompt.

The environment is a big topic in the news, both in the newspaper and on the television. For all of that information about taking care of the Earth, few made the connection that what Walter was doing was going to the future and seeing how bad the environment could be if it was not taken care of. Many of the students focused on Walter's bed floating but not that he was seeing the grim future.

I also felt I spent too much time on this book. I was looking for more understanding of the message of the book by some of the students. I got caught up in the

traditional paradigm of teaching reading in that I felt like everyone should have similar responses and insights into the problem posed by the book. It was that uncomfortable place for me again, worrying that readers were not understanding what they were reading. Here I had this wonderfully written book confronting the issues our planet could be facing in the near future, and some of the students did not get it. This ultimately became my problem, not theirs. I wanted this experience to be enjoyable and perhaps spark an interest in reading more, not a quest to find the perfect enlightened response. I want to be more conscious of this the next time around.

I had picked the first two stories because I was familiar with them and thought the students would be able to understand and relate with the issues presented. I also felt that these books represented challenges that allowed my students to practice looking at literature from a more critical stance. However, I wanted to give the students a chance to read books with issues or problems that were important to them. I made a graphic of a head to find out what types of things they were thinking or concerned about. I wanted to know what was going on in their head.

I introduced the page and talked with them about issues or concerns that they may have. I gave a couple of examples like bullying, which we had already talked and read about, and how siblings sometimes have a hard time getting along. Although I am sure many of them feel that way, the problem of sibling rivalry did appear on almost all of the students' sheets. I was trying to give them some ideas but they tended to put down the examples I gave. Some other interesting topics were being laughed at because of the clothing worn, feeling left out, not being able to get what is wanted, having to speak Spanish at home, and having to do all of the chores. From this student generated list, I

decided to focus on the topic of sibling rivalry.

Sibling Rivalry

The next step was to find books that fit that genre. I spent an afternoon at the public library looking for appropriate books. I also asked our librarian what she had that would fit. I ended up with nine books that were available from the public library and eleven from the school librarian. Each one had some aspect of it that dealt with sibling relationships. Not all of them characterized the sibling as annoying, but in many of them it presented the challenges of living with siblings. Unfortunately, I was not able to get multiple copies of any of them, but I did have twenty different titles.

For this literature study, I approached it differently than the others. For one thing, I did not want them to respond to so many questions like in the previous study. Instead, I wanted the focus to be on discussions with other students. There would be a time for response and reflection but not in the same way as the first two stories.

Since I did not have a book for every two students I set it up so that each child would read at least two titles. There were many different types of stories and by reading two different titles they would be able to compare and contrast them. I was hoping to provide various perspectives to a common problem the students all shared. For example, one book was about a younger brother that just wanted to help his twin sisters but everything he thought would be nice, they did not like. Another one was from the perspective of the parent dealing with squabbling siblings.

We still started with writing about an annoying sibling or relative. I asked them to think about what that person did that was irksome and to give as much detail as possible. This was one area that many of the students felt strongly about. For many of

them it was the most they had written before reading a book. Students wrote for about fifteen minutes then they shared in small groups. It was a spirited discussion with a number of children having similar experiences.

Before they began reading, I did a brief book talk on all of the books to give them a quick idea of what they were about. From there, I had them select a book they wanted to read. Many kids doubled up on a book. When they finished reading that book I asked them to write about the circumstances around the annoying or sibling behavior. What did the sibling do to be annoying? Why was it annoying to others? What happened because of the behavior?

The next step was to pick another book and do the same process. The goal was at least two books but some students were able to read three books. I wanted them to read more than one because there were a number of the books that offered slightly different perspectives.

By the third day when students had read at least two books, we talked about how they were similar to a character in the books. They started this discussion in small groups with it leading to a whole class discussion. Fourteen students compared themselves to characters in eight of the books.

- Sandy- In *Boomer's Big Surprise* the dog is jeles (jealous) of the baby dog. When my mom had my baby brother I was jeles (jealous) to.
- Ella- From *The Pain and the Great One* I'm more like Chester because the younger child messes every thing up gust like my sister.

The following day their assignment was to think about one of the books they had read. Using the main character in the story, the students filled in a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the character and the annoying person they had chosen to write about the first day. Again, this was shared in small groups then with the rest of the

class.

The final activity for these books was to go back to thinking about their original writing. I asked them to write a reflection on why they thought the person, a sibling or relative, acted the way he or she did. I wanted them to think about if that individual's true intention, as far as they could tell, was to be annoying or could it be another reason. Then they wrote as if they were that person. Their insights exceeded my expectations.

Julia who had written about her younger brother was able to write about how he just wants to play with her but seems to always make a mistake. Marta understood that her little brother just wanted to tell her things in the movie but wasn't trying to be annoying. Cole had written about his younger sister. In his writing he thought she would say that the reason she's mean to him is because he thinks she can't do anything and he helps her when she doesn't want help.

I was surprised at the number of students who acknowledged that younger siblings often times just want some attention from the older sibling or to play. Many wrote that they would play with them next time. It is not clear how many really followed through with that but at least they considered it.

I liked this literature study because I felt the students had more to say and more time to get to share either in small groups or with the class. Even though there was some responding required it was not more than a few sentences at a time. Additionally, what they did write was directly related to them so it made it easier to get ideas down on paper. I felt the work with these books ignited an interest that the first two books did not necessarily do. Although students enjoyed the first two books I was concerned that some of them were feeling overwhelmed with answering so many questions. I approached this

study in a different way and the change helped bring back some energy and enthusiasm.

Dual Language Study

Another topic that came out of the survey was about people speaking two languages. I have many students who are bilingual. Many of my students are Spanish speaking but I do have one Vietnamese and one Cambodian student. In addition, I have ten students who speak only English. There are occasional conflicts between students when someone is speaking a language that the others do not understand or understand well.

Similarly, as with the sibling rivalry books, I found multiple titles. This time however, I also was able secure five copies of *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi. After making my way to four libraries in the area, as well as our school library, I had two copies of two other titles as well. What I found interesting was that most of the books I could find had to do with speaking an Asian language. I was looking for more books about being bilingual with English and Spanish but many of those books were not available.

The prompt I had them initially respond to was asking them to think about what it is like to learn another language. I wanted them to write down what they could remember about doing that, from their school experience, frustrations, and/or triumphs. If they had not learned another language I wanted them to think about what it might feel like to go to school with everyone speaking a language they were not familiar with. As they shared their experiences I got the feeling from some of their responses that many did not really remember the process. Many wrote that it is hard to learn a language but it was not clear as to why or what was hard about it. Some of the students also responded that

they knew more than two or three languages. However, when questioned more about their knowledge, it turns out they only knew a few words but in their mind that made them bilingual.

I decided to try something different on the prompt to look for responses where everyone could have the same experience. A few months previously we had read a story called *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco. It was about the author's great grandmother who came from Russia to the United States. She spoke no English when she arrived and described the language as sounding like "pebbles dropping in a bucket of water". I asked the students to imagine suddenly finding themselves in Russia and having no idea what was being said or communicated because they no knowledge of the language. We did a think-pair-share about this topic. This generated what I felt was a more genuine discussion as it put all the students in the same situation.

- Brian- I would feel uncomfortable. I would want to move.
- Cole-I wouldn't know how to make a friend.

I asked him to think about what he could do. Cole responded that he would try to copy what people were saying.

- Mateo-I would carry around an English-Russian dictionary.
- Hilary- It would feel weird. I would not know if people were saying mean things.
- James- I would feel like I don't belong. If I didn't know where to eat lunch, I would wander around school to see where everyone else was eating lunch.

The next day, after a brief book talk about the books, students chose a book to read. In their journals they were to reflect on the book and write a brief description about what they felt the benefits and drawbacks of the characters being faced with the

challenges of either speaking or learning two languages. I also encouraged them to write any questions they might have after reading the book. The third day consisted of doing the same process with another book.

By day four I had them get into small groups with people who had also read the same book. The students filled out a sheet before hand (see appendix G) asking them to think about what is important to remember about the book, if anything had surprised them, and to generate a possible writing topic from their own lives that might relate to the book.

Some of the comments made about what is important to remember about the book were as follows:

- Ella-I think this book is important because Unhei wants an American name but in the end she wants to keep her name.
- Julia- Don't feel uncomfortable learning a different language.
- James-The mom had a hard time speaking English.

The responses about what surprised the students were primarily about the book *The Name Jar*. Many of the students were surprised she did not like her name or that others would make fun of it. One student was surprised that she did not pick an American name. In the book *My Name is Yoon*, two students were surprised that she wanted to be a bird, a cupcake, and a cat. For *Dear Juno* a student was surprised that Juno knows his grandma has a new cat.

When asked to make a connection to their own life, I felt some of the students had moved passed the more superficial connections such as the characters a girl and I am a girl, or the character has a green sweater and I have a green sweater. The connections now were more insightful. Some of the students could remember starting a new school

and how scary it had been not knowing anyone and trying to make friends. Two students, who have unique names, remembered how the first day in school kids were not saying their name correctly. One also wrote about helping another student from Asia who did not know English learn to write some words and her name in English.

Because we were fast approaching the Thanksgiving break, the students did not do a final project with these books. I did ask them, though, to think about what they could do to help someone who speaks another language feel welcome at our school. Just about all of the students responded that they would help that new person know where to go around the school and would play together at recess. In response to the question about what would not help, many stated that teasing or laughing at someone new would not help.

I think there was potential to extend this study with role playing to deepen the understanding of what it might feel like or designing a welcome committee handbook to ensure all new students knew the basics about how things functioned at our school. Unfortunately there were time constraints with previously scheduled commitments that resulted in a more abbreviated study. If this is an area of interest with students next year, I will make every effort to do a more detailed study.

Student Surveys

When the nine week study had ended a survey was distributed to get some additional feedback from the students (see appendix H). They were asked about aspects they enjoyed about making critical literacy part of the daily schedule and what they did not like. I also wanted to know what books made the biggest impact with them and why. Lastly, I asked what types of books they would like to read. I did not ask for their name

so they could be honest and not worry that I would know who wrote it.

I was surprised by the students' responses. There were fifteen students who answered the survey. Of that fifteen, seven of them responded that they did like the critical literacy time. Two answered that they sometimes like it, and six said they did not like it.

There were varied responses as to what students like about the critical literacy time. Three students like working with a friend or partner. Two liked writing about it or in their journal. Two liked the books because they were fun with one more adding it helps you to learn something. There were also three students who did not answer that question.

When asked what they did not like, there were many different answers. Two had strong feelings about *Smoky Night* and that left a negative feeling for them (*Smoky Night* was a book we had read after I finished my research). Some responses were, "I don't like it because it takes time away and you don't finish most of your work." Some of the students did not like writing about the book or how they felt. One did not like to share how he or she felt.

There was a tie for the students' favorite book. Five liked *Hooway for Wodney Wat* and five liked *Smoky Night*. One liked *The Name Jar* and three liked *Just a Dream*. One student liked all of the books except *Smoky Night*. No one picked any of the sibling rivalry books we had read.

Most of the students who chose *Hooway for Wodney Wat* as their favorite, liked it because it was funny. One felt like it made you learn a lesson. For *Smoky Night*, one student liked the art, another thought it gave you details of what it'll feel like when

there's a fire, and a third liked it because it had segregation. Going to different places and talking about the environment are the reasons given for *Just a Dream*. Finally, for *The Name Jar* the reason stated was that the student understood what it felt like to be Unhei because people have strange names.

The last question I asked was about what types of books they would like to read. Four students want to read anything funny. One wants to read about mining or the environment, and two like scary books. Dr. Suess, Roald Dahl, and Mary Pope Osborne were authors mentioned by name. A student who was not in favor of the critical literacy time, responded that he or she would like to read books that "teach stuff".

Giving students the time and the tools to read from a more critical stance has provided me with some valuable insights into my teaching. It was a shift in practice and expectations for both the students and me. I will discuss the implications and next steps in more detail in chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

Teaching reading is one of my favorite subjects as a classroom teacher. Yet for the past few years, I have felt that simply teaching the program that had been adopted by the district was not interesting to me nor was it providing students with experiences that ignited a passion about reading. They would read, answer questions, and regurgitate facts but there was little interest or connection to what was being read. This led to a journey to change how I taught and structured my reading program.

The questions guiding my research were:

1. How do literacy responses change when students are provided with increased opportunities to read and respond to many genres of literature that lend themselves to critical interpretations?
2. Do these experiences influence their book choices?
3. What do I notice about my teaching and my class's conversations that follow interactions with this practice?

In the twenty plus years that I have been teaching, much of the reading curriculum has been taught in a traditional way. It is teacher directed and follows a structured outline suggested by the publisher. There is a certain amount of time spent on comprehension skills, vocabulary, and grammar. A student's understanding is measured by questions usually devised by the publisher. All students are required to answer similarly with little room for individuality.

Most stories are studied for a week, maybe two with an assessment at the end of that time. The stories are read a time or two and may be partner read within that two

week period. Sometimes the selections are merely an excerpt and not the entire story. The choices of stories in the basal reader are designed to appeal to a wide variety of California students. There are selections that involve Hispanics, African-Americans, and one about a Native American boy. Most of the characters are middle class and are not going through the daily struggles many of my students are. There are realistic fiction, non-fiction, legends, fantasy, and biographies.

Much of the work that is assigned comes from practice books that each student is given. Within these books are pages where they use the story vocabulary, answer comprehension questions, and work with the skills for each story. Those are the basic elements of our reading program. Any additional resources are found elsewhere or created by the teacher.

There are certainly variations within stories and in different classrooms but this is the way reading has been taught historically in the district I work in. I have taught this way myself for many years. Many aspects of this model of teaching reading are necessary and effective. Students need to spend time learning skills and working with a story to show their level of understanding. However, I believe it should not be the only way to teach reading. I feel there is much more to a well rounded reading program. There has to be some aspect of it that compels students to want to read. It should ignite an interest and a passion that a traditional program sometimes does not.

It is my firm belief that a language arts program that incorporates learning how to take a more critical stance with literature and practicing those skills on a daily basis can help fill the void of more traditional programs. It is a process by which students are asked to think critically about what they have read and make meaning in individual ways.

Rosenblatt (1938) believed that a person reading text can make meaning from it by bringing in the reader's own experience with language and life (p. 7). Because meaning is made, it then becomes a transaction between the text and the reader. Meaning is not necessarily waiting undiscovered in the text or in the reader, but comes together when there is a transaction between the two (p. 7). What I felt was lacking in the program adopted by the district was the types of stories that a) my students had experience with and b) stories that were of interest to my students.

Rosenblatt talks of two different stances in reading. One is the efferent stance which means "carry away". This is when a reader focuses on accumulating what is to be carried away at the end of the reading. The other side of the continuum is the aesthetic stance. This means to "sense" or to "perceive". This is when a reader creates a new experience that is shaped or lived through (Rosenblatt, 1982). Rosenblatt (1938) stated that efferent and aesthetic reading should be taught in schools. She felt, though, that the aesthetic stance was most neglected in schools.

It is my contention that we have an obligation to provide these experiences for students in a comprehensive reading program. It becomes increasingly important in schools where students may not otherwise have access to quality literature. Giving students the opportunity to read and make their own interpretations is essential to helping kids know how to ask questions of themselves and others, compare their lives to characters in the book and with other stories, and accept that responses may vary among many or all of the students. One's response is not more correct than another.

This is evident in the variety of responses my students had to the books we read. Some had a deep emotional feeling after reading, such as when we were doing the sibling

rivalry books. Most all of the students had something to write about with that study. Even if it was not a sibling, many wrote about friends or cousins. It was clear in their responses that that was an area they had some past experience. They understood what it felt like to be annoyed with someone. The students also compared themselves with a character in one of the books.

What I was most impressed by though, was their ability to empathize with the person who bothered them. They put themselves in the other person's shoes and wrote a response based on that. Many commented later in our class discussion that they had never really thought about how that person might feel. To me, that is the power of going beyond the basal program. As a teacher, I seldom asked students to respond in such a way. With many of the stories in the basal reader there are limited opportunities for these types of interactions.

Johannessen (2003) discussed strategies to increase authentic discussions. One element is when the story creates controversy. I can think of no story that we read in the adopted text that would or could create controversy. That is why it is important to look beyond the basal and find books that lend themselves to those more meaningful interactions and interpretations.

As I look back over the responses students made throughout this research, I notice there is a certain depth and authenticity that surprised me. Eight- and nine-year olds do have something to say and can be quite articulate about it. They felt passionate and strongly about issues, and some seemed taken aback that they were even asked for and encouraged to share their opinions.

In reading responses written by my students it gave me more insight into their

lives and who they are. I felt that I got to know these children in a way I would not have otherwise. They shared their concerns and feelings about people and situations that helped me to understand them better. By the same token, I hope my students felt like they got to know me better because I shared some of my thoughts and feelings as well.

When it was time for our daily critical literacy exploration there was a shift in the energy. This was a time that they had to read and work with a book but there were no comprehension questions to answer. There were no tests to take on a book. This time was used to enjoy reading entertaining books and talking with classmates about it. It was not a high pressure time at all. In my mind, that is what encourages reading and the love of reading.

As a teacher, I looked forward to this part of the day the most. Watching students enjoy books brought me a sense of satisfaction. Hearing them having intelligent conversations and feeling more comfortable with their thoughts and opinions felt like an achievement. That is my wish for all my students. Even with the challenges of finding books, the overdue fees, and the patience to let them take the lead, it has been an amazing process. It is also a process I plan to continue as part of my daily teaching routine.

Although many aspects worked well, there were some problems I encountered. The biggest constraint was finding the books I needed. It works better to have multiple copies of the titles. Students can have a book in their hand, read at their own rate, and enjoy the illustrations as they read. I had access to the library at Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE) and that helped. I was able to reserve many copies of the same title. Using the public library worked to the extent that if the library had multiple copies I could check them out at one time. However, it is not possible to reserve copies of a title I

had already checked out. Thus, I would go from library to library to find what I needed whenever possible. Our school library was limited but was able to supplement from time to time.

An area I was not able to formally assess was how this exploration influenced students' book choices. I had planned on making that part of my guiding questions but I did not have the opportunity to look at that aspect in depth. What I did notice though, was that some students did begin to self monitor themselves with regards to choosing reading books. I encouraged my class to read a few pages and think about what was happening before they decided if it was a book they wanted to read. I often had students come to me and admit a book was too hard or they did not think it was interesting. Informally, that was a positive step as at the beginning of the year many students would simply pick a book quickly with little thought as to why it seemed like a good choice.

The next steps for me are to continue to work on and refine my approach to looking for and providing opportunities for my students to read from a critical stance. I have several lists of books that can be used to support critical conversations. I simply need to plan ahead to find as many titles as possible. I did notice a difference in how students responded and I was impressed with their insights and the discussions they had.

I also want to be more comfortable standing back and letting students take discussions where it leads them. I will offer support but not try to control all aspects. I initially was concerned that this experience would be too sophisticated for some of my students. I was pleasantly surprised that their interactions and response showed a maturity level I had seldom seen from many of these 8- and 9-year olds. Given the opportunity, it was gratifying to see and hear some of the quietest students participating

in discussions where it was clear they had something to say.

As I continue with this process in my classroom I want to move to books that deal with more intense subjects, such as gangs and racial discrimination. I purposely kept to more benign subjects in this study to give my students an opportunity to understand what was being asked and to focus on the procedure. I was worried it may have felt too intense to jump into emotionally sensitive books without that understanding. I now feel my class is ready to move forward with more complex themes.

I have a vision that with these experiences and expectations, students will develop into better, more motivated readers, feel more comfortable questioning themselves and others, and appreciate differences in opinions and interpretations. However, for that to happen, these experiences and expectations need to be part of all teachers' practice. It should be universal and incorporated into all aspects of education.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A Human Subjects Protocol

SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY—INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE RIGHTS OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Application for Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects

Rec'd 9/2/09
1:38 p

This application is designed to fulfill the responsibilities of Sonoma State University relative to the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 5, Part 46, regarding research involving human subjects. Failure to comply with the policies and procedures referenced in this application (1) may cause individuals to incur personal liability for negligence and harm; (2) may cause the University to lose federal funding, prevent individuals from applying for or receiving federal research funds, and prevent the University from engaging in research; and (3) will be viewed by SSU as a violation of university policies and procedures and will result in appropriate administrative action.

All research involving the use of human subjects conducted by SSU faculty, staff, or students—or sponsored in part or whole by SSU—must be reviewed and approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Rights of Human Subjects prior to the start of the project and then must be conducted in full compliance with University policies and procedures. It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to refer to the IRB any project involving human subjects, even if the subjects are not considered to be "at risk." This includes research conducted in conjunction with classroom assignments that will be published or shared, as well as student dissertation or thesis. It also includes all interviews, questionnaires, surveys, observations, educational tests, and secondary analyses of previously collected data that will be incorporated into published research or other public presentation. Such projects may be undertaken only after appropriate approval and may be continued only so long as that approval remains in effect. Changes in a project, or continuation of the project following adverse or untoward occurrences during the project, are also subject to review and approval.

Research intended solely for classroom use (with no possibility of further disclosure or publication) and conference/workshop evaluation surveys do not require IRB review.

Submit applications to:

Sonoma State University, Institutional Review Board – Stevenson 1024,
1801 East Cotati Ave., Rohnert Park, CA 94928

NOTE: Your complete application is due one month prior to the start of your research. It should include:

- Pages one and two of this application
- A descriptive protocol
- A copy of your written informed consent form OR a request for waiver of written informed consent with a copy of the oral text you intend to use to inform your subjects of the points listed on the Checklist of Informed Consent (page 3 of this application).

Responses should be typed or printed legibly in black ink.

Your signature below certifies that:

- You have read this 6-page packet and understand your responsibilities and liabilities as a principal investigator.
- You have reviewed the University's policies and procedures on research involving human subjects and will ensure your research is conducted in full compliance. Copies of the policies and procedures are available from the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) in Stevenson Hall, Room 1024. The information is also posted on the ORSP website at <http://www.sonoma.edu/aa/orsp/>.
- You have completed Module 2 (Investigator Responsibilities & Informed Consent) of the Human Subject Assurance Training provided online by the Office of Human Research Protections at: <http://137.187.172.153/CBTs/Assurance/login.asp>
- You, your spouse, or your dependent children have no financial interest in your project that will or may be reasonably expected to bias the design, conduct, or reporting of your research.

Signature of Principal Investigator: Sandra M. Facendini Date: 8/31/09

Title of Project: Literacy Practices of 3rd graders

Name of principal investigator: SANDRA M. FACENDINI Telephone: 480-0661

Home Address: 1127 PIPPIN CIRCLE, SANTA ROSA CA 95407 Email: smfacendini@hotmail.com

Department: LSEE Title or Academic Status: _____

Co-investigator(s): _____

For student investigators only:

Please print or type name of professor or faculty advisor: MARY ANN NICKEL

Signature of professor or faculty advisor: Mary Ann Nickel Title or Academic Status: Assoc. Prof of Ed

Department clearance: _____ Date: _____

Student investigators must obtain clearance from their department's human subjects committee, if one exists. Psychology students can permission to obtain the signatures of the department chairperson.

APPENDIX B



SONOMASTATEUNIVERSITY
 SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
 DEPARTMENT OF LITERACY STUDIES AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
 1801 E. Cotati Avenue
 Rohnert Park, CA 94928-3609

PHOTO / VIDEO / WRITTEN & ORAL WORK PERMISSION

I understand that Sandra Facendini, a graduate student in Education at Sonoma State University and the California State University, is going to conduct a study centered on reading material and students' connection to it. I authorize Sandra Facendini to tape record and video tape my child. I authorize the use of my child's written work and oral responses to be used anonymously for the purpose of analyzing and improving classroom instruction. I authorize Sandra Facendini to use and publish the same (including use and publication without my child's name for the purpose of demonstrating best practice in teaching and learning, publicity, illustration, commercial art, or advertising). Participation in this study will not have any affect on students' grades.

Print Name of Subject

Authorizing Signature (parent or guardian if not legal age)

Address _____

Phone _____

Date _____

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at:

Wright Charter School
 4389 Price Avenue
 Santa Rosa, CA 95407
 707-542-0556, x 121

Or contact my graduate advisor:

Dr. MaryAnn Nickel
 Department of Literacy Studies and Elementary Education
 Phone Number: 664-2082 Email: nickel@sonoma.ed

APPENDIX C

Critical Response

1. What messages do you get from the story?

2. Is this a problem in our community (classroom, neighborhood, etc)?

3. What could be done to help?

4. Who do you think might get upset by this story?

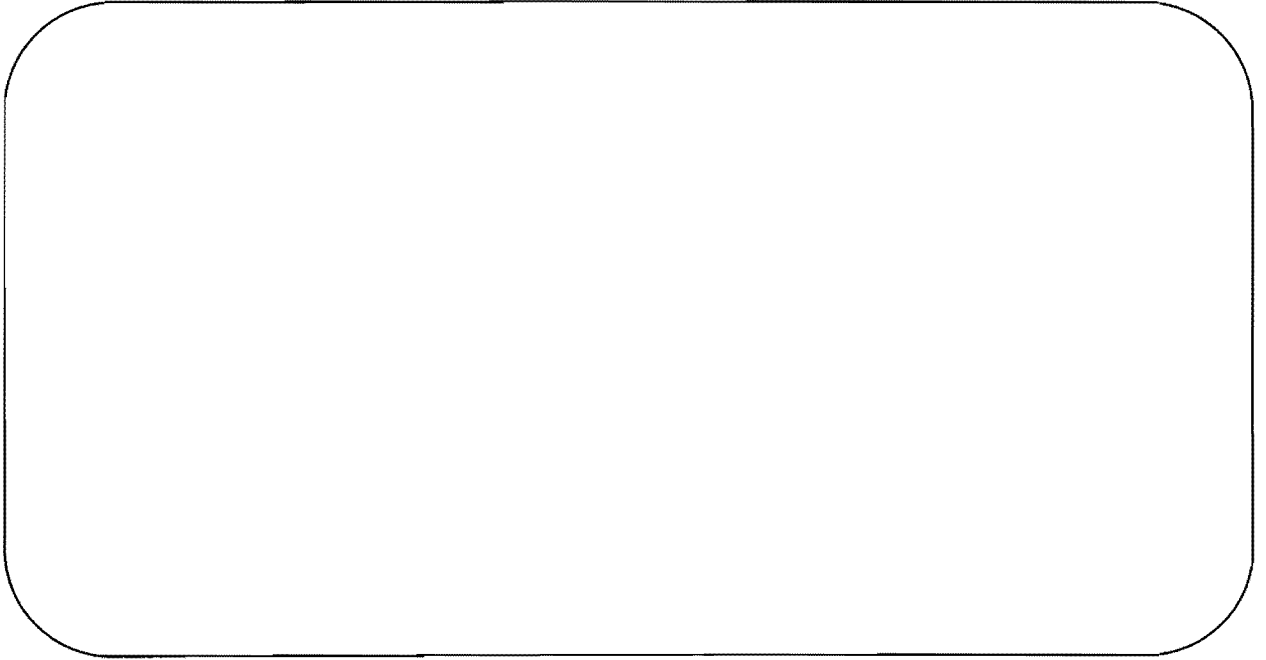
5. Why might they get upset?

6. What would you say to them?

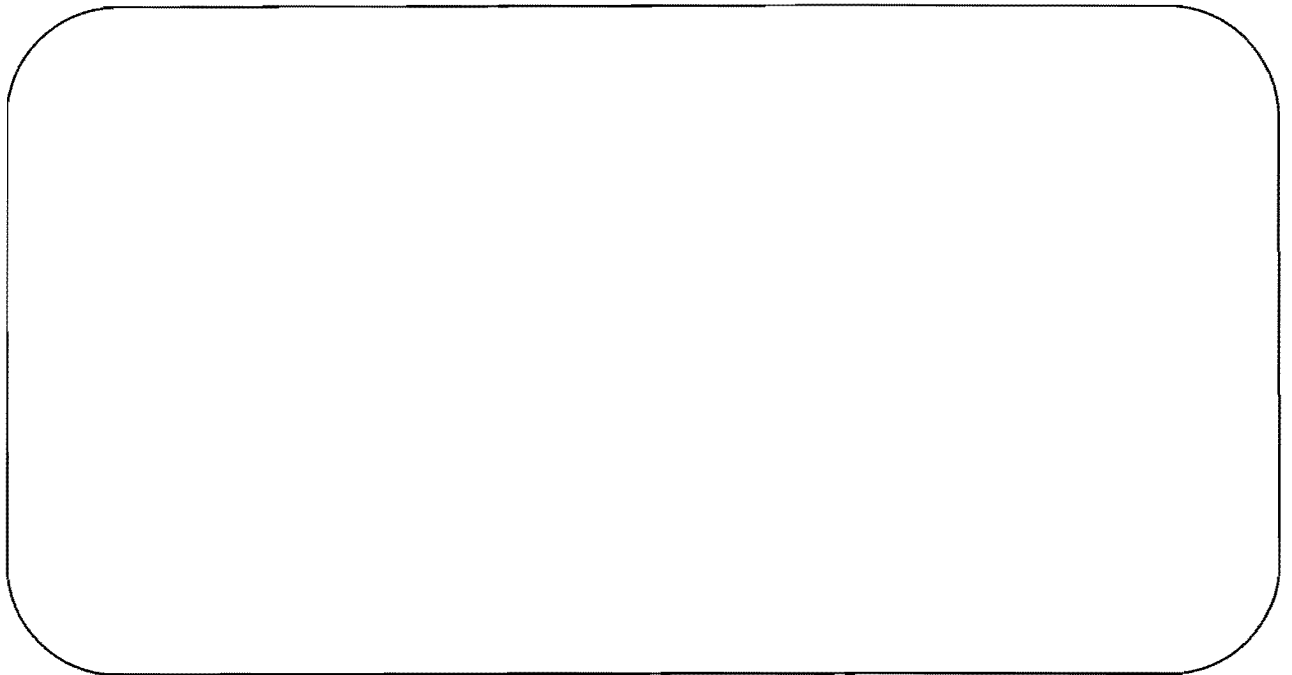
7. Write one or two writing topics from your own life that connects with this story.

APPENDIX E

What are some questions you have about the story?



What surprised you about the book?



APPENDIX F

Questions for *Just a Dream*

1. Why did he go to the future?
2. Why is his bed flying?
3. Why is he throwing the garbage out?
4. Why does the boy keep going in different places in his dream?
5. How did he get on top of the smokestack?
6. Why did the girl want a tree?
7. Why did he say the tree was dumb?
8. How did the boy feel about the dream?
9. Why did Walter litter?
10. Why didn't Walter sort out the bottles?
11. Why does the cat follow the boy everywhere, even the dream?

APPENDIX G

What is important to remember about this book?

What surprised you about the book?

Name a possible writing topic from your own life that relates to this book.

APPENDIX H

What do you think of critical literacy?

1. Do you like the time we spend on critical literacy books?

2. What, if anything, do you like about it?

3. What, if anything, do you not like?

4. What has been your favorite book?

5. Why?

6. What types of books would you like to read?

APPENDIX I

Book List

Darcy and Gran Don't Like Babies by Jane Cutler

Dear Juno by Soyung Pak

Home at Last by Susan Middleton Elya

Hooway for Wodney Wat by Helen Lester

I Hate English by Ellen Levine

I Love Saturdays and Domingos by Alma Flor Ada

I Love You the Purplest by Barbara Joosse

Just a Dream by Chris Van Allsburg

La Mariposa by Francisco Jimenez

My Name is Yoon by Helen Recorvits

My Rotten Red-Headed Older Brother by Patricia Polacco

Rosie and Buttercup by Chieri Uegaki

The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi

The Pain and the Great One by Judy Blume

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