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Exploring cultural identity: Creating a learning environment that invites cultural connections through a family studies inquiry and children's literature

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EXPLORING CULTURAL IDENTITY:
Creating a Learning Environment That Invites Cultural Connections Through A Family Studies Inquiry and Children's Literature

by
Sandy Kaser

A Teacher Research Study Submitted to the Faculty of the DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE, READING, AND CULTURE
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of EDUCATIONAL SPECIALIST In the Graduate College THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1994
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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Friendship is not a reward for our discrimination and good taste in finding one another. It is the instrument by which God reveals to each of us the beauty of all the others.

*C. S. Lewis*
DEDICATION

To JoDee, Maggie and Jon, with great love
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. THE NATURE OF THE INQUIRY ................................................................. 8  
   Background to the Project ..................................................................... 10  
   Statement of the Problem and the Questions ...................................... 14  
   Related Literature ............................................................................... 10  
   Talking About Culture ......................................................................... 20  
      Exploring an Education That is Multicultural ................................... 22  
      Learning About Culture Through Children's Literature .................. 24  
      The Impact of Kid Culture .............................................................. 28  
      The Influence of Reader Response Theory ....................................... 32  
      Literature Discussion as a Vehicle for Response ............................. 36  
      Overview of the Inquiry .................................................................. 39  

2. METHODS AND PROCEDURES .......................................................... 41  
   Teacher Research ................................................................................ 41  
   Research Setting and Participants ...................................................... 56  
   Curriculum Overview ......................................................................... 57  
   Flowchart of Family Studies Curriculum .......................................... 58  
   Data Collection .................................................................................. 70  

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS: STUDENT PROFILES ......... 83  

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS: TOTAL GROUP EXPERIENCES ........................................... 119  

5. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS .............................................. 157
TABLE OF CONTENTS - Continued

Summary of the Study ................................................................. 157
Discussion and Implications ...................................................... 162
Reflections on Teacher Research ............................................. 175
REFERENCES ............................................................................. 157
This study explores the responses of 28 students in a fifth grade class during a year long Family Studies Inquiry. The curriculum was designed as a way to encourage students to explore their own cultural identity and to share perspectives with one another in a way that would encourage an expanded awareness and mutual acceptance. Children's literature was used as a way for students to experience their own as well as the culture of others, thereby gaining knowledge and insight into the human experience. Three primary sources of data were collected: student artifacts, field notes and a teacher journal. The data was analyzed in two ways. The first part of the analysis is comprised of 3 student profiles documenting individual student's responses over the year. In the second section, 4 total group experiences are analyzed. Two of the total group experiences are discussions based on a piece of literature, one is a discussion after viewing a video and one is a focused writing experience in which the whole class participated.

The findings of the study indicate the need to broaden the definition of culture beyond ethnicity and to mesh cultural heritage with the "kid culture" phenomenon. The study speaks for learning experiences that are open-ended and which allow for collaboration, reflection, dialogue and personal response. The power of literature to support such learning experiences as relate to culture is evident. The study ends with reflections on the teacher-researcher process.
CHAPTER 1
THE NATURE OF THE INQUIRY

Mike Rose in his book *Lives on the Boundary* reflects on how America’s educational system can fail its students. He suggests that there is often knowledge and resources within students that cannot be retrieved through standard schooling methods:

Every day in our schools and colleges young people confront reading and writing tasks that seem hard or unusual, that confuse them, that they fail. But if you can get close enough to their failure, you’ll find knowledge that the assignment didn’t tap, ineffective rules and strategies that have a logic of their own; You’ll find clues, as well, to the complex ties between literacy and culture, to the tremendous difficulties our children face as they attempt to find their places in the American educational system (1989, p.8).

One of the more recent trends in schooling is the introduction of ways to provide students with an education that is multicultural. It has been my observation that many of the methods introduced do little to encourage what Rudine Sims Bishop sees as the purpose of such an education, that is “to change the world by making it a more equitable one” (1992, p.51). I searched for a way in my classroom to encourage students to explore their own cultural identity and to share perspectives with one another that could encourage an
expanded awareness and mutual acceptance. I developed a Family Studies Inquiry Unit using children's literature as a way for students to experience their own and others' cultures, thereby gaining knowledge and insight into the human experience and forming connections to their personal heritage. The Inquiry Unit also offered opportunities for dialogue, both written and oral.

The purpose of this study was to follow the unit in a systematic way in order to document the experiences and responses of the students as they lived through this curriculum. This documentation was not always easy. Collecting data and taking the time for thoughtful reflection and questioning in the midst of "whole hearted teaching" (Hubbard & Powell, 1992) was at times a struggle. "Whole-hearted" teaching implies not only fast-paced days, but that one's heart be in the teaching process. Giroux (1985) suggests that such dedicated educators see themselves not as practitioners, but as agents of change - "transformative" intellectuals who recognize their ability to critically transform the world.

Transforming the world sounded like a big order for me. I remembered Cynthia Rylant's character Solomon Singer (1992) who was transformed when he found the Westward Cafe, a place where he felt valued. Maybe the Family Studies Inquiry would do that for someone. Maybe the way students viewed multiculturalism would be expanded. Maybe I would find a way to develop an orientation toward multiculturalism in education that worked better than
anything so far. How does one transform the world? Perhaps one begins with self.

I have seen transformation in my approach to teaching over the last several years. I am moving away from packaged materials and manuals that control my thinking towards a more imaginative approach that questions purpose. As I begin this analysis of the Family Studies Inquiry, I need also to document my process of change in order to create meaning for myself and understand the growth that has taken place. I return to Mike Rose (1989) again as I start my story. He is relating an experience in college when he wrote up an investigation:

My chairman was an educational research methodologist and statistician; my background straddled humanities and social science, but what I knew about writing tended to be shaped by literary models. When it came time to report on the procedures I was using in my study, I wrote a detailed chronology of what I did and how I did it. I wanted to relay all the twists and turns of my investigation. About a week later I got it back covered with criticism. My chairman did not want the vagarities on my investigative life; he wanted a compressed and systematic account. “What do you think this is,” he wrote alongside one long, dancing stretch of narrative, “Travels with Charley” (pp. 189)?

Background to the Project

I teach fifth grade in a school that receives money from the government for special projects because 50% of the students at our school fit the characteristics of potential high school drop-outs. We were given special
funding in order to find ways to keep these children in school.

When I came to the school 5 years ago, I began working with intermediate kids. I noticed one behavior I found disturbing. Students were not reading books. They read whatever was necessary to complete work in the classroom, for example, directions and worksheets. Yet even when given a textbook assignment, they would superficially scan the page. Hence I became driven by a two-part question:

1) Why are my students choosing to not read books?
2) What can I do to change this stance?

I felt that getting my students into books was the single most important thing I could do to encourage them to remain in school. But how was I to do that?

I inquired among other teachers in the school as to how students could reach the ages of 11 and 12 and not appreciate books. Several "coffee break" theories were proposed. The theories ranged from too much television to "problematic" familiesituations. I pondered on these possible explanations.

Although certainly children tend to watch too many hours of television, and many of my students did live in difficult family settings, these were areas of life in which a teacher lacks control. These reasons seemed to blame the home instead of building on what children bring to school. I elected to look at how I approached reading in my classroom and ask myself if my "reading instruction" supported a love of books.
At least to some degree, I felt it did. I read aloud to my students. I introduced authors. I required “outside reading” and I placed books around the room. But to a larger degree, my methods did not support a love of reading. I demanded that book reports be written. I insisted they read books which I considered to be “good” and which seemed dated to the students. I was not familiar with enough current children’s literature to effectively match books to my students’ interests or reading ability. I expected them to read books independently that were far too challenging.

I also looked at what students in my classroom were reading for reading “instruction”. They were reading the basal. Some were reading a fifth grade basal, some were still in the fourth grade reader, and some were reading lower levels. Week after week we read short stories from these books, contrived stories designed primarily to teach vocabulary and the structure of language. I knew my approach to books and the teaching of reading needed to change. But how? Now I had a question and I began to explore. I heard about “literature-based curriculum”. I wondered what that meant. I heard that some intermediate teachers were embracing the concept of “whole language”. I wondered what that meant. I attended some workshops and conferences as a first step to gain some rudimentary knowledge. As a result of what I learned in various sessions, I formulated a plan to further explore change in two areas.

First, I made a decision to use “real books” as the foundation for reading
in my classroom. Lee Galda (1990) discusses the importance of books in the acquisition of literacy. She speaks of how the words and language in the simplest of children's books “transcends the school-based mundane” writing. I also believe that the physical act of holding “real” storybooks, opening and closing a trade book, and carrying a book to your desk for that day's reading and thinking are vital steps in developing life-long readers. Finally, a room filled with trade books where the emphasis is on good stories, and finding appropriate books for one's purposes rather than a focus on level of difficulty could erase lines of ability grouping and all children could see themselves as readers.

The second area I wanted to explore went beyond simply having good books in the library. I remember reading whole books at one sitting on women moving west. Why did I do that? What was there about that topic that drew me in? I think it may have been because my own childhood was somewhat difficult, and I experienced feelings of loneliness. Endurance and survival were my issues. The books about women moving west reflected these issues and were my inspiration. Again, Galda (1990) says that texts only "live" when read by a person in a particular context. I began searching for ways to help students connect - ways to make the text live for them, to speak to their personal experiences and interests.

For the next two years I explored these two areas: using real and
wonderful books in the classroom in place of the basal and studying the theory associated with children's response to literature. I familiarized myself with the latest in children's books and authors. I studied, through professional reading and classes, reader response theory and the use of inquiry based themes. I became part of a study group where teachers from my school gather together to discuss theory and practice. I used text sets, multiple copies, genre studies, and author studies as ways to organize real books in my classroom and make them more meaningful to my students. I incorporated response strategies (Short & Burke, 1991) and literature discussion groups to encourage reflection, interaction and connection. It was a positive time period and my students showed obvious growth in their appreciation for books. Each new year, however, was a struggle and a challenge as I continually sought better ways to support students in making connections to literature and to the larger world.

Statement of the Problem and the Questions

During this period of searching I found a soul mate in the works of Eliot Wigginton. His book Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience (1985) is his own attempt to answer the questions he encountered in 20 years of high school English teaching and to make meaning of his daily teaching life. He says,
For I have found that it is the constant, unrelenting examination and revision of approach - not a package of answers to packaged questions - that makes the better teachers among us the best (pp. 37).

The Foxfire story was also relevant to the theme of my study - looking at connections between life inside and outside the school. I was impressed with how Mr. Wigginton’s students took ownership of their learning when encouraged to engage in activities that would help them understand their culture and community. They willingly engaged in tasks that promoted extensive reading and writing when those tasks were ways to explore their roots and form a community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

I considered my own classroom where I have students who are Native American, African American, Hispanic American and European American. I thought about how I undertook the teaching of ethic culture. Each ethnic group tended to be studied in isolation - either as a theme study, or a “center” in the room, or perhaps in a special month. Ethnicity appeared to be static and uniform rather than the dynamic concept of living children within my room. Gonzales (1992) refers to these kinds of studies as a grab bag of tamales, quinceaneras, and cinco de mayo celebrations.

Thinking back, I could not recall the students ever making a personal response to any of these lessons. There had never been any occasion of
powerful classroom sharing. Why would they want to stay in school through high school graduation when they had to leave who they were outside my classroom door? Why stay with school for years when it seems unreal and irrelevant and does not address the struggles and complexities of all forms of culture inherent in students' lives?

I began to wonder . . . if I provided more support in the classroom to help these students understand their roots and therefore understand themselves, would this invite connections to literature and one another in a more authentic "energetic" way? The students themselves would become the curriculum.

I subsequently developed plans for a cross-curricular, literature based Family Studies Inquiry (see Figure 1). The Inquiry began with getting to know one another in the classroom and then moved to the family. I began the Inquiry asking these research questions:

1. What are the connections from their own specific cultures, life experiences and perspectives that students bring into the classroom?

2. How does the inquiry change their talk in literature discussion group?

3. How does the family study inquiry seem to impact their perspectives on school?

Due to the nature of teacher research, these questions changed and narrowed over the course of this study. This process of change will be
discussed in the sections on data collection and analysis. It was apparent that my first question on children’s connections would be the more meaningful one to pursue within the focus of this Inquiry and because of what was actually happening in the classroom.

As I collected data, I was also challenged as to my perceptions of the definition of culture. Kathy Short’s conceptualization of culture (1992) as “a way of thinking and acting in the world” made it broader than my prior notion of culture as ethnicity. Religion, gender, language, social class, and exceptionability are perspectives on culture that go beyond race (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990; Ovando, 1989). I discovered as well the culture inherent in different ages and generations.

The realization that people within an age group think and act similarly about certain issues in ways that set them apart and sometimes alienate them from other age groups was not new to me. My personal experiences confirmed this insight. I also was aware that I held preconceived notions of the attributes of school age children. I thought about ten and eleven year olds in one way, and twelve and thirteen year olds in a different way. The surprise came when I felt the unity among my students regarding issues of importance to them and their need to discuss their “kid culture” - which I would define as shared personal experiences within the family, neighborhood and school community that encouraged them to think and act in similar ways and as viewed from a
kid’s perspective. In spite of the fact that each student had his or her own cultural configurations, the issue of how to fit their cultural heritage together with the "kid culture" caused them a lot of disequilibrium and concern.

I therefore chose to alter my questions for this research:

1. What are the connections from their own specific cultures, life experiences and perspectives that students will bring into the classroom if engaged in a Family Studies Inquiry?

2. What are the issues that seem relevant to my students as related to “kid culture”?

To explore these questions about culture I gathered data in my classroom as a teacher researcher. I recorded the dialogue in small group literature circles and in total group discussion. I collected student artifacts including timelines, response logs and folders of family stories. Some of the record keeping is through the scripting of field notes and some is in the form of audio and video tapes and slides. I also kept a response log in which to reflect and do some preliminary analysis.

My question relating to individual cultural configurations will be examined through three student profiles. The perspectives of "kid culture" are conceptualized in the analysis of the total group discussions and supported with data from the student timelines. Conducting a formal research project in my classroom was challenging and resulted in a more meaningful learning environment for all concerned. Ayers (1992) suggests that "people learn best
when they are actively exploring, thinking, asking their own questions, and constructing knowledge through discovery" (p. 2).

Research in the field of culture in education as well as reader response theory constitute the theoretical framework for my research. I will elaborate on these bodies of knowledge in the next section with special emphasis on how this theory relates and contributes to my own philosophy and role as a teacher.

Related Literature

Based on my research questions, the two major areas of professional literature that I examined were issues related to culture and the use of children's literature in exploration and inquiry. This overview begins by supporting a definition of culture that is more comprehensive than that of only race and ethnicity. I will then look at "an education that is multicultural" (Klassen & Ruiz, 1994) and the role of children's books in an approach to education that broadens cultural understandings. The term "multicultural education" has frequently been used to denote a program that is added on to curriculum. Teachers are given packets of activities or schools are required to show evidence that "multicultural" events are taking place. For the purposes of this review the terms "multicultural education" and "an education that is multicultural" will serve as one in the same, as the purpose of this study is to look at one classroom framework that creates curricular opportunities for
students to experience and question their own and each other’s cultural heritage as a natural part of the learning process. In the body of research I examined, the term “multicultural education” was used frequently to refer to this orientation towards learning although the more recent term “an education that is multicultural” comes more near defining our purpose in the classroom. I will conclude this portion of the review with a discussion of the phenomenon of “kid culture” and the way it may relate to children’s responses to multicultural issues.

The theory of reader response is the foundation for the use of literature in the Family Studies Inquiry and will be examined closely in the second portion of the literature review. Emphasis will be placed on that portion of the reader response research that focuses on characteristics of the reader, the role of the teacher in response and on literature discussion in the classroom.

**Talking About Culture**

In order to enter into a discussion of an education that is multicultural, it is necessary to arrive at some understanding of culture. Much of the research relating to multiculturalism in education focuses on ethnicity or “race” alone (Banks and Banks, 1989). Major researchers in the field of children’s literature like Harris (1992) and Bishop (1992) limit most explorations into multicultural literature to ethnic studies. Such a limited view of culture, though perhaps necessary at one time, may now do more to encourage additional separatism in
a classroom as teachers implement the traditional methods of teaching ethnicity through special themes or units such as “Black History” or “Native Americans”. Gollnick & China (1990) and Ovando (1989) look at cultural differences and similarities through a perspective that goes beyond race and ethnicity to include gender, language, social class, exceptionability, age and religion. This viewpoint stresses that greater understandings and a sense of equity can come only when world views are examined. That world is created for students through the ways their thinking has been impacted by their over-all life experiences. Students need to develop a consciousness of how they have arrived at their own understandings and perspectives as well as looking at the perspectives and culture of others (Grant & Sleeter, 1989). To do this, it is necessary to look at the variety of “thought collectives” of which they have been a part (Fleck, 1935; Short, 1992). This is consistent with an anthropological view of culture as a person’s way of thinking, feeling and believing (Kluckhohn, 1971) or a system of shared rules or pooled knowledge transmitted by people who share a common social or historical experience (McCarty, 1989). Certainly race and ethnicity are important in this view, but it can also include many other groups through which we may pass, such as age, religion and social class, that forms who it is we become. When culture is defined in this broader sense, there are more ways for students to connect to one another through shared experiences and understandings. Finding commonalities
unites us and subsequently, areas of difference can then be more readily explored and understood.

**Exploring an Education that is Multicultural**

Schools have been “charged with helping students learn tolerance and appreciation of other cultures and persons who are members of these cultures” (Rasinski & Padak, 1990, p. 576). The authors go on to say that we are apparently falling short of this goal as evidenced by the increasing number of incidents involving racial hatred and intolerance. How can these incidents be reconciled to the emphasis in the classroom toward building more culturally pluralistic attitudes in students? Perhaps the fact that we are not achieving the hoped for goal in our students of truly valuing diversity has to do with our approach to multiculturalism in education. Banks (1989) describes four curricular models for integrating ethnic/multicultural content into regular curriculum. The models are hierarchically arranged in terms of their sophistication in making multicultural issues a central part of the curriculum. At the lowest level is the “contributions” approach, which is a focus on the highlights, heroes and holidays of a particular culture. The second level is called the “additive approach” where content, concepts, and themes that reflect other cultures are added to the set curriculum. In these two approaches, the school is clarifying what it is that sets us apart, and the understood notion is that more information will lead to more understanding which will in turn bring a
sense of equity and valuing. What it seems to have done is simply create students with knowledge about African American History (because we have Black History Month) or early Native American tribes (because every spring we do the Indian Basket Weaving Unit) but it is not leading to the hoped-for understandings and changes in behavior. Knowledge is good, but how can we be sure it is not re-creating stereotyping of races or keeping religious groups in a victim imaging?

Ruiz (1984) maintains that multiculturalism should be an orientation toward learning in the schools. This orientation values a diversity of viewpoints and experiences. All people are seen as contributors to society. Ramsey (1987) holds that this valuing begins with self, and suggests that students need experiences that help them develop positive racial, ethnic, gender, linguistic, social class, religious, exceptional, and national identities about themselves. This self defining will then encourage awareness and curiosity about other people leading to inquiry. This may very well begin with the teacher developing his or her own self awareness. There is increasing discontinuity between teacher and student diversity (Grant & Secada, 1990). This may mean that educators need to explore multicultural issues themselves (Grant & Grant, 1977) in order to develop a broader perspective on cultural pluralism that can lead to a more woven orientation to multiculturalism in the school.

For students and teachers alike such exploration needs to be
accompanied by critical, reflective learning (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990) rather than just curriculum add-ons. A study of culture cannot only be a definition of what delineates any one group, but must also include an examination of society’s assumptions about these groups and a challenge of such assumptions thus developing a critical consciousness (Freire & Macedo, 1987). For example, the schools are attempting to raise a critical consciousness stance toward gender. Textbooks are placing greater emphasis on the role of women in history and classroom discussion can focus on personal experience related to gender and society’s assumptions as to the roles of women and men. Inherent in such textbooks are examples of those people who have challenged the gender stereotype in society. The highest level in Banks (1989) hierarchy is the decision-making and social action level which may speak to this critical thinking and social consciousness paradigm. Certainly working to develop students who are thinking and caring and who act on values and beliefs arrived at through thoughtful analysis is what schools should be about (Rasinski & Padak, 1990).

**Learning About Culture Through Children’s Literature**

So how is it that we move from exploring self to a critical understanding of culture that brings about the change we are hoping for? Rudine Sims Bishop (1992) states that multicultural children’s literature can be a powerful vehicle for accomplishing that task. What do we mean when we refer to
“multicultural literature”? Literature that is multicultural consists of books that represent and reflect all peoples in ways that value “cultural uniqueness, diversity and universality” (Klassen, 1993, p. 51). Most frequently, however, the term “multicultural literature” has referred to books about people of color - African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics. It has been suggested that this term arose out of a need to avoid the term “minority” which may carry a low status connotation. Until recently, being a member of a minority ethnic group meant being excluded from children’s literature or being portrayed in undesirable ways as negative stereotypes or objects of ridicule (Harris, 1992). Children’s literature has also misrepresented or portrayed inaccurately groups of people from various regions in the United States, religious minorities and people in varying socioeconomic groups.

Since literature has long been recognized as a powerful aspect of a multicultural curriculum, cultural authenticity in children’s books has become a significant issue. Central to this issue is whether authors who are outside a cultural group can have a deep enough understanding of the nuances of day to day living within the group to write about it or will misrepresentations or distortions occur. Sims (1982) did a study of 150 fictional books published between 1965 and 1979 and revealed that a majority of books about African Americans were at that time being created by Euro-American writers. In a later article, Sims called for multicultural books written from an insider’s perspective
(Bishop, 1992). Yet it would seem that even books written by people who live within a specific cultural group have differing perspectives and opinions about life within that group. There have been disagreements, for example, among Native American authors (Slapin, Seale & Gonzales, 1989). A teacher will do well to carefully consider the purposes for using books considered to be from the field of multicultural literature and locate a resource offering criteria for analysis and evaluation rather than making any assumptions based on the author. Such criteria may include the language of the text or the illustrations. One would consider how the characters are portrayed and be alert for stereotyping and bias. Reimer (1992) cautions that one does not want to become, as she terms it “hypersensitive” to ethnic traits in books because using books that do not share cultural distinctiveness rather defeats the purpose. To show ethnic diversity in a book does not necessarily mean the book is perpetuating a stereotype and use of the book depends on the teacher’s approach. Reimer (1992) points out that, in fact, some authors do not distinguish enough within ethnicities and have a tendency to make cultural conglomerates, such as referring to Mexican or Central American peoples as simply “Hispanic”. Harris (1992) suggests that teachers make informed choices and select a balanced collection of books that show the diversity within and across cultures. Reimer (1992) advises teachers to simply forego books that do not deal with ethnicity in a tasteful manner. One would also want to use several
books in order to give a wider representation of any peoples.

Sims (1992) states that literature is a mirror that reflects human life. This view supports Banks' (1989) third level in his multicultural curriculum hierarchy, the transformation approach. Students are encouraged to view problems, themes, concerns and concepts from the perspective of different cultural groups. A use of books in such a curriculum would provide or contextualize diverse perspectives in very personal and concrete terms (Rasinski & Padak, 1990). The literature can help students understand their own cultural heritage and those of others inside and outside the classroom. It can provide students with contrasts in perspectives, that is similarities and differences across and within different cultural groups. When these perspectives are considered with the critical thinking described earlier, it has the potential to encourage greater awareness and understanding of students' own culture while offering insights into other cultures as well. It can move students to change their minds and their hearts by developing an awareness and internal value system about all people which can result in positive actions of understanding and acceptance (Giroux & Freire, 1989).

Using multicultural literature in the classroom is dependent on having the books available. Studies have been done on the publishing industry's response to society's changing cultural outlook (Larrick, 1965; Chall, Radwin, French & Hall, 19885; Rollack, 1984; Sims, 1985; Bishop, 1991). Publishers
have a responsibility to produce books that accurately represent diverse cultures, and those of us involved in education should indicate our need for these materials. To give out students the opportunity to come to know and value each other, we must insist on a large body of multicultural literature.

**The Impact of "Kid Culture"**

One commonly overlooked element that greatly impacts the role of multicultural literature is the community of learners that supports and challenges readers as they explore their own and other cultures. Klassen (1993, p. 75) states that it is the learning community that "can inspire learners to act upon their new understandings acquired through transactions with multicultural books. The literature itself does not transform students". In a school setting, this community of learners are students who are bonded together with a "kid culture". As previously stated, I define "kid culture" as shared personal experiences within the family, neighborhood and school community that encourage students to think and act in similar ways and to create certain rules, norms and expectations which can impact the way they integrate and act upon new world views. While others refer to this culture in the literature as "child culture", I prefer the term "kid culture" and will use that term. "Kid culture" more clearly indicates that I am seeking the perspective kids have of their own culture rather than an adult viewpoint or analysis. "Kid" is the term my students use to refer to each other. They do not like to be called "children".
Unfortunately, too few teachers recognize the power of the community of learners to accept as workable or reject as impractical a teacher’s notions of social change. I would suggest that acceptance or rejection may be rooted in how the teacher’s view of social change fits within the parameters of the “kid culture” in which the students are rooted. Inherent in the word “teacher” is the assumption that we are able to instruct students in any area we choose rather than providing the support needed in order for learning to take place. John Goodlad, author of A Place Called School (1984, p. 229) concludes that “if teachers in the talking mode and students in the listening mode is what we want, rest assured that we have it”. This may work in “teaching” flash cards but it will not work in content that relates to life experience and will be especially ineffective in evoking change. To provide the kind of critical thinking discussed earlier, students must have a voice. There needs to be an understanding of the concerns and issues inherent in the “kid culture” and thought given as to the impact of “kid culture” on the way students are able to assimilate other cultural experiences and perspectives. For example, we use the term “celebrating differences”, and yet the need for sameness and acceptance are foundational in the world of kids. Do we support children in resolutions of the apparent “conflict” in our talk about what we value as adults related to issues of culture and how it does or does not mesh with their issues within kid culture? Do we allow them a voice and a chance to think it through in real dialogue based on
critique and inquiry?

Bullivant defines culture as "a social group’s design for surviving in and adapting to its environment" (1989, p. 27). I recall an incident that demonstrated this phenomenon. A student of mine was older than her peers, having been retained due to illness. She was doing well and was subsequently promoted from my grade 5 class to middle school. I saw her two weeks later. She looked very different as a member of the middle school community than she did as a member of the elementary school community. My new student adapted to her new environment and it was absolutely a strategy for survival. Do we understand these pressures as we present new issues in the classroom? Do we find space to assist students in working through new perspectives on a broader definition of culture?

Kid culture is not only about older children. Newkirk (1992) discusses the kid culture he found in the talk of first and second graders. He determined that the kid culture brought a kind of non-adult like discourse into discussion groups. At first he found this discourse annoying and he questioned its relevance. Later, he was convinced that the children came to groups "not as total novices but as members of a rich oral culture that has its own repertoire of responses" (p. 9). He began to view his prior teaching method as a "one-way socialization of children into the adult mode of discussion" (p. 6). Children felt the discourse common in their kid culture had no place in the classroom and
that because they were unable to talk in the adult fashion they were not just
different, they were deficient.

Nodelman (1992) asserts that adults purport to see and speak for
children even through the avenue of children's literature because we believe
they are incapable of speaking for themselves and we see them as different
from, and presumably inferior to, ourselves as thinkers and speakers. He
suggests that we may see them as innocent rather than lacking in intelligence,
but this assumption allows us "power over children even just by existing" (p. 30).
Although I am not supposing an attitude of powering over children, I do believe
that teachers assume incorrectly that we can move students to an acceptance of
our values and that through whatever teaching practice we choose, we can
plant our seeds of wisdom in them.

Society is changing too quickly for us to rest secure in our preestablished
assumptions of what childhood is all about. Perhaps kids are not as innocent,
creative and spontaneous as we would like to think. Childhood has its own
culture. It has the good, the bad, the beautiful and the ugly. It has norms, social
classes, ways to reward and punish, and a violent sector. Child culture has its
own language. Yet we presume that we can impose a world view upon this
culture, bring children to new perspectives and change what it is children will
become as adults. The only way to educate children towards a more
multicultural orientation is to acknowledge the humanity that children share
with us, the adults. We need to provide a format for the concerns of kid culture
to intermingle with other concerns of cultural heritage and with acceptance and
understandings across cultures. Nodelman (1992) suggests that we treat kids
as if they were human just like the rest of us. Rather than speaking for them, we
should allow kids to speak for themselves. We need to ask them what their
concerns are as a ten year old Native American or an eleven year old
Hispanic or a twelve year old European American. Maybe we just need to ask
them what life is like for a kid, and how can we best be supportive.

The Influence of Reader Response Theory

If teachers use children's literature as a foundation in providing an
education that is multicultural, it is important for us to think deeply about our
understandings of the reading process and the way literature is used in our
classrooms. For many of us, our training as educators has led us to believe
that reading in school is designed to teach language development and the
elements of story. The manuals we are giving are bursting with vocabulary lists
and text analysis activities. Occasionally there is a question relating to values
(i.e. If you were Sam, would you give back the money you found?).

Rosenblatt (1938) drawing on Dewey (1934) suggests that the
connection of personal experience to the reading event is where the power in
literature lies:
"The human experience the literature presents is primary . . .
the formal elements of the work - style and structure and
rhythmic flow - function only as part of the total literary
experience. The reader seeks to participate in another's
vision - - to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the
resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will
make his own life more comprehensible" (p. 7).

When readers approach a text, they bring to the reading experience their
own frameworks of experiences and understandings. The term "transaction"
refers to the nature of the relationship between the reader and the text during
the reading event, each mutually acts on the other to evoke an experience or a
meaning for the particular reader of the text (Rosenblatt, 1971). Rosenblatt
offers an alternative to the belief that a text carries a meaning that the reader
must figure out. Rather, the text guides the reader's active creation of meaning.
Slatoff (1970) agrees that a separation of the reader from the text denies the
power inherent in literature. What then does a reader bring to the experience of
reading?

Holland (1968) refers to an "identity theme" which affects a reader's view
of and response to the world. The reader's past experience, reading ability,
expectations for and about reading, reading preferences, and concepts about
Readers have a style of response that reflects their personalities and goes
across texts (Galda, 1982; Holland, 1975). Applebee (1978) found that
evaluations of literature change as a function of age and maturation. Cognitive development plays a role in how a reader responds. Britton (1970) suggests that a reader needs to approach a fictional book with a certain attitude called a "spectator stance". Rosenblatt terms this a reader's "mental set" (1982). This stance seems to be linked to the development of formal operational thought (Galda, 1982; Petrosky, 1975). Cox and Many (1992) in a year long study of 38 fifth graders attempted to describe the stances children use when responding to literature and film. The children created meaning by picturing and imaging while reading or viewing, by extending the story beyond the actual text or by hypothesizing how the story could have been different, and by relating associations and describing feelings. These responses are characteristic of aesthetic transactions in which students "draw on their own linguistic, literary, and life experiences as they created their own personal meaning while reading" (p. 32).

Readers are also a part of a "community of readers" (Bleich, 1975) which may be the cultural or even the educational context. Bleich's study on personal response to literature verifies the belief that reading produces greater personal understanding in varying degrees with varying educational tasks. Hickman (1981) describes the importance of the physical surroundings and a secure environment to response. The role of the teacher would apparently then be crucial, based on these studies.
Rosenblatt (1982) has much to say to a teacher. She suggests that after a student participates in a reading experience, it is the teacher's function to deepen that experience, "we should help the young reader to return to, relive, savor the experience" (p. 275). This may take the form of non-verbal expression or response such as drawing or dance, or verbal response either oral or written. Rosenblatt encourages the teacher to have a truly receptive attitude and make strong efforts to create trust so that there is no sense of a testing motive. She suggests that teachers foster expressions of response that keep the experiential and qualitative elements in mind through the use of open-ended questioning and further reflection on the text as to what triggered the reaction.

Cox and Many (1992) offer advice to teachers on how to encourage personal responses. They suggest teachers offer choice about how students will organize their evocation of a text, both choice in content and choice in form of response. Time to respond and responding over time is of importance as well. Teachers should invite and encourage students to make personal and intertextual connections. Teachers should recognize, support, and encourage a focus of attention on the lived-through experience of the literary evocation. Finally, teachers should provide opportunities for students to “talk to themselves, to each other, or to teachers who genuinely want to know what they think" (p. 32).
The importance of the teacher's role was emphasized in a study done by Hickman (1982). She concluded that teachers...

"wield a great deal of power over children's responses to literature. In choosing books that would be in their classroom area, in choosing the way such books would be presented and discussed, in providing ready access to the books, and in suggesting and demonstrating appropriate modes of responding, teachers influenced both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the responses of children" (p. 12).

**Literature Discussion as a Vehicle for Response**

As students grow older, the sharing of responses becomes the basis for valuable interchange (Rosenblatt, 1982). Cox and Many (1992) have stated the importance of talk. Talk has been analyzed by Purves and Beach (1972) according to the language readers use to express their response. Eeds and Wells (1989) explored response to literature as teachers and students engaged in "grand conversations" about literature. Probst (1988) suggests that sharing responses:

"allows you to be wrong, to make mistakes, to be convinced by the sharper insights of someone else - in other words to engage in the natural activities associated with learning and thinking" (p. 33).

Peterson (1992) differentiates between responding simply through conversation and response that results in true dialogue. In true dialogue there is a focus "and participants join for the purpose of understanding, disclosing
and constructing meaning" (p. 103). Peterson suggests that true dialogue encompasses inquiry and critique - the skills necessary for constructing meaning that can lead to change.

"Any action needs an impetus. In a multicultural curriculum, there are few stimuli with greater potential to move people to action than literature. Because it tells the stories of human events and the human condition and not simply the facts, literature does more than change minds; it changes people's hearts. And people with changed hearts are people who can move the world."

(Rasinski & Padak, 1990, p. 580)

The kind of sharing and dialogue focused on a piece of literature that deals with multicultural issues can be a powerful experience. Given the validity of reader response theory and the research exploring response through discussion and dialogue, one might make the assumption that encouraging literature discussion takes little effort. Short (1991) suggests that both students and teachers have particular views about learning that make literature discussion difficult, at least in the beginning. Students may not be familiar with thinking together with other learners because they have experienced learning in isolation. They do not see learning as an "active reflective and social process" (p. 10). Students need time to learn how to put their thinking into language to share and explore with others. Short states that teachers also have to move away from a belief system that sees learning as an individual
cognitive process which is directly taught and move towards believing that learning is active, and all learners must have voice in determining the direction of the curriculum and of their own learning (p. 10). In engaging students in literature discussion as one way to establish social contexts for learning, Short (1990) cautions teachers against using literature circles as simply adding another method to their curriculum instead of taking a new perspective on learning.

Peterson and Eeds (1990) suggest that bringing children to see themselves as makers of meaning is not a simple matter. They state, "The attitudes and skills involved are not there merely for the taking: They must be learned" (p. 16). The major challenge is to help children perceive themselves as having worthwhile experiences and ideas to contribute. This will be easier if the topics of the books are familiar to the students and when the settings and ideas expressed are relevant (Martinez & Nash, 1990). Hence the need for good pieces of literature representing cultural diversity to serve as a basis for discussion, books where students see themselves in the illustrations and where they can vicariously experience other cultures than their own. The literature serves as a way to convey knowledge, and yet has the power to change students' beliefs and values about people who are different from them or from the mainstream of society.
Overview of the Inquiry

The remaining chapters of this work provide an in-depth description of the methods, data analysis, and educational implications of my research using the Family Studies Inquiry with my fifth grade students. Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the current understandings in the field of teacher research. In this chapter I then describe the research setting and participants and provide an overview of the curriculum in my classroom. The last section of Chapter 2 summarizes the data collection process and details the beginning observations and analysis which lead to changes in my thinking and therefore, changes in the questions that guided this study.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed analysis of the Family Studies Inquiry through three student profiles as I looked intensely at individual children's participation in the study over the entire year through their literature discussion and writing. I then look at four total group experiences in Chapter 4: two read-alouds, one response to a video, and one class writing project. Four categories of response guide the analysis of the the total group experiences.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study and the significant findings through an examination of the two specific questions that guided this project. I then take a critical look at the implications of the work for classroom teachers in defining cultural heritage, the use of children's literature and literature discussion groups as a support in providing an education that is multicultural,
and the existence and relevance of a "kid culture" for classrooms. Chapter 5 also considers teacher research once again through my own personal reflections on this project and suggestions for how schools, districts and universities can better support this kind of research.
CHAPTER 2

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

“Learning from experience is not automatic it requires certain conditions.”
(Bissex, 1986)

The setting for this research study was my fifth grade classroom at
Warren Elementary School in Tucson, Arizona. The data was collected during
the 1992 - 93 school year. Data was collected throughout the school year.
Initial analysis began during that same year and continued over the summer
and fall of 1993. Extensive examination of the data sources was completed
during the spring of 1994. This study was conducted from a teacher as
researcher perspective.

Teacher Research

When I decided to conduct research in my own classroom, I felt I needed
answers to the following questions about the field of teacher research:

What is meant by the term “teacher research”?

A working definition for teacher research is “systematic intentional
inquiry” conducted by teachers (Cochran-Smith, 1990). I see systematic to
mean that written records are kept, experiences in the classroom are
documented, and information is gathered in a variety of ways. **Intentional**
indicates a focus and a plan. **Inquiry** implies a question generated by
classroom observation as teachers view the classroom to be a place to find out
about learning. It is a process of discovering what is really taking place within
the educational processes in one's classroom.

For many years, I secretly refused to use some of the curriculum
materials assigned to my grade level. The worksheets and activities often
seemed like "an exercise in futility" and I would abandon them in favor of my
own plan that I felt would better suit the needs of my students. I now understand
that research questions can arise when theory put into practice does not result
in learning. "Research questions teachers ask often emerge from
discrepancies between what is intended and what occurs resulting in critical
reflection on the intersection of theory and practice (Cochran-Smith, 1990). I
discovered that teacher research can also mean looking at such discrepancies
when the desired learning outcome is not taking place in only one child (White,
1990).

Another dimension in a teacher-as-researcher perspective is to continue
to learn through experience and risk-taking in new areas of knowledge
(McConoaghy, 1986). Children are always changing as larger elements in our
world help to shape them. If teachers are student-centered, we will learn from
these children, observing and questioning responses and then risking new approaches. Teachers see everything that happens in a classroom as data to be understood rather than causes for blaming or congratulating ourselves or the children (Bissex, 1986).

The meaning of teacher research as systematic intentional inquiry that questions educational assumptions and that is based on student observation also implies teacher self reflection. This means to me that during this project I need a focus, yet I will search for more questions as I attempt to resolve for myself the questions with which I began my study. I will formulate a plan for observing students and recording these observations and I will reflect on my own educational processes as I risk trying some new things.

How does teacher-research differ from traditional university research sometimes conducted in classroom contexts?

In their book Inside Outside (1993) Cochran-Smith & Lytle refers to the traditional university research as research “about teaching” (p. 12) when comparing it to teacher research. They compare the two fields of research in several ways. They suggest that in research about teaching the university has ownership of the research as well as enjoying a broader support structure. In teacher research ownership exists within the profession with little intellectual or monetary support. As previously stated, a teachers questions arrive out of classroom practice where as university grounded research generally emerges.
from study in a discipline and/or analysis of theoretical and empirical literature, referenced to the major work in some area of the field. The university findings are usually intended for application and use outside of the context in which they were developed. The theoretical frameworks are derived from disciplines related to teaching, learning and schooling. Research on teaching are generally quantitative studies and interpretative studies built on the professional detachment and objectivity of the researcher using standard paradigms and means of data collection. Teacher research, on the other hand, is usually intended for use within the context in which it was developed, in order to enhance conceptual framework, alter practice, or reconstruct curriculum. It is derived from the knowledge of professional practice and also from disciplines related to teaching, school, and learning. Teacher research studies are predominantly interpretive studies with the professional involvement and systematic subjectivity of the researcher using new paradigms and alternative kinds of discourse and analysis.

There has been debate over the way in which teacher research is theoretically grounded. Teachers in the past have had little regard for some of the research about teaching, believing that it either overstated the obvious or was simply irrelevant to classroom practice even if such research was "well grounded" in educational theory. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1993) suggest that professional knowledge is essentially theoretical knowledge which results in
intentional, skillful action in real world situations. If this “action” (teaching) is to be successful than teachers “must have the ability to perceive relevant features of complex, problematic and changeable situations and make appropriate choices” (p. 16).

This discussion can move into a discussion of “rigor” and questions about whether teacher research is as “valid” as university based research. Perhaps this debate exists merely as a result of a limited concept of what kinds of research can contribute to our knowledge about teaching. Perhaps it is an understatement to say that all studies, irregardless of the concept of theory on which they are based, should be taken on their own merits as to what the studies may contribute to current knowledge and/or understandings. I was reminded of a story told by Burton (1985) about a study done on “drunk Indians” who visited a religious shrine. The study evidently included many statistics and diagrams. A Native American professor in my department also discussed the study at one point and remarked, “It only proved that lots of Indians were drunk when they visited the statue.” The implication was that the study simply stated the obvious and was viewed as insulting. Burton (1985) compares this study to similar kinds of studies in the educational arena, and says such studies may give the illusion of objectivity and scientific, but yield very little valid knowledge.

Certainly, research about teaching and teacher research both
generate theories related to teaching, learning and schooling. Such theories should contribute to improved school and classroom practice. Perhaps the trend toward collaboration between university professors and classroom teachers is a way each field can support the other but one would hope that each area of research could also stand alone and be recognized as contributing to knowledge about education and about research itself.

Fred Burton (1985), however, discusses the issue of the institutional gap that exists between universities and public schools and variation of rules and rewards in the two systems. I found this phenomenon interesting and I determined to have university professors involved in my classroom research. Working closely with the university could do much to close the theory-practice gap. In this discussion, Burton comments regarding the need for professors to publish rather than spend time in classrooms because "one does not consult elementary school teachers to find out about the usefulness of a professor's work when it comes time to consider this professor for promotion. There are few non-tenured professors who are willing to risk the chance of promotion by too heavy an involvement with problems significant to teachers" (p. 203). Such pressure may result in studies that do not really contribute to better classroom practice as truly becoming involving in a classroom and being willing to take a good look at what happens there, is often messy and time-consuming. As a general practice, a university researcher observes the educational process,
whereas a teacher lives it.

I would suggest that times are changing. As teachers find mentors at the university with whom to collaborate, and as professors spend time in the classrooms, perhaps significant studies will be conceived and accomplished that will make the educational process more powerful for the students and for ourselves. An example of one such study was done by Matlin and Wortman (1989). Matlin states how important the insights of the classroom teacher were as she collected and interpreted data.

How will the teacher research I do be viewed by the broader research community?

The view toward teacher research in the broader research community is in a state of transition. Certainly there are researchers of great standing who relate to research done by teachers in a positive way. Goswami and Stillman demonstrate this positiveness in their book Reclaiming the Classroom: Teacher Research as an Agency for change (1987). This book has 19 articles about classroom inquiry, possible ways to design studies and six actual studies that can serve as models. One article in this book by Nancy Atwell discusses the changes that occur in classrooms and in the teachers themselves when immersed in the process of systematic inquiry. Dorothy Watson also references teacher observations (1987).
Although these and other collections of articles and studies see the power in teacher research, there are also those who view teachers as technicians whose primary role is to implement theory rather than create or challenge theory. Applebee (1987) sees a teacher's role as that of reflecting on their practice and relating problems to "real researchers". He describes teachers' knowledge as a filter to make researcher's work useful and "on target". Some research communities of thought also suggest that teacher research lacks "rigor".

In response to this, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) propose that teacher research has really just begun to be developed as a methodology compared to "research on teaching" and has not yet been synthesized or systematically critiqued. They suggest that teacher research not be seen as an imitation of university research but as its own genre. Inherent in this perspective are conflicting conceptions of the nature and purposes of teacher research and different assumptions about the role of teachers in the production and use of knowledge. I will discuss this from my own perspective as a first-time teacher researcher in Chapter Five of this document.

**What are the methods of record keeping that teachers as researchers use?**

Hubbard & Power (1993) refer to research as an art and craft and the
strategies for data collection as the tools to be found in the artist's toolbox. They suggest that teachers can learn to manipulate these tools to gain a sense of how different tools can inform and complement their individual vision of teaching. Some of the tools they describe at length are:

**Note-taking:** Notes are taken in a variety of ways and take the form of anecdotal records. Corsaro (1983) suggests four categories of note-taking. Field notes are a direct observation of what you see in your classroom. Methodological notes are observations involving the methods you are using and notations of the need for change. Theoretical notes are notations involving what is happening in the field and can include references from research literature or personal hunches. Personal notes are references involving events in your life or the lives of the students that may have an effect on the data collected.

**Student work and classroom artifacts:** This type of data would include student writing, student reading, student projects, correspondence from the principal or district offices, notes from colleagues, parents or specialists, flyers of special events, or newspaper clippings.

**Interviews:** Interviews can be formal (e.g. surveys or sociograms) or informal (e.g. student conferences).
Audio and Videotape Transcriptions: Hubbard & Power caution that researchers would want to have thought through their purpose in taping and should not record or try to video everything in a "shotgun" fashion, as viewing and transcribing tapes can be time-consuming. Short (1994) has suggested field-noting tapes later as a way to summarize them so that the data is more readily accessible during analysis.

As researchers sift through all the notes, artifacts, interviews and tapes, they see findings beginning to support one another. An important factor in drawing conclusions is the use of multiple sources to support findings. Webb refers to this as triangulation. In triangulation, a finding is supported "by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, don't contradict it" (Miles & Huberman 1984, p. 234).

Burton (1985) gives some suggestions for the field work stage to manage the data so that it does not become overwhelming. He suggests that you develop analytic questions, forcing yourself to make decisions that narrow the study. He indicates a need for some kind of analysis as you collect the data so that you can plan continuous, new or additional data collection in light of what you find on previous observations.

Is the case study a valid method for doing teacher research?

Merriam (1988) begins her book by saying "the qualitative case study
is a particularly suitable methodology for dealing with critical problems of practice and extending the knowledge base of various aspects of education" (p. xiii). She suggests that a case study is often best when the researcher approaches a problem of practice from a holistic perspective, in which understanding is sought in order to improve practice. Merriam begins with a discussion of the characteristics and skills needed to conduct a qualitative case study investigation and indicates it may not be a research method everyone would want to choose. Case studies can be "descriptive", a detailed account that chronicles a sequence of events, or "interpretive", a rich description used to develop categories and to illustrate, support or challenge theoretical assumptions and evaluative case studies involving description, explanation and judgment (Merriam, 1988).

A strength of the case study method is the in-depth perspective which may very well be transferable to other human behavior in similar settings that has not actually been observed. In educational settings, the case study could be especially useful in studying educational innovation, program evaluation, and for informing policy (Collins and Noblit, 1978, p. 26). There are also some inherent limitations to this kind of study. Case studies frequently take a great deal of time to investigate, analyze and report. Such a detailed account may then not be read by the people it should influence. Case studies can oversimplify or exaggerate (Guba and Lincoln, 1981) and thereby lead the
reader to incorrect conclusions. Much depends on the sensitivity and integrity of the research (Riley, 1963). There is also the matter of personal bias. I especially appreciated this statement: “what people think they are doing, what people say they are doing, what they appear to others to be doing, and what in fact they are doing may be sources of considerable discrepancy . . .” (McDonald and Walker, 1977, p.187). Denny Taylor (1988, p. xv) in a discussion of her study of inner-city families says, “. . . we still have to deal on a daily basis with our own ethnocentrism and mental baggage. Reflection and introspection are continuous processes that have taken place throughout the course of this study”. Denny Taylor also suggests that there is no standard way to do field work in a case study (1988). Each study begun is in fact a unique and individual one. Any prior readings of case studies should serve only to model or help one learn the craft.

One of my favorite classroom case studies was research by Connie White which she wrote about in her book, Jevon doesn’t sit in the back anymore (1990). It is a small book, sensitively written which shows the tremendous growth that can take place in a teacher who looks closely at one student over time.

What are the benefits of teacher research?

Teachers change when they become involved with systematic inquiry.
Wigginton (1985) refers to analysis as a “way to make meaning out of his daily teaching life”. Through this process he realized that there was much he wanted to change about his teaching. Surely we need to observe and write to make sense of what it is we are doing in our classrooms.

Doing teacher research empowers teachers (Bissex 1986). They become theorists, articulating their intentions, testing their assumptions, and finding connections with practice. Their perception of themselves is transformed. They “step-up” their use of resources, they form networks, and they become more involved professionally. They become critical, responsive readers and users of current research, more authoritative in assessment of curriculum, methods and materials. They can therefore bring about change in their classrooms, schools and districts - as well as inform theory. Data from classroom life can be used to construct and reconstruct theories of teaching and learning. Classroom research reveals what teachers regard as the current issues in applying theory to practice. Classroom research can build a knowledge base. Teachers can describe discrepancies to theories (Cochran-Smith, 1987).

In the article, “Teachers and Researchers: A New Mutualism” (Patterson & Stansell, 1987) three more advantages emerged: a defense against burn-out, more confidence in instructional decision making, and a renewed appreciation for theory. Bissex (1986) reported that teacher researchers with
whom she worked learned how to observe, and why they were teaching the way they were. They learned to reinterpret events from their students point of view.

The teacher researchers making these kinds of observation and changes as determined by Bissex and others, will necessarily impact the students and the teacher’s approach to the learner. McConaghy (1986) tells us that her observations informed her teaching. She said that when she asked her students questions, they knew she really wanted to know the answers. She began to build knowledge in her students instead of just disseminating it. Bob Wortman (1989) talks about the impact on the children when he did research in his class with Matlin. He says the children took more interest in their reading and writing, developed longer attention spans and asked for more frequent “interviews” so they could talk about their own learning. I was reminded of an incident in my own classroom when a student asked me “why” we were doing a specific assignment. One of the other students came to my defense and said, “It’s rude to ask why. Just do it.” I quickly jumped in to give my rationale for the students to be empowered as active learners (Cochran-Smith, 1987).

**Summary observations about teacher research**

In preparing to conduct classroom research, I found other information that would prove helpful but to which I had not directed a specific question. There
needs to be a group of people with whom you can dialogue about your research. Burton (1985) refers to this as an "Action Forum". He found that meeting with this group of people was a "comforting" place where he could talk through issues and gain new energy and insights. He felt the group would challenge his assumptions and strengthen the integrity of the study. Such a support group could be composed of other classroom researchers, university students, professors or other teachers.

Another strand in teacher research is the merging together of observation, theory, data collection and analysis, and the formulation of questions and hypothesis. Although one begins with a plan, the research flows here and there, with reflection and interpretation in one area suggesting the next step to take in another area. One may focus more on one aspect of the research than another at certain times - there is no recipe. I was struck as well with how some excellent studies did not yield "earth-shattering" results. The questions explored were often small pieces of larger ideas contributing one more bit of knowledge to the field. This gave me personal confidence that even if my research did not "hit the headlines", I might still have something to add to the field as well as to my own understanding.
Research Setting and Participants

The site for this study was my own fifth grade classroom at Warren Elementary School. The area surrounding Warren is suburban, almost rural. Set apart by distance, rugged terrain and lack of convenient public transportation, there is no easy access to public libraries or cultural centers. Warren is essentially the hub of literacy in the community. The Warren families come from multi-ethnic and largely middle to low socioeconomic backgrounds. Seventy-two percent of the students receive free or reduced breakfast and lunch at school. The ethnic make-up of our students includes Hispanics (62%), Anglos (30.2%), Native-Americans (4.8%), Asian-Americans (1.8 %) and African Americans (1.2%).

Students come to school with varied literacy experiences, including many who have not had writing or book experiences before age 5. Many parents and grandparents speak Spanish, yet the vast majority of students are English speakers. Approximately 7% are bilingual. There is an average of 10 students a year who are monolingual Spanish speakers. State and national tests indicate the literacy achievement is low at Warren; the mean percentile score of the fourth grade students in the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills was 39.

All of the children in my class were either 10 or 11 years old. I started the year with 27 students of which 12 were boys and 15 were girls. One student left during the year, so I completed the study with virtually all of the students
participating in the complete curriculum. The class was made up of 14 Mexican-American, 2 Native-Americans, 1 African-Americans and 10 European Americans. See Appendix A for pictures of some of these children.

All of the students lived in the Warren community with the exception of one girl who was the daughter of a teacher in the building and one boy who was driven in from a neighboring area. Three of my students were children of people who worked in the building as Teacher's Aides. The class had only one student who presented a management problem. In general, the class was cooperative and looked forward to our learning experiences together.

Curriculum Overview

In order to better understand the students and their responses in this study, it is necessary to look at the framework for learning that composed the Family Studies Inquiry. Not all of the learning experiences in which the students engaged contributed directly to the data collection and analysis. These experiences did, however, influence the sense of community in the room and did much to encourage a flow of dialogue. See Figure 1 for a flow chart of the year's curriculum.
Figure 1 - Flowchart of the Family Studies Curriculum

Getting to Know Each Other

- students interview each other
- reading interviews

Looking at Family

- getting to know each other
- newspaper
- reading interviews
- text sets
- discussions

Researching Lifetimes

- webs
- charts
- logs
- research notebooks
- timelines
- looking at family discussions
- story""
Getting To Know Each Other

When the students came into the classroom in the fall, my primary concern was to build a sense of community and lay the foundation for the family stories I hoped to generate later. We began a study of the interview process. Our reading program was reading interviews in newspapers and magazines. Homework was to watch television interviews and write down the questions the interviewer asked. We talked about keeping in mind the purpose of the interview, and how to ask probing questions. The students then interviewed each other and published their interviews in a class newspaper. For the remainder of the year we conducted interviews with various people who worked in our classroom. At one point, a storyteller came to visit and was surprised to find a simulation of a television studio set where he was to be interviewed regarding his life of storytelling.

Looking at Family

To support my beliefs that classroom studies need a strong literature component, I put together “text sets” related to the topic of family. There were specific text sets on “Fathers”, “Mothers”, “Brothers and Sisters”, “Grandparents”, and “Family Stories from a Storyteller's Point of View”.

These text sets (Harste, Short & Burke, 1988) were made up of short pieces of reading material, primarily picture books and copies of poems. I
arranged these materials in baskets, and rotated them through small groups of children for browsing. I chose picture books with high level concepts and my fifth graders became engrossed in them. Each group of students chose one set of books to reread and to discuss. These discussions quickly became a sharing of their own family stories. Within the text set, a variety of ethnic backgrounds were represented. I recall a discussion by the group of 5 boys who were examining the books on "Grandparents". One student, Brian, shared his story of when his grandfather died and how his life would never be quite the same. The other students had great empathy with him and it was touching to hear a group of very young people share an understanding of grief with each other.

Brian: My grandpa used to take us fishing in Pinetop. We did a lot stuff like that with him. He died and we don't do that stuff . . well, sometimes we do things like that and fish but we . . . well, I miss him.

Erwin: I just wish I could have done things with my grandfather. I wish I knew stories that my grandfather would have told me.

Dale: Me, too. Brian, you were lucky. I will have to wait and see if my grandfather will tell me stories in heaven. But it is still sad for you.

In a later discussion within this same group, Erwin, a Gila River Pima student, referred to the book *Knots on a Counting Rope* (Martin & Archambault, 1987). Erwin expressed his wish to be an eagle dancer as his grandfather had been. He lost his self-consciousness about being only one of two Native Americans in the class and spoke of his customs. These were the connections
I was hoping would emerge.

The students kept literature response logs, and often continued their thoughts in this log or commented on the stories other members of the group had shared. They were encouraged to write down their stories and we soon had a folder of family stories. I suggested they take their knowledge of interviewing, and their interest in family stories and ask members of their family to tell “I remember . . .” stories. Their writing then became a true journey from experience to paper. A folder of family stories was then begun and, as we worked our way through the year, we added different kinds of written material to this folder. We wrote poems, researched our names, and added extended versions of timeline entries. We also did some formulated pieces for this folder. For example, we did “Me” poems and a “Do You Know Your Parents?” questionnaire. This folder was a place to put all the items falling under the category of support pieces and response material, in addition to narrative pieces of writing.

To encourage good sharing and discussion, I also read picture books out-loud to the students and encouraged responses in total class discussion. One such discussion centered around the book *Pueblo Boy* (Keegan, 1992). The topic arose as to how various cultures have celebrations. My Mexican-American students thought their *folklorico* was similar to the Native American dances. The Native Americans agreed that both kinds of dances were colorful,
but that some Native American dances could be viewed as a kind of prayer. I see this to be an authentic sharing of ethnic diversity in a way that promotes true understandings and respect.

I also encouraged group discussion centered on student writing. Sometimes students were asked questions about aspects of their culture that they could not answer. For example, after a student shared a family story entitled “I Remember Making Christmas Tamales With My Grandmother” she was asked why the Mexican American culture eats tamales at Christmas. The question encouraged her to look deeper into her own ethnicity.

Researching Lifetimes

Since often the stories the students were sharing occurred at an early age, it seemed appropriate to work on timelines. Each child created a timeline for a decade - the average length of their lives. Although they could list many experiences on this timeline, I asked them to pick what they felt were the ten most important events and write a short paragraph of explanation.

Perhaps it may surprise some to know they did not list birthday parties or Christmas presents. They wrote about pets, grandparents, moving, and getting hurt or sick. Christina wrote about the first time she went fishing. “Because I caught my first fish. I was proud of myself.”

While we worked on our timelines, we read biographies, reading and
discussing the lives of famous people. Although each student read a different biography, they met in groups for discussion. It seemed appropriate after having examined our lives so carefully, to look at the lives of others and to take that next step of looking at the contributions one can make over a lifetime.

After the students chose a biography that most interested them, we grouped ourselves for discussion. We had 6 groups: people who wrote books, people in conflict, famous historical figures, people of great courage, western heroes and creative people. The students met in groups to discover the commonalities across their books and to draw some conclusions as to what made these people who they were. The final discussion centered on the "lessons of life" with which we could personally connect from our book.

I brought many books into the room for students to choose from and a diversity of cultures were represented. In one instance a student read a collection of stories about famous American Indian Chiefs. He felt he should be in the group reading lives of western heroes. An interesting few days followed as the group grappled with the concept of what really constitutes a hero. Again, I heard powerful discussions as various viewpoints were considered. The final piece that each student came away with was a personal connection, "What is it about the life of this special person that holds a lesson for me?"

We made a class timeline and put all of the people we were reading about in their place in time, and it took us back many years. During read-aloud,
I read chapters from biography collections such as *Mathematicians Are People, Too* (Reimer & Reimer, 1990) and we added mathematicians to our timeline. One student found out she was related to one of the people on our timeline and she brought in a family history chart for proof.

The class then did a "century" timeline and researched their own families back 100 years. Again, they wrote up the ten most special events. Since their events involved whole families, we didn't have enough hours in the day to share all the stories. In researching their stories, many students learned the history of their family's move from Mexico. One student was amazed to discover that a road near our school had been named for his family. Many of the family stories were connected to remembered events in American history such as the sinking of the Titanic or the assassination of a president which led students to personal inquiries about these events.

**Exploring Our Place**

About this time, I went to a local conference and was introduced to the book *My Place* (Wheatley & Rawlins, 1989). This book tells about life in Australia by looking at one place and telling it's story every ten years going back in time - - complete with a map so children can compare the changes. There is a tree in the center of each map that does not change, and in the end there is only the tree.
I obtained several copies of the book and each day we read two stories and examined the map for changes. The wonderful thing about whole language classrooms is that they allow for spontaneity, because this book sent us spiraling off from my original plan for about 6 weeks. I kept careful records of each day's discussion and when the book was finished, we organized our book discussion topics into six categories: the pets children had through the years, the way children used the tree, the connections to events in broader society, Australian terms, the family history throughout the book, and the jobs people had through the years. The students then formed groups to "revisit" the book and take notes on their particular topic. The class was eager to share the book with others so we organized in a visual way the information we had collected and put it on display in the library. The group looking at pets made a bar graph with pictures of animals to illustrate how many pets were dogs, cats, etc. Each block on the graph had a year assigned. Another group made a big tree and drew on large leaves with the year inscribed as to all the ways the tree was used. The projects were wonderful examples of collecting, organizing and sharing information as well as demonstrating authentic response to a piece of literature.

There was more to come. On Monday morning after the projects were done, a student brought in a "My Place" of her own. She had drawn a rough map of her neighborhood and highlighted the places that were of importance to
her. She had a short essay about her pets, her family and their jobs. She included her picture. Naturally we all thought it was a great idea and we spent the next week making our own maps and telling about our place in time. Kristen wrote a particularly poignant essay:

"This is my place where I live with my mother. My dad doesn't live here any more. He lives at his place".

Whether or not Kristen realized it, she had touched on the very topic the class called “Connections to Broader Society”. Many students shared this kind of extended family.

Through Kristen’s example and as part of the family studies inquiry, students had a safe place to share their family situations. I began to think more broadly about my definition of “culture”. Consideration must be given to the issues all my students face as kids. I came to understand that culture goes beyond ethnicity; it incorporates the ways in which we live and think in the world. One of the cultures I began to think about was the culture of generations and the differences between my “adult culture” and their “kid culture”.

For the next literature experience relating to the family studies inquiry, I chose a variety of novels for students to choose from, with 5 students reading the same novel and discussing it. I wanted to use books with a strong family theme while being representative of a variety of cultures. I found Racing the Sun (Pitts, 1988) Maniac Magee (Spinelli, 1990) and A Jar of Dreams
(Uchida, 1981) to be especially effective. In these discussions, a range of topics such as homelessness and attitudes toward old age arose. The following is an excerpt from one session in which the ethnic aspect of culture was under discussion. The book that served as the focus for the discussion was Racing the Sun (Pitts, 1988). The students are all boys. Brian is European-American, Tekoa is African-American, Erwin is Gila River Pima and Ronald and Damian are Mexican-American. The boys are discussing why the father in the story (a Navajo who is a college professor) does not wish to return to the reservation to visit the grandfather who is ill.

Brian: Sometimes people aren't proud of their heritage because the traditions seem silly.

Ronald: It doesn't seem up to date. The book calls it "the old ways".

Brian: The father was just trying to get away from the stereotyping of Indians - you know, riding horses, shooting arrows -

Damian: He probably didn't remember the language, either.

Erwin: I think people should stay in their heritage, but no one in my family is into it. Like that guy in the story, they want to go on with life and pretend they are not Indian. I feel like Brandon - I'm interested.

Tekoa: I'm like Brandon, too. I'm interested.

Erwin: I think if I was Tekoa, I would get mad at the way they treated the blacks, as slaves and all. Some people still treat them as long ago - as slaves - you have to get to know black people.

Tekoa: Indians were treated badly, too.
Brian: They had to prove they were equal to white culture before we could talk about their heritage. I think we should study all cultures because they all have important people... like Martin Luther King...

Erwin: and Malcolm X...

Once again the literature provided the vehicle for students from four cultural backgrounds to share a common ground to explore their personal beliefs and experiences. They were able to share from the heart, and to support one another. I see this as a powerful way to develop respect and true understanding in an authentic way in the classroom.

**Closing out the Year**

During the time we were working on our Family Studies Inquiry, we studied American History more formally, primarily through the use of the textbook. Many of the family stories shared by the students related to events in American History, particularly wars. The students therefore elected to finish the year with a "War Inquiry". They worked in groups to study the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, World War I, World War II and Vietnam. Using their expertise about interviewing, they went to family and community members for taped interviews. When appropriate, we went to the library to read newspaper articles from the time period. Students brought family artifacts into the room including pictures, old uniforms and medals. Throughout this study we continued to look at people in conflict and the issues of family and cultural diversity as the
touchstone to which the discussion always returned.

**Summary**

When the school year ended, I took a look at all the data I had collected. I had stacks of writing, and transcripts of discussions as well as the various projects that the children had created. As I began to dig deeper into this material, I came to see, that given a supportive environment, children would get to know one another and become interested in the perspective that each of us has, our own particular view of the world. I found that there were many differences that children wanted to explore, not only those of cultural heritage, but those aspects of "kid culture" that they find so disturbing such as the clothes we choose to wear and the messages our clothing conveys.

I discovered that the whole notion of American History had become more real for them, because the history was not just dates from a textbook, but people and families. There seemed to be a better understanding of time, as we added people and events to various timelines throughout the year. I believe each child came away with a greater sense of themselves.

Our classroom became a place where home and school merged together. It was not always easy. The students needed a lot of support learning how to respond to books. They were accustomed to simply answering questions. They had to build a trust in their classmates and understand that I,
It was difficult at times to be a “researcher”. Taking field notes of discussions or using video or audio tapes was time-consuming and awkward. I sometimes felt in the beginning that perhaps it wouldn’t happen, maybe they would not connect with these books in the way I had hoped. Many projects took longer than I had anticipated. Nevertheless, we had a powerful, energetic study. It concluded with a presentation to parents on the last day of school. The class sang a medley of songs related to families. As I looked at each face, representing may cultures, I thought to myself . . .

“E Pluribus Unum - Out of many, one.”

Data Collection

The Family Studies Inquiry grew out of my observation as an elementary school teacher of the ways students explore cultural diversity. The questions I formed as I began the research changed over the time period of the study. In this section I will share how my thinking and subsequently my questions changed. I will also describe the data sources collected.

When I began the data collection in the fall, I was asking three questions:

1. What are the connections from their own specific cultures, life experiences and perspectives that students will bring into the classroom if engaged in a Family Studies Inquiry?
2. How does the inquiry change their talk in literature discussion groups?

3. How does the Family Studies Inquiry seem to impact their perspective on school?

My first step in data collection was to explore the students' perspectives in school so that I could look for any change that might occur during the Family Studies Inquiry. I felt a school attitude analysis would be helpful because of the history of students dropping out before completing high school. I was not able, however, to generate much genuine response with the measures I was using. It may be that students are not accustomed to sharing feelings about the school process with adults who occupy positions of authority within the school. I was also just meeting my new class and perhaps had not yet acquired an adequate trust level. In the free write after reading The Art Lesson (de Paola, 1989) nearly all the students wrote of a good experience and only one expressed a dissatisfaction with the way things turned out in some aspect of his school experience. The answers to the questionnaire seemed superficial. The students wanted me to like them and tried to convince me that school was and had always been marvelous. Another possible explanation is that discontentment is tolerated through the younger grades but disrupts into an "attitude" resulting in abandonment of school later on, perhaps in the middle school years. I therefore chose to drop question 3 from my analysis. The kids
seemed happy to be in my class and I chose to be grateful. I considered the possibility of looking at that question another year if presented with a single student having a history of a negative attitude. Certainly in my past experience I have seen changes in students and documenting such change could add integrity to my teaching methods.

**Literature Discussion Using Text Sets**

I moved into my area of concentration, literature discussion groups. I organized picture books and other short pieces of print into text sets with 5 themes related to the family: mothers, fathers, grandparents, family issues and family stories told from the storyteller's point of view. Students were allowed to explore each set and then were asked to choose one to consider at length. This was the beginning of the data collection for question 1. I documented the connections from their own specific cultures, life experiences and perspectives by scripting or taping their discussions, and by collecting their literature logs at the end of each session as well as the webs or other graphic organizers used in the discussion. I then examined this data over the year to explore question 2 - How does the inquiry change their talk in literature discussion groups? I also began collecting writing samples as the text set discussions led naturally to the sharing of family stories and I asked students to write these stories down.

I allowed the students time to read and share the text sets, and then I
began videotaping their discussions. I found these videos to be helpful in a variety of ways. They allowed me to examine my stance as researcher and teacher. I was able to see what other students were doing while I was focused on the person talking. I noticed responses upon closer analysis that I had perhaps over-looked. I could also review the tape with a colleague. Nevertheless, due to the complicated process of arranging to videotape, I was not able to tape frequently.

At the end of the first round of literature discussions, I reflected on the data as a way to begin some preliminary analysis. I realized that my definition of culture was too narrow if I was looking only through the lens of ethnicity. Certainly I wanted my students of varying ethnic backgrounds to share their rich heritage with all of us. But one's culture also includes such traits as religion, social class, age and gender. I looked at the data determined to use a wider lens when looking for evidence of connections relating to culture.

The data collected from these small group discussion tended to be representative of a student's individual or personal connections to the Family Studies Inquiry. After experiencing the powerful responses students were making in these text set discussions, I decided to incorporate picture books to a greater degree by having a total group read-aloud and discussion each month. When the group came together for a total group discussion the discussion became much broader. Comparisons were made across students
through mutual sharing, and I was startled to discover the importance of "kid culture" to my students. The indication was that the problems for them lay not so much in the bringing together of individual differences, but making these differences fit with a preestablished set of norms for being a kid. At that point in my data collection and analysis, I formed a new question. I realized I was not so much interested in how their talk changed (question 2) as what it was they talked about. I wondered if the Family Studies Inquiry would generate discussion about the issues involved in merging family heritage with the expectations or "rules" of the age factor in their cultural configuration. A "meshing" of experiences might develop the kinds of authentic knowledge and understandings of self and others that I found were lacking in the current educational approach.

Intending to use both small and large group literature discussion as the vehicle for looking at response, I formulated what would be my final set of questions for this piece of classroom research:

1. What are the connections from their own specific cultures, life experiences and perspectives that students bring into the classroom while engaged in a Family Studies Inquiry?

2. What are the issues that seem relevant to my students as relate to "kid culture"?

I found that the small group discussions generated more personal kinds of responses relevant to question 1. The total group discussions using picture
books or, in one instance, a video, became a forum for cross-cultural connections and discussions relating to “kid culture” thus giving me a data source relevant to my second question.

**Literature Discussion Using Chapter Books**

I continued to document responses throughout the reading of sets of chapter books related to families. All of the books used in the study were representative of cultural diversity and students were always allowed choice in deciding what book to read. Groups of 4 or 5 students picked the same book to read and discuss together. Many read several of the books offered as free-reading in addition to the one they read for their group literature analysis sessions.

The third literature study was a reading of biographies. Each student picked a person’s life to read about and the students then grouped themselves according to broad categories such as “authors” in order to discuss the books together. The students selected from all the available biographies in our school library. From this literature study, I again collected tapes of discussions, field notes and literature logs. At the end of the biography literature study, the students gave presentations and I gathered all the artifacts I could talk them into leaving. They each presented on their own person and then shared as a group the connections they found across books.
Timelines

Another important artifact collected and analyzed during the school year were the timelines. Each student created a family timeline that was to include 100 years of family history. Although as many dates as desired could be listed on the timeline, I asked each student to pick the ten most significant dates and write a paragraph explaining the date and why it was of significance. They were also to create a timeline of their own life, which for the average student was 10 years. This timeline was also to have ten significant dates written in paragraph form.

I listed all of the significant events from the 100 year timelines in order to try to identify similarities in responses. As commonalities occurred, I was able to organize the responses under three headings; they gave a record of their arrival in Arizona (most came from Mexico), they made connections to significant periods in American history, and they reflected on important family events.

I realized that the parents had assisted their children in the creation of the 100 year timelines as the students would not have been able to arrive at the required knowledge on their own and it was therefore my perception that the events so recorded reflected almost entirely the adult perspective. I later asked the students to reflect on their 100 year timelines or to write expanded stories about the events. Most expressed surprise as their history reflected
family experiences they had never known about. Although I did not consider this data as examples of student connections since it was adult generated, it was a way for the student's knowledge of family and hence of self, to be enhanced. It was a support for what they could bring into discussions and a support for their writing. In the overall picture, it gave them an expanded sense of heritage to reflect on.

The 10 year timelines, however, seemed to have been left up to the students and reflected a very different tone. Again, I listed the phrases used as the students described the events of significance. The categories that grew out of the 100 year timelines were not seen in the shorter versions. Even though some of the kids had experienced "Desert Storm" and we were finishing up a Presidential election the year of the study, none of them made connections to natural or world history. Very few chose events of family importance and those who did were largely concerned with trips. The only other family event mentioned a significant number of times was the death of a grandparent. The timelines of the lifetimes of the kids were devoted to their learning and growth. A large number of entries started with the words, "This was the first time I...". The entries were centered primarily on self and personal accomplishments.

After sitting and reading through the 10 year timelines several times, I thought about the tremendous leaps a child takes from birth to age ten. I thought about how concerned they are with learning and growing and finding
their place. How necessary it is to figure out the world around them. How important every accomplishment becomes.

Because of the distinct differences in these two sets of timelines, I considered that this comparison could be evidence of the “kid culture” notion I was thinking through and could give additional insight into question 2 as to what the issues are that kids see as relevant. The timelines gave me a little closer look at the way my students view themselves and would support other data emerging as related to “kid culture”.

**Beginning Analysis and Organization of the Data**

Over the summer after I finished collecting the data, I listened to the tapes and transcribed field notes to indicate what was on each tape. I read through all of the student work again. I thought I might choose one small group from each literature study to analyze in detail. But I could not leave out the data gathered through the timelines and total group experiences. How could I address the personal response apparent in the small group discussions and also look at the other areas of research I found intriguing? How could I demonstrate the power of this theme design in allowing for authentic, personal connections and response? I rearranged the data by student rather than by literature studies. I went through one student’s responses from beginning to end. I considered the possibility of a case study. The problem I could foresee in attempting a case
study was that first of all I needed to know much more about this kind of research, and secondly I knew I had not collected nearly enough information on any one student for a case study and now the year was finished.

I made the decision in the fall to put together what I would call a “student profile” which would be primarily a descriptive account of the student and his/her participation and response while engaged in the Family Inquiry Study. I eventually chose three students to profile as a way to demonstrate the flexibility of the study for individual inquiry and reflection and as a way to value the whole child. I chose students who had produced a response in each section of the study and who seemed to walk a more focused path. I wanted to include both boys and girls. I wanted students who might be available and willing to cooperate if I needed more information. This process is described in greater detail in the student profile section of chapter 3 on the data analysis and results. As previously stated, these profiles are the primary data analysis for Question 1- What are the connections students make based on their own cultural configurations, life experiences and perspectives while engaged in the Family Studies Inquiry? The researcher’s descriptive accounts are interpreted then through a teacher’s lens as to the apparent effect the study had on each individual student.

I also chose four “total group” experiences to analyze with reference to question 2. I based my choices on those discussions for which I felt I had
adequate notes and in which a larger number of students participated. Some of the picture books generated more energy and interest than did others. I finally selected for analysis the picture book discussion of Angel Child, Dragon Child (Surat, 1983), the picture book discussion of Pueblo Boy (Keegan, 1992), and the discussion of the video "Nikkolina" (1985). Included also as a total group experience is an analysis of the two sets of timelines.

I reflected at length with advisors and colleagues on the various webs, charts and transcriptions from these four experiences. As I reexamined the data collected from the three discussions I noted the kinds of responses students made during the sharing and compared these responses across discussions. A pattern emerged which allowed me to place most responses in one of four categories: 1. The students made connections to the their own cultural traditions. 2. They made references to what I define as "kid culture" - the understandings my students see as relevant to their own age group. 3. They used connections or comparisons to other literature used in the study to support the sharing. 4. There were "I Wonders..." - questions raised which could be indicators of conflict and useful for further discussion to encourage students to explore on a deeper level. Each discussion is described and reflected upon through these categories and a web is included as a visual organization. Although these discussions contribute to the data pool of question 1 regarding personal cultural configurations, they serve primarily as an investigation of
question 2 - the issues students see as relevant in “kid culture”.

Through this whole process were frequent calls and visits with my advisor Dr. Kathy Short. She helped in the selection of books, organization of the data collection and analysis process and in discussion surrounding the formation of my new questions. She was able to give me articles at crucial times to develop my perspective on the field I was researching. She encouraged me to think about what I was seeing instead of trying to see what I was thinking about, especially when I was first beginning and things didn’t seem to be going in the direction I had anticipated. She met my students and read to them. She browsed my artifacts and helped me focus on next steps. She supported me throughout the process as I negotiated a shift in research paradigms so as to better understand the nature of teacher research.

In the next chapter, I present the analysis of each research question and then look across all seven data sources to discuss the impact of the Family Studies Inquiry on the cultural connections in my fifth grade class.
Give Me A Book

Give me a book
   and long tall grass,
There will I look
   as the hours pass

To other places
    I can see;
To other faces
   strange to me.

In black and white
   they fill my head
With men and women -
   Vanished, dead -

Of hope and fear,
  of wish and need.
The world stands still.
  I, breathless, read,

And in their history
   I see
The untold mystery
   Of me.

(Myra Cohn Livingston, 1976)
CHAPTER 3

DATA ANALYSIS: STUDENT PROFILES

The methods described and the data analyzed in this section come from a qualitative, teacher-as-researcher perspective. The data presented will be largely descriptive with quotations from transcripts of various discussions, and with examples taken from the students' written documents. Knowledge of research in the field of reader response and an extended study of the dynamics of teacher research preceeded this data collection as well as an exploration of multicultural issues in education.

Although I would be pleased to feel that this analysis could extend the knowledge base of education in the area of multicultural issues, it is of greater importance to me that I find ways to address problems and questions that arise in my daily work life in order to improve my practice. My research questions arose out of a practice in my present teaching situation which I believe is a common occurrence in schools today. I refer to the contrived and often forced study of certain ethnic groups as a way to bring about respect for ethnic diversity. Black History Month is one example of this practice. With this practice comes the expectation that teachers subscribe to the lofty goal of helping kids "come together separately" - maintaining individuality yet coming to understand
and accept one another.

I organized a theme study that I felt would serve as a framework for more authentic connections across cultures and I looked at what happened throughout this study in a systematic way. The plan was not to prove that my study was a “better” curriculum than what we currently had in place. Rather, I was looking for a vehicle to connect home and school - a way to signal to children that how they came to be who they are is of value in school. I therefore devised a study of the family and posed my first question:

What are the connections from their own specific cultures, life experiences and perspectives that students bring into the classroom when given the opportunity to participate in a Family Studies Inquiry?

The Family Studies Unit took place over one ten-month school year. I moved through the study collaboratively with my students and therefore some learning experiences corresponded closely to what I had planned and other experiences emerged unexpectedly or took a turn in a direction I had not anticipated.

One such bend in the road was the notion of a culture defined as “the world of kids”. I realized that in order to encourage understanding and acceptance of individual cultural configurations it was necessary to not only provide a way for students to share such knowledge, but I also needed to consider the impact of meshing their ethnic and family heritage with the “kid”
culture that has its own system of rules. Perhaps if our goal is one of building community within a diversified classroom, the concerns and problems which arise as students attempt to juxtapose one on the other should be acknowledged and given a forum. Clearly, this was a broader issue than I could examine in one year, but I needed to at least begin to define for myself what some of the underlying considerations were in this “kid” culture as referenced by my students.

Our society changes so quickly that we need to go to the source when it comes to the subject of “kid culture”. Therefore the second question I chose to consider as I examined the data became:

What are the issues that seem relevant to my students as relate to “kid culture” as they work through the Family Studies Inquiry?

I have organized the analysis into two sections. The first section will be three student profiles as I look intensely at individual children's participation in the study over the entire year. I will look at their dialogue in literature discussion groups and at pieces of their writing. The purpose of telling each story is to examine “up-close” what the students brought to the classroom and how the Family Studies Unit connected with their own personal selves, issues and interests. I believe these stories authenticate the genuine responsive nature of the study and of the classroom learning environment as well as demonstrating the student diversity.
In the second section of analysis I look broadly over the whole class in four total group experiences. Three of these experiences are discussions we had together. It is in these discussions that I became aware of the importance of the "kid" culture and the role it can play in issues of acceptance. The fourth total class analysis will be that of two sets of timelines - one timeline generated with parent involvement, which contributed to the individual cultural configurations the children were forming, and a second set of timelines created by the students without as much parental input. It was the latter which contributed to my understandings of the world of children.

As I discuss this study, one needs to understand that "when we give proper weight to local conditions, any generalization is a working hypothesis and not a conclusion (Cronback, 1975, pp. 124-125)." This study supports and confirms some areas of thinking for me, yet also suggests new directions.

Student Profiles

I elected to begin the data analysis with profiles of three students as a way to look at the Family Studies Unit in total. By looking at one student's experience within the boundaries of the unit, I was able to see the variables inherent in the study. For example, I became less focused on one specific issue of culture, and was able to see more of the whole child and the opportunities the study gave for bringing the whole child into my classroom.
Merriam, in her book entitled *Case Study Research in Education* (1988), discusses descriptive case studies as useful when the focus is on an innovative program or practice. She goes on to suggest that whatever the basis of inquiry, basic description comes before hypothesizing or theory testing. It seemed important, therefore, if I was going to describe the curriculum that I also look intensely at a few individuals working within that curriculum. I wanted to see how different students interacted with the study over time - to describe what they did and then to reflect on that from a teacher's as well as the researcher's perspective. It was relevant when looking at total group experiences to have some notion of how students were creating meaning individually and then bringing that into our broader community. I also felt a need as a teacher who grows to care deeply about her students to ponder whether this study changed these individuals in any way.

I have chosen to call these stories "profiles" because I developed them through audio tapes and artifacts which were, at the time, being collected for the entire class. These three students were not selected at the beginning of the research and therefore did not receive the close observation that would be needed to construct a more formal case study.

The criteria for selection of the three children is that they were those students who made a strong consistent statement of the meaning they were creating through dialogue and written response. For each of them, there was
one aspect of their culture that kept reappearing throughout the focus study. Only as I narrowed the choices did I consider ethnicity or gender, and was able to choose one child from each of the ethnic groups represented in my classroom as well as to have both male and female students represented. The final selection was simply to choose students I thought I could get in touch with if necessary during the process of analysis. As you read through the analysis, see Appendix B for actual samples of student artifacts.

**Student Profile 1 - Christina**

Christina is a 10 year old Mexican-American girl who has been a student at Warren for six years. Her mother works as an aide for one of the teachers in the building and her father is a sheet metal worker. She has an older brother who is sixteen. Christina composed this poem the second week of school to describe herself:

Christina  
Exciting and interesting  
Daughter of Tony and Norma  
Who loves my family, pizza and money  
Who feels sick when up high  
Who feels sad when I get in trouble  
Who feels happy when I play and see my friends.  
Who fears heights, snakes, and dogs who chase you on your bike  
Who would like to go to Disneyland  
Who would like to be a lawyer  
Who would like to graduate from school  
Born in Tucson, Arizona  
H.
Note that the first item on Christina’s list of what she loves is family. Later during the fall of the year, the students interviewed each other for the school newspaper. The student who interviewed Christina wrote “Christina’s family is the most important thing to her”. It was not surprising then, when Christina chose the books on “Family Issues” as her first literature study. She wrote that she chose this group because the books looked interesting to her. She wanted to read about kinds of families that were different from her own. After reading through the books in this text set, she collaborated with three other girls to form a web listing the most important family issues from these books. These issues were:

1. The possibility of a Dad being laid off. Christina commented that this had actually occurred in her family and that it is especially hard to handle around Christmas.

2. Kids who have two families and have to go back and forth.

3. Favorite belongings that people in families have. Christina shared the common experience of a blanket that went everywhere with her.

4. Expectations for boys and girls. Christina remarked that this was like a "label" - if you were a boy you should like certain games and activities. She said she liked a lot of “stuff” just boys were supposed to like. She felt this had a lot to do with parental attitude and expectations.

5. Families composed of people from different races. Christina said that a lot of Mexicans marry people who are not Mexican, and that it’s “O.K., but I think it’s harder because they don’t understand each other as well.”

6. Foster Families. Christina became very intrigued with the idea of foster homes. She had known some “foster kids” in her classes and wanted to understand the term.
The foster family topic became Christina’s focus for the remainder of that literature study. In quoting from Christina, I have not changed her words in any way. She wrote in her log:

“I like the book Foster Families because I want to learn about how to help people. I think it is really sad that kids have to be put in foster care because their parents are abusive with them. It’s really sad. I wish all parents would be nice to their kids.”

Christina then elected to do an expert study on foster families . . .

“Mrs. Kaser, I want to do a report on foster families. Because maybe I can put it in our newsletter and maybe I can make a difference for more people to adopt foster kids or maybe I can convince people.”

After concluding her investigation and reporting to the class, Christina joined the class in preparing a timeline of her family going back 100 years. Her first entry was 1907 when her Great Grandmother Herrera was born. She chose this for her first entry because “I love her very much”.

She then jumped to 1915 when her Great-Great-Grandparents Benevidus moved from Mexico to California in a covered wagon. She later wrote in her reflection journal:

“I think it is so weird that I have relatives who rode in a covered wagon. That was a long way.”

She went on to 1931 to describe the Model A Ford her grandpa drove. “You don’t see those around,” she said.

The remaining entries centered on the births of various family members
and connections the family had with our country's wars. In 1943 her great
grandpa was a prisoner of war in World War II. Her cousin Alex died in Viet
Nam and her uncle went to Saudi Arabia. Since only ten items in family history
were chosen for this century timeline, the three entries concerning the wars are
significant and demonstrate her family's pride in these connections.

Christina's timeline of her life (a decade) took a very different turn. Her
ten most important events reveal a secure childhood in which she sought to
find out just who she was. She begins with 1982:

"because that's when I was born. It made my parents happy."

What follows is a list of "firsts" . . . .

1983 - My first haircut. The hair is still in my baby book.


1985 - I caught my first fish. I was proud of myself.

1986 - My first time to go golfing. I lost.

1987 - My first day of school.

1988 - I made my first Thanksgiving picture and story.
        I was barely learning how to make pictures and write.

1989 - My first real friend. She is still my friend.

1990 - I got my first award. It was for field day.

1991 - I got an award for no tardies. It was a free hamburger
        at McDonalds.

1992 - I went to Disneyland for the first time.

Christina and I conferenced on her timelines. I asked her how
she came to know about the events before she was born. She told me she had called her grandparents. She said:

“It was funny to learn all these things about my family that I didn’t even know.”

She added thoughtfully that it seemed like this was “stuff” you read in books at school and then when you find out it was your own family, it felt strange. I shared her remark with the rest of the class to see if any of the others would be in agreement. We concluded that when one stopped and thought about everything that had ever happened to anyone since time began, it had happened to someone who was a part of someone’s family. Through discussion generated by Christina, history became real people and not just so many words in a textbook.

The timeline experience also created a continued dialogue between Christina and her grandparents. In her reflection log, she frequently wrote about the discussions she had with her grandparents. She said:

“We talked about our traditions of lighting candles on Christmas and the food we eat as Mexicans. They talk about how they didn’t have cars back then and ‘stuff like that’. They ask me how I’m doing in school and what I want to be when I grow up.”

Christina enjoyed discussing things and found collaboration a way to extend her thinking. She joined the group reading A Jar of Dreams (Uchida, 1981). The family interaction during the story was of great interest to Christina. Also, the way the neighborhood treated the immigrant family in the
story clashed with Christina's sense of fairness. She took an active participant role in the literature discussion and mentioned on at least two occasions that the daughter in the story had a lot of responsibility because she was helping the family adjust to life in America.

During this period of time, Christina was writing. She filled a folder with short "I remember when..." family stories which she readily shared and discussed with others in the class. She gained the confidence to record on video one family story regarding a religious celebration at Christmas time. She told of how her family lights candles and spends several hours in prayer.

The final book Christina read in the study was a biography of Clara Barton. She thought the fact that Clara Barton was a teacher at age fifteen a most amazing thing. She reflected on her own life and decided she needed to set some goals. I asked her to write down for me what it was in this book that she wanted to take away with her and she wrote:

"My personal response to Clara Barton is that she had goals to be a nurse or a teacher. She made these goals come true. She became a teacher and a nurse. I want to be a lawyer. So each day I want to work on my goal to make it come true. She was a teacher at fifteen. I am almost that old. That's why I am saying that I'm going to work hard to make my goal come true when I am young."

Aside from the family studies unit Christina was thriving in the collaborative classroom environment. She grew more confident in her ability to share and make a contribution to the group. She wanted to work this way in all
areas of her learning. She began to reason and use logic in math groups in a way she had not done before. Her success in math became paramount. She wrote in her response log on the last day of school.

"Fifth grade school was interesting. In fourth grade we mostly worked in textbooks. This year we worked in groups. I liked working in groups. I liked my teacher and friends. This year, school was wonderful and fun. I liked my teacher, friends and math. Ms. Kaser explained things and helped me with what I needed to learn."

Summary and Reflection - Christina

Christina connected with the Family Studies Unit immediately. This may reflect on her Hispanic heritage in which the family is of great importance. The Hispanic children attending Warren are frequently members of large, extended family situations. They often stay within a few miles of each other and get together often. Learning about her family history and traditions and sharing with the class gave Christina a reason for dialogue with family members that continued all year. As she shared her heritage and her stories, it gave us all a rich sense of the values of Mexican peoples. It was authentic knowledge based on the experiences of a member of our community rather than "mandated" learning.

Christina was interested in issues surrounding families from the first set of books. In the text set, she was reminded of an interest in foster families
and she was able to take the time to follow-up on this interest and do some self-directed research. Doing these "expert" studies is one way for students to see themselves as life-long self-directed learners. Her discussion of foster families moved the class a step further in considering situations different from their own - an essential move if the Inquiry Study was going to facilitate understanding and acceptance of difference.

The timelines connected Christina in a powerful way to her ancestry. Her realization that all people, dead or living, were members of families was a connection for her to broader society and history and resulted in a class discussion that impacted all of us. How can we discuss immigration, wars, or any part of history unless we talk about families? The timelines made history breathe for Christina in a way that the textbooks cannot do. I think to a degree this may have then enabled her to gain more meaning from the biography she read. She saw herself as a part of history and people from the past as role models - hence, she began to set goals for herself.

Finally, the collaborative nature of the study enabled Christina to become more of a contributing member of the class. Her exploration of family made her more aware of her "place in time" and I believe she began to perceive herself differently. This tumbled over into other areas of study (I.e. math) and she became more of a risktaker. The study provided a framework for her to find questions and the support to find the answers. This study was a broadening
experience for Christina. When she left for middle school, she did not simply know more, she was more.

Student Profile 2 - Brian

Brian is ten years old and is of European-American heritage through his mother and Mexican-American heritage through his father. Brian has a 13 year old sister and a 16 year old brother. His father is a Baptist minister and his mother teaches in a preschool. Brian was small for his age and yet easily held a place of respect with the other boys in the classroom. He was active in soccer and was an excellent runner. He took charge of activities on the playground, often organizing the spontaneous recess games of touch football and basketball, and he always grabbed the ball first on the way out the door.

He also excelled academically. He had energy for nearly any assignment and yet I felt that school had been somewhat of a disappointment to Brian. At the beginning of the research project, I read The Art Lesson by Tomie DePaola (1989). I asked the class to write about a memory they had about school. Brian wrote the following:

"Last year I went into orchestra. I thought the first day we were going to play a song. I was wrong. The first day of orchestra we only learned the strings. About a week later we started plucking. That was it. Plucking and learning the strings was all we did for three weeks. It was a lot different than I imagined and expected."
Brian had little patience and once placed in a group and given an assignment, he would simply “take over” and dispense with it. The respect the others had for Brian’s ability would eliminate any interference from the group. They would sit back and let him complete the assignment single-handed. This class had been together for several years and experience had assured them that Brian was nearly always right about everything. They rarely questioned him. Even in total class situations, Brian spoke first.

Brian complained about the lack of support from members of the group and yet, he did not solicit their assistance and set about tasks as if no one else was even at the table. He was unkind at times. In defense of his attitude, I feel compelled to add that Brian had been in a system for 6 years that applauded the completion of assignments done quickly and well. The reward was usually to be asked to assist others in the class. Brian was weary of being a teacher’s aide and was resistant to helping anyone.

I was concerned about Brian because I feel keenly that my responsibility is to work with the whole child. For Brian to contribute significantly to society as an adult, he would need interpersonal skills - but more than that, he would need to value the opinions and contributions of others. His parents were equally concerned but for somewhat different reasons. Religion was an important part of Brian’s culture. His family saw his lack of support of others as rudeness and his leadership as bossiness. His mother once said to me, “What
good is all his ability, if he isn’t nice to people?”

Brian began the year writing a poem about himself that I now realize held the key for his personal connections in the Family Studies Inquiry. He writes a line in the poem saying he feels sad when someone dies.

Brian
Nice, funny, athletic
Son of Randy and Wanda
Who loves sports, pasta, and family
Who feels tired after school
Who feels comfortable at home
Who feels sad when someone dies
Who fears atomic bombs, poisonous things, and robbers
Who would like to explore outer space
Who would like to travel around the world
Who would like to be a sports player
H.

Brian lost an important family member when his grandfather died. Even with his “take charge” attitude, this death was something Brian had not fully come to accept. The first set of books he chose to explore dealt with the subject of grandfathers.

Brian joined this literature study along with three other boys, Dale, Ronald and Erwin. Ronald was Mexican-American, Erwin was Pima Indian and Dale was European-American. After reading the picture books, the group did some generalized sharing. Brian seemed uncharacteristically quiet. Erwin took the lead. He picked up the book *Knots on a Counting Rope* (Martin, 1987) and began talking about his grandfather who was skilled in some of the Native
American dances. Brian appeared not to be listening and was drawing in his literature log. At the end of the session, however, he showed Erwin his log. Brian had sketched his image of what Erwin’s grandfather must look like, based on Erwin’s description of the costume.

In this group session, Brian had become a listener because the subject was too near his heart. His sketch supported Erwin’s ability to speak out when Brian was not quite ready to enter the discussion. Brian’s log entry:

"I liked Erwin’s story about the Eagle Dancer. I drew a picture from the description. I thought it was great. I thought our session went well."

After several discussions, the group did a web of the connections they found across the books. After this session, Brian wrote this in his log:

"Today I made a connection with the books. My grandpa used to take us fishing in Pinetop. (We did a lot of stuff like that with him). He died and we don’t do that, well, sometimes we do things like that and fish, but we (I) miss him."

When the first session of literature circles using picture book text sets ended, Brian chose the novel Racing the Sun (Pitts, 1988) to read. Although this novel deals with a grandfather/grandson relationship, I believe Brian chose it because he had connected with Erwin. He was interested in continuing the grandparent discussion, but he had also become intrigued with Erwin’s Native-American stance. It was in this discussion that Brian became a
participant. He was a member of the group and did not at any time attempt to
dominate the group or indicate he felt a sense of superiority. He continued to
work through the death of his own grandfather in the first few sessions the group
met. He did a web in his log about his connections to the book:

How sad I was when my
grandfather died.

How much I liked doing special
things with my grandfather.

How I had to try to
live my life the same way
after he died.

Racing the Sun has reminded me of . . .

How much I loved my grandfather.

My grandfather died of cancer
and in the book the grandfather
is dying of cancer.

There was a shift in Brian's thinking about mid-way through the book.
He began to look at his religion and to view it as a significant piece of his
culture. About half way through the book, Brian made this log entry:

"I connect with the book in a religious way.
People say that the point of time we're in
now is the new age (with all the theories
like the Big Bang). My family and I have to
keep our Christian ways as does the
grandfather in Racing the Sun who has to
keep his Indian ways. Next time we may want
to talk a little about people in our families who
do and don't keep up with the families background."
I asked Brian at one point if he enjoyed his grandmother and what kinds of things they talked about together. He said his grandmother is Mexican and speaks only Spanish. She "keeps up with her culture" and talks a lot about how it was in Mexico and how his Dad used to be Catholic but now he's Baptist.

The class began working on their timelines. Each student made a century family history timeline which included ten significant dates with accompanying explanations as to why the specific dates were chosen. The ten most recent years (the time period the student would have been a member of the family) were listed on a separate decade timeline again with ten accompanying comments. Brian began the century timeline with his Nana's birth. His comment stated that he felt this was significant because:

"My nana is the only person I know who was born in the 1800's".

He next recorded the date his grandmother's side of his family moved from Mexico. He recalled a family relative (Uncle Gus) who was shot down in France and died as a POW in Germany in 1942. Brian commented that this was significant because, although he did not know him personally, everyone liked him and

"I know my uncle died serving his country".

In 1958, his grandfather won land in an auction and Brian's family settled in Arizona. He then referred to the year of his grandfather's death. His
only comment on the timeline regarding the significance of this date is that there is a lesson in it for him. The lesson is that when he grows up he should watch his diet and have tests so he does not die from the same cancer his grandfather did. There is no indication of the personal significance of this loss.

The remainder of Brian's comments on significant events during his own life span were typical to that of many in the class, i.e. the date when he said his first words or took a significant vacation. It differs in that he gave the year 1985 as important because he "became a Christian". He wrote:

'This date was important to me because it was a big step in my life. I plan to stick with it.'

He gave the date the following year when he moved from the parsonage to his house that was the housing for his church's minister, his Dad.

Brian continued to connect with the death of his grandfather and with his spiritual self throughout the final literature study on biographies. Brian read about the life of Abraham Lincoln. In his log he wrote:

"Lincoln was only 56 when he died. It reminded me of my Grandpa because he was about 60 when he died."

When asked what part of Abraham Lincoln's life held the greatest personal connection for him, Brian wrote:

"I'm a Christian. When people around me start to cuss, and do things like that, I try to get away from it. . . I get put
down a lot because I am a Christian. It's easier just to be a normal person, than to be a Christian. Like Lincoln, I have to put all the times I've been put down or made fun of behind me."

"Abraham Lincoln tried to be the best he could be. I try that, too. He got frustrated during the war. It must have been hard on him. I don't blame him for getting frustrated because I get frustrated, too. He did a lot of things in his life. I am going to try to do the same."

The last time Brian met with his literature group, each of whom had read a book about a historical figure, they made a web together of what they felt these notable people had in common that may have contributed to their greatness. Although Brian was the one who did the writing, he listened to the comments of the others in the group and at times asked questions for clarification so that he was better able to get their meaning onto the web. At the end of the session, however, he made his own web in his log of what he felt contributed to the greatness of the historical figures under consideration. Although he acted as a member of the group during the discussion, he did not necessarily hold to all the views of the group and wanted to create a new web that reflected his personal stance.

According to his web, the historical characters including Abraham Lincoln, about whom Brian had spent considerable time reading and writing and thinking, had goals, and were intelligent and determined. But he also wrote,
“They all cared. They were all helpful. They made contributions.”

These were important attributes for Brian to consider as he walks his own life path.

Summary and Reflection - Brian

Although Brian had a strong Hispanic heritage (i.e. a grandmother from Mexico who still speaks Spanish) his ethnicity was only referred to briefly on the timeline and in a personal conversation with me. The significant aspect of Brian’s culture which continued to emerge throughout the Family Studies Unit was his religion. It had clearly impacted the family when his father embraced the Baptist perspective. Brian, as he entered adolescence, was thinking seriously about his commitment to this belief system and how it was affecting him now and what it would mean for his future. The Family Studies Unit allowed Brian to examine the aspect of his personal cultural configuration that was of greatest importance to him at the time of the study.

His thoughts about the religion which seemed to guide at least some of his behaviors, were never openly discussed in a literature group even though members of the class were well aware of his father’s position as a minister and some even attended his congregation. He did, however, do a considerable amount of writing on the subject and later, in a total group experience, Brian participated in a discussion comparing his view of God to his perceptions of the
Native-American view of God. His friend, Erwin, was a significant contributor to this dialogue which is presented more fully in the next section of the analysis. I believe that Brian’s exploration of his religion on a personal basis throughout the study enabled him to speak in a thoughtful way to that aspect of culture when the subject arose within our community. He therefore was able to contribute in an authentic way to our understandings of cultural diversity.

The second key to Brian’s engagement in the Family Studies Unit lay in his poem written the first week of school - “I feel sad when someone dies”. The experience of loss and the suffering inherent in a significant loss places us all on common ground. Family crisis seems to be a significant component in the lives of the students I teach. The most frequent disruption is that of failing marriages, but there are also issues of illness, death, change, and loss of income. Children need opportunities to explore these issues with others of their age and experience who are as powerless as they are.

This topic of discussion changed the pattern of Brian’s group dynamics. Although his personal connection drew him to the books about grandfathers, once in the group he found it impossible to talk freely and his position of group leader was relinquished. He did not, however, stop listening as the sketch in his log indicates. He wanted to hear the stories that others had to share. He wanted to know if anyone felt as he did and so he waited.

Brian found the opportunity in the Family Studies Unit to revisit the death
of his grandfather through literature, group discussion with peers, and writing experiences. I could see change over time in the way he participated in group dialogue and also in the way the group responded to him. Although still a leader in many ways, he was becoming more respectful of the viewpoints of others based on their experiences. Because the subject was close to Brian, he was satisfied with being a contributing group member and was willing for someone else to take the leadership role. This resulted in a true sense of collaboration with Brian sharing his knowledge but also placing value on the knowledge and insight of others, thus he was creating meaning for himself as relates to death or the mysterious bond between grandparents and their grandchildren.

**Student Profile 3 - Erwin**

Erwin was a new student to Warren the year he was in my class. He was Pima Indian and lived in an apartment building on the Reservation with his mother and his older brother. His brother had been retained for one year and was just a year ahead of Erwin and in the sixth grade at Warren. Erwin's mother complained to me that the older brother caused the family much worry by his behavior and study habits. Erwin seemed to get along well with his brother. The mother worked as a receptionist at a nearby clinic.
Erwin, at age 11, was thoughtful and seemed to take his life seriously. When asked to share an experience from an earlier year in school, he told about the first time he made the honor roll. One of the highlights for the year in my class, he said later, was when he made “straight A’s” on his report card. He was tested for the Gifted and Talented Program in the school and was quickly accepted. He attended this program one day a week. He wanted to go to college, and his advice for the future Warren fifth grade when he was interviewed at the end of the year was:

“Don’t dropout. Just keep going. Make your dream come true of what you want to be.”

When asked where he thought he would be when he was 21, he said,

“I’ll still be in school, studying chemistry.”

Erwin became eagerly involved in the Family Studies as soon as books were placed in his hands. He chose the “grandfathers” text set to discuss. Erwin joined three other boys - one was European-American, another was Mexican-American and one was of both European American and Mexican American heritage (Brian). I was also a member of the group. Erwin enjoyed the format of literature circles. He wrote in his log after the first session:

“It went really well. Everybody just jumped right in.”

Erwin “jumped in” during this first session by sharing his favorite book in the grandfathers text set, Knots on a Counting Rope (Martin, 1987). He
shared that his grandfather had been a deer dancer, but that the grandfather was now dead. He said that some of the books in the text set had talked about grandfathers telling stories. He told us about family Indian gatherings that he goes to with his family where the old people tell stories. He said he wished his grandfather were still alive to tell him stories. He referred to the illustrations in the book to help us imagine what his grandfather may have looked like as he danced. Brian did a sketch as Erwin was talking. Erwin made the book come alive for the group and they each picked it up at some point in the discussion and read through it.

In later sessions I noticed how Erwin empathized with the other members of the group. Brian shared how he missed fishing with his grandfather and Erwin again wrote in his log. “I felt sad for Brian today.” Even though Erwin was new to the school, he quickly bonded with the boys in this literature circle and I saw them playing basketball together.

Erwin chose Racing the Sun (Pitts, 1988) to read next. Brian, his friend from the first group, chose the same book. The book is about a Native American family and the grandfather is a strong character. Warmed by the first literature circle they had shared, Brian and Erwin “jumped in” again. With them was Tekoa, an African-American and Ronald and Damian, both Mexican-American. I sat in with this group again. Although I was accepted as a member of the group, I made only a few comments and spent most of my time taking field notes.
One particular discussion reflects the kind of talk that occurred in this group. It was the second session for the group. After webbing some of the themes in the book, they elected to discuss the grandfather's trip back to the reservation, where he wanted to die, choosing not to live in the city with his son. The grandson helped him get back to the reservation. Erwin made the following observations in the group discussion:

Ms. Kaser: I wonder why he wanted to go back

Erwin: Earlier in the book he says he misses the smell of the sagebrush.

Brian: He didn't feel comfortable in the city.

Tekoa: It said he was feeling sick but he felt better at home.

Brian: He wanted to die in his hometown.

Erwin: His reservation.

Brian: Maybe it's a custom of the Navajo's. On p. 116 it says, "he looks better" because he was happy . .

Erwin: In the city, he was home alone with the family working. He wanted to go to people who were more into their culture, like he was.

Brian: The father did not want to go, it says on p 117 - for the same reasons, each one wanted to stay in his own culture.

Erwin: The father said he didn't want the grandfather to be in a car.

Brian: But that was just an excuse

Erwin: Brandon (the grandson) wanted to go because he was getting interested in his culture. He was getting closer to the grandfather. The grandfather shared stories, chants and jogging and growing plants. And besides the father did go back.
(They spend a few minutes discussing what happened when the family ends up on the reservation, then . . )

Brian: Well, anyway, I think the book is about how to take on the new ways without having to give up the old.

Erwin: You shouldn’t give up on your heritage.

Brian: Yeah, but, sometimes people aren’t proud of heritage because traditions seem silly.

Ronald: It doesn’t seem up to date. He even calls it, “the old ways”.

Brian: I think the father was just trying to get away from the stereotyping of Indians - riding horses, shooting arrows . .

Erwin: Yeah, well, I still think people should stay in their heritage, but no one in my family is into it. Like that guy in the story, they want to go on with life and pretend they are not Indian. I feel more like Brandon. I’m interested.

Tekoa: I’m like Brandon, too. I want to remember.

Erwin: I think if I was Tekoa, I would get mad at the way they treated the blacks as slaves. Some people still think of them as long ago as slaves - you have to get to know black people.

Tekoa: Indians were treated badly, too.

Brian: They all had to prove they were equal to white culture before we could talk about heritage. I think we should study all cultures because they all have important people - like Martin Luther King . .

Erwin: And Malcolm X.

I was intrigued as I listened to the range of connections that emerged in this discussion. Erwin remembered a line in the book “missing the smell of the sagebrush” while the others examined the larger issue of going home to die.

Again, Erwin corrected Brian when he said “hometown”. The grandfather was
returning to his reservation. Erwin took an authority stance as the only Native American in the group and drawing upon the connections he made to his own ethnicity. Brian suggested an hypothesis for why the grandfather was returning to his reservation in his comment that perhaps it’s a custom of the Navajos. Again Erwin came in with the definitive answer based on his own understanding that the grandfather wanted to be with people who acknowledged that they were Indian. It became apparent as the discussion continued that Erwin was thinking through what it meant to him to be an Indian. He was developing an awareness of how people around him view their own ethnic heritage and how they, in turn, are viewed by the broader society. An interesting dialogue took place between Erwin and Tekoa (an African American and a Native American) as they acknowledged their history to one another and each took the other’s part. Erwin acknowledged that there was little support at home for the interest he has in his own ethnic heritage and the ethnicity of other members of the class. The comments he made that day in his log show his interest and enthusiasm:

“I think it was a good discussion today. Like how we talked about the black people and the Indians. I think we should learn about the black history because maybe some people don’t know much about their history. Next time we should talk more Mexican. Or other cultures.”

Because of Erwin’s openness and enthusiasm in the literature circles,
I looked forward with anticipation to his one hundred year family history timeline and his 10 year personal history timeline. Erwin, however, wrote only the briefest responses to the dates on his timeline as demonstrated by these examples:

1922 - My grandma was born and she was my favorite person.
1942 - My Uncle Dallas was born. He always made me laugh.
1989 - My Uncle Dallas died and it made me sad to see him go into the ground.

Although proficient in writing skills, Erwin wrote very little in his family stories folder during this time. His last literature study experience was with a book about Ryan White, a teenager who died from the disease of AIDS. Erwin was interested in Ryan’s story at the beginning but never became fully engaged as he had in prior groups. I did see that same earlier openness and energy when we discussed issues of culture in the total group. He was able to move the class into deeper understandings about the American Indian way of life (this will be discussed at greater length in the analysis section of total class experiences).

Although he completed all the tasks the other students did, his written work was never as rich as his conversation. I enjoyed my interview with him related to the kinds of things he talked about with his grandparents or older family members.

Erwin said to me:
"They talk about all the other family members. 
They talk about when they were kids. 
They talk about how hard they had to work. 
They had to work real hard to buy food. 
Sometimes they talk about our culture. 
Mostly they talk about what I am going to do in the future."

Erwin's future was of great concern to him. I asked him what he thought the future would hold for kids a few years down the line. Again, a thoughtful reply,

"They may be driving solar cars. 
They'll learn most of the same stuff. 
Maybe they'll come up with an easier way to learn. 
I think they may have a hard time breathing if we don't take care of the pollution."

I also asked him, "If you could give a gift to the future kids of Warren, what would it be?" Erwin grinned.

"That's easy. Plants and trees for the playground."

He then reminded me that the people from his heritage care about the earth. I told him I hoped that now we all do.

**Summary and Reflection - Erwin**

Erwin clearly saw the Family Studies Inquiry as a place where he could articulate his concerns about understanding his ethnic heritage. He felt a sense of identity with the Native-American characters in the books he read, and was more participatory in group discussions centered on these books. He
expressed a disappointment that his family seemed to place more importance on becoming part of mainstream society than on developing their own ethnic uniqueness. He did mention attending large Indian gatherings, however, so his ethnicity is supported, at least to some degree, at home.

I believe that Erwin felt a sense of status in the classroom because of the Family Studies Inquiry. Since he was only one of two Native-Americans in the room, he became the resident expert. We have a resource teacher in the building and I asked her to support Erwin by finding some materials for him. This knowledge added to his role as the authority on the Native-Americans. Rather than setting him apart, it contributed to his acceptance as a new student. It should be said, however, that he was intelligent, friendly, and good in sports which also contributed to peer approval. More importantly, the Family Studies Inquiry gave Erwin an opportunity to express his concerns about his ethnicity and to view himself in a positive way.

A question that rose with Erwin's work was why he did very little writing of family stories. Oftentimes sharing experiences in literature circles can be the spark for writing family stories. He wrote lengthy entries in his response logs but no stories. He wrote essays and letters of average length during this time. Yet, his family stories folder was virtually empty and his timeline annotations were only a sentence or two or just a phrase.

It may be a reflection of his ethnic heritage to maintain a sense of privacy
about family. Perhaps there is the feeling that others should not know about their problems. Although he discussed family attitudes and Native-American customs, he told few family stories even on a casual basis. Early in the year he shared his father's alcoholism with me after I read a short story to the class about an alcoholic. The only other story I remember was about his grandfather who was a deer dancer and that was more a connection than a story.

A second possible explanation may be the oral tradition in some Native American communities. Stories of all kinds may be told, but are not to be written down. The other Native-American student in the class read a book on Yaqui legends and I suggested he consider putting on a drama performance of one of the stories. He thought it was a good idea until I mentioned video-taping it. Then he said that he would not be allowed to do that. Putting certain kinds of stories into a permanent form is forbidden in some instances. Another possibility is that for Erwin, stories are oral and meant to be told as part of family and culture and writing is reserved for other things that are part of mainstream society.

There are other possible explanations unrelated to ethnicity. Perhaps the family did not know much of their history. Perhaps Erwin simply did not enjoy this type of narrative writing. I gave him the opportunity to tell me by commenting, “There doesn't seem to be much here,” on more than one occasion. He would just grin and shrug. I didn't pursue it. He had good skills
and wrote well when he wanted to. Why he was choosing not to in this instance remains his secret. But I would like to have understood why he chose not to write family stories so that I could have supported him as a learner.

**Conclusion - Student Profiles**

As I looked across all three of the profiles I saw evidence of student growth. Foundational to this growth was the opportunity the Family Studies Inquiry gave for children to respond to all aspects of their cultural heritage. Because I did not make a decision ahead of time about exactly what would be studied or how students should respond in such a study, they were able to create meaning for themselves. For Christina, it was building on her sense of family. For Brian, it was his religion and the death of a grandparent. Erwin was considering what it meant to be Native-American.

Although teachers need an instructional framework through which they offer support, the learning takes place when students are able to make connections to their prior knowledge and personal experience, searching out new information based on their interests and personalities. The Family Studies Inquiry allowed for these kinds of connections in a variety of ways.

The use of good children’s literature that was enjoyable and representative of diverse ethnicity was crucial to the Family Studies Inquiry. The literature selections enabled a range of culture-related issues to surface.
The biggest
Surprise
On the library shelf
Is when you suddenly
Find yourself
Inside a book -
(The hidden you)

You wonder how
The author knew.

(Beverly McLoughland, 1985)

There was the expectation within the study that the students could do their own thinking and share in true dialogue as they made sense of their own worlds. The study offered open-ended experiences to support and push their thinking. The timelines are one example of this type of experience. Simply filling in dates was replaced with “Why?” questions (i.e. Why were these dates significant?). A teacher should ask students to talk about their thinking. Teachers need to ask questions to which they do not already have the answers. The study allowed for a variety of written responses - journals, family story folders, and response logs. There was also the opportunity throughout the broader curriculum to respond in other ways, such as music, art, and oral storytelling.

Finally, the study allowed students to become experts in an area that mattered to them - to find their own research questions. Christina researched
foster families. Brian became intrigued with Abraham Lincoln. Erwin studied reference material on the Pima Indians. Yet even though each student could study areas of individual interest, there was a continual sharing in the classroom so that each learned from one another.

What is important is that children in school write about what matters to them to someone who matters to them. (Britton, 1982)
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS: TOTAL GROUP EXPERIENCES

While reflecting on the data collected throughout the year, I had two questions that were my focus:

1. What are the connections from their own specific cultures, life experiences and perspectives that students bring into the classroom when given the opportunity to participate in a Family Studies Inquiry?

2. What are the issues that seem relevant to my students as related to "kid culture"?

To look at question 1, it seemed necessary to look intensely at individual children. I did this by creating 3 student profiles which form the first part of the data analysis section. I wrote each profile based on the student's work in small group literature discussions which were focused on a book of their choice, and on their individual writing pieces and research.

During the year, I also had times where the class came together as a group, either to listen to a picture book I read, watch a related video, or complete an assignment. It was during these group sharing times that the issues related to "kid culture" first began to appear. It made sense in the data analysis to look broadly over several whole class experiences. I found the talk
from these experiences especially helpful in examining my second question. I chose sessions in which the talk focused most clearly on issues of "kid culture" or in which the talk was the most intense. I also wanted sessions with wide participation rather than those in which a few students dominated.

I chose three discussion sessions as total group experiences and one written project. Two discussions were preceded by the reading of a picture book and one by watching a video. These three I analyzed together.

I began by simply listing all of the issues and connections that surfaced during the discussion. The way I kept notes each time will be included in a description of each session. I looked at what individuals might be bringing from their independent studies in smaller groups to the large group, and for the "kid culture" references. Looking across all three discussions, I found strong patterns which permeated the discussions and I used these to create 4 patterns of talk.

In the first category, the students continued to make connections to their own individual cultural configurations. Within the larger group, it seemed to be ethnic connections with religious or family traditions such as the significance of holidays linked to that ethnicity. There was a second category of statements in which the students referred to the other pieces of literature they were reading as part of the study and drew comparisons. References to other pieces of literature were usually made as a way to connect across discussions. The third
category of talk was the "kid culture" which pulled the group together. They made connections as to how a particular topic was related to being a member of their age group and understandings that seemed relevant to the cultural topic under discussion. For example, if they read a book that referred to native dress, they would discuss matters of acceptable dress among peers. Finally, I noticed what I shall refer to as "I wonders . .". This category involved questions that students raised in the discussion that may or may not have been addressed. These questions give evidence to the struggle students have in bringing together their cultural heritage with the norms of their age group. The questions also reflect the sense of community that students were able to achieve and the level of thinking that occurred within the Family Studies Inquiry.

I will begin each total group analysis section with a rich description (Guba, 1987) of the discussion and conclude with a web showing how the discussion could be organized according to the previously stated categories. Following these three pieces, I will discuss the categories across all the discussions and show how the talk helped to define the categories and the significance of each category.

I will then discuss how my reflections on these discussions changed the way I viewed the analysis of the timelines the students constructed and how the timelines support their "kid culture".
Total Group Discussion 1 - Pueblo Boy

I read aloud the book *Pueblo Boy: Growing up in Two Worlds* (Keegan, 1991) to the whole class as part of the beginning emphasis on the family early in the school year. Students were reading and discussing text sets related to families in the smaller groups. The book shares the life of a Pueblo Indian boy who lives in the Pueblo Indian community with family members who are concerned with maintaining their ethnic heritage while at the same contributing as members of the broader society. The book is illustrated with photographs. I took brief field notes as we talked.

Students from three ethnic groups contributed to the discussion which followed the read-aloud. The European-American students took note of the book’s reference that in this particular group of Pueblo Indians, a woman goes to live in her husband’s village when she marries. A European-American student suggested that it is the “white” culture for a wife to go with a man in terms of his employment. He indicated that most women work at jobs in a secondary capacity, to “help out” but it is the man’s job that receives the most recognition and is of greater importance. Interestingly, an “I wonder” arose when another student said, “But it is not like that sometimes, because some woman don’t get married or they get divorced. Then they have the most important job.” The discussion of jobs stopped there but there was a long period of quiet thought. Woman and marriage and jobs. Big “I wonders . . .” in fifth
A second comparison made by a European American student was a discussion of name origin. In the book, the boy's Indian name had "come" to an elder during a deer dance. The student suggested that the boy had a name with "meaning" but he also had an "American" name that he used in public school. The class joined in and a lively discussion followed on the origin of names. One student asked the Pima Indian student in the class if he had another name. "No," Erwin said, "but my grandfather had two names. I was just named after my grandfather."

The question arose as to how we all came to have our names. Since many students were unsure, the class decided this would be a good "I wonder" and the question became homework for the evening. The next morning students came to the room before the bell in their excitement to share. One student was aghast to discover he had been named for a popular singer in the 1960's.

The name discussion continued down a different track when valuing names came up. A student remarked, "Nobody wants a weird name. You get made fun of. So if you have a weird name, you go by a nickname or something." There was a general murmur of agreement and a few examples of kids with weird names were generated. Evidently some students at the school had known a girl named "Crystal Lake". They laughed and shook their heads.
No parent who knew anything about kid culture should do that.

The conversation continued with someone finally contributing that he hated his name because there were always several other people in his classes with the same name. "Why is that?" we wondered. A Mexican student offered an answer. "A lot of Mexicans have the same name," he said. "There are like popular Mexican names." Another said that sometimes names are just popular, like old-fashioned names. An argument ensued when a student suggested that Mexican names were the most prevalent in Warren School. The class decided to conduct a research study and we set out later that very day, making predictions and collecting data.

A Native American student brought up the subject of dance. He said he liked the photographs of the costumes. A Mexican student compared the Pueblo feast days to Hispanic festivals and the corn dancers to traditional Hispanic folklorico dancing. "No," said the Native-American (Erwin). "They are not the same. When an Indian dances, it is a kind prayer. We pray by dancing."

"Right, that is what Indians do. But why do you still do that?" Brian asked. "You pray to the sun and stuff, and you are supposed to pray to God. I am Christian and I pray to God."

Several students spoke up spontaneously and I heard murmurs, "We are Catholic and we pray to God." I waited for Erwin. I knew Erwin to be Catholic also. What would he say? Would I need to offer support? The mysteries of
religion across ethnic groups are big "I wonders . . . "

Erwin rose to the occasion. "I am Catholic and I am Indian also. We pray to one God, but we believe his spirit is in all of nature. There is like a spirit god for each thing in nature."

Erwin then moved the subject away from such emotional connections and said, "Indians dance all their lives, like from age 3 on. The whole tribe goes to dances. It's not like you can choose." Through this statement, Erwin answers Brian's "why" question and also honors the role of tradition in his heritage, implying that when tradition is strong it can eliminate choice.

Aron, a Yaqui student told the class about a book he had been given on Yaqui myths and legends. He told us that the dances sometimes had to do with these stories. He told about other Yaqui traditions, one in particular that involved burning masks on Easter. He told us that people who are not Yaqui do not know these stories because "it is our religion that we cannot tell the story." Aron may at this point have been trying to support Erwin by letting Brian know there are reasons why Brian may not understand all that goes on.

Another student asked Aron why he was reading that book. It was not one of the literature study books. Aron did not seem to know and had no response. He may have felt he had done something wrong and shouldn't be reading a book other than those set out for literature study.

Manny (Hispanic) filled the silence. "The book is just trying to explain
that they believe certain things about nature . . ” and Manny went on to share a “sun” story that he himself had read in the book. It was discovered that three or four of the boys were reading the book together with Aron. They suggested they could “act out” one of the stories for us at a later date if it was all right with Aron for them to go “public” with the legend. Aron gave his “permission”, but we could tell he was not quite sure if it would truly be all right. Aron’s family was now Baptist.

As the discussion wound down, we made a web together of all that we had discussed. We made a chart with the ethnic comparisons we had come up with and we made a list of our questions. These artifacts I retained for analysis.

**Reflection on Group Discussion 1 - Pueblo Boy**

This discussion was significant in that a forum was set up for sharing across cultures in our classroom community. I mentioned Erwin and Brian by name to demonstrate how their personal small group agendas carried into the total group. Erwin continued his expert stance on Native-Americans and Brian pursued his interest in religion. Aron, the only other Native-American and usually extremely quiet, also made a significant contribution to this discussion when the way was opened by Erwin. Aron felt he had another piece of information that might be helpful in assisting the class to understand his Native-American heritage.
This discussion compared traditions across ethnic cultures as a search to define those traditions - reaching for ideas related to a woman's role in her family and a definition of God. There was a spirit of seeking to understand throughout the discussion with each offering their knowledge of culture.

The importance of names was a significant conversation related to the world of children and took up a major portion of the time. It was the part of the discussion that carried over to other activities as the kids first researched their own names and then counted and categorized the names in the school. This study was large enough that we called it social inquiry and entered it in the school Inquiry Fair. The following web is a visualization of how this discussion fell into the four categories of analysis:

**Connections to individual cultural heritage**
- religious beliefs
- names
- festivals
- role of women

**I Wonders . . .**
- When is a woman's job important?
- Do all Indians have two names?
- What are the most frequently occurring names at our school? Why?
- Do Indians believe in one “God”?
- How do we keep our traditions if they are religious in nature and we are now of a different belief system?
- What do we keep?
- What do we let go?
- What do we transform?

**Connections to other literature**
- Yaqui Myths and Legends

**Read Aloud:**
- Pueblo Boy

**References to “Kid” Culture**
- Importance of Names
Total Group Discussion 2 - Angel Child, Dragon Child

I read the picture book *Angel Child, Dragon Child* (Surat, 1983) to the class the week we moved into our chapter books. This was the beginning of the second quarter in school and first week of November. It is the story of a little girl who comes to the United States from Viet Nam. She is made fun of in school but eventually she makes friends and the kids raise money to bring her mother over from Viet Nam. My student teacher scripted the discussion.

After I finished the story, the discussion began with a comparison of the Vietnamese customs to "our customs", meaning the United States. No one in the class suggested that customs in America can vary. Rather it was an "us" and "them" discussion which resulted in a chart which we constructed on the board. The first topic brought up was the little girl's name. The student referred to *Pueblo Boy* (Keegan, 1991), an earlier read-aloud and said, "They have ways they name kids that have special meaning like the Indians do." From there other comparisons were made and this was the chart constructed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Viet Nam</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last name comes first</td>
<td>Last name comes after first name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They have legends and they use them to name their kids</td>
<td>We have family stories and experiences that tell us about our names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They chant together in school.</td>
<td>We raise hands and speak individually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They eat rice cakes.</td>
<td>We eat bread and cookies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No snow.</td>
<td>We have all kinds of weather.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I posed the broad question, "Does there seem to be anything we have in common?" I was surprised at the response. The class left the topic of customs and brought up feelings.

"She was lonely, leaving her mom and going to a new school," said Sonya. Children nodded in agreement. One student said it was because they made fun of her. He shared his own experience going to a new school and this set off the entire class. Many of the students had "going to a new school" stories and all were anticipating moving to middle school at the end of the year. They were in agreement that going to a different school was one of the hardest things a kid has to do and one of the things least understood by adults.

"They just walk in the door and tell you, boom! 'You have to go live with your Dad' and boom, your whole life is different," said Dale.

I asked what made it so hard. The responses included getting used to a new teacher's routine, leaving behind people and situations that are familiar and experiencing loneliness. Again Dale spoke up, "Kids at a new place make fun of you no matter who you are. They all stare at you because you are the new kid."

Building on Dale's comment of being made fun of, Christina brought the discussion back to the book, "It was sad in the book when they teased her because she was different. They said she wore pajamas." The character in the story wore her traditional Vietnamese clothes to school.
“Yeah, that was pretty dumb,” said Manny. “Somebody should have told her to dress like all the other kids. She has to fit in more. How you dress in school is important.” Everyone became animated at this change of direction and I had to call for order. One at a time they shared their understandings about the importance of dress in the world of kids.

D: You don’t want to look like a bum...all poor.  

F: You have to dress according to the weather or you look weird.  

C: It’s important because people look at you and judge you by what you are wearing on the outside.  

S: Your hair is also part of how you are dressed. Hairstyles are really important.  

C: Like Mexican girls wear their hair different than other kids. It’s usually bushier and more teased.  

E: Most people dress according to their personality. Like some people are all laid back and some come to school like fashion plates.  

M: Nerds dress different - like pocket protectors or bow ties - just to say, ‘I’m part of the nerd group.’  

B: ... and you can tell gang members by how they dress. And then there are the gang wanna-be’s. They try to dress like gang members and act all cool, but everybody knows they are not in the gangs.  

C: Sometimes people dress like ... well, say if you are like a nature person who goes hiking and stuff, you wear khaki clothes and hiking boots even if you are not hiking that day.  

M: It’s to let people know you like to do that. Like people into art and stuff dress different. Like in all black and they shave their heads or dye their hair.
As the discussion continued, the class seemed to conclude that dress was an important way to communicate. Manny referred to the book again when he said, “And she just walked in and communicated, ‘Hey, look at me, I’m different.’ She was already different enough.”

But the class seemed to feel that everyone should have been nice to her anyway. Brian referred back to the beginning of the discussion on moving, “If it were us in Viet Nam, then we would be the different ones.”

After this lengthy analysis, the class seemed to lose interest and we were ready to move on. As the rustling of the transition began, a student came up and suggested we add the book to the text set they had just completed on the topic of “mothers”. I agreed and gave her the book.

Reflection on Group Discussion 2 - Angel Child, Dragon Child

The focus in this discussion was "kid culture" in two specific areas. The first was the lack of power in a kid's life that is reflected in frequent changes. Such disruptions usually end up with a change in schools. The students' attitude seemed to be such that the reason for the change was of lesser importance than walking into a new school situation which they found to be highly traumatic. Adults may spend little time considering the effect of a new school adjustment on a child as kids are thought to be highly flexible and able to make friends quickly. While I am not a student of psychology and am not
trying to prove anything, it does seem that kids are not given recognition for the anxiety level that such a change can make. As a teacher it was a valuable insight for me to listen to their remarks and to consider how I can help new students feel more comfortable. I put together a set of books related to experiences of moving and brought them into the classroom. This discussion and the subsequent reading of the text set elicited family moving stories for their writing folders. Reading these stories gave me new knowledge about my students.

The second hot topic of the discussion was the importance of dress in “kid culture”. I found the depth of understanding about the communication of dress to be quite astounding. The students’ in my class at the early age of 10 could read people by the way they were dressed and knew how to dress themselves so as to give a desired message to the rest of the world. Here was the only place where certain ethnicity was shared in terms of dress and hairstyles. The class was in agreement that Hispanic girls liked “big” hair and spiked bangs. I found it interesting that my class found hairstyles as another way of stating who you are.

The most striking feeling from this discussion was the “relief” that seemed apparent as evidenced by the energy level of the discussion. Even the quietest children had something to say about one of these issues. To be able to open up to other kids and realize they were all feeling the same ways was
wonderful for them, and frequently throughout the discussion it was as if I was not there as they talked to each other. No matter what each child’s individual cultural configuration, the disruptions in their lives, going to new schools and trying to look right through dress and hairstyle were common issues that bonded them together.

The following web shows this discussion arranged according to the four categories of analysis:

**Connections to individual cultural heritage**
- dress/hairstyles
- food
- school behaviors
- names

**Connections to other literature**
- *Pueblo Boy*
- text set related to mothers

**Read Aloud - Angel Child, Dragon Child**

**References to “kid” culture**
- moving to a new school
- dress as a form of communication
- the importance of ‘fitting in’

**I Wonders . . .**
- Why didn’t someone tell her to dress differently?
- Why are we mean to people who seem different?

**Total Group Discussion - “Nikkolina”**

“Nikkolina” (1978) is a video that relates a fictional story about a 10 year old girl of Greek heritage. She is an ice-skater and performs in skating competitions. We watched this video in January, after completing the chapter
books. We were working on family timelines and the dates when relatives arrived from other countries was mentioned frequently on the timelines. Students were in the process of discovering their ancestry.

In this story, a cousin of Nikkolina’s is getting married. A great aunt from Greece comes for the wedding and stays in Nikkolina’s home. She speaks only Greek and much of the story focuses on Nikkolina’s reaction to this visitor. The real complication comes, however, when Nikkolina is asked to wear a native Greek costume and dance Greek dances at the wedding which happens to be on the same day as an important skating competition. As the story progresses, Nikkolina comes to like her aunt and shows interest in the family picture album. She helps the aunt cook Greek food. She finally opts to dance at the wedding. She is asked at a later date to perform in a skating competition for which she is now unprepared. She does not have a skating outfit or a routine ready. Her aunt ends up cutting her Greek wedding costume shorter to make a skater’s outfit and she does the Greek dance on the ice and is spectacular. At the end of her routine, she looks over at her aunt and both give the thumbs up sign. We began the discussion by creating a web of connections. A student from the University took field notes.

The class began the discussion with comparisons to other books they were reading. One student said it reminded her of the “scene” in Jar of Dreams (Uchida, 1985) when she “puts the dress in the drawer”. Erwin said it was like
Racing the Sun (Pitts, 1988) because in that book some of the family members were embarrassed by the Indian grandfather.

When others agreed that Nikkolina was embarrassed by the presence of her great aunt from Greece, I asked why they thought this was true. The kids responded quickly. Here are examples of their comments:

“*It embarrassed her that the aunt could not speak English.*”

“*The aunt hadn’t moved into the ‘new’ culture. It is like talking about Indian ‘old ways’ in Racing the Sun. She didn’t have new clothing and stuff.*”

“*The aunt wanted to stick with Greek habits.*”

“*She had an old-fashioned hairstyle and she wore that scarf. Nobody in American wears their scarves like that.*”

The discussion shifted when Christina (Mexican-American) pointed out that even if all those things were true, Nikkolina should have been nicer to the aunt and she should have been more willing to dance in the wedding because it was her family. I mention Christina’s ethnic background here only because it has been my experience in this particular community that members of the Hispanic population value large extended families and are supportive of family members. The family considers living in close proximity also important and it is not unusual for some family members to lack fluency in English. I believe that Christina’s ethnic values may have prompted her observation.

Erwin, a Pima Indian student, said that he didn’t think it was just that the aunt was an embarrassment. He said Nikkolina was “denying her background”.
From field notes of one of Erwin's earlier literature studies, I knew he was concerned about Native Americans who do not want to learn about their heritage, some of whom are his own family members. Erwin continued that Nikkolina did not want to be in the wedding because "it would be in the Greek style and she wanted to be American".

One brave student spoke out that he thought it was "her own business". When pressed to explain, Manny said,

"I just think it's a big deal now that you are supposed to find your roots and stuff, and I think it has to be your own business. Some people like that stuff, like blacks who wear African clothes and have 'afros'. I'm Mexican but I don't want to wear a sombrero."

Erwin disagreed. If you don't acknowledge your background, it is "like lying. And it causes family problems. Like it did in the movie."

At this point, another European-American student got into the discussion. He is very competitive in sports and is seen as a good athlete by his peers. He changed the focus:

"Well, maybe she didn't want to be in the wedding because it was the same day as the skating competition, and she had really worked hard to practice and she would be letting her coach and her skating partner down."

Things quieted down as the class moved their thinking into the area of decision making. I waited and then called on a student who hadn't yet joined the discussion. "What do you think?" I asked. He smiled and said, "The choice would be tough." I asked him why it would be tough. He shrugged but did not
respond.

One of the girls spoke out, “Because she doesn’t want to hurt people. She knows what she wants but she also knows what her father wants.” At this point I shared an experience of my own. I told the class I could really understand how hard decisions are because I had just made an important decision and I had really thought alot about the other people to whom my decision was just as important as it was to me. We spent the next several minutes as they shared decision making memories. It was at this point that the discussion became more concerned with the world of kids than issues of culture. The children agreed that the most difficult decisions are when parents disagree. The decision the child makes is perceived as “siding” with one parent or the other even if that is not the intention. Two students talked about pleasing parents in divorce situations. Dale spoke up and said, “I never get to make any decisions. I just have to do what everybody else says.”

After a few minutes of sharing, I asked if anyone wanted to say anything else about Nikkolina. Christina said she thought it all worked out for the best that she went along with what the family wanted. Another student responded, “She didn’t just go along with her family. It was something she wanted to do. She got to liking her aunt. In those pictures it showed, she was smiling and stuff when she danced.” Erwin had to get in the last word. “Right,” he said, “Getting involved in her culture turned out better.”
Sonya said it was both. Nikkolina got to liking her aunt but it was because they were doing "Greek stuff" together. Nikkolina learned about her Greek heritage through her relationship with her aunt. "It was because the aunt taught her things. The music. The food. Love for the family with that picture album."

Although many good points had been raised that perhaps we could build on in later discussions, I brought this time together to a close by saying I liked the way the film ended, with the aunt using an American hand sign. We agreed that the aunt was proud of Nikkolina, but Christina made a beautiful statement comparing the Nikkolina at the film's beginning with the Nikkolina who smiled over at her aunt during her final skating scene. "She had a little more Greekness inside of her," she said.

Reflection on Group Discussion 3 - "Nikkolina"

In this discussion the students touched on topics they had discussed earlier as a way of beginning the discussion. They mentioned the aunt's hairstyle and way of dressing. They also used connections to books they were reading as a way to organize a response. The fact that the aunt did not speak English was mentioned as part of Nikkolina's embarrassment, and I expected some discussion here because several of the students have relatives who do not speak English. But this was touched on and passed over. Perhaps it was
too close to home, considered too private or not an important issue to them at the time.

The large share of the time in this discussion was spent on the difficulty of decision making and parents who are seen as rivals. Divorce situations came up again. There was a moment of thought when Manny raised the issue of whether or not one really had to dig into one's culture and if you were interested, what did that really mean? Would it change the way we presented ourselves?

A perception that came to me as I looked over my notes on this discussion was how teachers spend a great deal of time laying a foundation and perhaps less time building on that foundation. This discussion had the potential of further discussion in meaningful areas - that of decision making skills and of what keeping in touch with one's cultural heritage can mean. With the strong foundation of small group discussion and the earlier total group sharing, this discussion raised significant issues that should have been pursued. It is so easy to plan a learning experience that is productive, but could be powerful if we stay more in tune with what's coming from the kids than what is next on our curricular schedule. When one does teacher research and examines data closely and over time it is easy to see opportunities missed and ways lessons could be extended and enriched.

The following web illustrates the video discussion as organized as
organized according to the four categories of analysis:

**Connections to individual cultural heritage**
- language
- dress/hairstyles
- food
- importance of family

**Connections to other literature**
- Racing the Sun
- Jar of Dreams

**Discussion of Video: “Nikkolina”**

**References to “kid” culture**
- difficulty of making decisions
- parental rivalry
- divorce situations
- family members can embarrass us

**I Wonders . . .**
- Do I have to honor my heritage?
- Do I have to do what my family members want if I have other priorities?
- How do I connect with my ethnic heritage?

**Total class writing experience - Timelines**

I did the timeline analysis during the school year after discussing each timeline with the students. I was discouraged because the 100 year timeline, although rich in cultural connections had, according to the students, been completed primarily by their parents. This would make sense since the students had little knowledge of their history. The students were quick to reassure me, however, that most of them had completed the 10 year timeline by themselves. At the time I felt that this preliminary analysis would not be useful. The timelines
would serve as part of the supportive curriculum. I later discovered the timelines were a rich source of data for comparison when I realized the relevance of "kid culture". The timeline analysis became another way to look at information within the study that illustrates the differences between adult and children's perspectives when considering relevant issues of life. The timeline activity was designed to support connections to family history. It did so in the century timeline completed by adults. The decade timelines completed by children were very different. Their significant dates had to do more with the challenge of growing up. The adults connected to broader society. Kids were concerned with the business of living.

**Description of the Timeline Project**

The purpose of placing the timeline learning experience into the Family Studies Inquiry was three fold. The first purpose was to broaden students' perspectives on their place in the family - to help them get a strong sense of family identity. The second purpose was to encourage parent and student communication which could extend into other parts of the curriculum such as telling and writing family stories. It also could provide a strong support base for dialogue in literature discussion. Inherent in this statement was my anticipation of various kinds of connections to personal cultural configurations. The third purpose was to establish a perspective on history and dates that would support
students in the biography studies and in placing events in American history within a framework.

Most writing done during the study was student initiated. That is, the students responded in logs or wrote family stories during writing time or researched areas of interest to them. I did, however, plan a writing experience that every student in the class was asked to do. This was the task of creating timelines.

After completing two literature experiences which included first the reading of text sets of picture books and other short pieces related to the theme of family, and secondly, novels with family relationships as a focus, we were ready to move into the study of biographies. Before reading a book on someone else’s life, I wanted the class to look first at our own family histories. I assigned the completion of two timelines. The first timeline was to cover a century - one hundred years of family history. Although they could put as many dates on the timeline as they wished, I asked them to explain ten dates from the timeline that they felt were of most significance. Since the children were only 10, I assumed this would be a shared experience between family adults and children. I then asked the class to complete a decade timeline of ten years. This would be the entire lifespan of most of my students. Again, they were to pick ten dates from the timeline to tell me about in writing. I wondered what kinds of experiences would be chosen for each kind of timeline. I wondered
what connections would be made. What is important in extended family history? What would my students think were the ten most important things that had occurred in their ten years on planet Earth? Would the timelines reflect ethnicity, religion, or other cultural connections? Perhaps they would reflect our recent study of families and the students would share family experiences that are common to all.

Century timelines - 100 years of family history.

The comments from the century timelines reflected three areas of interest. First, nearly every timeline had the date members of the family came to Arizona or to the United States. Here are examples:

1892 - My great-great-grandparents moved from Germany to the U.S.A. and lived a happy life.

1900 - My great grandparents moved from Mexico.

1916 - My grandfather was brought to the U.S. from Mexico to work as a cowboy.

1915 - My great great grandparents moved from Mexico to California in a covered wagon.

1892 - Francisco and Antonia Valenzuela married in Mexico. He came to the U.S. in 1904 to work as a teamster.

Having established themselves in the United States, the timelines then accorded the families a connection in the history of America. Over half of the comments referred to a particular event in American history.
1830 - There was no work and a lot of sickness. It was the Great Depression.

1948 - Valencia Road was named after my family.

1969 - The year of Woodstock.

1910 - My great grandma heard that the Titanic sunk. The people thought that ship would never sink.

1868 - My grandpa made one of the doors of the San Xavier Mission.

1975 - Members of my family went to the first show at the Tucson 4 Drive-In.

1962 - My uncle Mario was born on the day Kennedy died.

1966 - My cousin Alex died in the war. It was so sad.

1931 - My grandpa drove a 1930 Model A Ford.

1776 - Paul Revere was our cousin. It is interesting to know that I am related to someone in our history books.

1893 - My great great grandpa owned a cattle ranch in Texas. I thought it was interesting to know our family went back to cowboy days. I didn’t think that I had a grandpa that long ago.

1776 - Thomas McClean and Francis Hopkinson were relatives of mine and they signed the Declaration of Independence.

1901 - My great-grandfather was a deputy sheriff at the last hanging in Arizona.

1943 - My great grandpa Pena was a prisoner of war in W.W. II

1943 - My great uncle fought in W.W. II as a soldier. He was a Captain. He flew a plane.

1964 - My parents liked the Beatles.

1966 - My mom learned to do the twist. She tried to teach me how, but I can’t.

1990 - My uncle got shot. He was in a plane in the war. He still has the bullet in his head.
The final group of entries on the timelines shared experiences that had significant impact on the family.

1989 - My sister had a stroke. They said she was going to die but she didn’t.

1979 - My mom and dad met in high school. I was in my mom’s stomach when she was 16. In H.S., my mom went to a place called “Homebound” where pregnant teenagers went.

1934 - My great grandfather was killed by a hydraulic truck. The other great grandfather fell while working on a steel bridge. He fell 25 stories.

1952 - My Tia Toni was born. My nana was happy. My tia was almost born in a taxi because in those day they didn’t have streets and the road was bumpy.

1921 - I chose this day because my Tata is special. You kind of have to talk loud to him. My nana is special, too. She likes to go to the Price Club. They got married in 1924. When you get married, you get closer to God.

There was a significant amount of learning that took place from these timelines. We made a long timeline on the wall and students put up as many of their connections as we had room. It gave them a place to connect when we added names and dates of the people they were reading about during the biography section of the Family Studies Inquiry. They also had many stories to tell that were new to them. The interest in these timelines led directly to my purchase of the book My Place (Wheatley & Rallins, 1992) which became a major study for the next six weeks of school.
Decade timelines

One might predict that a child’s timeline would be full of dates of special occasions such as birthdays or holidays. Certainly any classroom teacher is aware of the importance of such occasions. Yet a birthday party or a holiday did not appear. The only special “occasions” recorded on the timelines were those of religious nature. Religious traditions were apparently seen as a kind of “rite of passage” or milestone.

1990 - I had my first communion.
1882 - I was baptized.
1989 - I took catechism lessons.
1985 - I became a Christian.
1982 - My baptism.

The majority of comments were “firsts”. There are a lot of beginnings between birth and age ten.

1988 - I picked the date I started reading because I love to read.
1981 - I was born. It was a very good day.
1990 - I got my first dog. It was a puppy and I named him Cookie because he looked like a chocolate chip cookie.
1985 - I got my first tricycle. It was nice and shiny. I remember I used to ride it all the time.
1986 - I learned to skate. I got a new pair of skates. And they were blue and pink. I fell many times.
1987 - I got my first bike with training wheels.
1989 - It was my first time on a baseball team. I had fun. I was good.

1983 - I said my first sentence. I said, “It is mine. Give it to me.”

1985 - I caught my first fish. I was proud of myself.

1986 - My first time to go golfing. I lost. My score was 84.

1989 - I started Brownies. I was in it for 3 years.

1989 - I lost my first tooth. I got money. And I thought it was just wonderful.

After listing their “firsts”, the remaining entries were a delightful collage of memories that gave me a window into the minds of my students.

1984 - This was the year I moved to Arizona. I mention it because I have met people here who like to fish as much as I do.

1948 - This is not really supposed to be on this timeline. But this is when my father was born. He is the best in my life! He is the one who took me to the store to get my poster board, my construction paper and some gum.

1986 - Uncle Merrill got hit by a car on his bike. It's important because it is a lesson. Don't ride your bike in the middle of the street.

1989 - I had to move. I didn't like it. I would not pack up to the new house.

1988 - My grandmother died. I am very sad. I miss her a lot. I still remember the time I went to her funeral.

1985 - My mom remarried. I got my own room.

1984 - I went to day care because my mom went to work.

1986 - The first time I lived with my Dad since the divorce.

1991 - I got my own set of tools. I fixed by father's drill. I like fixing things.

1985 - I saw snow close-up.
1984 - I had to get stitches. I was jumping on the bed.

These decade timelines, although making only a few direct connections to family heritage, were rich for me as a teacher. In the summers I conduct workshops for teachers. We spend the first day of the workshop talking about knowing the learner. Short & Burke (1991, pp. 10) suggest a first step in creating curriculum is to ask ourselves the question, “What do we understand about the natural learners who enter our schools?” These timelines gave me a keyhole view into the individual meaning making construction of life that often times can be viewed only from observation and not from a student’s perspective.

Reflection on Group Experience 4 - Timelines

With the help of the parents, the century timelines gave us some wonderful understandings to build on in the classroom. But the decade timelines told me the most about what was relevant to my students. Comparison of the two sets of timelines told me that students do not always buy into an adult's agenda, and, if allowed the freedom, may produce something quite unexpected and wonderful. The decade timelines validated my students' learning and adjustments that had been taking place in their lives for ten years.

This was one of those instances when students move away from the modeled form of response. But in doing so they produced something very rich
and unique to the thinking of children. Newkirk (1992) believes that it is the meeting and interaction of the two cultures, the adult culture represented by the teacher and parents and the culture of ten year olds, that contributes to success. Do we as adults, as teachers, allow only one interpretation of the classroom text, so that children cannot bring their own meaning making interpretations? Learning and a change of heart occurs, I believe, when adult culture and kid culture mesh together, sharing and valuing each other's thinking, experience and language.

Though we as adults can remember specific experiences from our childhood and still feel the pain or joy of that experience, as adults we tend to devalue such experience in the children around us. I continue to reflect on the culture of kids and the role it should take in the development of all curriculum certainly, but for the purpose of this study, the degree to which it impacts curriculum designed to broaden cultural understandings especially as they relate to ethnicity.

It is now "avant garde" to ask a child about the social experiences of her or his ethnic heritage. We want the whole family to come in and share. But are we listening to the voices that want to tell us about "kid culture" and the social experiences that grow from that? It seems to me that education addressing cultural issues needs to recognize that a child's ethnic heritage fits within the age related culture and that if kids are not given a way to process the
connections between the two, growth will not take place and such educational procedures as often termed "multicultural education" will be at best ineffectual and perhaps even promote a greater notion of ethnic separatism.

“If the culture of the teacher is to be part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher . . . We should start knowing that the social experience the child already possesses is valid and significant, and that this social experience should be reflected back to him as valid and significant.”
(Bernstein, 1966, p. 120)

Discussion of the Categories

Dorothy Watson (1990) writes that one of the goals of literature study “is to provide a setting in which students and teachers are secure and comfortable in sharing their intellectual and emotional connections with literature”. She continues by suggesting that students’ personal meanings are deepened through the social transaction within a group of learners. Watson suggests that a concern inherent in this kind of curriculum is the way to capture and record when connections are made, “when patterns become clear, when learning happens.”

In the descriptions of the three group discussions, there is evidence of “learners thinking and feeling deeply” (Watson, 1990) in response to literature. As a teacher reflecting on these discussions, I first acknowledge how unusual
this kind of discussion is in a classroom. In my experience with a range of state-adopted curriculums, discussion serves other purposes than to allow for connections and personal growth. Students are seldom asked to talk together without guidance by the teacher toward a predetermined educational goal and in fact with little intervention from the teacher. To actually plan such discussions and create prior learning experiences within the classroom to support discussion is even more unusual. Because of the concern voiced by Watson (1990) that we be able to retrieve evidence of the learning that takes place through literature discussion, it is important for teachers to learn how to look closely at discussion. Looking for connections and patterns across discussions not only contributed insights into my research questions relating to the cultural understandings and questions of students, but also gave validity to the establishment of collaborative social contexts for learning (Short, 1991).

In looking across the three discussions, I noticed that in the larger group the students connected to their individual cultural configurations just as they had done in the smaller literature groups. They referred to their own cultural heritage experiences with religious beliefs, celebrations, the role of women, the importance of the family, food, dress, hairstyles and issues of language. Rosenblatt (1968) observes that readers draw on past experience to elicit meaning and then reorganize the past experience in order to create new understandings. As the students then create these new understandings by
exploring their own pluralism within a collaborative environment, they have the opportunity to hear diverse perspectives and to become aware of and value other cultures (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990). The students learn about culture in an authentic way through dialogue with each other. This sets the tone throughout the classroom for an “orientation” (Ruiz, 1984) toward multicultural learning throughout the curriculum.

Literature is one of the most powerful components of a multicultural education curriculum, the “underlying purpose of which is to make the society a more equitable one” (Bishop, 1987). While drawing from the known to create new understandings, these students used knowledge or insights gained from other reading that they were doing. They referenced books from their small group literature studies, books they were reading during free reading time, and books shared in earlier total group discussions. Throughout the Family Studies Inquiry, we were building a community of learners with literature as our base. Children were sharing books and these books became part of our group history (Short, 1991). These books also created a context for further exploration of culture by illuminating the experiences of other children growing up as members of particular cultures not represented in our classroom population.

I found that the open discussion with total group kindled associated memories. These memories grew out of the students’ culturally related experiences and from pieces of literature that had significance for them. These
connections are significant, yet were somewhat predictable. Newkirk (1992) tells us that there may be that moment in open discussion when talk leaps unpredictably to new topics. The topics that became the most productive for discussion in total group were those concerned with the age and generational aspect of culture. All of the students had this aspect of culture in common and sharing the concerns relevant to being a kid became a means of bonding in spite of individual differences in heritage, at least for this short period of time. In looking through the discussions, these topics specific to “kid culture” were discussed: the difficulty of decision making and a kid’s lack of empowerment, parental rivalry, a kid’s perspective on divorce and it’s effect on kids, the embarrassment family members can cause, the significance of a name, moving to new schools, the dress code in the world of kids and the importance of fitting in. Their timelines demonstrated the importance of accomplishment and all of the new beginnings inherent in childhood.

These responses prompted me to consider that the acknowledgment of one’s cultural heritage could, in some children, occur only to the degree that it did not interfere with membership in the culture of their age which may have priority. Assuming that children themselves create this culture with varying elements present in any one class, it becomes important for a teacher to maintain a multicultural orientation to all learning that values diversity and sees all people as valuable contributors to the experience of school and society
(Fleming, Fuetevilla & Ruiz, 1991).

A more detailed discussion of the significance of "kid-culture" can be found in Chapter 5. Apparent in this issue is the conflict children can experience when attempting to combining both worlds. It is my belief that such conflicts are not considered when curriculum is designed to "teach multiculturalism".

Finally, the sharing of story and open dialogue gave students the opportunity to assimilate ideas and attitudes and to form new questions. Forming questions as they look at themselves and society is the basis of inquiry and foundational to growth. I suggest that such inquiry is the process we refer to as critical thinking, although this term has been overused in the field of education. Being critical and reflective connotes an ability to interpret and analyze the multiple perspectives experienced each day (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990). Whether these experiences relate to the broader cultural heritage or focus on issues of "kid culture", I would want my students to have "I wonders . . ." about all of it. If I attempt to develop learning experiences in my classroom that probe the thinking of my students, then it follows that I would want to see if students are indeed asking "why" questions. As I looked across the three discussions, I formed the following list of "I Wonders . . ." some of which were addressed in the discussion, while others were questions that could form the basis for future learning experiences:
I wonder why we are mean to people who seem different?

I wonder why someone didn't tell her she should dress differently?

Do I have to honor my heritage?

Do I have to do what my family wants if I have other priorities?

How do I connect with my ethnic heritage?

When is a woman’s job the most important?

How did I get my name?

What are the most frequently occurring names at our school? Why?

Do Indians believe in one God?

Do different ethnic groups have different ways of naming people?

Do all Indians have two names?

How do we keep traditions if they are religious in nature and we choose a different belief system that has traditionally been associated with other ethnic groups?

What about our heritage should we keep? What should we let go? What should we transform?

Although many learning experiences took place during the Family Studies Inquiry, I believe that, upon analysis, the total group discussions based on a piece of literature that reflects a multicultural world were the most productive in sharing perspectives and broadening understandings within our classroom community. As a teacher and also as a researcher, I regret that I did
not encourage students to have more than one discussion centered on each book. The emergence of the four categories of talk demonstrate that these discussions were largely sharing and exploration. With time for reflection, continuing the discussion at a later date might have encouraged a clearer focus and students may have found an opportunity to dig deeper and engage in critique and inquiry through dialogue.
In this chapter I give an overview of the concern leading to this study and a summary of the data collection and analysis. I discuss the findings that I consider to be of greatest significance and the understandings I have developed as a teacher, i.e. the "true vision" (Hubbard & Power, p. 96).

Summary of the Study

One of the more recent trends in schooling is the introduction of ways to provide students with an education that is multicultural. It has been my observation that many of the methods introduced do little to encourage what Rudine Sims (1992) sees as the purpose of such an education, that is “to change the world by making it a more equitable one” (p. 51). In fact, the approaches most frequently used by teachers, that is, using ethnic groups or geographic regions as a theme study, or “culture of the month” celebrations, seem to lead to a more separatist feeling. I searched for a way in my classroom to encourage students to explore their own cultural identity and to share perspectives with one another in a way that would encourage an expanded awareness and mutual acceptance. I developed a Family Studies Inquiry Unit
using children’s literature as a way for students to experience their own as well as others’ cultures, thereby gaining knowledge and insight into the human experience and forming connections to their personal heritage. I also came to realize that in order to encourage understanding and acceptance of individual cultural configurations I needed to consider the impact of meshing their ethnic and family heritage with the “kid culture” in which all of my students shared. Therefore, two overall questions guided this study:

1. What are the connections from their own specific cultures, life experiences and perspectives that students bring into the classroom when given the opportunity to participate in a Family Studies Inquiry?

2. What are the issues that seem relevant to my students as related to “kid culture”?

Because this study was a teacher-as-researcher empirical design, it was conducted in my own classroom with 28 fifth grade students over one school year. There were three primary sources of data collected: student artifacts, field notes and a teacher journal. Secondary sources of data included anecdotal records, audio and video tapes, interviews and surveys. The purpose of collecting this data was to document references students made to cultural heritage or to issues of “kid culture” during the course of the Family Studies Inquiry. Data analysis was undertaken during as well as after the data
collection period and included regular dialogue with a university mentor and peer teacher researchers. In the first part of the final data analysis I developed three student profiles where I looked intensely at individual children's participation in the study over the year. In the second section, I looked broadly over the whole class in four total group experiences. Two of these experiences are discussions based on a piece of literature, one is a discussion after viewing a video and one is a focused writing experience in which the whole class participated. After analyzing the data, I found the following areas to be of significance:

1. **Students engaged in the Family Studies Inquiry did indeed make personal connections to their own cultural configurations.** The personal connections were as varied as were the students. Connections were made to their religions, their views of family and family members, as well as numerous traditions and customs. These connections were evident in both small and large group discussion and in their writing.

2. **Students engaged in the Family Studies Inquiry made comparisons and connections across cultures.** These connections and comparisons took place in the small literature discussion groups and also during the total class discussions. Students built on the comments of others by sharing or explaining about themselves or by asking questions. They showed evidence of expanded
awareness and understandings about multiculturalism. This kind of sharing created a strong sense of community within this class.

3. **Children's literature that dealt with multicultural issues and literature representative of varying ethnic groups was a catalyst for dialogue related to culture.** The literature was a place to see themselves and a way to look at similarities and differences. The literature was effective as a vehicle for critical thinking as students considered multiple perspectives and entered into dialogue. Although most discussions had one book or a set of books as a general focus, the students also referred to other pieces of literature used in the study when making comments. They reflected on characters and situations from other stories and used the stories to explain their meaning. This demonstrates the power of literature for vicarious experiences and long term connections which then has the inherent potential for bringing about change in attitudes and behaviors.

4. **Students searched for other materials or resources to answer concerns raised during discussions.** Students engaged in inquiry showing evidence that true dialogue had occurred in the group discussions. The individual inquiries led to other learning engagements that pushed students to think more deeply about culture.
5. **The students made references throughout the study to “kid culture”.** Students shared issues inherent in being a kid. One issue was that of empowerment. They discussed the communication strategy used in dress and hairstyles, as well as other customs, rules and traditions in kid world. This sharing and discussion was woven throughout the activities of the Family Studies Inquiry. The kid culture topics generally emerged in the total class discussion. Differences in kid’s views and adult views were again demonstrated through analysis of the timelines. Because of the tendency of kid culture to surface frequently, it became apparent that any discussion of cultural heritage needed to include a reference to kid culture for connections and understandings to occur.

6. **Students questioned their understandings of culture.** They not only searched for answers to questions other students had asked and for which they did not have the answer, but they also sought meaning together for “I Wonders” in which no one had the “definitive” answer and thereby went deeper into cultural issues. They discussed the relationship of family heritage and the codes of “kid culture”. These discussions occurred primarily in the latter half of the year reflecting the process of change over time - as various definitions of culture emerged and as sharing moved to inquiry.
Discussion and Implications

Based on these findings, my understandings as a teacher have deepened most significantly in the defining of cultural heritage, the use of children's literature and literature discussion groups as a support in providing an education that is multicultural, the existence and relevance of a "kid culture", and the multiplicity of issues related to classroom research. In this section, I will reconsider each of these areas based on knowledge gained through this study and offer suggestions to educators for possible curricular change or adjustment based on needs indicated by the research.

The Defining of Cultural Heritage

As previously described, the customary approach to studying culture in many classrooms is through artificial methods that focus primarily on ethnicity alone or ethnicity related to region. Examples of these kinds of studies may be "Black History Month" or "Indians of the Southwest". I therefore entered the research study with a mental focus on the various ethnic cultures in my classroom. I wondered if the Black American student would eventually engage in dialogue with the Native American or Hispanic student. This did, indeed, happen throughout the course of the year, but it is also true that the Christian student questioned the religious events participated in by Native-Americans and Hispanics. The formation of our country is based on religion, yet in the zeal to keep religious teaching out of the curriculum, it has become forgotten as a
significant element in culture. If discussed at all, it is in relation to historical events, such as the Holocaust or the Pilgrim's journey to America. Just as students need to broaden perspectives on ethnicity, there may also be the need to understand and acknowledge one's own religion and that of others. Misunderstandings, prejudice and stereotyping exist in religion as well as ethnicity. Some students have their religious views made very public in a classroom when for example, they cannot say the pledge or have to stay home when holidays are observed. None of the other children seem to know why and sometimes the student doesn't know either. Such differences in religion need to be addressed.

There are other issues in defining culture. The variation in family structures are growing in number, i.e. single parent households and children growing up in shared family situations. This has become a part of their heritage. Any teacher who has asked students to design a family tree knows the panic it can instill in some students. The role of gender in our heritage was also a significant area of discussion during the research study. Certainly issues of gender can be woven throughout issues of ethnicity and religion. Socioeconomic concerns are also relevant to students and comparisons consciously or unconsciously made.

All aspects of culture seem to be changeable in today's world and although historical studies are important and have a place, students should be
given opportunities to analyze and consider deeply the current issues of their daily life and make sense of it all. It is my belief that it is inappropriate for teachers to expect change in student's attitudes toward each other resulting in a change of action if our focus on culture remains fragmented and does not address the whole child. I would suggest the following three points for teachers to consider when making curricular decisions:

1. **Move away from “topic” studies as relate to culture** (i.e. Indians of the Southwest). Develop a more global orientation to learning that enables issues relating to a broad definition of culture to flow through in a natural way.

2. **Choose learning experiences that are more open-ended and which allow for collaboration, reflection, dialogue and personal response.** In these kinds of experiences, students can explore the aspect of culture which is of greatest personal significance at the current time. In this study, one student spent the greatest amount of time looking at his religion and his comparative questioning supported another student who was looking deeply into his Pima Indian heritage.

3. **Think through your own cultural history and use that as a basis of inquiry for learning about, understanding and valuing each**
individual's culture in your classroom. Deeper insight into the aspects of culture that have influenced each of us will bring about an orientation towards multiculturalism that is greater than ethnicity alone. It will encourage a sensitivity toward students and issues that will be evident in our approach to the classroom community and that will view an education that is multicultural as a day-to-day endeavor rather than a special month or a designated "unit" of study.

Shortly after I completed this study, I met a teacher from Georgia who wanted her class to be penpals with my class. I agreed. What I did not understand was that this was a part of her “Southwestern” topic study. When our first set of letters arrived, each brief student letter was accompanied by a list of questions my class was supposed to answer individually (see Appendix C). I was astonished at some of the questions. Among them were: What kind of students are in your classroom? Do you live in a hogan? Do you see many Native Americans? Have any of the students lived on a reservation? Do you have many Spanish in your classroom?

There was silence as we read the questions. We were no longer people. We were part of a project. Students looked at me with faces that said, “What is this?” Nothing we could write back would change completely the separateness we felt. I do not think that was the teacher’s intention. Some of our methods for
“teaching culture” are simply missing the boat. Are we as teachers perpetuating the stereotypes?

Children’s Literature and Literature Discussion Groups

In my own attempt to confront diversity and create a learning environment that would provide students with multiple ways of knowing about themselves and the world, I turned to children’s literature. Huck (1978) tells us that literature can be windows for looking at different aspects of life and mirrors for seeing ourselves. Good children’s literature can raise the consciousness level of children and deepen their understanding of their own culture well as providing insights into other cultures. Huck goes on to say “children need to discover what is unique to each group of persons and what is universal to the experience of being human” (p. 502).

I believe the books that are most useful as mirrors and windows are the ones in which a good story is the central focus and the aspect of culture that may be highlighted simply flows through that story. Although we need publishers to print more of these kinds of books, the days should be gone when teachers study issues of culture with dusty, out of date books or rely only on nonfiction. Many of the more recently published books termed as “multicultural” have beautiful illustrations or photographs that are very appealing and stories that draw the reader to an experience that is vicarious but which nevertheless
gives a place to hook a future connection or an understanding.

Teachers should also acquaint themselves with the field of children’s literature. They need to stay current with new books, read widely and come to understandings of how to use literature in a powerful way that will encourage true dialogue. For example, not all books need to deal directly with the issues they want to raise in their classrooms. Books about moving would help children understand perspectives inherent in a cultural study of immigration.

I would suggest that teachers acquaint themselves with the many resources available for bibliographies and book lists related to themes and be prepared when the librarian is ready to order books. In selecting books, teachers should choose books which authentically reflect cultural uniqueness and they should be careful to select a range of representations of each particular cultural group. I recall a study did this past year on immigration. I first put together sets of books on family and then books on moving and we were careful to choose a range of books with different perspectives on these themes. Finally we began to read books on immigration. Because of the “multicultural” nature of immigration we gave less attention to our selection. I read several picture books to the class and we participated in discussion groups focused on chapter books. One morning as I began the day with another yet “immigration” book, one of the students commented that she just didn’t think she could listen to one more sad story. “Weren’t there any happy immigrants who got along just
"Fine?" she asked. It does little to help broaden the world view of students if we give them only one perspective of any group of people. We may need to search out related texts and not rely only on books. Poetry, magazine or newspaper articles may be useful if they are appealing as well as informative.

Literature wisely chosen for use in the classroom will be more effective if used in a curricular setting that allows for individual response and dialogue. In this study I organized literature discussion groups centered on text sets and later on novels in which 4 or 5 children read the same book. If teachers do not give them a predetermined set of questions to answer or topics to address, it then follows that students can generate dialogue based on a mutual experience which then becomes a natural way to learn and to construct meaning. This mutual experience is not only that of reading the book together but living through the story experiences in a vicarious way. The model of teaching cultural "topics" even when accompanied by creative activities still remains a passive way for students to receive knowledge. In literature discussion students actively share experiences and ideas. For example, they may agree or disagree with the decisions made by the character in the story or have a difference of opinion with other group members. This leads them to revisit the text to defend or clarify their statements or perhaps check on their own understandings.

Peterson (1992) differentiates between this kind of dialogue and
conversation. He suggests that conversation is an exchange where being with other people is of foremost importance. In true dialogue, there is a focus "and participants join for the purpose of understanding, disclosing, and constructing meaning" (p. 103). Peterson suggests that true dialogue encompasses inquiry and critique - the skills necessary for constructing meaning. In the context of developing a pluralistic view, true dialogue would result in students listening and responding to one another's views and experiences as they join together in making sense of the book and of their own connections and responses. This dialogue grants the opportunity for students to gain new understandings of the issues in cultural diversity through the inquiry process which has the hope of bringing about an awakening of a critical consciousness and an involvement of the heart that can lead to change in attitudes of stereotyping and prejudice.

Supporting students in the creation of meaning through dialogue requires much effort. Students who are accustomed to workbooks and "guess what the teacher is thinking" questions are uncomfortable. Students who spend hours discussing movies and baseball cards can not think of one thing to say about a book. There has been a value placed on quiet in the classroom and being allowed to sit in groups and talk has a kind of freedom attached to it that may pose some management problems in the beginning. How does a teacher achieve greatness in dialogue?

Through this study I learned that one way to begin small literature
discussion groups is with shorter pieces of text that are easy to read and understand and which have themes children can easily relate to. I began with sets of picture books on family members. The stories were easily read and everyone had something to say. Yet, at the same time, discussing family was a way to begin looking at issues of culture. One Native-American student made immediate connections to his grandfather who was a deer dancer after he read Knots on a Counting Rope (1987) in the grandfather's text set. Besides picture books which can be time consuming to collect and organize, a teacher could begin with short stories, poetry, articles or a chapter from a longer book. The teacher can sit in on discussion groups as a participant. As a member of the group, a teacher can reflect or share a personal connection that model the process being careful not to impose one's own agenda on to the group.

A teacher's role in supporting good dialogue, however, begins long before sitting down with the discussion group. I especially like the advice of Peterson (1992) who said that building a community which nurtures the development of attentive and caring attitudes largely depends on the teacher who should daily be demonstrating caring for their student's ideas and "very being" (p. 108). The importance of building community cannot be overstated in a classroom where we hope to be sensitive to one another.

One way I was able to demonstrate this caring and sensitivity was in the total group literature discussions. Bringing the students together after they
had read and dialogued in small groups gave support to the larger group discussion and made it richer. I wonder how often teachers “recreate the wheel” in lessons instead of building on prior knowledge and understandings in a way that encourages students to dig deeper. The smaller groups made the large group more energetic and productive, because students were ready to discuss issues already raised in the smaller group sessions with other pieces of literature. These ideas then came together and generated new thinking which created a list of more issues to discuss related to cultural that would stretch our thinking even farther.

The Relevance of “Kid Culture”

It was in the total group discussions with the support of prior reading and sharing, that the fifth graders opened the door to “kid culture” as they attempted to connect cultural diversity with the expectations of childhood. I was amazed at the need my students had to discuss the issues relating to “kid culture”. Although students are bombarded with the issues of ethnicity, I believe it is the story of growing up they are each creating that is their focus. The struggle to become one’s own person is a struggle which they all share, irrespective of differences in their individual cultural configurations. I would suggest that the ways in which cultural understanding and acceptance are currently being taught are not bringing about a significant change in attitude
because we are imposing it on children and they have another more powerful agenda.

In elementary school especially, there seems to be the attitude that by simply telling a child what we as adults consider to be the important things to believe, he or she will absorb it, believe it and become it. Programs that did not work in junior high or high school are not scrapped. It is just assumed that kids need them at a younger age. Hence, elementary school is inundated with “good beginnings” - substance abuse prevention programs, conflict resolution programs, family life education, gang education, self-esteem projects and career guidance. These programs are imposed on the students and imposed on teacher who not only are required to give time over to these programs but are sometimes required to teach them. Not least in all this are the programs designed to bring about cultural understandings and tolerance.

Huck (1978) aptly points out that childhood is not a waiting room for adulthood. We can expand this analogy to say childhood is not an empty waiting room where ideas can quietly walk in, sit down and stay forevermore. Children grow into adults whose roots certainly are in childhood experiences. But each child organizes, understands and relates these experiences in differing ways that result in individual adults. When do we give children the chance to speak and to share this meaning making process with us and with each other? Are educators afraid to allow students anything but fill-in-the-blank
talk because we may possibly hear them say, "What you are “teaching” is meaningless and irrelevant to me. This task is designed to make adults feel better and rid themselves of guilt."

I am reminded of a teacher I once knew who taught a math program using primarily textbooks supported with workbooks and skills sheets. The publishing company provided a range of materials organized for students of differing abilities. In one year’s time, my friend had all of her students complete all of the activities that came with the program regardless of their capability in computation. On the last day of school when the final sheet was turned in, the teacher stated, "If they don't know math by now, it's not my fault." They probably did not know much about math at the end of that year and yes, it was.

I believe the students who participated in this research study actively constructed meaning related to issues of cultural diversity through their own thought processes and in a social context in a way which is similar rather than inferior to the way adults construct meaning. When presented with new information or an alternate perspective, students were given a chance to find where it might fit with what they already knew, understood, or had experienced. Time and opportunities for this kind of processing is necessary for life long learning to take place.

A more concrete comparison might be to consider recent research related to spelling. A student can spell an entire list of words correctly when
words are given in isolation but transference does not necessarily occur when
the student uses one of the words in an authentic writing experience. The tool
we intended the student to have in order to be more successful in life is not in
place. A hundred lectures on the bad effects of drugs will not keep a student
drug free if his issues are those of self-esteem. Similarly, we can preach
about accepting one another's cultural differences, but if time for personal
response and dialogue relating the “celebration of diversity” to acceptance as
a functioning member of “kid culture” the information may cycle through a kid’s
brain as simply so much irrelevant data.

I am currently involved with the middle school transition program. As a
part of this program, ten sessions with a counselor take place in my classroom.
The counselor talks most of the time, only pausing now and then to ask if
there are any questions. The questions are always superficial, perhaps a
question about the cost of lunch. The students are for the most part cooperative,
yet silent. I later learn from parents that their children are still experiencing
acute apprehension in spite of all the sessions with the counselor. Their
apprehension comes from the “kid culture” concerns. Yet not one student spoke
up in class. Ten sessions of counselors speaking for them until they may be
unable to speak for themselves in the setting that is designed for learning.

In order to recognize the relevance of the “kid culture” phenomenon as
we seek to broaden students' perspectives regarding cultural diversity,
teachers must understand and accept that children have their own unique age
related culture that attempts to define them. Such issues as acceptance and
rejection are powerful and will influence understandings. Teachers need to
build a trusting community so that children are able to ask the hard questions
and support one another in finding the answers. Teachers need to show
genuine care and concern when students' attempt to mesh issues of religion or
ethnicity with their issues of kid culture. It was my experience in this study that
children felt relief in just sitting together as a group of fifth graders and
‘dumping’ their opinions, understandings and fears. Again, in choosing
literature, teachers can also choose books representative of cultural diversity
but which also presenting dilemmas faced in the growing up process so that
students see both cultures represented in the literature.

Reflections on Teacher Research

Conducting research in my class has been a journey. The way seemed
long at times and full of scary parts, but one must have trust to keep moving and
faith that the journey will prove to have been profitable and worth the devotion.
In this closing reflection on teacher research, I would like to share some
personal observations of my own growth process and then offer suggestions or
recommendations to this unique field of research.

It was through the process of conducting research that I learned the
meaning of true collaboration between student and teacher. Even though I had established a framework for learning, the essence of the research meant I had no predetermined learning outcome. I had to wait to see what happened. When students responded, I resisted the temptation to critique and suggest a better way to respond. If I had information or understandings that were supportive, I shared those. If I had connections I shared those. Then together we decided on the next step. The discussions flowed in a natural way and led to unexpected places. It was the sense that I was recording what happened instead of making it happen that helped me to experience what it felt like to let go. As a teacher I had been trained to figure out a myriad of ways to make learning happen. Research gave me the freedom to join with my students as a learner and trust the process.

In my readings I came across a story that so aptly describes this change in attitude that I felt I must include it here. The story is told from the life experiences of Mike Rose which he shares in his book Lives on the Boundary:

"They started sending me favorite poems of their own, some they had written themselves and some they had found in magazines. This threw me. The poems were sentimental as could be, and the rhymes were strained and the diction archaic. They were the kinds of poems all my training taught me to dismiss. But the intentions and feelings were present now, couldn't be discounted, a clashing of aesthetic and human need. I wasn't quite sure what to do. I rehearsed several critical responses. They didn't feel right - at all. The solution came indirectly. My mother called me one night to see if I thought a card she had bought for her doctor was okay. She read me the Hallmark rhyme. I was about to tell her what I thought when it hit me. Addie and Ernest and the rest weren't sending the poems for criticism; they wanted to pass on a gift or show off a little - they wanted to participate in some
fuller way. I didn’t need to be the critic. There are times when it’s better to let all that schooling slide. So I simply Xeroxed the poems and sent them to everybody along with my own selections. What followed was nice surprise. The participants ended up liking both, but for different reasons: they liked the rhymes in the poems they had selected and they liked the feelings in the ones I picked. And that opened the door for us to not only share the associations and memories the poems evoked, but to talk a little about technique as well.” (1989, p. 163)

What a powerful description of collaboration. Although I cannot tell a story of the moment of my enlightenment, I know that I now understand collaboration in a way that I did not understand it before.

Conducting classroom research also changed my perception of self. Over the past three years I have moved from viewing myself as a practitioner who was slightly more creative than most to viewing myself as a theorist.

The appreciation for theory which I have developed has led to greater confidence in instructional decision making. I question practice rather than criticize. I question my own assumptions as well and now see the assumptions inherent in packaged curriculum. I am grounded enough that I no longer feel forced to attempt any shift in my teaching paradigm until I have examined the theoretical foundations. When implementing change I have replaced a sense of success or failure with an attitude that classroom experiences however exciting or painful are simply life experiences and primarily data to be processed. What worked? What didn’t? What should I retain? What should I abandon? I look for the “why” in my instructional strategies and ask myself how what it is I am doing supports my belief system for how it is that children learn.
Classroom research has encouraged this view of self by teaching me how to observe closely. For example, going through a typed transcript of a literature discussion gives one a very different perspective than observation. The need for resources forced me to read widely in the field and to read studies conducted by others. This contributed perhaps more than any other one thing in giving me a sense of knowing. Relationships and dialogue with other people involved in looking at theory and practice were major supports as well. Primary in these relationships were peer teachers who were involved with me in group research projects. I also was supported in my exploration of theory and practice through close ties with a University mentor who was frequently present in my classroom.

Conducting classroom research contributed to my professional growth. I discovered I had views and I became more articulate in sharing them. I felt I had a broader perspective on the field of education which supported me in giving presentations at local conferences. Being involved with group research at the University allowed me to present at larger conferences where I was able to dig deeper into the foundations of education and to meet some of the people whose writing I was becoming familiar with. Eventually I began to write as well.

The process of actually conducting the research was difficult, however, and I want now to share what was problematic for me and the suggestions I have both for other classroom researchers and for the field of education. To
begin, I do not feel I was adequately prepared to conduct classroom research even though I was involved in classes at the University. The project was necessary in order to graduate, yet none of my "research" classes prepared me to conduct this type of qualitative design. This meant countless hit and miss approaches trying to figure out what it was I was supposed to be doing at the same time that I was doing it. Because a teacher is isolated in her classroom and cannot question professors or other students on a regular basis it is vital that there be a way to study this method of research in a class or seminar. I relied almost solely on my mentor for guidance in writing a proposal, collecting data, the data analysis process and writing up the research.

Although I would like to have had a better understanding of the process, such knowledge would still have needed the support of regular classroom visits by people significant to the research. If teachers are not enrolled in a degree program, I would suggest they connect with someone who has a strong knowledge base in the field and who will support them in the data collection and analysis process. The person chosen should be willing to come into the school environment on a regular basis during the time period of the research. As an aside, I am reminded that classroom visitation was an essential support during the process of my paradigm shift from basal readers to literature-based curriculum as well. Teachers need knowledgeable people willing to come to where the kids are not only to support a teacher’s efforts in conducting research
but also to support a change in belief and practice that may well lead to the
questions for research.

Along with these mentor visits, teachers need a group of peer
researchers to meet with regularly. Classroom research is not always viewed
positively by others in the school who lack complete understandings of our
purposes. Teachers need the care, concern and advice of teachers attempting
similar projects. Such groups are helpful simply to share data collecting
techniques, such as how and when to best videotape, but they serve also as
an intellectual community challenging your analysis or suggesting alternate
strategies. Such a group can keep you going when the going gets tough.

The going does get tough within the present system. If a teacher is
willing to conduct classroom research it is accomplished along with all of the
other tasks necessary in good instruction and in a commitment to a school. If
the teacher is enrolled in the University the research process may take place
along with other classes the teacher attends. This is a difficult situation that
would overburden anyone and led I am sure to the notion of taking time off work
for residency when in a higher level degree program. Yet my definition of
classroom research and what I believe to be the power in classroom research is
that it is conducted by the teacher in her own classroom to answer questions
she or he has arrived at through attempts to connect theory to practice. I would
hope that classroom research is not done only by people seeking degrees who
may be on their way out of the classroom, but also by dedicated classroom teachers who view themselves as professionals and seek to study and grow and contribute to the knowledge base of education through research. How then can classroom research be accomplished? It is discouraging to say that major areas of change are needed.

District administration need to place a greater value on classroom research. This may possibly be accomplished by encouraging the formation of school based study groups where theory is examined through discussion of professional literature. A study group could stimulate questioning so that teachers share possibilities for research and gain support for their study within the building. Perhaps workshops could be held throughout the district to enlighten teachers in classroom research who do not attend at the University. A teacher research support cadre could be organized. The district could network the individuals conducting research and arrange meetings or sharing times. Perhaps a district publication could report on current research being conducted throughout the district. Suggestions such as these would demonstrate the value an administration places on educational research and especially that kind of research done by teachers.

Without a doubt, there is never enough time for teachers to move through all the layers of responsibility a day can hold. Thought needs to be given to how time is organized so teachers are allotted space in the day to keep a
teaching journal or meet with a mentor. Perhaps teachers who have approved projects could be relieved of any other “committee” duty for a semester. The research itself would be seen as their contribution. Another alternative is to offer teachers with approved projects a brief paid leave of absence to devote themselves to data analysis or the writing of the research in order to have quiet, uninterrupted time to reflect on and make sense of what they did in the classroom. If no solutions can be found to time constraints, I would suggest a district value research enough that financial compensation be made to a teacher willing to put in additional hours. This funding could support a teacher wishing to attend or present research at conferences.

I would suggest that the University professors support teachers who are enrolled in classes and also conducting research by allowing them to use steps in their research as a way to meet at least partial requirements for the class such as writing a proposal, doing preliminary data analysis, or putting together a final product. I have been able to do this and it has been of paramount importance to me as I have taken several classes along with my two year research project. These classes fulfilled my need for an intellectual community and supportive relationships without my needing to take on a great deal of additional work. I also would encourage professors who organize major research studies to continue to involve teachers in these studies. This is another way for teachers to learn about research and become more
empowered.

Although I know that teacher research is a relatively new field, my final concern is simply how to get more teachers involved. We as teachers complain about the educational system not working for today’s kids. Who do we think is going to change it? Who or what are we waiting for? Perhaps with district reform that makes research less demanding and a greater valuing of teacher research at all levels, the fire that has been lit will grow stronger and more teachers will choose to ask the questions, and look for the answers through systematic inquiry.
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REFERENCES


