

AUTONOMY IN A CONSTRUCTIVIST  
CLASSROOM

By

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# AUTONOMY IN A CONSTRUCTIVIST CLASSROOM

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The child's own instincts and powers furnish the material and give the starting point for all education.

-John Dewey  
Education Today, 1940.

The following two vignettes contrast a heteronomous classroom with a constructivist classroom.

Twenty, eight-year-old second-graders are sitting in their lined-up desks facing the chalkboard in the front of the classroom where the teacher is standing behind her desk. To the right of the chalkboard is a bulletin board that was designed by the teacher to present classroom rules. While the teacher is writing the daily assignments from her lesson plan book on the chalkboard, some children flip their pencils, anxious to enter the race to get assignments completed correctly; some children stare open-eyed or squint-eyed at the chalkboard as if overwhelmed by the daily work; while others are attempting to decipher the symbols on the board; some children throw an eraser among themselves with relief on

their faces every time they relinquish the eraser and are successful at not getting caught; and some children sit with their heads on their desks or turned toward the windows as if to say "I'm not here yet." The teacher turns around with a smile and the pencils are still, eyes blink and focus. An eraser silently falls to the floor and heads turn toward the front of the classroom. The teacher greets the children and says "These are today's assignments. Let us begin by turning to page 62 in your spelling book." Is this teaching? Is this learning?

In a different classroom another twenty, eight-year-old second-graders are sitting on the floor with their teacher. The children are discussing the storm that took place during the night. Some children are sitting "criss-cross-applesauce," some children are sitting on their knees; some children are sitting on pillows; some children are laying on their sides with their heads propped up with their hands; and some children are sitting on the couch. The children are talking one after the other. They are wiggly with delight, anxiousness and importance. Each child seems to want to reveal some fact of his experience with the torrential storm and to listen to others' experiences. The teacher begins recording their expressions on a flip chart. She makes symbols for rain, lightening, and thunder, and records what the children say. When the conversation pauses, one child says "Why did it storm?" The children pause, the teacher puts her marker down, puts one arm across her chest and one hand on her chin and looks to the children for responses, then says, "Tell me what you know about thunderstorms." The children again start boasting about what they know about storms while the teacher feverishly writes everything down, then says "How can we find out more about thunderstorms?" Some children quickly say, "read!"; some children suggest, "draw about it!"; some children exclaim, "ask a weather forecaster!"; some children boast, "ask others about storms!"; other children say, "let's do experiments!". Is this teaching? Is this learning?

In the first vignette the children are in a classroom that is teacher centered and teacher controlled. This type of environment promotes heteronomy. The rules, assignments, schedule and class arrangement are all in the hands of the teacher. Typically

in a classroom such as this the philosophy of education is one of "getting children ready" or "preparing them for the future." The teacher's role in this philosophy is one of a leader, decision-maker, and judge in the classroom . . . all characteristics that adults would like to see in their children, but in this case they are imposed on the children. The children's role in a classroom is to be attentive to the task at hand, mind the rules regardless of the situation, do assignments in order, and correct the first attempt, and do what the teacher says. Children in the classroom described above will be expected to learn the material that is presented, do the assignments without questioning why or how, and to respect others in a class where interaction is minimal.

In the second vignette the children are in a classroom that is child-centered and democratic. This classroom promotes autonomy. The rules, class schedule and room arrangement are discussed among the teacher and the students to promote cooperation, respect, independence and self-regulation. The philosophy of education in this classroom focuses on self-regulation or the ability to cognitively construct meaning from interactions in the environment. The teacher's role in the classroom is one of facilitator, mediator, and encourager. The children's role in the classroom that promotes autonomy is to be an explorer, inventor, questioner, and regulator of their own activity. In the second classroom the opportunity to develop autonomy is provided for young children through the experiences in the classroom within a meaningful context. Interaction with the teachers and class members promotes perspective-taking. A classroom that promotes autonomy is called a constructivist classroom.

In a constructivist classroom there are chances for child choice, social interaction, sharing different perspectives, and construction of knowledge within a meaningful context. Children are more likely to be engaged in active learning and as a result are more likely to construct a sense of self-regulation and responsibility for their actions.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Children learn in a variety of settings, in a variety of ways. Previous research has primarily focused on producing effective curriculum to teach children the skills and facts they need to function in the adult world. Teachers were encouraged to practice direct instruction techniques by both policy makers and textbook publishers (Scott & Combs, 1993). High achievement scores and academic excellence were the characteristics of successful schools, teachers and children. Chorus rang out "Bring the uneducated children to the schools and we will educate them." Direct instruction implied that the educators know all and will tell the children what they should know. In the middle 60's scores on achievement tests began to level off and scores in abstract thinking, creativity and problem solving were lower (Lambert, 1989). This drop in scores caused some to begin to influence educators to wake-up and look at the individual children and how they learn in classrooms. Glasser (1969) suggested changes he would like to see in the school system such as the elimination of grades and rote learning. Educators began to look at alternative approaches to teaching and began to focus on how young children learn.

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development proposed the notion that children create their own knowledge through experience in the environment. "But, how can this be? Children cannot be left alone to educate themselves," declared the perplexed educators. Many people called for a bold and more fundamental change based on how human beings acquire knowledge and moral values (Kamii, Clark, Dominick, 1994). The people who establish goals to promote change seldom consider how children learn. Instead the goals are created from experiences and values from their personal backgrounds. In 1991 the nation's governors along with President Bush created six national goals of education. In contrast, Constance Kamii (1991,1985) and Jean Piaget (1973, 1948) proposed that the one broad aim for education should be the development of autonomy.

The educator's role in the classroom and the child's role in the classroom became the focus of research, change and new theory. Compromise and partnership of the teacher and the child that will promote autonomy and allow the child to construct knowledge through his actions and experiences became the Constructivist approach. Autonomy is an aim of constructivist education. The need for autonomy as an educational aim is apparent every hour of the school day in the electronic media, print media and in people's dismay of events and happenings in our communities today. Reports and questions about children involved with drugs, young children carrying weapons to school, violence among young children, and lack of motivation and achievement in school, are clues to a society that is educators are failing to provide children the social, moral and intellectual experiences needed to make sense of their world and to be competent human beings. Unless we have a set of goals inherently formulated with autonomy as the overall aim of education, the second decade of reform will once again be disappointing (Kamii, Clark, Dominick, 1994). However, this question continues to be raised: What is autonomy in a classroom? How is it experienced? What does it look like? What does it sound like and feel like? Can the experience of autonomy in a classroom be described in such a way as to convey the essence of it to others? These are the questions underlying this study.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to describe autonomy as it is experienced in a second grade classroom. Children will be observed interacting with each other, the teacher, and the environment. Examples of autonomy, will be recorded, studied and described. Through this interpretive observation the meaning significance of autonomy in education will be more deeply understood.



## DEFINITION OF TERMS

Throughout this study, an attempt will be made to use terms consistently. For the purposes of this study, the following definition of terms is offered:

**Autonomy** is the inherent inner resource a child uses in determining for him/herself the significance of experience independent of reward and/or punishment. Autonomy is the ability of children to cognitively construct meaning from their experiences in the environment. Meaning is not imposed upon them or spoon-fed to them. Meaning is obtained from reality constructed in the child's mind. Children synthesize this through experience, posing questions and seeking answers, rethinking, re-experiencing and assimilating information by building upon past experiences. Robson (1991) defines autonomy as "the possession of a consistent and integrated set of values that are truly one's own." Familiar analogs for autonomy frequently seen in education are: self-regulation, self-governance, rule-making, independence, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-realization, self-direction, personal values and intrinsic motivation.

Piaget (1973) and Kamii (1991, 1985, 1981) define autonomy as "the ability to think for oneself and to decide between right and wrong in the moral realm and between truth and untruth in the intellectual realm by taking all relevant factors into account, independently of rewards or punishments." Autonomy will be discussed further in Chapter two.

**Moral autonomy** occurs when a child constructs moral values and rules from the inside, through interactions with other people. To foster moral autonomy in children mutual respect and exchange of viewpoints are essential. Morally autonomous people are not governed by rewards and punishments (Kamii, Clark, Dominick, 1994).

**Intellectual autonomy** means the ability to govern oneself by being able to take relevant factors into account in deciding what is true or untrue (Kamii, 1985). Piaget's

theory describes the child acquiring knowledge by constructing knowledge from within, rather than internalizing knowledge from the environment. Children construct knowledge by coordinating relationships and this often leads to a higher level of reasoning.

**Constructivist education** is a cognitive-developmental-epistemological paradigm of education with the central theme of viewing the child as knower and as active in interpreting experience thus constructing both knowledge and intelligence. Constructivist education attempts to foster development through activities that appeal to children's interests, involve experimentation with phenomena of the physical world, and create the need for social interaction leading to cooperation. Kamii (1991) said that children construct knowledge by creating and coordinating relationships. From a constructivist view, the three types of knowledge include physical, social, and logio-mathematical

**Physical-knowledge** involves learning through the senses. It consists of an individual's actions with objects and leads to knowledge of the objects themselves. (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987).

**Logico-mathematical** knowledge consists of actions on objects that introduce characteristics the other objects do not have, into the individual's ideas about those objects. There can be no physical experience without logico-mathematical framework and for young children, there can be no logico-mathematical experience without objects to put into relation with one another. (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987).

**Social knowledge** consists of arbitrary truth agreed upon by convention and rules agreed upon by coordination of points of view. Similar to physical knowledge, it requires input from the external world and the content must be structured within some logico-mathematical framework. (DeVries & Kamii, 1987).

**Traditional education** views knowledge as accumulated bits of information coming from outside the individual to the inside in unmodified form. The objectives are achieved through group lessons in language, reading and mathematics and individual work

sheet assignments. Children are evaluated through mastery tests and standardized achievement tests (DeVries, Haney & Zan, 1991).

## BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Classroom settings have been studied and compared for decades. Academic progress, attitudes, behavior and differences are typically measured quantitatively. However, many aspects of education go unnoticed because the everyday interaction of the child and the learning environment is not easily measured. What is taking place daily in a classroom? Few investigations have been effectively carried out on education's attempt at providing for autonomy through the constructivist view of teaching. Now is the time to look at the lived experience of the child in order to make the needed reforms so desperately needed to meet each child's intellectual, social and moral developmental needs.

Educational reform swept the nation beginning in 1957 with the launching of the Soviet satellite Sputnik and the Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960's. The powerful United States became the underdog and a nation divided. The federal government, educators and non-professionals came together to voice a need for change in schooling. Authors got on the band-wagon to support reform from traditional education (direct-instruction) to models that focused on children's individual capabilities. The writings of Holt (1964), Kohl (1967) Herndon (1968) and Goodlad (1973) became classics in the surge to look beyond skills, grades and test scores. The tie that binds all these writings is the belief that children should be allowed to find themselves, develop a feeling of self-worth and above all, be respected as individuals. "A moral context, happily, becomes an intellectually creative context" (Sizer, 1973, p.62).

At this critical period in educational consciousness, Jean Piaget's cognitive developmental approach gained attention. Piaget's research (1965) led him to conclude

that autonomous actions are the chief source of knowledge, intelligence and morality in young children. This conclusion then led educators to develop learning activities that appeal to the child's spontaneity, unrehearsed activity and impromptu relationships with adults. Professionals attempted to present Piaget's theory as a practical framework for educators searching for alternatives to traditional methods that furnished the mind with knowledge. Constructivism became the title of the educational approach to learning built upon Piaget's theory of cognitive development that emphasizes the importance of providing for autonomy in the child's learning experiences.

Research conducted in constructivist settings has focused on sociomoral development (DeVries, Haney & Zan, 1991), mathematical knowledge (Kamii, 1985), physical knowledge activities (Kamii & DeVries, 1993), and promoting autonomy in preservice teachers (Boud, 1988). Books have been written that promote constructivist learning activities in the classroom by Kamii & DeVries (1993), Katz & Chard (1991), Fosnot (1989), Duckworth (1987) and Fosnot (1989). The study of intellectual and moral autonomy in a constructivist classroom has been defined and discussed, but the study of autonomy as it is experienced in a classroom is an unexplored area of research. Autonomy is likely to exist in classrooms with constructivist approaches to education.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In a constructivist classroom, children are encouraged to independently construct their own knowledge through spontaneous and unrehearsed learning activities and impromptu interactions with adults and peers which are both rare and unique. By locating and observing an environment that incorporates constructivist philosophy and provides for autonomous experiences of autonomy in classrooms can be documented

Piaget's concept of autonomy was grounded in moral and intellectual development. Kamii expanded autonomy to the educational experiences of children. Kamii hypothesized

that when autonomy rather than heteronomy is fostered in schools, society will reap the benefits of children who can question teachers, themselves, and others. Children will no longer blindly conform to rules "just because." Instead, they will obey rules out of respect for community or construct a better rule for themselves (Castle, 1990). When autonomy is fostered, children will discuss ideas, morals and social issues. Discussion promotes perspective-taking and an exchange of points of view that in turn, fosters the construction of knowledge.

When autonomy is promoted in the classroom, children more freely participate in physical knowledge activities and logico-mathematical activities. The result is a child who is able to make good choices for himself, who can consider situations from several points of view, and who is more likely to act responsibly.

## CHAPTER TWO

... education must stop being dictated by the pendulum that keeps returning to what did not work before. Rather than going back to "basics," we must move forward with what we now know about how human beings acquire knowledge and moral values.

Constance Kamii, *Young Children Reinvent Arithmetic*, 1985, p.xiv

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will review Piaget's cognitive development theory, autonomy and constructivist education. Piaget's cognitive and moral development theories were the foundation upon which constructivist education was built. To better understand Piaget's theories is to have a clearer grasp of autonomy and constructivist education. The theory of cognitive development will be discussed first, then Piaget and Kamii's ideas of autonomy. Also included in this chapter is an examination of early theorists in education. These theorists advocated reform in education from a rigid traditional view to one that promotes children's individuality. The chapter will conclude with a summary of constructivist education according to Piaget, Kamii and DeVries.

## PIAGET'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

### THEORY

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was a Swiss psychologist. As a young boy Piaget had a keen interest in nature which led him into the field of biology. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on mollusks! Piaget was also interested in philosophy, especially epistemology, a branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of knowledge. For this reason Piaget referred to himself as a genetic epistemologist - one who attempts to get at the problem of the origin and development of knowledge (Piaget, 1970). He examined knowledge from the biological perspective, asking: How does knowledge come about?

Mental growth according to Piaget, is the result of interactions between the individual and the environment. Intellect depends on the cognitive structures available at any one time. These structures develop continually as the individual matures and interacts with the environment. Intellectual development falls into four stages, each defined by a characteristic way of functioning. Children move gradually from one stage to the next and each new stage is made possible by the experiences of the previous stage (Santrock, 1995; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Piaget, 1967). The four stages of cognitive development according to Piaget are:

1. **Sensorimotor stage.** Birth to two years. In this stage, infants construct an understanding of the world by coordinating sensory experiences with physical, motoric actions. At birth infants use reflexes to gain sensory input (Santrock, 1995; Elkind, 1976). A baby constructs objects and his own intelligence by observing what happens when he pushes, pulls, shakes, and drops objects (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987).
2. **Preoperational stage.** Two years to seven years. Children in this stage begin to represent the world with words, images, and drawings. Although they can symbolically represent the world, according to Piaget they still lack the ability to perform operations. Operations is the Piagetian term for internalized mental actions that allow children to do

mentally what they previously did physically (Santrock, 1995; Elkind, 1976; Piaget, 1969). DeVries and Kohlberg (1987) write that during this stage the physical-material-observable and logico-mathematical aspects of actions continue to be undifferentiated. The observable result of actions is the child's main interest.

3. **Concrete-operational stage.** Seven years to eleven years. In this stage, children can perform operations, and logical reasoning replaces intuitive thought as long as reasoning can be applied to specific or concrete examples. The child begins to internalize actions with concrete objects and their thinking is no longer dominated by perception (Santrock, 1995; Elkind, 1976). The logico-mathematical aspect develops into coherent systems which make possible logical deductions about phenomena involving physical objects (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987).

4. **Formal operational stage.** Appears between the ages of eleven and fifteen. Individuals move beyond the world of actual, concrete experiences and think in abstract and more logical terms. Adolescents develop images of ideal circumstances, entertain possibilities for the future, and can develop and test hypotheses (Santrock, 1995; Elkind, 1976).

### CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE

It is known that children construct their own knowledge, intelligence, and morality because they have so many ideas we never teach them and some ideas we try to teach them they do not understand or remember (DeVries, 1987). Knowledge is constructed from the inside by the child in continuous interaction with the environment. The sequence of development is the same for all children regardless of the culture and we cannot change the sequence or skip a step in the long process of construction (Kamii, 1973). No matter what the content domain, young children think in qualitatively different ways from older children and adults (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987).



What Piaget means by intelligence is "adaption to new situations." We adapt to new situations, but we also understand new situations in terms of the knowledge that we bring to them. Situations are understood because they are assimilated to the knowledge that we have already built and brought to the situation. Assimilating new knowledge (structures) from a situation is called organization. As the years go by the child constructs increasingly richer and more elaborate organizations of knowledge. Kamii (1973, p. 219) writes that Piaget's view that because knowledge is an organized, coherent, whole structure, no meaningful concept can exist in isolation. Each concept is supported and colored by many other concepts and feelings.

There are three areas of knowledge that are described by Piaget. The first is physical knowledge. Physical knowledge is structured from the object's reaction to the child's action on objects. The second is logio-mathematical knowledge which is structured from the child's actions themselves. This is not a motor act of moving or touching objects, but a mental action of introducing a relationship among objects. Physical knowledge can be built by discovery, but logio-mathematical knowledge cannot. It can be built only by the child's own invention ( Castle & Rogers, 1993; Kamii, 1973). The third area is social-arbitrary knowledge which is conventions that people have created such as special dates manners, names (Kamii, 1973).

In Piaget's theory there are two kinds of abstractions. For the abstraction of properties from objects, the term empirical abstraction is used. In empirical abstraction the child focuses on a certain property of the object and ignores the others, such as focusing on color. The second kind of abstraction is constructive or reflective abstraction which involves the construction of relationships between/among objects. Such as knowing the "8" is an amount not just the written symbol eight or a number. A relationship does not exist in the physical object only. A relationship exists only in the minds of those who can create it between the objects. Empirical and constructive abstraction, take place

together, just as physical knowledge and logico-mathematical knowledge take place together.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUTONOMY

We are all born heteronomous. We are helpless at birth and dependent on adults for our survival. Young children (Kamii, 1994, Kamii and DeVries, 1993) tend to be more heteronomous than autonomous because of their dependence on adults. A child will continue to be heteronomous or become increasingly more autonomous, depending on the ways in which adults relate to the child and try to influence him, especially in the early years. Heteronomous adults thus beget heteronomy, and more autonomous adults beget more autonomy (Kamii, 1985).

The term autonomy in Piaget's theory means "the ability to take relevant factors into account and make decisions for oneself about right and wrong in the moral realm, and about truth and untruth in the intellectual realm, independent of reward and punishment" (Piaget, 1965). There can be no moral autonomy without intellectual autonomy (Kamii & DeVries, 1993). If a child is given rules and not allowed to question the adult, his experiences do not provide him with sufficient opportunities to develop an attitude of critically evaluating what the adult tells him. Constraint on moral behavior thus is a constraint on intellectual development. Also, if a child is forced to study and retain information in order to give the right answer, without questioning it, he cannot develop the freedom of mind to question moral rules either. Moral values are constructed from within the child and through interaction with the environment. The child who does not have the freedom of mind to ask "Why?" in one area cannot be expected to exercise this freedom in another area. When awards and right answers are used in education children learn to distrust their own thinking and construct less knowledge (Kamii, 1985). Children

who are autonomous are mentally active and confident. Children can be encouraged to think for themselves in order to enhance autonomy in an environment which minimizes coercion and punishment and promotes mutual respect.

Autonomy (Kamii & DeVries, 1993) is the opposite of heteronomy which means being governed by somebody else. Heteronomy is characterized by obedience and conformity to external rules and/or the wishes of others. Children believe what is told to them, with no questioning. Manipulating children with reward and punishment often unwittingly promotes heteronomy. Punishment has three outcomes. The first is calculation of risks in which the child will repeat the action if he thinks he can get away with it or if it is important enough to him. The second outcome of punishment is blind conformity. Children will just go along with rules and authority, whether they are appropriate or not, to avoid punishment and for security. The last outcome of punishment is revolt in which children behave for years but at a certain point they decide they are tired of pleasing their parents and teachers. They decide it is time to begin living for themselves and sometimes engage in delinquent behaviors. Reward and punishment are means of controlling behavior and imposing adult expectations on young children. This creates an increasingly heteronomous child, instead of a child more capable of making a decision or sharing a perspective.

Constance Kamii in *Young Children Reinvent Arithmetic: Implications of Piaget's Theory* (1985, pp. 161-164) outlines some principles of teaching related to the development of autonomy. The most general principle for the teacher to keep in mind is to reduce adult power as much as possible and to exchange points of view with children. This means that reward and punishment should be avoided as much as possible because it is through them that power is most often exercised. The children in the classroom should be free to speak their minds, to disagree with the teacher, or to discuss a problem.

The next principle for teaching is to encourage the exchange of coordination of points of view among peers. The coordination of viewpoints is essential for the

development of moral autonomy as well as of logico-mathematical knowledge. When children become frustrated by another peer they frequently turn to the teacher for help. To encourage the development of autonomy it is best to ask them to work out a solution by asking "What can you do to come to an agreement?"

The principle in relation to autonomy and learning is to encourage children to think in their own ways (rather than recite "right" answers) and to engage in activities with intrinsic motivation. Children who are autonomous are convinced of their own ideas. When a child makes an error such as  $11 + 7 = 17$ , it is better to ask if everybody agrees than to correct the answer or to tell him that his answer is wrong. Children learn by modifying old ideas and considering other points of view until they are convinced of a better idea. There is nothing arbitrary in logico-mathematical knowledge, children are bound to find the truth if they argue long enough (Kamii, 1985).

The development of autonomy is an emerging process, just as cognitive development is. Experience with family, friends, school, and community enrich our intellectual and moral autonomy daily. Many recent authors have written about the development of autonomy: Boud, D. (1988); Brown, S. (1975); Callan, E. (1988); Hendrick, J. (1992); Kamii, C. (1994, 1993, 1991); Robson, S. (1991); and Castle, K. (1990). These authors support the idea of autonomy in education in a variety of ways. Throughout history many philosophers and educators have affirmed their convictions of the innate qualities of the young child and the right to an appropriate education.

## APPEALS FOR CHANGE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Autonomy in early childhood education has a rich past. The notion of autonomy was apparent in the earliest of educational theories. Even though autonomy was defined differently by each theorist, there was an element in theories of education for young

children that supported the idea of autonomy as individuality or self-regulation. Autonomy in some theories was seen as autonomy in education. Other theories advocated autonomy in moral thought. Early childhood education philosophers urged change in societal views of education. They promoted support for self-regulation, discovery, and child-centered curriculum.

SOCRATES (469-399 B.C.), a Greek philosopher, had a motto, "know thyself." He also believed that knowledge is virtue and that ignorance is the only evil. Socrates developed the Socratic method in which he carried on an argument and led people through carefully chosen questions. He advocated that by doing this the people would think through issues of life and citizenship for themselves and discover answers to their own problems (Mason, 1953).

JOHN AMOS COMENIUS (1592-1670) was a Czech educator and a bishop who worked to bring a renewal of schools in the Czech nation. He was a philosopher in the Puritan era when adult control and regulation, harshness and original sin were common beliefs. Amid these majority beliefs he believed that education extended further than methodology or programmed learning (Sadler, 1966). The Comenian method of education was "assimilation of the processes of nature" (Sadler, 1966, p. 192). Comenius believed the experience of perception brought innate ideas to the surface of consciousness. He strongly believed in the law of nature and children's innate abilities. "The most important aspect of all living things is that their pattern of growth seems to be determined by an innate force. They are autonomous" (Sadler, 1966, 191). Comenius used the analogy of a bird hatching its young to illustrate that the pattern of growth is determined by an innate force. The entire process is not premeditated and yet it is sequential. The creation of the young chick is a unique and autonomous event in nature, it is also repeated time after time.

Comenius developed "Principles for Facilitating Teaching and Study" as follows:

1. Proceed by stages.
2. Examine everything oneself, without abdicating in the face of adult authority. (Comenius used the work "autopsy" here.)
3. Act on one's own impulsion: "Autopraxy." "This requires that, with reference to all that is presented to the intellect, the memory, the tongue, and the hand, the pupils shall themselves seek, discover, discuss, do and repeat, by their own efforts." (Comenius, 1967, p. 17)

The reference to "autopraxy" is one of the first terms used to describe what we refer to as autonomy today. Comenius's strong belief in nature and innateness of human led to one of the first of many theories of early childhood education and autonomy.

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1712-1778) is remembered for writing *Emile* (1762) which promoted the importance of beginning a child's education at birth. Rousseau believed that education should be based on the nature of children not in adult's notions of what children are like or should be like. He also concluded that children should grow up freely, unrestricted by the depravity of adult society. (Boyd, 1963) In *Emile*, Rousseau discusses educating a young boy:

The more children can do for themselves the less help they need from other people. Added strength brings with it the sense needed for its direction. With the coming of self-consciousness at this second stage individual life really begins. Memory extends the sense of identity over all the moments of the child's existence. From this point on it is essential to regard him as a moral being (Boyd, 1962, p. 30).

*Emile* is a fictitious novel about the ideal education of a boy according to the principles of natural inclination rather than rigid discipline. It influenced many educational reformers, including Pestalozzi and Froebel.

JOHANN HEINRICH PESTALOZZI (1747-1827) believed man intrinsically possesses moral, intellectual, and physical potentialities. Throughout his life he sought to find effective means of how man could cooperate with the natural laws of growth and

development. Pestalozzi's philosophy of education was that children learn through sense observation and perception. Pestalozzi frequently used the term "anschauung" in his writings. He used the term to refer to every mental operation relevant to concept formation, such as sense of impression, observation, contemplation, perception and intuition (Gutek, 1968). These characteristics all allude to what is intrinsic in children. Pestalozzi's belief in sensory education is one of a child governing his own concept formation.

Pestalozzi attacked the excessive verbalism of traditional education and advocated a pedagogical regeneration based on the purity of the child's interests and needs. Pestalozzi's major criticisms of traditional education were that it:

1. ignored and weakened sense impression;
2. failed to teach essentials;
3. stressed the isolated teaching of special things;
4. produced artificially minded logicians;
5. separated theory and action (Gutek, 1968, p. 104).

Pestalozzi believed in direct experience rather than schooling based upon mastery of literary symbols that stressed indirect experience through the printed page. This singular experience caused memorization without comprehension and Pestalozzi believed that another person's idea cannot be the student's idea.

FREDRICH FROEBEL (1782-1852) was a German educational reformer. He opened a school for children under six called "kindergarten." Froebel believed the early years of life are the most critical and are those in which the foundation for later years is built. Froebel wrote "Children do indeed show us the right way in their intuitive hope and trust, but we must adopt it with conscious insight and deliberate choice" (Lilley, 1967, p. 139). His belief in the innate nature of the young child to learn is evident in his writings:

"Must we go on stamping our children like coins instead of seeing them walk among us as the images of God? Mankind is meant to enjoy a range of knowledge and insight and to possess productive power such as we do not yet imagine, for who has measured the limits of humanity which is born of God? Yet this should emerge from each individual's development, growing forth in the freshness and vigor of youth, as new creations which he himself produces" (Lilley, 1967, p. 156).

IMMANUEL KANT (1724-1804) had a great influence on Jean Piaget. Kant argued that knowledge is either a priori (independent of experience) or a posteriori (born of experience). Kant's lectures on ethics discussed his view of "autocracy":

"... the power of the soul over all our faculties and circumstances to make them submit to its free and undetermined will is autocratic. Man must give this autocracy its full scope, otherwise he becomes a plaything of other forces... our autocracy is therefore, the power to compel our hearts to do our bidding in spite of every obstacle. Autocracy implies not merely directing authority, but mastering over oneself. Autocracy of the mind over all mental power and faculties must be regarded as the principle condition of observing our duties toward ourselves" (Infield, 1963. pp. 138, 143, 147).

JOHN DEWEY (1859-1952) believed education was preparation for life and a democratic society. For this reason he proposed that children learn to think, reason, and make decisions for themselves. He advocated children learning the skills needed to think through their own activity and play through interaction with the total environment. Dewey also preferred real life experiences for children as opposed to transmitting or piping the information, knowledge or "truth" from the full into the empty vessel (Dewey, 1950, p. viii). Dewey's strong belief in child-centered education is apparent in his many writings:

The child is the starting-point, the center, and the end. His development, his growth, is the ideal. It alone furnishes the standard. To the growth of the child all studies are subservient; they are instruments valued as they serve the needs of growth. Not knowledge or information, but self-realization, is the goal. To possess all the world of knowledge and lose one's own self is as awful a fate in



education as in religion. Learning is active. It involves reaching out of the mind. It involves organic assimilation starting from within (Dewey, 1950, p.13).

MARIA MONTESSORI (1870-1952) the first female doctor in Italy became interested in children in asylums in Italy. She began working with these children and eventually trained teachers and educated children who had been deemed ineducable. Her theory of educating children became known as the Montessori Method. Montessori's theory had many facets but beliefs that are related to autonomy and individuality are evident. In her book *The Discovery of the Child* (1967), Montessori writes "Individuality is a surer word; it carries with it a connotation of uniqueness of quality, or at least of distinctiveness. It suggests a freedom which is not legal, comparative and external but which is intrinsic and constructive" (p. 164). Montessori used the term auto-education to refer to the child's ability to organize his own thinking when engaged in certain activities.

JEAN PIAGET (1896-1980) advocated constructivist theory in education and every child's right to an education in his book *To Understand is to Invent* (1974).

On constructivism:

A student who achieves a certain knowledge through free investigation and spontaneous effort will later be able to retain it; he will have acquired a methodology that can serve him for the rest of his life, which will stimulate his curiosity without the risk of exhausting it (p.93).

On traditional methods of teaching:

The traditional school "furnishes" the mind and subjects it to various "intellectual gymnastics". In cases where this type of learning is forgotten (and we all know how little remains of it five, ten, or twenty years after the termination of secondary studies), there remains at least some satisfaction in having exercised the intelligence (p.92-93).

CONSTANCE KAMII (University of Alabama, Birmingham) studied with Jean Piaget in Geneva, Switzerland. She has since promoted Piaget's idea of constructivism and

enhanced it with her own research on autonomy and mathematics. Kamii advocates for eliminating standardized testing in early childhood education.

Education is an amazing profession in which professionals can be forced to do things against their conscience. Physicians are not forced to give treatments that only make the symptoms disappear, but many teachers give phonic lessons and worksheets, knowing perfectly well that the imposition of the 3 R's may make children dislike school and lose confidence in their own ability to figure things out (Kamii, 1985, p. 3).

OTHER THEORISTS support the idea of autonomy, again defined differently according to each theorist. Durkheim in *Moral Education* (1961) debates the ideas of autonomy and self-determination; Erik Erikson in *Childhood and Society* (1963) describes the second stage of his eight stages of psychosocial development as "autonomy versus shame and doubt"; in *A Way of Being* (1980), Carl Rogers states "It was a real struggle to let him be himself, to let him develop as a person entirely separate from me and my ideas and my values. I think this permission to be a separate person is what makes for the autonomous development of another individual" (p.18); and even B.F. Skinner, a behaviorist writes "Autonomous man is not easily changed; in fact, to the extent that he is autonomous, he is by definition not changeable at all" (1971, p.101). Skinner did go on to say "But the environment can be changed, and we are learning how to change it."!

All the above theorists have different ideas of autonomy, individuality and how children learn. The important element is that throughout history many have acknowledged the importance of autonomy to the developing child, to education, and to moral development. The significance of autonomy in its variable forms has lead quantitative researchers from various backgrounds to research autonomy.

Quantitative research has focused on singular facets of autonomy as defined by theorists other than Piaget. The many facets of investigative research on autonomy as seen by these researchers has created many questions about the effects of autonomy on

certain issues and autonomy's relationship to certain areas of development and social issues. Green & Foster (1986) found that teachers who promoted the development of autonomy enhanced the intrinsic motivation of girls more than boys and older children were less intrinsic than younger children; Grolnick, Ryan & Deci (1991), found that perceived maternal and paternal autonomy support and involvement were related to perceived competence and autonomy; how parenting styles affected autonomy in school-age children and toddlers was investigated by Crockenberg & Litman (1990) Grolnick & Ryan (1989) and Steinberg, Elmen & Mounts (1989); Murtaugh & Zetlin (1990) found that in families with handicapped adolescents where autonomy is achieved with the least amount of discord are the parents who relax control gradually during adolescence.

The area of adolescence and autonomy has been examined by several researchers such as Church, (1994), Newton, Brack & Brack, (1992), Eccles, Buchanan, Flanagan Fuligni, Midgley & Yee, (1991), Allen, Aber & Leadbeater, (1990), Chandler & Moran, (1990), and Ryan & Lynch, (1989). Martin & Elmer (1991) researched adults who had been abused as young children and found that some individuals exhibited limited autonomy and coping skills. Autonomy in the preschool years has been investigated by Provost & LaFreniere, (1991), Denham, Renwick & Holt, (1991), and Kuczynski & Kochanska (1990). The majority of these studies have researched children's autonomy development according to Erik Erikson and in classroom settings. Grolnick & Ryan (1987) discussed the role of autonomy in learning and development and the issue of direct versus nondirect learning.

## CONSTRUCTIVIST EDUCATION

Constructivist education reflects the cognitive developmental theory inspired by Jean Piaget. It promotes the assumption that knowledge is constructed by a knower who actively interprets experience. In other words, children make sense of experience in terms

of what they already know and how they already reason. Constructivist education is a developmentally appropriate approach to early education (DeVries & Zan, 1995). There are several characteristics that DeVries and Kohlberg (1987) suggest that are distinguishable traits of a constructivist classroom. The first trait is that errors in children's thought processes are errors of ideas and are viewed as a positive experience. Constructivist teaching emphasizes that learners need to be actively involved, to reflect on their learning and make inferences, and to experience cognitive conflict (Fosnot, 1989). In a constructivist classroom error is regarded as evidence of intelligence at work. It is believed that through the continued exercise of reasoning, the child will gradually transform his own interpretations himself. The continued process of thinking and questioning evolves more adequate forms of cognition and moral reasoning.

The second characteristic discussed by DeVries and Kamii (1993) is that constructivist classrooms attempt to foster development through activities that appeal to children's interest, involve experimentation with phenomena of the physical world, and create the need for social interaction leading to cooperation. A day in a constructivist classroom includes physical-knowledge activities, art, blockbuilding and other construction activities and collective activities. Collective experiences are activities such as listening to stories, discussing moral dilemmas, playing group games and planning group projects. Reasoning about number, arithmetic, written language, and sociomoral issues available and children pursue these activities out of their own personal interests and purposes (DeVries, Haney & Zan, 1991).

Another distinguishable trait is that in a constructivist classroom inclusion of interpersonal conflict and its resolution is part of the curriculum. The teacher invests considerable time in mediating children's conflicts by helping them consider the other's perspective and develop new strategies for dealing with conflicts. Opportunities for constructive conflict encourage children to work out problems on their own without relying on the teacher. Such social skills are important, but promoting sociomoral

development is often ignored in school settings (Castle, 1990). The sociomoral atmosphere sought by constructivist teachers is a feeling of community characterized by a spirit of fairness, mutual concern, friendship, and positive shared experience (DeVries, Haney & Zan, 1991, p. 452).

Teachers in a constructivist classroom create an atmosphere that fosters active reasoning. The teacher does not impose activities, but organizes the classroom so children can choose from a variety of possibilities and even invent their own activities. The teacher is a warm and supportive collaborator and a companion-guide who minimizes adult authority and yet is not permissive. Children's mistakes are not corrected, but instead the teacher encourages them to experiment to possibly correct their misconceptions. The teacher promotes a democratic atmosphere in which children vote, create their own rules and discuss the consequences, if needed (DeVries, Haney & Zan, 1991)

A sociomoral atmosphere is one in which respect for others is continually practiced. This does stress moral development in a time when some professionals believe that schools should not be involved with moral education but should only promote intellectual development. Most teachers know it is hard to avoid moral development especially when issues of behavior and what is good and bad, right and wrong occur daily. DeVries and Zan (1995) challenge teachers to relate to children and engage them in activities in which they construct their own moral convictions. Some suggestions for creating a sociomoral classroom follow: 1.) Strike a delicate balance of leadership between the children and yourself. Let the children participate the planning and participation of group times. Children can share ideas and possibly lead the activity with a teacher's gentle encouragement. 2.) Responsibility for decision making is shared by everybody in the class community. The teacher invites children to make rules and decisions about how to manage the class. This reduces adult authority and promotes children's self-governance. It is not necessary to give children ready-made rules. Rules can be created by the class when they are needed and then children understand the reason

for rules and take ownership of the rules. Children in a sociomoral atmosphere practice expressing their ideas in a clear and acceptable way so that everyone can understand them. Children have the opportunities for sharing perspectives with their classroom community.

3.) When children have a difference of opinion voting may be a good solution. Voting offers opportunity for exchanging or defending points of view, listening to others and then deciding fairly.

4.) Everyday life offers material for social and moral dilemmas. These exchanges of ideas, perspectives, and resolutions contribute to a child's moral development by helping them consider choices and what is right and good.

5.) Conflict in a constructivist classroom is used as an opportunity to share perspectives and develop solutions that are acceptable to all parties. Teachers who model conflict resolution let children settle a dispute if they can and if not help mediate the problem. Each child voices their concern then listens to the other. Then the teacher can invite ideas for solutions to the problem until all agree.

6.) Activities are planned by the children or with the children in mind. In a sociomoral classroom children are free to choose what activities and what class members they want to work with. Peer interaction is encouraged by referring children to other children for help, supporting negotiation when tensions arise, and promoting friendly, shared experiences ( DeVries & Zan, 1995, 1994).

Constructivist education promotes intellectual and moral autonomy in a setting that creates a classroom community built on respect. Theorists for at least the last two centuries have advocated that education embrace the child and focus on their individuality. Children's thoughts, ideas, creations, circumstances and capabilities are what drives a constructivist classroom.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

"When someone with . . . authority . . . describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing."

A. Rich, *Culture and Truth*, 1989, p. ix.

### INTRODUCTION

Naturalistic inquiry was selected as this study's primary methodology. Many important questions have been unanswered or unasked. Questions regarding educational outcomes and processes have been quantitatively measured by administering tests or by measures of individual and group differences (Walsh, Tobin, Graue, 1993). One question systematically overlooked in early childhood educational research is what Bruner (1990, p.20) called "the ordinary conduct of life." How do children make sense of their lives in classrooms? "We have measured people but we have not listened to them well" (Walsh, Tobin, Graue, 1993, p.465). Paley (1986) thought that the abstract child who emerges from experimental methods is difficult to reconcile with the warm-bodied children who confront the teacher in real life. To focus on everyday experiences in everyday life in the classroom and leave the research site with computations is not describing the uniqueness and richness of childhood experience in the classroom. The roots of naturalistic inquiry are in pursuing the understanding of the meaning that people are constructing in their

everyday actions. It focuses on intention and meaning. Researchers make sense of children by using the same sensibilities and sensitivities that make for good teachers, friends, lovers and parents such as: listening, conversing, interpreting, reflecting, describing and narrating (Walsh, Tobin, Graue, 1993).

Jacob (1988) listed three attributes of qualitative research: the research is conducted in a natural setting; stress is placed on the importance of understanding participants' perspectives and questions; and method emerges during fieldwork. The assumptions underlying naturalistic-inquiry research as explained by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen (1993) are:

- 1) Qualitative methods are generally preferred, primarily because they allow for rich data to be collected.
- 2) While both relevance and rigor are important in research, relevance is paramount.
- 3) Grounded emergent theory is preferred to a priori theory.
- 4) Tacit knowledge (including intuitions, apprehensions, or feelings) is treated differently but on an equal basis with knowledge that is explicated in language.
- 5) While the researcher may use a variety of instruments to gather data, the primary research instrument is the researcher.
- 6) Research design emanates from the research itself.
- 7) A natural setting is always preferred to a laboratory or controlled setting.

Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson interpreted, considered and integrated emergent themes to create their theories of cognitive development and psychosocial development, respectively. Naturalistic inquiry meshes theoretically with Piaget's theory of cognitive development and his notion of autonomy . . . the individual constructs knowledge through interaction with the environment. Naturalistic inquiry allows for the researcher to investigate and interpret the environment or the research site and search for questions and information that will emerge through observation. Incidences, actions and examples of autonomy as seen in the constructivist classroom were described and interpreted.



Vignettes rich in detail of children's experience with or experiencing autonomy were told. The description of how autonomy is "played out" in the classroom is best fit to the naturalistic inquiry methodology.

## PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study were twenty members of a primary constructivist classroom. There were eleven boys and nine girls who ranged in age from seven to eight years old. Participation was requested via a letter of consent to the school district, school principal and teacher. Parents of the children received a letter requesting permission for their child's participation (See Appendix A). Twenty parents returned parent consent forms within two days. The children's consent was requested through verbal solicitation in which their voluntary cooperation was requested after a brief explanation of their involvement in the study. Children were informed at that time that they were free to leave any study situation without reprisal. Names for all participants and the school were changed. All participants were informed that their responses and actions were voluntary, anonymous and confidential.

Federal regulations, and Oklahoma State University policy require a proposal review and approval of research that involves human study. The review of this project was conducted by Oklahoma State University Research Services and the Institutional Review board, IRB, to provide surveillance of this research insuring that the rights and welfare of the human subjects were properly protected. This study received permission to continue in February, 1995 and was assigned the following number from the IRB: ED-95-050 (See Appendix B).

## DESIGN OF STUDY

Naturalistic inquiry takes great care to see that it is not imposed arbitrarily on the context and that it takes in the full richness of the context (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen, 1993; Guba and Lincoln, 1988). The design of the study emerges as the researcher is in the site collecting and analyzing data daily. The researcher needs a plan for gathering data, but the plans will be less defined than in quantitative studies (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). There are several tasks a researcher can plan a priori to facilitate the emergent process of naturalistic inquiry.

Naturalistic Inquiry Design (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993).

1. Planning for purposive sampling selection.
2. Planning for data collection.
3. Planning for data analysis.
4. Planning for the quality of the study.
5. Planning for the dissemination of the studies findings.
6. Develop a logistical plan for the study.

## PURPOSIVE SAMPLING

A major concern of naturalistic inquiry is to maximize discovery and actions that occur in the context. Purposive sampling allows for the opportunity of maximum discovery. There are two basic designs in purposive sampling. The first is, selection of whom and what to study. What sources will help to answer the basic research questions? Second, choose who and what not to study. This helps narrow the study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). In purposive sampling there is no rule for sample size. The study seeks richness of the content not volume or comparisons.

In this study, participants were purposefully selected based on what they could contribute to the understanding of autonomy in the constructivist classroom. The participants were nominated through the "gatekeeper" method of selection (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). Gatekeepers for this study were professionals in higher education and the public school system who were well versed in the notion of autonomy in the classroom. The gatekeeper was asked to suggest the names in order according to which teacher was most likely to promote autonomy in the classroom to the one that was least likely. Contact was made with the first teacher, by telephone, in order to arrange an observation of the classroom. After the first observation it was determined that the classroom was not as available for research as the researcher needed. The second teacher was contacted by telephone and an observation of the classroom was scheduled. After the observation, this classroom was chosen to conduct research in autonomy in a second grade classroom. Permission from the school district and school principal was sought and received.

### DATA COLLECTION

The main source of data collection was through observation. Evertson & Green described observation as the "systematic description of events, behaviors and artifacts in the social setting chosen for the study" (1993, p. 79). Erikson (1986) described observation as an attempt to sample a wide slice of everyday life. Lincoln & Guba (1985) outlined the benefits of observation:

1. Observation maximizes the researcher ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, and customs.
2. Observation allows the researcher to see the world as his subjects see it, to live in their time frames, to capture the phenomenon on its own terms, and to grasp the culture in its own natural, ongoing environment.

3. Observation provides the researcher with access to the emotional reactions of the group introspectively; it permits the observer to be a data source.
4. Observation allows the observer to build on tacit knowledge, both his own and that of the participants.

The role of the researcher in this study was as an observer-participant, in that the participation in the group was secondary to the role of collecting data. Data was collected by the observer-participant through fieldnotes and tape recordings of class discussions and interactions. Documents that verified taped discussions or observations were collected and in many cases given to the observer-participant by the children. There were occasional informal conversations with the second-grade teacher. Notes were made periodically throughout the day. Tape recordings were made when the researcher wanted to recall the discussion, facts, or incidents that took place during class time. The tape recording were transcribed in order to analyze.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis began on the first day at the site of the study. The collection and analysis of the data obtained were studied simultaneously. Themes emerged as the data were collected during the study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). Emergent themes were discovered by taking all the available data and sorting them into similar categories. The categories that emerged were considered the organization of the data. van Manan (1990) titled this emergent process as thematic analysis. It refers to the process of recovering themes that were embodied or dramatized in the data. van Manan (1990, p.87) also described thematic analysis as an "act of seeing meaning." Themes give control and order to research analysis; themes provide the desire to make sense. van Manan (1990) described two approaches toward uncovering and isolating thematic aspects: the wholistic approach and the selective or highlighting approach. The wholistic

approach is used to express the fundamental or overall meaning of a text. It is a judgment call and it does not make one interpretation necessarily more true than another. The selective or highlighting approach attempts to find phrases that stand out or sentences that seem to be thematic. These approaches were used when placing data in categories and analyzing the data.

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen (1993) also outlined a process for establishing themes or categories:

1. Read the first entry of data. Set it aside as the first entry in the first category.
2. Read the second unit. If its content has the same tacit feel as the first entry, then add it to the same pile as the first. If not, then set it aside as the first entry in the second category.
3. Proceed in this fashion until all units have been assigned to categories. A miscellaneous category can be established and looked back through later to determine whether data included should be reassigned to one of the other categories.
4. Develop category titles or descriptive sentences or both that distinguish each category from the others.
5. Start over. Repeat the process that has already been followed, making sure not to get confined to original categories. Allow new categories to emerge and old ones to be obsolete.

Through data collection and analysis, incidents of autonomy in a constructivist classroom were captured and themes emerged to give a new, fresh, insightful description.

### PLANNING FOR QUALITY

For naturalistic inquiry research to be credible it must build upon trustworthiness (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993; Lincoln and Guba 1981). Establishing

trustworthiness enables a naturalistic study to make a reasonable claim to methodological soundness (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). The naturalistic techniques that provided trustworthiness in this study are described below:

1. Persistent observation seeks sources of data identified by the researcher's own emergent design (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). Persistent observation provides depth to the research. It is dependent on the researcher's ability to risk, to seize the moment. It is achieved through purposefulness and assertiveness.
2. Peer debriefing allows a peer who is a professional outside the context and who has some general understanding of the study to analyze materials, emergent designs and listen to the researcher's ideas and concerns (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). Hypothesis, themes, questions, strategies, an methodology will be explored. The professional will be a university professor in early childhood education whose knowledge of constructivist education is current and thorough.
3. Purposeful sampling is governed by insights about what is relevant to the study based on the focus of the research.

A basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is how an inquirer can persuade readers that the findings are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The meaning and worth of the study lies less with the researcher than with the reader (Tobin, Walsh, & Graue, 1993). Erikson (1986, p. 145) describes what qualities of research report enable the reader to act as co-analysts with the researcher: 1) intellectual meaning in the relations drawn between concrete details and the more abstract observations; 2) display the range of evidence that warrants the assertion the researcher makes; and 3) make explicit the researcher's own interpretative stance and the grounds of that stance. Good interpretive work invites readers to enter critical dialogue with the researcher and the researched. The

worth of the research will emerge in the interaction of the reader and the text (Tobin, Walsh & Graue, 1993).

### PLANNING FOR DISSEMINATION

The narrative vignette is a vivid portrayal of an event of everyday life in which "the sights and sounds of what was being said and done are described in the natural sequence of their occurrence in real time" (Erikson, 1986, p. 150). The vignettes in this study describe "what is happening here." Everyday life is largely invisible because of its familiarity. The vignettes attempt to make the familiar strange and interesting again. What is happening can become visible and can be documented systematically (Erikson, 1986). The narrative vignette is an analysis, in that the moment-to-moment style of description gives the reader a sense of being there. The vignettes persuade the reader that things in the setting were as real as the researcher claims because the sense of presence captures the reader's attention. The narrative vignette is rhetorical in the way it conveys the meaning of everyday life in rich description of specific actions by specific people (Erikson, 1986). It is also rhetorical in the way that descriptions are used to explain what is happening, to the reader. The researcher's analytic constructs convince the reader that the incident could and did happen.

The narrative vignettes is based on field notes and tape recordings taken as events happen (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). The narrative vignette is an elaboration and interpretation of the field notes. "The way the vignette is written up should match the researcher's interpretative purposes and should communicate that purpose clearly to the audience" (Erikson, 1986, p. 50). The validity of the vignette is in the interpretation of the incident and the literary account of the event. Validity of the vignettes can be shown by citing analogous instances and by showing in summary fashion the overall distribution of instances in the data. The details of the vignette are selected

carefully and contain a statement of a theory of organization and meaning of events (Erikson, 1986). Vignettes originate from the researcher's interpretation of observations, tapes or field notes. van Manan (1990, p.116) explains narrative vignettes as anecdotes and defines anecdotes as "an usually short narrative of interesting, amusing or biographic incidents" or "an incident or events itself interesting or striking." The moment-to-moment style of description in a narrative vignette gives the reader a sense of being there.

### DEVELOPING A LOGISTICAL PLAN

#### FOR THE STUDY

1. Contacted gatekeeper for nomination for participants to study.
2. Sought permission and cooperation via a letter, of the teacher whose constructivist class was observed.
3. Sought permission from the school district and principle to conduct research in the school.
4. Sought approval from parents of children to be observed.
5. Sought children's approval verbally, assuring them that they could leave any event at anytime they wanted.
6. Began research in the classroom.
7. Reviewed field notes and tape recordings daily to organize data and look for themes and new directions for observations.
8. Organized data thematically.
9. Began writing results after research was concluded.
10. Final dissemination of data.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### THE CHILDREN'S VOICES

##### INTRODUCTION

Nestled in the middle of a small school was an intriguing classroom filled with wonder and respect. The teacher in this classroom, Ms. Bright, had been in the public school system for twenty-three years. Her philosophy of education was a philosophy of life. It is deep in her soul and she lived her philosophy whether at home or at school. Her belief in the goodness of human nature and respect and trust in others fused together her home, school and community life. Most of all she believes in children. She derives her energy from the children in the classroom. Discussions, activities, events are not just touched on, they are dived into, heart first. She believes children are capable, creative, and sincere. She believes children's interests can drive the curriculum. Their discussions can create the atmosphere of the class and their actions are learning.

This class was a prime example of autonomy in live action. By the time my research started in April the children had experienced seven months as an autonomous classroom. They created the rules, brainstormed activities for the day, questioned events of the day, resolved conflicts, and developed a respect for one another that was the elastic that kept them together. They were at the pinnacle of participation during the time of this research.

The results of observations in Ms. Bright's class include a series of themes that were the most prominent and then vignettes that project the children's voices. The

vignettes bring to life the themes because the children's words describe the deep meaning they had developed through the school year. The four prominent themes are:

1. Autonomy in self-governance
2. Autonomy in curriculum
3. Autonomy in conflict resolution
4. Autonomy in respect for others.

These themes are then brought together in an unexpected way, through the children's activities following the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. Through this tragedy the themes became embodied in classroom activity.

#### THEME 1: AUTONOMY IN SELF-GOVERNANCE

The opportunity for self-governance was apparent everyday. Self-governance was most evident in events that happened everyday such as: lunch count, daily attendance, regulation of behavior and rules in the classroom. The children were in charge of the lunch count and daily attendance. Each morning a discussion began with the helper of the day taking care of the "business of the day" which included attendance and lunch count. The helper of the day sat on a heart shaped stool in what was referred to as the heart circle. The name of the circle originated before I arrived, but the children told me that one day one of the children noticed the group was in a heart shape instead of a circle. Everyone agreed and from that day forward the discussion circle had a very revealing name. What needed to be communicated to the office each morning was taken care of everyday, but because a different child was in charge everyday and because attendance and lunch count fluctuated everyday, what is usually routine was original because the children had the opportunity to govern themselves, and their peers. An example of a typical scenario of how attendance and lunch count were handled follows:

## I Agree

In the morning the children came chattering into the classroom while hanging up their jackets and backpacks. Most children unstacked chairs and then would sit on the floor to form the heart circle for discussion. A few would begin working on the computer. One child, Oliver, was on a heart shaped stool where the special helper of the day was privileged to sit. Oliver had two small paper tablets in his hand, one for attendance and one for lunch orders. He was studying the group carefully and writing things down. He then got up and looked at the bulletin board behind him. Ms. Bright then said "Oliver, it looks like you are waiting for the group's attention." Oliver shook his head in agreement. "For what?" I wondered. Oliver then began:

- Oliver:** "A" is hamburger and "B" is corn dog. Okay raise your hand and count if you want "A".
- Child:** One.
- Child:** Two.
- Child:** Three.
- Child:** Four.
- Child:** Five.
- Child:** Six.
- Child:** Seven
- Child:** Eight
- Child:** Nine (two children). Oh.
- Child:** Nine.
- Child:** Ten.
- Child:** Eleven.

**Oliver:** Who wants corn dogs?

**Child:** One.

**Child:** Two.

**Child:** Three.

**Child:** Four.

**Child:** Five.

**Child:** Six.

Yori entered the classroom late.

**Oliver:** Yori, what do you want "A" or . . . do you want a corn dog or a hamburger?

**Yori:** I'll take a hamburger.

**Oliver:** Does anyone want a super?

**Children:** No.

**Oliver:** Ms. Bright, do you want a "B" hamburger, I mean "A" hamburger or "B" corn dog?

**Ms. Bright:** Neither today, thank you.

**Oliver:** Any lunch money?

**Child:** Oh, I have some!

**Ms. Bright:** Have we counted attendance?

**Oliver:** Okay, um, you start off Zane.

Children count off to nineteen.

**Oliver:** Whitney, did you count?

**Whitney:** No, twenty.

**Oliver:** We are all here.

**Ms. Bright:** Are you through?

**Child:** No.

**Child:** We're gonna start again, um, cause Yale said there is only 19.

**Yale:** Whitney's here but she's leaving.

**Ms. Bright:** Whitney's here but she's leaving. Did she tell you that?

**Yale:** That's what she said.

**Ms. Bright:** She's gone to the office for a minute, she will be back.

**Yale:** Oh, okay, I agree with Oliver then.

Oliver then began filling out an attendance sheet that includes a lunch order while the children begin discussing the eggs Ms. Bright brought to school. Oliver then quietly rises, shows the paper to Ms. Bright. She shakes her head "Yes" and smiles. Oliver leaves the room to take the attendance and lunch count to the office. Oliver was very proud and confident while doing attendance. He knew what to do and say and that he would have the cooperation of his classmates. Lunch count and attendance are a very important part of the day. The school and the school system depend on this report and its accuracy. Ms. Bright's second graders cared for this job with personal responsibility.

Lunch count did not always go this smoothly. Attendance and lunch count were supposed to be into the office fifteen minutes after school began. Ms. Bright's classroom usually took longer than 15 minutes. Ms. Bright would not step in and take over just because the office called the room on the intercom to remind her that the report was not in the office. They may not have been first in the office with the daily report, but whatever obstacle arose, the children handled it through collaboration, sometimes in 7 to 8 minutes and sometimes the question to be clarified would take 30 minutes! Some of the challenges that arose during the lunch count included, disagreement on the total of attendance and lunch count, problem-solving solutions when the lunch count does not equal the attendance and lunches brought from home and the absences, excessive talking or lack of attention while the helper is trying to do lunch count. One day the question was called as to whether the children still wanted to handle the responsibility of "business" in

the morning, as it had been their choice. These events will be detailed by the voices of the children.

### I Don't Agree

Many times during the lunch or attendance count two children would count at the same time or a child would be late or in the restroom and the count would have to begin again. Sometimes a child was not paying attention when the count would come to him and the child next to him would count for him and another child in the group would think that person counted themselves twice. Then discussion would begin. If a child said "I do not agree with the count" it was always considered. Children would share their ideas of why they did not agree with the total on the lunch count or attendance and would try to explain what had happened. Sometimes through collaboration, the solution was obvious. Sometimes the count would have to be repeated. Ms. Bright would always listen closely to the discussion and occasionally would interject a question, but she never told them the "answer", took over the business herself, or told them how to resolve the question. When the problem was resolved there was not any animosity between the child/children that disagreed with the helper or any appearance of taking sides. It was a collaborative process, an exchange of perception and information in order to come to an agreement or understanding to finish the agreed upon task.

### Mystery Person

Forrest was Helper of the Day and had done the attendance and then took the lunch count. He kept counting and counting the lunches and it was not adding up to the amount of children present that day. He asked if anyone had brought their lunch. One child had, but it still did not add up. Forrest could not figure out why it was not adding

up. When Ms. Bright asked what the problem was, Forrest said "We have a mystery person, someone is missing." Forrest could not figure out who or why. He asked Xavier and Grant to add the lunch count and they got the same number as Forrest. "There are 19 people here. 12 have ordered lunch "A" and 5 have ordered lunch "B" and Grant brought his lunch today. Someone is missing." Ms. Bright asked "What are the possible solutions?" The children started speculating on whom the person could be and all claimed they had counted off. Forrest suggested counting off again. Attendance: 1 Å19. Lunch "A" 12, lunch "B" 5, and one sack lunch. Forrest asked, "Is anybody going out to lunch?". No positive responses. Yale softly said "Forrest which lunch are you going to have?" Forrest giggled at himself and said "Oh, it's me, I'm the mystery person. I forgot to count myself!". His community giggled with him.

### Take a Deep Breath

On several occasions the children wanted to talk to one another and share news or questions while the business was being conducted. Ms. Bright never took over the responsibility when the cooperation was minimal. She did however use several techniques that helped the children regroup or focus. When children were excited and talking at the same time to one another and not as a group Ms. Bright would begin to bring the children back together.

**Ms. Bright:** Everyone look at me. Take a deep breathe. Take three deep breaths. Grant turn around, I am asking you to please leave the computers empty right now. I know it's hard, but please do it. I see people not taking deep breaths. Is there a reason you don't want to? It will help you relax. Noisy deep breaths. I can't hear you breathing.

**Children:** (Breathing loudly)

**Ms. Bright:** I want to see your nostrils moving in and out!

**Children:** (Breathing even more loudly.)

**Ms. Bright:** I want to hear you blow out.

**Children:** (Breathing noisily.)

**Ms. Bright:** Blow a big bubble.

**Child:** I have to have gum.

**Child:** I'm getting dizzy

**Ms. Bright:** Now, is there anyone who is feeling unable to continue in group right now?

**Children:** No!

The children always cooperated amicably with the deep breathing exercise. Taking a deep breath was not done with anger or forced on all children. It was a healthy and physical technique to get the children to focus on themselves and their roles in a group. All, would take an upright, straight back position, put their hands in their laps and begin breathing. Some children would close their eyes without suggestion. Some children would move their upper bodies up and down to breathe deeply and some would move their chests only. All the children breathed until everyone was breathing as a group and with the same rhythm. They were together again.

### Composure

Another alternative to breathing deeply together was a simple question with great results. If a child was not focusing on the group discussion or causing someone else to divert his attention Ms. Bright would ask the child, "Would you like to step outside the classroom to regain your composure?". The first time I heard this question I thought it was just a positive statement that helped the child take notice of his behavior, or the lack of, and bring him back to attention. I was wrong. Ms. Bright asked this in such a positive, respectful way, that the child to whom the question was directed too, became aware of his behavior and said "Yes." and proceeded to walk into the hall. Once the child was out in the hall he would return to the group anywhere from 30 seconds to 5 minutes.



A child's return to the heart circle would go unnoticed or Ms. Bright would comment "I'm glad you're back".

On one particular occasion Ms. Bright spoke to the entire group, "If you need to step outside and regain your composure, do that, because your attention at group is important." One child walked outside the classroom for a minute then came back in. In only a few moments this same child was beginning to disrupt the group again. A conversation about composure began:

**Ms. Bright:** What does it mean to have composure? What is composure?

**Noelle:** Under control

**Whitney:** Having control of yourself.

**Vince:** To settle down and keep quiet and listen to each other.

**Ms. Bright:** Wyatt, do you need to step outside for a minute? Does anyone else need to step outside? You are not being punished, you are being given a chance to regain your composure. Okay, Xavier you think you need to? Go right ahead. It's all right. Take a minute.

Two children walked out and came back in. Then two more children walked out and returned to the group composed! The discussion about what to do that day carried on with children who took personal responsibility to compose themselves and to be a vital part of the day's discussion and plans.

### What is Happening Here?

About one week after Ms. Bright had returned to school after an illness, the morning business was taking a long time to complete. The office had called to say they did not have the lunch count from Ms. Bright's room. The children were not discussing or agreeing with any of the business taking place. They were not cooperating. Ms. Bright,

who usually sits in her chair sipping hot tea and listening to the children collaborate, heard a group that was not helping one another. A discussion began.

**Ms. Bright:** What was happening here that made this so slow?

**Children:** Oliver was talking. Xavier wasn't paying attention. Zane and Grant were ..

**Ms. Bright:** Hold it, wait a minute! Instead of blaming somebody can you speak in terms of yourself? Does anybody have anything to offer to make the morning business go better? Just for yourself and not about someone else. Raise your hand if you think it worked this morning. (Some children raise their hands.) You did? Grant, what did you like about circle this morning?

**Grant:** The things we got done.

**Ms. Bright:** But it is 9:30, we are 30 minutes late taking attendance to the office. We are usually finished by now. Is it time to talk about whether you want to take turns as helper of the day and handling the business yourself?

**Children:** YES! NO!

**Ms. Bright:** You want to talk about it? Grant, what do you think?

**Grant:** I don't want to talk about it.

**Ms. Bright:** I thought you said yes. Raise your hand if you still want to take personal responsibility for helper of the day. Let's see where we are. It appears to be unanimous. By that unanimous sign of hands we agree to continue helper of the day. Does anyone have any suggestions for tomorrow, so that the morning business will be smoother? Vince?

**Vince:** We could actually let the helper talk!

**Ms. Bright:** That is a novel idea!

**Yori:** Let our conscience be our guide.

**Ms. Bright:** Thank you. Raise your hand if you will remember tomorrow to let the helper talk and really lead.

In Ms. Bright's absence the children continued conducting the business of the day as was the custom. Getting the business done was one thing, but getting it done with cooperation and respect was the most important thing. Ms. Bright reminded the class of the importance of togetherness and helped them focus on community process and not themselves.

### Class Rules

A list of rules was stapled to the bulletin board by the monthly calendar. The paper with the rules on it had been laminated, but it was faded. I asked Ms. Bright about the rules and she said the class brainstormed rules for about a month. Whenever they were in a situation that called for the need of a rule, they would write it on a piece of paper. After about three weeks of writing rules, they categorized the rules and created five main rules. She referred to these as "rules of life."

1. Treat others the way you want to be treated
2. Let your conscience be your guide
3. Be responsible for yourself and your stuff
4. Always do your best.
5. You can't say "You can't play." Be a friend.

One day the children had created and participated in many projects that the room was in disarray. When it was time to clean up before lunch the children balked and complained. After lunch and recess Ms. Bright discussed how she felt about the lack of help during clean up time that led to a review of the class rules.

**Ms. Bright:** I have never needed a spotless classroom, but I wish we had sat together and I had told you that I was feeling upset that some people were not

carrying the load. I wish we had just reviewed the class rules but we had to go to lunch.

**Wyatt:** We might still be in here if we had done that!

**Ivy:** We could read them now.

**Ms. Bright:** Let's do it. What is one of our rules?

**Eva:** Let your conscience be your guide.

**Ms. Bright:** That is what I am trying to do now. I have told you about how I feel when you do not want to take care of your classroom.

**Wesley:** We all could have helped clean up the room.

**Ms. Bright:** Thank you.

**Yale:** Treat others the way you want to be treated

**Emily:** I will clean up better and help others.

**Children:** Me too.

**Ms. Bright:** What is another rule that would help us manage clean up?

**Children:** Be responsible for yourself and your stuff.

**Yori:** People that weren't cleaning should have been responsible.

**Ms. Bright:** Do you wish you had done that better? And yes, maybe I should have let you be responsible for yourself and your stuff, but I think about the custodian. He is going to be angry with me if there is clay all over the floor and nobody cleans it up. To do that I would have to stay here for four or five hours to clean up by myself and I have to go home and take care of my family too. (pause) Any questions or comments about this rule? Okay, any other rules that would help us?

**Vaughn:** Always do your best.

**Wyatt:** I felt like I didn't do my best by sitting around and not helping other people clean.

**Ms. Bright:** If you had it to do over again, how would you change it?

**Wyatt:** By cleaning up.

**Ms. Bright:** That is courageous Wyatt. It is courageous of you to say that. Are there any other questions or things you want to discuss?

**Forrest:** Let's do our work this afternoon and everyone will be responsible.

**Children:** Yeah! Yes! I agree!

The children reviewed these rules in a different order than they were written on the poster. I watched to see how many looked up at the faded rules on the board and very few did. They knew these "rules of life" in their hearts. They did not just review the rules in order and read them. They reviewed them by thinking about them and how they applied to this particular situation. They did not mention the rule, you can't say "You can't play." Be a friend. This rule did not apply to the situation and they did not mindlessly review it. Notice how these are rules that have character and no consequences. They promote a spirit of community and state no rewards or punishments. When the children discussed the rules and how they related to cleaning up the room, they never said, if we don't clean up we will lose our privilege of . . . or if the room is not clean we can't do projects. The children did not think in terms of pay-offs or privileges, because none have ever been established or used. Ms. Bright and the children were sharing with each other about their personal responsibilities in the classroom and to each other.

### Computer Care Company

The class had defined and selected jobs at the beginning of the year. The job and the person in charge of it was listed on a large piece of paper from a flip chart and hung in an inconspicuous place in the classroom. Representative examples of the types of jobs were: floor-sweeper, board-eraser, chair-stacker, pencil-sharpener, fish-feeder, and plant-waterer. The job responsibilities were usually tended to each day with no mention of "this is your responsibility." The children seemed to help each other with the jobs or they had learned how to handle all the jobs that needed to be done. The job that I heard most about and that seemed to be the one job that was not shared by many was the computer care team. Forrest, Zane and Grant were the members of this team. Their responsibility

included turning on and booting up the computer every morning and turning it off at the end of the day. Their responsibility was really not a "job" at all. It was their interest. They were highly motivated and knew a lot about the computer. At least fifty percent of the children would create something on the computer everyday. The percentage would rise to 75% if all the children that worked in groups on the computer were included. Even though they all did not type on the keyboard, they were verbally involved in composing on the computer. The computer care company became the helpers and rescuers if someone needed to know something. Occasionally a child that was stuck or wanted to do something he did not know how to do, would ask a peer how to do it and that peer would try to help. If his friend couldn't help him, they would go to Forrest, Zane or Grant. There were several times when a child needed help on the computer would "call out" to the computer care company to come help him. This was unusual for the children to call for help or even raise their voices. One day this happened and I asked Nicole why she was calling out to Forrest instead of going over to get him and she said, "I don't want someone else to sit here and mess this up!" The computers were never empty and she had probably had that experience before. The few times a computer was empty and a child wanted to work on it and the screen had something on it, the child would seek to find out who last worked on the computer and ask them if his work was saved.

The computer care team of Grant, Zane and Forrest also helped with disputes about whom was next. When many children wanted to make posters for the bombing rescue efforts and everyone wanted on the computer at once, children would tell the computer care team that they wanted to go next. A child would tell Grant and not Forrest that he wanted to be next and another child would tell Forrest and not Grant. After just one mix up Zane made sign-in sheets for each computer and soon set a limit of fifteen minutes on the computers. Ivy signed both lists, and Grant caught it and told her she could just sign up for one computer because there were so many that wanted to use the computer that day! Where was Ms. Bright? Observing all these interactions. Noelle

complained about all the people using the computer and that she would not get a turn and Ms. Bright suggested that she visit with the computer care team and see if they could work it out together.

Self-governance in Ms. Bright's classroom was the opportunity to exercise self-control, leadership, communication, and organizational skills. This made what is usually routine in other classrooms unique and unpredictable everyday. The children were the originators of what most classrooms call routine. The collaboration that occurred during these times of leadership showed the difference between something mundane that happens over and over versus something that is inventive and fresh. The children talk to and listen to each other with purpose and deliberation. Their questions and suggestions to each other lead to an exchange of ideas and inquiries into matters that arose and promoted cooperation between the children. DeVries and Zan (1994) describe children leading routine situations and involved in collaboration as children engaged in self-governance and thinking about social and moral issues:

As children participate in making rules, dealing with class problems, proposing and choosing class activities, and making other decisions, they learn numerous lessons in democracy. They learn that all voices are given the chance to be heard, that no one opinion is given more weight than another, and that they do have power to decide what happens in their class. (p. 105)

There was a difference seen in the group discussions in Ms. Bright's class and the suggestions for conducting a group time for preschool children in Rheta DeVries and Betty Zan's book *Moral Classroom, Moral Children: Creating a Constructivist Atmosphere in Early Childhood Education*. Here DeVries and Zan suggest group time is a time for teachers to lead, plan and manage group time. They suggest that the seating arrangements for the children may need to be determined by the teacher, and that group time should not be long. Discussion groups in Ms. Bright's class were directed by the children and Ms. Bright was a part of the group. She was there when children needed

help focusing, or when everybody would try to talk at one time, but she never seemed to direct the course taken by the class. When Ms. Bright asked a question of the children she did not raise the inflection at the end of the sentence to indicate a question. It appeared that she did not want to ask deliberate questions that required one correct response from children. When she did ask a question, and it was not acknowledged or answered she did not repeat it or require an answer.

## THEME #2: AUTONOMY IN CURRICULUM

Curriculum in Ms. Bright's second grade emerged from the children's discussions and creativity. Everyday began with discussion in the heart group. Through this discussion children's ideas, questions, and inventions would emerge. This was so subtle an event that the day would be planned without huge explanation or preparation. Ms. Bright had a planning book, because it was required by the school. It could be called her diary. She did not pre-plan any learning activity before it happened. Her planning book was only written in after the week was over, not before. How can you plan emergent curriculum? If the curriculum comes from the child then preparing a plan for the week is predisposing the children to what you want them to do. Ms. Bright knew her class so well by now that she trusted that they would plan what interested them the most. She had hunches about what they might be interested in, like the eggs. If the eggs had gone unnoticed, she also trusted that there would be another topic that would be the focus of their attention and curiosity. An example of this ability to listen to the children and let their ideas be the plan for the day follows:

One day Ms. Bright brought a bouquet of flowers from her home garden. She thought the children would inquire about the flowers and create activities involving the flowers. She set them in a vase on a shelf by the sink. The children did not mention or inquire about the flowers. The flowers stayed in the same place for two days. By this time



I thought the flowers were going to wither away before they were noticed. I asked Ms. Bright if she was going to show the flowers to the children and she said "No, if the children are interested in them they will notice them." On the third day a child was cleaning and moved the flowers onto a table by the discussion circle. Finally, on the fourth day the children asked where the flowers came from! Ms. Bright explained that they came from her garden and she brought them for the class. At that moment, ideas began flowing and a whole day of activities became centered around the flowers. They shared them with the principal and the counselor. They looked at the parts of the flower under a microscope. Some children went to the library and researched flower parts. They tried to find the seeds and plant them, and they made paint with the bright yellow petals. The children invented these ideas because they were curious about the flowers, not because it was a scheduled activity.

The curriculum that surrounded the bombing (See page 93) was child initiated. Ms. Bright told them the tragic news about an explosion in Oklahoma City, and in their discussion they began thinking of ways to help and things to do. This was certainly not in the lesson plans of any teacher and for that reason, some classes did not do anything related to the issue of the bombing. Through discussion the children would share an idea and it would build or be expanded by the end of the discussion. Most of the time Ms. Bright would write on the chalkboard as the children created activities for the day. Other times she would write on a flip chart. The day of the bombing the children wanted to do something for the "people". They made thoughtful cards, get well cards, and posters for hospital rooms. They went home that afternoon and heard and saw live coverage of the mass destruction, terror in children's and adult's eyes and rescue efforts that quickly became fruitless. The next morning the activities that the children suggested were intense. They were the symbol of action that the children wanted to take as a result of the graphic tragedy that had affected each child and their family or friends. The activities the day after the bombing reflected what the children had seen on the television and what they

experienced at home. The child whose family took food from their restaurant to feed the people standing in long lines to donate blood, wanted to collect food to make hot soup and stew. The children who had family members in the health services area wanted to know about blood donations and wanted to make things for the victims in the hospital. Children who had friends, or extended family members who were missing wanted to make posters to put in the community in order to collect items needed by the rescuers and victims who were homeless as a result of the destruction in the downtown area. Each idea was seen as helping activity, and soon all the children participated in all the activities. They learned and shared with each member of their classroom community. The children's activities focused on helping the victims, rescuers or families went strong for about two weeks. Then some children began to focus on other ideas, while others were still working on activities related to the bombing. The children were given time to actively heal, consider, and question their thoughts and feelings related to this tragedy each at their own pace and not according to a schedule.

The curriculum that will be described in the following vignette began with eggs sitting in a wire basket on a shelf. Ms. Bright brought the eggs to school to share with the children and possibly discuss and investigate. If the children had not been curious about the eggs then the egg activities would not have been created. The day would have been filled with other activities that we will never know. The children were instantly inquisitive about the eggs and within minutes were already asking questions, creating humorous terms, and offering ideas for "eggtivities". As the children shared ideas, Ms. Bright wrote them on a flip chart, as she repeated what they said. When the children surprised her with an idea or a fact about eggs she would be enthusiastic and excited. The children kept on until a child would say "Let's get to work." or "We want to start now." This was her cue to say "Let's go, be careful out there!" Occasionally, after the children had created activities for the day she would say "Okay, tell me what your plan is." The children would explain what they were going to do if they were in a group. Some children chose to work

by themselves and they would tell Ms. Bright what they were going to do. Usually they participated in the activity they had thought of or originally wanted to do. Then during the morning they would also participate in another activity. By the end of the week of "eggtivities" each individual activity had been intertwined with the others into a bigger project that extended the original activity ideas. The day after Ms. Bright brought the eggs, the children walked in the classroom asking about the eggs, and brought items from home to continue making homes for the eggs. There was no question about what topic the activities of that day would focus on.

### "Eggsperiments!!!"

Ms. Bright had been gone for four weeks due to a lengthy illness. On her first day back and my first day in the classroom, she carefully placed an antique wire basket full of duck eggs on the shelf beside her chair. The children greeted her with big hugs, many questions and comments about her health such as: "Are you better now Ms. Bright?" "Will you be here for a long time now?" "I'm glad you are back!" "Are you feeling better now?" Ms. Bright had truly been missed. As Ms. Bright sat in the heart circle, the children's eyes caught sight of the eggs and soon their thoughts and words followed. The basket of eggs drew their attention and it did not take long for the children to surmise that in Ms. Bright's absence from school, their duck, Ducky, had started laying eggs. Ducky was well known in Randolph School for it's "miracle" hatching. The story as told by the girl, who is now in third grade, who found the egg, is written in her own words as follows:

Some things are worth waiting for

Well one day I was at my grand parints house and I was walking around in there backyard and the mother lad Ducky and I picked him up.

That night I was spending the night with my grandparints and I said, "what will I do with Ducky," and my grama said the V.C.R. is warm on top and so I put it on it. That night I was scared. I thought it would hach. The next morning it was fine and worm. Then my mom picked me up and I had a soccer game and Ducky was in a paper towel and in a cup in the car. Next we went to the groshry store and I brout the egg in. Then the next day was school it was about this time an Mrs. Dale (the librarian) was here and she asked me why I had the egg and I said I found it at my grama's house and its a egg of a duck and she said well we need to call to find out what it eats. Then I ran to Ms. Bright and she was so exsided and I said Mrs. Dale is bringing down the inkibader. Then she hached it. I am so surprised the she lad 27 eggs and I'm happy. By Lynn timer

Ducky, as an egg, had travelled many miles and had been many places before it was set to rest in the incubator that would hopefully give it life. When Ducky started hatching everyone was so surprised. Ducky, as the duck became known, was raised in the classroom after she hatched in April of 1994. Ms. Bright had a cage and a little swimming pool for the duck to stay in and play in. Ducky would follow Ms. Bright around the classroom and down the hall and, of course, had many loving pats and treats from school friends. When school was out in the spring of 1994, Ms. Bright took Ducky to her home for the summer. Ducky had been a frequent visitor in this new second grade class and many others familiar with Ducky would come by and greet her. Now, she was laying eggs. The celebration of life continues.

Ms. Bright gently took the wire basket off the shelf while she told them that the basket was her Grandmother's and she remembers gathering eggs with her. She then held the basket and went to each child and invited them to take an egg. The sound of silence was as fragile as the eggs. The children took their eggs in their hands and turned them, held them up to the light, smelled them, rubbed their fingers over the shell, and inspected them curiously. The children were inquisitive about how Ducky laid so many eggs, when she laid them, how many eggs she laid a day, and most of all did they have baby chicks in them? They posed many questions, as if to "ask" Ms. Bright, but Ms. Bright hardly got a word in! The children began sharing their own experiences with eggs and answered each

other's questions and created more questions for discovery. Ms. Bright began shaping and documenting the discussion by writing down what the children said on a flip chart. Each time there was a new topic she would flip to a new page. The charts during the thirty-minute conversation looked like this:

#### The Eggsact facts/ what we know/statements

not fertilized

Ducky laid them

they're all brothers and sisters - all from Ducky

they're precious just as they are (not fertilized)

When Xavier's egg cracked, only the white part came out, not the yolk

When I shake it, I can feel something rattle

In the inside of the egg there's a soft clear covering like silk that protects the egg on the inside

Eggs are used in high school to help teenagers learn responsibility which is necessary to be a mom or a dad.

Have to be carfele. (A child wrote this later in the day when her egg cracked.)

#### Questions

How did Ducky lay the eggs if there is no male duck?

Can we make artistic representations of these eggs?

#### Egg Yolks (Jokes) Ha Ha

Garfield's Egg Buddy in the Sunday paper.

"separating"

(p)Eggy White (Eva's friends' name)

Yolklahoma

Yolklahoma City (Oklahoma City)

Eggspiration date

"Eggstra Eggivities"

#### Things to do

Ducky Newspaper about her gifts (eggs) and life

Paint designs on eggs - zigzag, diamond, square

What do you think of when you think of eggs?

Live inside	Surprise
Life	Excited
Yolk	Thrilled
duck	work

### "Eggsceptional Seggestions"

1. Papier mache eggs 1 Cup glue, 1/2 Cup water, newspaper
2. Puppet show about "toad and egg" "Egg and Toad"
3. Pinata of egg
4. Houses and furniture for your egg - special, good, sturdy, soft, comfortable, safe place, cat-proof, sign/ instruction.
5. Paint egg -collage
6. High School Parenting Responsibility Eggsercise
7. Eggsamine Wesley's egg
8. Discover the meaning of the white spot and share
9. Discovery

The children were carefully holding their eggs and "eggsamining" them as they discussed egg facts, egg "yolks", questions, "eggtivities", and "seggestions". Within thirty minutes, they were already bonding to their individual eggs, by looking at distinctive marks, and wanting to protect them by not breaking them, making a safe-place for them (a home) and carrying them gently around like babies. As the conversation lulled, Ms. Bright asked "Does anyone need any specialized materials or mediums to work with?" The children responded "No". Then Ms. Bright asked "Does anyone need anything that you need adult help for? No? Okay, have fun and be careful out there!". The children went into the classroom and began creating. Two children went to the library to research eggs and how they are laid and hatched. During the day, five children composed a newsletter containing news about eggs . (See figure 1 )

Egg egg egg  
Grat egg  
Grat grat egg

## Eggstra!

Eggs take over the class!

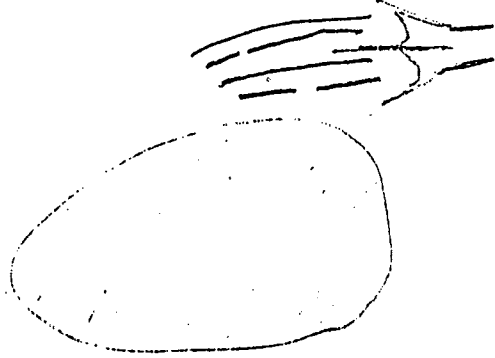


Figure 1 - "Egghappenings!"

Four boys worked together to create a puppet show, four children made papier mache eggs, and two children were painting their eggs. The rest of the children made houses and furniture for their eggs and carefully carried their eggs around or put them in a safe place while they were working. Some children worked by themselves, some children worked in pairs, and some children worked side-by-side, sharing information. They also participated in several of the "eggtivities" around the room, but still carried through or extended their original ideas. For example, two children that went to the library, wrote the facts about eggs on paper, shared them with Ms. Bright and other children, then typed the facts on the computer, all the time carrying their eggs in a basket with soft stuffing! The four boys that were composing a puppet show about eggs, designed a scene through collaboration, put together the scene (which was a safe, comfortable home with furniture and a pool) and incorporated a papier mache wall into the home, and put their eggs in safe areas so they would not break while they were constructing. All the children did at least three to four of the activities they had thought of as a class, but they were all within their own ideas of what to do. By the end of the first day of exploring Ducky's gifts, one egg had broken and two eggs had cracked, and all eggs were adopted and greatly adored.

The next day, the children arrived in class eager to see their eggs and finish their inventions from yesterday. After taking care of the attendance and lunch count the children wanted to get back to where they left off yesterday, doing "eggivities"! Their eggs had been kept in a basket in the refrigerator overnight. Ms. Bright asked how each child was going to get his egg. The children came up with ideas such as: one person pass the eggs out; two people at a time get their eggs; and for Ms. Bright to pass out the eggs. They also thought of passing the egg basket around so each person could get his own egg. This suggestion won the majority of the class votes. The egg basket was overflowing with tenderly cared for eggs. The guardians of the eggs had put them in small containers, wrapped securely in tissue, and surrounded by colorful material. The eggs were already known for their distinctive markings and "personalities". Every child got his own egg, but after close inspection, Wyatt said that he did not get his egg, because the white spot on his egg was at the top, not in the middle. Everybody looked at their eggs. Wyatt then announced that he had wrapped his egg just like Zane's. Zane looked at his egg, and agreed that he had Wyatt's egg, then cooperatively traded. The children eagerly left the circle and continued their work from the day before. By today the activities that the children were creating, appeared to be projects. The activities had blossomed, and expanded to incorporate each child's new thinking and ideas, and creations they heard or had seen in the community classroom. The children were making homes for the eggs, protecting them, writing stories and newsletters about the eggs, painting and making papier mache eggs with determination and discovery.

The homes that they made for the eggs were special. Most of the homes were made out of boxes. The boxes were decorated on the outside with paint or markers. Windows and doors that had been cut out or drawn by hand by the children. Some children attempted to put roofs on the houses by folding a flat piece of cardboard into an angle. The hardest thing for them to do was to make it stay on. Some children used tape, which seemed to be the most successful, and some used glue while others tried to make



slits. A few of the children tried to use straight pins and thumbtacks with a marginal degree of success. The insides of the houses were also decorated with material, drawings, and soft things like carpet scraps, yarn, and an abundance of tissue. If the children decorated the inside, they always put a bed or something for the egg to sleep or rest in. The bed was much like a crib. It had protective sides, was soft and gave the appearance of being secure. Some children put pictures on the wall of the egg "homes" by drawing them or cutting out print fabric or drawing egg "family members."

On this day, just like the first, children were composing the "Daily News" (See figure 2.)

#### THE LOST EGG

Once upona time ther was a egg and the egg was just lade by his mom skinner chicken but when she whn't to get some food she got shot she fele to the graownd the egg din't know whn't happnind but the egg hachde and the chik was lost for ever.



Eggs's are good too eat.

eGg, I have an egg.

Grrrrrrr. Whars my egg.

Shhhh. my egg she's sleping.

Figure 2 - Egg stories

on the computer. Some children were writing stories and then reading them to each other. Wesley, Wyatt, and Oliver were building a three-story house with a swimming pool

on top for their eggs and a toad that Wesley had brought to school the last two days. They would suggest an idea to each other, discuss the idea and build upon it until it was workable and agreeable to all. Quinn and Vaughn spent their morning painting their eggs, washing them off and painting them again. They washed off the eggs in a bucket which created a mixture of all the colors they had used. They began adding texture to the paint such as sand and glitter. This texture was also added to the bucket where they were washing the eggs. They started wondering where the sand was after they washed their eggs and soon poured out the colored water to find the sand on the bottom of the bucket. At this point they focused their attention on the sand and attempted to color it by using paint, then rolled the egg into the colored, wet sand to see if it would stick to the egg. It did to a certain extent and when the sand fell off the paint left a print in the eggshell.

Other children added layers to the dried papier mache eggs they made the previous day. During the additions of paper layers, they ran out of powdered paste and one of the children knew how to make paste from flour and water and proceeded to mix the paste so the layers could be completed. The second day ended with three more cracked eggs, but many safe comfortable containers for their cherished duck eggs.

Ms. Bright's role during these last two days can be described as facilitator. She moved about the room observing the work of the children. She encouraged them to answer their own questions when they posed questions to her from their own discoveries. She supported their ideas or helped them modify them, by thinking through the activity. She was the cheerleader for their new discoveries and accomplishments. Ms. Bright also suggested to children that they handle their own conflicts by talking with each other and agreeing to a solution. If children could not resolve their conflict Ms. Bright was there to mediate, if needed (see Autonomy and Conflict Resolution in this chapter).

The next day was April 19, 1995. In the morning there was a familiar substitute and the children continued work on their egg houses. The majority of the children began painting the outside of the houses with paint. At opening it was their idea to paint the

houses and make a town out of them. They got the paint and paintbrushes out, covered the floor with plastic or newspaper and designated an area to let the houses dry before lunch. On this afternoon Ms. Bright "broke" the news of the bomb that exploded in downtown Oklahoma City (see The Bombing of the Heartland, this chapter). All "eggtivities" ceased for about 9 days.

On April 28th, one week and two days after the bombing, Grant announced that he had only four more weeks of school because he and his family were going on a vacation and he would get out of school early. Other children questioned how many days of school were left and several children began figuring out the days and weeks in their own mathematical ways. While solving this problem Ivy said, "I don't want school to be over, there is so much left to do!". Ms. Bright said, "What things have we not finished that you wish you could finish in the four weeks and 2 days left of school?". There was a long, thoughtful pause, and Eva said " That thing (number calendar) up there that has the numbers on it." Ms. Bright began writing their ideas on the flip chart. The ideas ranged from projects they started at the beginning of the school year to things they liked the best, to what they had left undone over a week ago. Zara and Wyatt wanted to finish the papier mache eggs and several others wanted to finish their egg houses and stories. Ginny very quietly said "My dad blew the yolk out of an egg at home. Many children asked if she saw how he blew the egg out, and how he poked holes in the eggs. The conversation that launched two more days of projects went as follows:

**Ginny:** My dad blew the yolk out of an egg I had.

**Ms. Bright:** Did you watch him do this?

**Ginny:** Yes.

**Vince:** How did he do it?

**Ginny:** He took this whatsamacallit, like a screw driver round thing and poked a hole on this side (pointing to the top and bottom of her hand, which was representing the egg) and that side and then blew the yolk out.

**Yori:** What did he blow it out with.

**Ginny:** A screw driver, not a screw driver. Maybe something like a needle.

**Yale:** Did he blow the egg whites out too?

**Ginny:** Yes that came out too.

**Yale:** It seems like the egg whites would come out first because the yolk is always in the middle.

**Ms. Bright:** The yolk is always in the middle?

**Grant:** Egg whites are surrounding it most of the time.

**Ms. Bright:** What do you mean most of the time?

**Grant:** Sometimes it is over to one side.

**Forrest:** Yes, the egg whites are thinner than the egg yolks, they would come out first. I know how to blow out eggs.

**Ms. Bright:** Is anyone interested in doing egg experiments with your eggs?

**Children:** Yes! Cool! No!

**Ms. Bright:** Sh-h-h, I need it "eggstra" quiet. If you are interested in blowing out your eggs like Ginny's dad did and Forrest says he knows how to do . . . Forrest have you done this before?

**Forrest:** No, but I know how to do it.

**Ms. Bright:** Could we maybe set up a demonstration?

**Forrest:** I can draw on the chalkboard how to do it.

**Ms. Bright:** Great!

**Ms. Bright:** OK, let's let Forrest have a moment. Speak, stand and deliver, Forrest.

**Forrest:** First of all, poke a hole right here and then one hole right there with a pin or a needle. When that is finished you bring your mouth at one end, it doesn't matter which end and then you blow through the other hole.

**Children:** Ugh. Yuk.

- Ms. Bright:** The one thing we always try to do is stay safe. So when Forrest says you have to put your mouth on the egg and blow you have to do it that way. Do you know what I as a mother and a teacher am worried about? What would your mother or father worry about?
- Child:** Sucking on the egg.
- Child:** Swallowing the egg.
- Child:** Germs that it might have.
- Ms. Bright:** Yes, this is important. The eggs are not fresh and they should not be close to your mouth. There are germs called salmonella germs that can make you sick.
- Child:** Duck germs.
- Forrest:** What about using a straw?
- Child:** Yes, we have straws in the art area.
- Ms. Bright:** We have straws! Great, see if it will work. What do you think would be the best way to do the eggs? Where are we going to sit? What are we going to do? If we don't have a plan what will happen?
- Child:** It may get messy, and we would have a problem.
- Ms. Bright:** Yes, you will have to work it out.

The morning began with children preparing their areas for egg blowing. Most children covered their tables with newspaper or plastic and used bowls or pans in which to blow the egg. They used straws to attempt to blow the eggs out and things such as pencil points, scissors, toothpicks, and paper clips to poke holes in the eggs. They were surprised by the force they had to use to penetrate the egg and talked about the skin inside the egg that holds it together. They also had a hard time blowing out the egg and began discussing alternatives to straws. They cut the straws in half, used paper that had been tightly rolled up, and used cardboard tubes. When their ventures at blowing the eggs out were successful there were squeals of delight and satisfaction. Forrest announced that he was collecting the egg whites and yolks to scramble and set a big bowl on a table for

others to deposit their just-blown-out eggs. Most children contributed the insides of their eggs to the scrambled recipe bowl, but a few children had their own ideas of things to do with the slimy insides. Quinn and Vaughn mixed their eggs yolks together then divided it into little bowls. Then they added ingredients to the eggs such as food coloring, tempera, acrylic paint and glitter. Then they started painting their eggs and painted on paper. Immediately they saw the difference in egg yolk paint and other paint and shared their invention with others, who also began painting with egg yolk paint.

Forrest gathered several comrades and began making "scrambled eggs." They asked Ms. Bright for a recipe and she asked them, "Have you ever seen anyone make scrambled eggs? What do you recall?". She encouraged them to create their own. At this point is where I really became immersed in this activity and the interaction between the boys and Ms. Bright. I felt the eggs were not healthy to eat because some had not been refrigerated, some had been cracked for a while and some of the containers that the children had blown their eggs into were not clean. It was difficult to refrain from saying anything to them. When Ms. Bright told them to create their own recipe, I thought she thought it was all right to eat these eggs. I told her some of the things I had seen and she had seen them too, but "They are creating, thinking, experimenting, communicating. I think they will figure it out." That was my first experience at trusting children to think about options for themselves. I sat and watched as they first endeavored to get the eggshells out of the eggs, but could not get them all. They decided to cook them out. They added salt and pepper at first, then some garlic and onion salt. They mixed and mixed until they all agreed they were ready to cook them. Forrest, Vince, Oliver, and Wyatt decided the eggs should be cooked in the microwave oven, but could not agree on the amount of time. Finally, Grant mediated and said "Lets just keep cooking them until they are done". "Yeah, Yeah", everyone agreed. The first time was for three minutes and as they were setting the timer on the microwave, they discussed why there were two dials on the microwave. They counted, then discussed and repeated. They did not ask Ms.

Bright how to set the timer, they trusted their own thinking enough to figure it out. They agreed that the top dial was for seconds and the bottom dial was for minutes because the top dial was numbered up to 60 and the bottom dial was numbered in 10's up to 60. They set the bottom dial for 2 minutes and the top dial for 50 seconds. When the bell sounded, they rushed to check the eggs. They could smell them and they could see they were cooking around the edges. Vince said "I think my mom cooks them for 15 minutes." Oliver said "I think one minute". They added the two comments together and set the microwave for 16 minutes!. By this time the smell of scrambled eggs radiated throughout the classroom. By then, the aroma had drawn twelve children to pull up chairs to watch the eggs cook. The eggs puffed up as they cooked and they were all amazed. Some thought there would be enough for the class, the secretary and the principal! The eggs kept cooking on and on. The smell went down the hall. The egg mixture had peaked and now it was on its way down. Four more minutes to go. At this point Forrest said "I don't think we should eat those because they have eggshells in them and they may be dangerous". Vince, "Maybe we cooked them out, or they dissolved." Grant, "No, eggshells don't dissolve. The eggs sure smell good." There it was, careful consideration of whether to eat the eggs or not. Ms. Bright is trusting. As the timer was about to go off the children commented that there had been no movement from the eggs and they did not look as fluffy. The timer rang. Forrest got a pot holder and took the eggs out. Everyone gathered around. The eggs had cooked so long they were now hard as a rock! Forrest turned the pan upside down and nothing happened. A few of the children touched the top with caution then with more force, and still nothing happened. The smell of scrambled eggs lingered in the air for hours and the overly-scrambled eggs became a monument for all the egg "eggsperiments".

The eggshells had been lying on tables and cabinets now that they were minus matter inside. Ivy and Noelle found their eggs at the table and noticed they had dried out. They looked for the membrane, the skin inside the egg. They peeled the eggshell carefully

and slowly until the eggshell was gone and the membrane was left. This was a very important breakthrough since the children have talked so much about the membrane. At a discussion group on their return from physical education class. Ivy and Noelle wanted to show their tediously discovered membrane of one of Ducky's eggs. The comments as the membranes were being passed around were quite bold and clearly expressed their vast sensory experiences.

**Child:** It looks like a moon.

**Child:** It looks like a cyclops.

**Child:** Oh, this smells like my doll.

**Child:** I think it smells like left-overs.

**Child:** I can barely feel it in my hand.

**Child:** My mother makes an egg casserole.

**Child:** It smells like Zara's dog!

The egg experiments and activities began decreasing after this day, but they were not forgotten. The houses, the scrambled egg monument, the new articles, the poems and the left-over eggshells that had been so delicately placed in a pie pan and put on a shelf were constant reminders and stimulators for more activity with Ducky's eggs.

### THEME # 3: AUTONOMY IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflicts or differences of opinion among children in a class can be expected. Conflicts in a class of twenty-one autonomous members were provoking. When there was a conflict between children, they would discuss it and work it out between themselves. There were many incidents of children who had a difference of opinion in how to do something. They would collaborate and incorporate each other's opinions into a solution



or idea. Many children used this collaboration or exchange of ideas, on their own with great success. It was sometimes so successful that before it was obvious that there was a conflict, the children had already settled the difference before I could record anything.

An adult could possibly detect, through the conversation and actions of the children, who may have been at fault in the dispute or how each child was saying the same thing in different ways and with different perspectives. When children sought Ms. Bright's assistance, she never acknowledged that one child or another appeared to be at fault. She let the children talk about the problem themselves or she mediated with them until they came up with a solution. The solution did not always involve acknowledgment of fault. These conflicts also revealed how children interpret space, body movements or what another person said. The disputes were not settled in private or in the hall. They were discussed where they happened. The children involved would sometimes reenact the episode so that they could better understand it and the reenactment showed how each one had perceived the incident. Mediation conversations were always in an atmosphere of respect and unconditional acceptance. The children felt safe enough to tell their sides and on some occasions, safe enough to apologize if moved to do so. The following are three conflicts that were mediated by Ms. Bright:

#### Do You Think it Was a Misunderstanding?

**Ms. Bright:** You tell me what you think happened, Vaughn.

**Vaughn:** Well, this is the first part, he came up and said . . . well, I put his stuff in the trash can and I forgot what happened after that.

**Ms. Bright:** Vince came to me and he told me you slapped him with a ruler.

**Vaughn:** It wasn't a ruler, it was this.

**Ms. Bright:** A paint stirrer?

**Vaughn:** Yes, but he pushed me.

**Vince:** No, I didn't

**Vaughn:** You were right here

**Vince:** No, I was right here. I walked over here and you slapped me with that stick..

**Ms. Bright:** I want to know what happened.

**Vince:** First, I came over to say something and I bumped him with my shoulder.

**Ms. Bright:** You bumped him?

**Vince:** Barely, not very hard at all. I said "Excuse me Vaughn" so I could go throw something away and about right here he started hitting me.

**Vaughn:** No, you punched me. I was at cooks corner cleaning and Vince said . . . something . . . I forgot.

**Ms. Bright:** Was it something friendly or unfriendly?

**Vaughn:** It was friendly, but he was just playing and being rough.

**Vince:** I didn't do any of that. I just said "Excuse me, I'm going through this anyway."

**Vaughn:** No, you walked that way and went through..

**Ms. Bright:** Everybody stop. We could stand here and argue about who did what and who we think did right, but what do you think we should do right now?

**Vince:** Keep cleaning and forget about it.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, but do you know what? You haven't been able to forget about it because you keep coming to me and telling me Vaughn slapped you with a ruler.

**Vince:** He did.

**Ms. Bright:** So cleaning and forgetting about it doesn't seem like a good option. What is a good option?

**Vince:** Work it out.

**Ms. Bright:** Okay. Stand here and work it out.

**Vince:** Vaughn, I am sorry if I bumped you on accident.

**Vaughn:** That's all right. I'm sorry I hit you with my paint stirrer.

**Ms. Bright:** Now is this worked out?

**Boys:** Yes.

**Ms. Bright:** Do you think it was a misunderstanding? Can you think of something that might help it not to happen again? You two are good friends.

**Vince:** Walk more carefully.

**Vaughn:** Do our business.

**Ms. Bright:** Let's pretend to collide again and show me what you would do.

Boys collide with each other and they both say "Excuse me."

#### Let's Be Friends, Like in Kindergarten

**Ms. Bright:** Nicole did you know that Whitney was angry with you?

**Nicole:** Did I hit you?

**Whitney:** You were pushing me against the wall.

**Nicole:** Two times that is all.

**Ms. Bright:** But Nicole, two times is two times. I want you to be responsible for your actions.

**Nicole:** Two times against the wall isn't that much.

**Ms. Bright:** You would let someone push you against the wall two times and then say that wasn't too much, no big deal?

**Nicole:** Yes.

**Ms. Bright:** I want you to write a note for your mother to sign.

**Nicole:** But there is no reason for us to write notes home.

**Ms. Bright:** There is a reason. What do you think the reason is?

**Nicole and Zara:** No reason.

**Ms. Bright:** That is what concerns me. You don't want to take responsibility for what you did. Don't you think your parents would like to help you through the hard times?

**Zara:** But we could just tell them with our own mouths instead of writing with our hands.

**Ms. Bright:** Are you going to tell your parents that there was no problem at all? If there was a reason I want you to write it down.

**Nicole:** There was no reason. We went over there and said "Whitney stop erasing Emily's work and don't fight any more." Then you walked in and then I went to Whitney.

**Ms. Bright:** Zara was in on it too.

**Whitney:** Yes you yelled "Whitney quit erasing Emily's work." Then you were watching me.

**Zara:** No, I know in my mind what I did.

**Ms. Bright:** I want you all to find a place together and see if you can work this out among yourselves.

(Whitney, Zara, Emily, and Nicole talking in the hallway.)

**Nicole:** I want to be your friend, but I can't

**Whitney:** If we just talk about what happened today and the fight and forgive each other and forget what happened, then we could be friends again.

**Zara:** Well, Okay, I'll be your friend.

**Emily:** Okay.

**Nicole:** I'll be friends.

**Zara:** Let's tell Ms. Bright that we don't have to take a note home because we worked it out.

**Whitney:** Let's say that none of this happened and we've been friends since kindergarten.

**Zara:** Okay, we have known each other a long time.

**Ms. Bright:** Did you get things worked out?

**Whitney:** Yes, we are saying none of this happened, we are starting all over like when we met in kindergarten. We didn't fight then.

**Ms. Bright:** You are starting all over. That tells me that you are not pretending. That you really care so much about each other and you really want to. Oh-h-h it gives me goosebumps!

#### What is the Problem?

**Noelle:** Wyatt is changing the calendar and he is stepping where we are cleaning up.

**Ms. Bright:** Did you talk to Wyatt, Noelle?

**Noelle:** Yes, he said "I am supposed to be over here."

**Ms. Bright:** Whitney, Wyatt and Noelle, take a break and sit here and see if you can work it out together. Let me know what you decide.

Whitney, Wyatt and Noelle sat together and began a discussion and Ms. Bright goes to another area. A short while later:

**Wyatt:** She said "Why should I even talk to you."

**Ms. Bright:** She, there are a lot of shes, who could it be?

**Wyatt:** Noelle said "Why should I even talk to you."

**Noelle:** I did not. I said "Why should I even be talking?" and I said "I am not going to get into a fight."

**Ms. Bright:** Do you want me to help you work this out?

**Children:** Yes.

**Ms. Bright:** What is the problem? I want to hear from both of you.

**Wyatt:** When I came over here Noelle goes, "Well Wyatt you are not supposed to be over here." I said, "I am over here to finish the calendar."

**Ms. Bright:** Did you say that Noelle?

**Noelle:** No. I said "No, you're not even supposed to be over here." and he said "I'm trying to finish the calendar." Then I said "Ms. Bright told Whitney to pick a partner to do the calendar and Whitney picked me." And that's what I said.

**Ms. Bright:** You know I have realized I may have made a mistake here. I knew that Wyatt was almost finished with the calendar and I knew that the math manipulatives had not been cleaned and now you are in each other's way. Could you possibly start cleaning on the right side of the math shelf and then as soon as Wyatt is finished with the calendar, he will let you know? Wyatt, will you tell them that you are finished?

**Wyatt:** Yes.

**Ms. Bright:** Will that work? Does everyone agree?

**Wyatt & Noelle:** Yes.

There were times when conflicts involved the entire classroom. The children would sit with Ms. Bright and discuss the issue that was affecting the members of the classroom, the routine of the day, Ms. Bright, or common values that had been agreed upon together in class. These discussions were approached with honesty, openness and respect.

In the next vignette, the class had spent a majority of the previous day cleaning up the room, by straightening areas, redoing bulletin boards, putting materials back together or all in one place. Normally, this was done on a daily basis, but when Ms. Bright was out of the classroom for three weeks, the creations and projects the children made had just stacked up so that Ms. Bright could marvel at them upon her return. So this mass cleaning effort had been dubbed "spring cleaning." The children cleaned, moved, rearranged, and sorted through many items with contentment, as if it was a project. The entire class participated and the children made the majority of the decisions about where to put things or what to throw away (which was not much!). The day following "spring

cleaning" the children worked on special projects to give a visitor that was coming to class. The visitor stayed until 15 minutes before lunch. After he left, Ms. Bright suggested they look around the room. They all agreed it was a mess, but very few worked on getting things picked up before lunch. After lunch and recess, there was a discussion about the lack of effort and responsibility toward clean-up time:

### It Was Worth It

**Ms. Bright:** Should we clean up? The room is still messy from this morning

**Children:** No! Yes!

**Ms. Bright:** It sounds like you do not want to pick up.

**Children:** All day!

**Zara:** I want to keep on doing the stuff that we were working on this morning.

**Grant:** We don't have to stop when somebody leaves.

**Nicole:** Clean up always means we have to leave.

**Vince:** Clean up means the day is over.

**Ms. Bright:** Being responsible for the room before lunch does not mean the day is over.

**Forrest:** But it means we have to stop what we were doing and thinking about.

**Wyatt:** Yeah! And when we get back from lunch we have music or P.E. and we don't get to finish what we are doing.

**Ms. Bright:** It is very hard to stop what you are doing and change, I hear you saying that. What if we never stop, we just keep on doing what we were doing the day before, everyday? I see a problem with that. Does anyone else see a problem with that?

**Ivy:** We have no where to do anything.

**Ms. Bright:** There would be no place to put your projects.

- Zara:** There is something I don't understand. If we make a mess and clean that mess up, then we make another mess and clean that up, why don't we make a mess and clean up one time?
- Ms. Bright:** Does anybody have any ideas about that? Should we save clean up until then end of the day?
- Yale:** Let's start cleaning up now.
- Ivy:** What I think is we make a mess and clean it up one time and if we pick it up now then we will be making another mess this afternoon and what I think we should do is make a mess now and then at the end of the day we clean up all our messes but if we start cleaning now, we'll be cleaning all day like what happened yesterday.
- Vaughn:** I want to clean up each time we leave. If we don't there will be no room to do anything.
- Zara:** But we would be cleaning up 1,000 times a day!
- Wesley:** If we don't pick up our mess then there would be no place to draw pictures and do other work.
- Vince:** If you make a mess and you know you are going to make another mess right after that, then why clean up before you make another mess?
- Eva:** I think we should clean up all at one time.
- Ms. Bright:** What happens after school when the room does not get cleaned up?
- Children:** You have to clean it up.
- Ms. Bright:** Guess how many hours I've been here this week.
- Children:** How many?
- Ms. Bright:** About eight hours after school. Everybody is gone and I am just cleaning.
- Ginny:** I don't mind cleaning up. It is worth it.
- Zane:** Let's clean up and do things in between.
- Oliver:** I don't mind so much, cleaning up, because I had fun before cleaning up and it was worth it.
- Whitney:** It's an act of kindness!
- Ms. Bright:** I am looking at the room right now. What needs to happen?



The children began cleaning the room with no malice. Through this discussion, the children got to the root of the problem, that clean up time was an interruption, and it meant they were going to have to focus on something else. The something else was lunch, Spanish, music, health, P.E. (called "specials" at Randolph) or leaving for the day. Ms. Bright had arranged the class schedule so that they would have no specials in the morning. This meant that they had from 8:30 to 11:30 with no outside interruptions. After lunch and recess the children spent an hour in the room, then left for a 45 minute special. The children had music and physical education two days a week and health once a week. After the afternoon class special the children spent another 45 minutes in the classroom. The afternoon was disruptive, depending what they were focusing on. It was occasionally hard for them to leave what they were doing to attend music, physical education or health.

Ms. Bright and the other twenty members of the class were active many times during the day in conflict resolution. Ms. Bright shared with me the problem solving sheets she used in the beginning months of school. These sheets helped the children think about the problem and they soon became a model of conflict resolution that could be used automatically, without writing. The problem solving steps on the paper were:

1. The problem is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. I am feeling: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. I think that this would be a solution: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Each child would write what he thought was the problem, what he was feeling, and what a solution would be. Then they would share them if they wanted. The children were

now doing these steps mentally as a part of conflict resolution, without having to stop and dissect the problem before resolving the conflict.

In most cases, the conflict was a difference of opinion. The children solved the differences of opinion, by voicing their beliefs or perspectives. Each child would explain why he thought he was correct, then the other child would do the same. There were several ways children would resolve conflicts: 1) one child would understand the other child's perspective and modify his own opinion or agree with his peer; 2) the children discussing the difference would incorporate both opinions with their own, creating a positive resolution, 3) the children would build upon both of their ideas, merge the ideas into one and come to an agreement or; 4) they would agree to disagree. These incidents of private perspective discussion were so quick that I could hardly understand the conversation. Sometimes, these discussions took place in the midst of working on an activity, and the exchange of ideas was so fast, and thought provoking for the children involved, that unless you were standing there listening and analyzing, it was undetectable.

In group or individual discussions, there was never any incidence of positive or negative reinforcement. Such words as "good," "great," or "super" were not in her vocabulary. Statements that related disappointment, dissatisfaction, and disfunctions were never heard. Ms. Bright was mesmerized many times by the intriguing thoughts the children shared, but never said "Oh what a good idea!" or "Great idea!" or "That is super!". There was never any positive or negative reinforcement in discussions with the children. Ms. Bright would simply repeat what a child said, and sometimes interpret in her words what they said. The children would listen and agree or disagree, and sometimes correct! Autonomy and intrinsic motivation were the rewards. The children did not question whether their activities were "good" or "adequate." They reviewed them themselves or with a friend. The need for reinforcement from the teacher was not there. When children were solving problems together, they did not brag that they had settled a

difference, or they did not want to know what Ms. Bright thought. They went on with their day, confident in themselves.

Ms. Bright's class had been resolving conflicts for the previous six months before I arrived. Their early attempts at conflict resolution may have possibly needed more teacher or class interaction to be successful. It was evident that by April the children were comfortable and secure in discussing and solving conflicts.

#### THEME # 4: AUTONOMY IN RESPECT FOR OTHERS

This aspect of Ms. Bright's class was the most amazing and heartwarming of all the vignettes. Respect for other's opinions, habits, ideas, feelings, customs, concerns, and rights were obvious in their interactions and actions in the classroom. The perspective for other's views that developed was a gift the children used in class everyday and a gift they can carry into the future. The promotion of respect for others and the classroom was a constant theme and it was evident everyday. The vignettes that follow are simply a small part of the overall respect for others that permeated the class. The first vignette is a walk down memory lane that took place two weeks before school ended. The children recall favorite times in the classroom and how they are different now than when they arrived at school the first day. In this vignette the children listen to others without judgment and share their feeling and perceptions about their classroom experience. Their loyalty to one another and the class is evident in their exchange of ideas on how they have grown and the class had grown. The second vignette is a similar discussion but originated from children's discussion about what to do with a number chart. They defend their loyalty to each other, Ms. Bright and their classroom community. "Suspension" reveals the strong loyal bond the children had developed. In this vignette the children discussed right and wrong and how to protect a member of their class who had been suspended.

## We're Still Us!

- Ms. Bright:** Do you remember when we started the year, and one of the questions I asked you was what kind of classroom you would like to have? Does anyone remember how we started the year?
- Grant:** The first day we went wild because we didn't know what to do.
- Xavier:** The first day of school was the best, no problems, no nothing.
- Ms. Bright:** Yes, that is a wonderful way to start, we all started off clean, no records.
- Ivy:** It was exciting.
- Forrest:** My favorite time was when we had to eat outside because they were painting the cafeteria.
- Zara:** I liked it when Kaye brought her dolls from Guatemala.
- Vince:** My first favorite time was when we went on a field trip to look for insects. The other classes brought dead insects, but we looked for real ones. My second favorite time was when we went to the zoo.
- Ms. Bright:** You liked getting out. What is different about the way we studied insects?
- Noelle:** They were alive.
- Ms. Bright:** Yes, you decided as a class that you wanted to study live insects. We never-ever-ever caught an insect and killed it on purpose.
- Children:** No.
- Ms. Bright:** What was it that caused this class to choose to treat insects with respect?
- Whitney:** Zara brought those butterfly cocoons.
- Ivy:** I felt like a mother butterfly that day.
- Ms. Bright:** You did!
- Nicole:** We studied butterflies and moved our tables into butterfly shapes.
- Ivy:** I was scared the first day of school. I didn't know anyone. My Dad had to push me in the door.
- Zane:** The first of the year Xavier was really scared.

**Ms. Bright:** If Xavier was really scared you all must have made him welcome.

**Noelle:** The first day of school I saw Grant. I was surprised. I didn't know he was going to be at Randolph.

**Oliver:** I like the magic school bus.

**Whitney:** I remember the purple mountain.

**Ms. Bright:** OH! The purple mountain! Let me tell you why the purple mountain existed. Now I can tell you about it because you are older and more mature and you can handle it.

**Nicole:** We're still us!

**Ms. Bright:** That's powerful. The reason for the purple mountain is that I worked so hard this summer and I still did not get everything done. The reason the purple mountain became the purple mountain, I never got finished getting all ready so I threw this beautiful purple blanket over everything I had not finished! It was a way of helping me get through the first day of school when I was only thinking about who you would be to me. I didn't think about things " I wonder if they can read, write or spell? I wonder if they misbehave?" I didn't worry about those things because we all misbehave and we all learn to read and write! I was so excited about who you were, and now we know.

**Wyatt:** Where is the stuff now?

**Ms. Bright:** Oh, we have used it all over and over, it is everywhere now! I grow each year!

**Emily:** We have grown too.

**Whitney:** I want to get held back so I could stay in this class.

**Quinn:** Me too.

**Several children:** Me too!

**Vince:** I wonder if there is a way to get held back on purpose.

**Ms. Bright:** In April and May children say that they want to stay or they ask if I am going to teach third grade. Children have said this before. They wish they could stay.

**Grant:** Then they would have to have another second grade teacher.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, and I am a second grade teacher. We have had a remarkable year together. You are coming to a special point in your life where you decide what is real and what is make-believe. When you are here I want to be here, now.

**Ivy:** All the time?

**Ms. Bright:** All the time, all the way. Completely.

### I Used to Write Backwards and Now I Don't

One day Nicole wanted to reorganize the bulletin board that the monthly calendar, rules and a number chart were on. She took everything off. As she was putting the things up again she announced that she was going to erase the numbers on the number chart because some of the numbers were backwards. The number chart had been used at the beginning of the year. Each day the helper of the day would write a number, in sequential order, on the chart. The numbers stopped at 78. The children helping Nicole or standing around her began debating the issue of erasing the numbers. The children said that the feelings of the children who wrote backwards (and they knew who they were) might be hurt. Gradually as a crowd gathered around the chart and more children looked at it, a larger group became involved. Ms. Bright suggested that they sit and talk about it.

**Ms. Bright:** Nicole, tell me what you want to do.

**Nicole:** I want to erase the numbers on this number chart because some of the numbers are backwards and if someone comes into the room and sees the numbers backwards they are going to think the we haven't learned anything in Ms. Bright's class.

**Yori:** I said I didn't want her to because the children who wrote backwards might be sad?

**Ms. Bright:** Why do you think they might be sad?

**Yori:** Because Nicole doesn't want their writing to be on the board.

**Nicole:** I just wanted it to be right, so the people that came into our class would not think that Ms. Bright did not teach us anything because we write backwards.

**Yale:** I used to write backwards and now I don't.

**Oliver:** I learned to write more numbers and letters now that I am 8.

**Ms. Bright:** We have done a lot of writing this year.

**Ivy:** You will have different kids next year. Will they do this?

**Ms. Bright:** It will be up, but every class is different. This class stopped using it and became interested in other ways of using numbers.

**Zara:** So it will have to be erased at the end of the year anyway?

**Ginny:** I think we should leave it up until school is out, because it has all our writing on it and we know the numbers, even if some are backward.

**Eva:** It has a lot of memories.

**Nicole:** I did not want to hurt anyone's feelings.

**Ms. Bright:** Does anyone else have anything you want to say about the number chart?

**Quinn:** I wrote this number and this number and they are backwards, but I write better now.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, this chart is something we did at the beginning of the school year. You all have studied butterflies, Guatemala, art and eggs and lots more! Do you think people will come in here and think that I have not taught you anything?

**Children:** NO!

**Grant:** We have changed a lot in second grade.

**Ms. Bright:** We have all learned many things. I have too. Do you want to vote about whether or not to erase the number chart?

**Children:** No and few children saying yes.

**Vince:** I think we should leave it until school is out.

**Ms. Bright:** Is that a motion?

**Vince:** Yes.

**Ms. Bright:** Those who agree raise your hand. (everybody agrees) Is there anyone who disagrees? Then it shall be done.

This class had figured the number of days left until school was out and they were aware their time together was coming to an end. On many days I would hear a child say "Can you be our teacher next year?" or "I don't want school to be over, then we won't be in this class any more". "I wish I could be held back another year, then I would get to have Ms. Bright again". When Nicole was redesigning the bulletin board that had been used since the beginning of school and one that had many mementoes on it, for some of the children it was like changing the class and the time they had together, too soon. When Nicole looked at the chart, she had learned enough to know that the numbers were backwards and that no one wrote like that anymore. Her perspective was to erase it and let the next year owners of the class write on it like they did. It was not until she heard other's perspectives that she realized that it might hurt someone's feelings. There was no apprehension in voicing their opinions, but they did it with utmost regard for one another. They did not competitively debate, argue or take anything personally. They did not look for approval from Ms. Bright or their peers for opinions they had voiced. They did not keep count of who sided with whom.

Another interesting aspect of this discussion was their protectiveness toward Ms. Bright. They knew that outside the four walls of their classroom, education, rules, behavior and expectations were different. They did not want anybody questioning or doubting Ms. Bright. They knew they were special to her and to each other. They were also protective of the classroom. Their hearts and souls were entrenched in every nook and cranny of the classroom. They owned, managed, and loved the classroom. It was their symbol of their evolution as a community. They did not want to give up Ms. Bright or the class. This community was experiencing separation anxiety.



## Suspension

Toward the end of the year a dramatic situation occurred in the classroom that resulted in an "in-house" suspension for one student. His fictitious name will be changed to Josh in order to protect his identity. When I arrived at school one morning Ms. Bright informed me that Josh had been disruptive in class and as she attempted to help him, he became physically violent. It was determined that Josh would be on in-house suspension for two days. This meant that Josh would come to school but instead of attending class he would stay in the principal's office and do his work for two days. Ms. Bright was very upset over this scene, which took place in front of the class, and concerned about what effect it would have on the class. The discussion on this morning went as follows:

**Ms. Bright:** We have a very sad situation today. What makes me sad is that this is something we have worked on all year. We worked as a community on personal responsibility, kindness, and making this a community that works. I really do think it is my job as your teacher. And understand that I think you are my teachers, too. You are teaching me to teach even better. It is my job as your teacher to help you gain responsibility everyday for yourself.

**Xavier:** What does suspension mean?

**Ms. Bright:** That is what I will talk about. Now it is time. (Pause) Yesterday Josh was having trouble behaving, but remember how productive he became and he was working hard. I even commented to him that he had been responsible during clean-up. I supported Josh when he was choosing to do the right thing. It is important for you to remember that I want to support you every time you do the right thing, but I cannot support you when you do the wrong thing, on purpose. We understand and know about mistakes. Have any of you ever made any mistakes?

**Children:** YES!

**Ms. Bright:** Raise your hand if you have made mistakes in the classroom. (Everybody including Ms. Bright and myself raise our hands.) Oh, my goodness! Everybody. Raise your hand only if you feel like even if you made a mistake, your community would care about you and support you and

help you. (Everybody raises a hand.) It's unanimous. (Emotional deep breath.) This is what Josh and I have been talking about and because of confidentiality . . . does anybody know what confidentiality means?

**Children:** NO!

**Ms. Bright:** It means that when things happen between a teacher and a student I will not tell you more than you need to know. I will be very cautious about what I say. I will keep things private. There are things that Lori has no idea about that have happened this year because they are confidential. I have never shared them with her. I trust Lori and I know I could tell her anything and she would keep it confidential. But it is my responsibility to keep that confidential for each of you. It is even my legal responsibility, but more over, it is my hearts' responsibility to you. You know that you can have a conversation with me and trust me. Does everybody know that?

**Children:** YES!

**Ms. Bright:** What I need to tell you, and you know this happened because you saw it, Josh needed to leave the room because he needed to regain his composure.

**Several children:** Yes.

**Nicole:** You gave him about five chances.

**Ms. Bright:** I did, I gave him a lot of chances and it got worse and worse. I knew he needed to leave the room and get himself together. Josh would not leave so I reached out my hand to help him out and he pushed it away and slapped me. I'm quick and I'm not injured. Only my feelings hurt. My face does not hurt.

**Vince:** I heard a noise like this (slapped his hands together).

**Oliver:** I didn't see anything, but I heard that noise too.

**Xavier:** I thought you were hurt when he hit you, but your feelings are only hurt.

**Ms. Bright:** It hurt when it happened but it doesn't hurt today, physically, but my feelings are hurt. I don't know how long it will hurt. I hope that can be fixed soon. Right now, it is hard for Josh to take personal responsibility for what he did.

**Ms. Bright:** I know, Josh needs your support. I don't want you to enable Josh. I don't want you to go "Oh, Josh, I feel so sorry for you." I want you to be respectful, speak to him kindly and when you see him say Hi. For two

days Josh is staying in the office in a chair at a desk and facing the wall and doing work quietly.

**Ginny:** I thought suspended meant you have to stay home.

**Ms. Bright:** There are two types of suspensions. When you have to stay home and something called "in-house" suspension. We agreed that he would have in-house suspension. It is a serious thing. Josh is not feeling good about himself right now. What Josh is working on is whether he is going to take personal responsibility for what happened.

**Yori:** What if he hasn't thought about it when two days are over?

**Ms. Bright:** If you were Josh and you were in the principal's office would you think about it?

**Child:** I would think about it.

**Nicole:** I wouldn't ever be able to forget it.

**Whitney:** Did his father believe him?

**Ms. Bright:** You saw his father this morning, didn't you?

**Children:** Yes.

**Ms. Bright:** His father came back because he got a different version of what happened and he wanted to clarify it. He was very responsible and loves Josh very much. He wanted to check out what Josh told him.

**Oliver:** It is not nice to tell lies.

**Vaughn:** Will he get in trouble for that?

**Ms. Bright:** I don't know, this is Josh's dilemma.

**Zane:** My mom says she knows when I lie.

**Ms. Bright:** Do your parents know when you are lying?

**Children:** YES!

**Child in the background:** Everyone makes mistakes!

**Ginny:** You get in trouble when you lie, people don't trust you.

**Emily:** I think we should write a letter to Josh.

**Ms. Bright:** What would you say in a letter?

**Emily:** Tell him we are friends and we want to play with him.

**Yale:** Will he miss recess?

**Ms. Bright:** Yes.

**Grant:** Will he have lunch?

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, he will have lunch in the principal's office.

**Nicole:** We could say, even though you did something wrong we are still your friends.

**Ginny:** You can get put into jail if you did that in high school.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, that could happen. The important thing to know is that I care for all of you but can we make anyone else make good decisions?

**Children:** NO!

**Grant:** Josh is the only one that can make that choice.

**Eva:** I think Josh and all of us are trying to do our best.

**Ms. Bright:** I think so too. Some days are harder than others!

**Xavier:** I think Josh is facing our class.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, he is on the other side of the wall. I have something important to say. Because we are a community we have responsibility to Josh that is not going to be easy to keep. Because other kids are going to ask you on the playground "Is it true?" or "I heard . . ." We have to make a decision about what we are going to do. Just this morning Mrs. Bell said to me "what happened with Josh yesterday?" I said "I can't talk about it, you will have to talk to Mrs. Palmeyer (the school principal)." The only reason we are all talking about it now is that we all witnessed it and you are the community Josh belongs too. What are you going to say?

**Several children offer suggestions at one time:** I'm not going to tell you. I'm not going to answer. Change the subject and say that is personal.

**Ms. Bright:** What if you change the subject? Will that work? Xavier, walk up to Ivy and pretend you are from another class and ask about Josh. Ivy, you change the subject.

**Xavier:** Is it true what I hear about Josh?

**Ivy:** Do you want to go play?

- Ms. Bright:** Does that work for you Xavier? Does that response answer your question?
- Xavier:** I want her to say something different.
- Ms. Bright:** So what would you do?
- Xavier:** Come on and tell me what happened.
- Ivy:** I don't want to talk about it. It is personal.
- Ms. Bright:** What is another response?
- Wesley:** We are Josh's friends.
- Yori:** I don't want his feelings to be hurt more than they already are.
- Zara:** I want to role play.
- Ivy:** Is it true what happened?
- Zara:** I don't want to talk about it because it is sad. I don't want to spread it around the school.
- Nicole:** I want to role play next.
- Ivy:** Is it true what happened to Josh?
- Nicole:** I don't want to talk about it because it is personal to our classroom and he is still a part of our community.
- Ms. Bright:** That is spoken with respect. People in this school know about our community and how important it is and they will understand that answer.

The children were confronted at lunch and on the playground by other students who were inquiring about Josh and why he was suspended. The children reported after recess these incidents and how they repeated the phrase "I don't want to talk about it because it is personal to our classroom and Josh is still a part of our community." No one reported others asking more questions after that. They all stayed true to their community and Josh.

The discussion and role-play exposed the deep commitment the class had built since the first of the year for Ms. Bright and each other. They were concerned for Ms.

Bright's well-being and feelings as well as for Josh's. There was no question whether what had occurred between Ms. Bright and Josh was wrong. There was only discussion about what it meant to their classroom. They wanted Josh as a member of the classroom and wanted to protect him from scandal, not because they were embarrassed, but because they wanted to protect his feelings and dignity.

In most of the discussions Ms. Bright is the person who prompts with questions or statements to think about. In this discussion she talked while most of the children listened, commented, or asked questions. This was a traumatic blow to this democratic, non-violent classroom. I think she knew that by how concerned the children were when they arrived in the morning and how focused they were on the discussion. She also did not want them to have negative feelings about Josh. She did not have to worry about that.

I knew I was a member of this classroom at this point by the way they greeted me everyday, ignored my tape-recorder, and included me in all activities and discussions. I was learning how it felt to be autonomous. It was through this incident with Josh that my loyalty to the members of this classroom was tested, outside the secure classroom walls. I was questioned by a person who had a child in the school about what happened between Ms. Bright and Josh. We were in a familiar informal setting outside the school where we usually talked about our children and school. I first thought this is the dilemma that the children and Ms. Bright role-played and expected, but I had not expected it. There were the obvious issues of confidentiality and professionalism, but most of all I felt like I would be perpetuating a story that might not be in this child's best interest. I could see how incidents that happen with children get spread around and possibly stick with that child for many years. I also felt loyalty to a class that had modeled how to protect someone's dignity and that knew how to respect one another. I immediately said "I can't talk about it. It is personal to the class, and Josh is a member of their community." It works with adults too. There were no more questions.

The strongest theme of all was the theme of respect for others. This was the essence and ending to a classroom that had experienced autonomy in a constructivist classroom for eight months. All of the above themes were possible because of the lived experiences the class had shared all year. They had a supportive, respectful, noncompetitive, peaceful community classroom. They felt safe and secure. The classroom discussion and activity time was like a symphony. Each child thought and moved to their own rhythm and tone. They were individual yet together they harmonized. It was a beautiful dance, original and unreproducible. The insights, opinions, respect, and perspective that were observed were the essence of constructivist philosophy, that cannot be prescribed for success. It is a feeling and a value that is nurtured from the first day of school and crescendos into a sense of community.

Activities that created shared experience were role-play and discussion. Role-play was used instantaneously as a method to share perspectives or come to an agreement on how to respect others. Children were not hesitant to participate in role play, they were eager to share. They were not apprehensive about getting up and talking, this was not a play or a presentation. This was a means of looking at other's views or coming together to decide what to do (such as the plan for answering questions about Josh's suspension). When the children role-played they were creating, learning and growing. Everybody looked, everybody listened.

Discussions were continuous. There were large group discussions, small group discussions personal discussions and spontaneous discussions. Children exchanged perspectives in these discussions. Some perspectives were very different, but the children felt secure in revealing them. Children did not ridicule others for their way of thinking. They debated with vigor but not vengeance. If someone felt mad or upset, they just said so. This revelation might draw a few to their side, but was by no means a manipulation to draw sympathy or to be competitive. Discussions seem to be the medium that helped facilitate respect for others and a sense of community.

EXPERIENTIAL ANECDOTE THAT EMBODIED  
ALL THEMES OF AUTONOMY: THE BOMBING OF THE  
HEARTLAND HOW A CONSTRUCTIVE CLASSROOM  
HEALS AND HELPS

This last vignette evolved into a story, a journey through an unexpected tragedy in Oklahoma, the bombing of the A.P. Murrah Federal Building. This experiential anecdote embodies all the themes presented in the previous sections: Autonomy and Self-governance; Autonomy and Curriculum; Autonomy and Conflict Resolution, and Autonomy and Respect for Others. Self-governance is apparent in the way the children continued to take care of daily business, plan ideas for the day, and took the time they personally needed to heal after the bombing. Autonomy in curriculum in this narrative continues to be driven by the children. Ms. Bright did not plan, prescribe, or prepare any of the projects that were related to the bombing. They were all original ideas from the class. Autonomy and conflict resolution was found less often two weeks after the bombing than at other times during my observation. When there were conflict, the children resolved them quickly and quietly. Autonomy and respect for others was observable everyday and in almost every facet of the bombing tragedy and was the most touching of the themes. This is a chronicle of strength, hope, respect and peace. The children actively worked through this tragedy through their connectedness to one another and their respect for other's hurt, sadness and loss.

This is a chronicle of how autonomous students handled themselves in the midst of a national tragedy. I was a researcher in a second grade classroom in a suburb of Oklahoma City when this disaster happened. I have never been privy to such thoughtfulness, respectfulness and genuine concern with any group of human beings as I was with Ms. Bright's class of second graders on April 19, 1995, the day the A.P. Murrah Federal Building was bombed. This is an account of the conversations, activities,



discussions and the healing that took place in the weeks that followed the bombing. The children were able to demonstrate their autonomy and compassion to themselves and the nation.

On April 19, 1995 the world shook with the news of a terrorist bombing in downtown Oklahoma City, or the heartland, as the nation refers to the center, the safe part of the country. The devastation the city experienced that Wednesday morning at 9:02 a.m. forever crushed our innocence, changed our realities but not our hearts. One hundred and sixty-eight people were killed, including 19 children. Over 600 were injured or hospitalized, 30 children were orphaned when one or both of their parents were killed in the blast, 47 children and teens were displaced, and 462 people were left homeless (Blakeney, 1995). Forty of the injured were children five and under who attended the YMCA child care center across from the federal building. Their dazed, bleeding faces stunned families across the nation.

On this day I was preparing my tape recorder for what I anticipated would be another day filled with children's discussions, filled with children's decisions about what the schedule would be that day and filled with the emergence of child-initiated curriculum. As I busily wrote 4/19/95 on the tape I noticed a substitute teacher, Ms. Shook, had arrived in Ms. Bright's classroom of second-graders. The substitute was a half-time teacher, a frequent and familiar face in the school. Ms. Bright had been ill for three weeks and Ms. Shook had been a substitute teacher for the majority of the time Ms. Bright was out of the class. The children greeted her with delight at seeing her again and concern that Ms. Bright was ill, again. Statements such as "Where is Ms. Bright?", "Is Ms. Bright sick?", were all acknowledged by Ms. Shook with the reassurance that Ms. Bright would return to school after lunch. As the children began taking their places, I noticed Wyatt holding his stomach and closing his eyes. I asked him if he was all right and he said he thought he was going to be sick. At that moment Wyatt ran toward a trash can and I followed; it was 9:00 a.m. Then I helped Wyatt to the main office to lie down. At that

instant a mild earthquake-like vibration was felt by many. I sought the custodian for assistance in the room and he asked me if I had felt the shake a little after nine o'clock. I told him I had been occupied with Wyatt and had not noticed anything. Throughout the Oklahoma City Metropolitan area many who innocently noticed the vibration, commented and went on. My six year old son was at his friend's house playing outside. When the bomb exploded, he and his friend felt the shaking of the earth and the sound of an explosion. They ran into the house shouting "There was a bomb!". Grandma, who was baby-sitting, said it was just a sonic boom. Minutes later she learned it had indeed been a bomb. Out of the mouth of babes . . .

What seemed to be a normal day, would eventually turn out to be a day that everyone's life would be closely touched by tragedy. The children at Randolph Elementary School had planned a morning full of activities that centered around the duck eggs Ms. Bright brought on Monday. They were actively engaging in writing, composing on the computer, painting and constructing houses for their eggs. I left the classroom at approximately 9:20 a.m. to make a phone call in the teacher's lounge. The person I called informed me that a building in downtown Oklahoma City had blown up at 9:02 a.m. and the destruction was so massive that the media was not sure what building it was. Now, as I look back at this moment, it was chaotic and happened so fast. A barrage of incidents was unfolding in front of me and the pieces began fitting together to give me a sense of the complexity of this disaster. A teacher came in and said that the fifth grade had to cancel their field trip to the downtown Civic Center Music Hall to hear the Oklahoma City Symphony because the bus drivers were notified that the area was not accessible. During this conversation the custodian and librarian were wheeling a TV. monitor into the lounge. They turned it on, and there before me was mass destruction. At this point no one knew the extent, cause, or purpose of the explosion and subsequent fires. Reporters speculated about a possible boiler room explosion or possibly a machinery malfunction, but in the beginning, there was no speculation of maliciousness. It was not until the dust had

settled, fires were extinguished, and people were reporting from within the perimeter of the destruction, that cameras were able to focus on the shell of a building that now had only three sides standing. The fourth side and the entire middle of this eight-story building had fallen flat like stacked pancakes to the ground. Speculation continued, but after surveying the ruins, the idea of terrorism was now cautiously being mentioned. Teacher's whose husbands, wives or family members worked in the downtown area were notified and gathered in the school lounge to watch live television coverage. Many teachers said they and their students felt the vibration and thought it was a sonic boom, an earthquake or the heating unit coming on. Many teachers watched with disbelief as live television pictures of the federal building, maimed people, and limp, lifeless children were tagged and carried to triage. Teachers immediately began thinking about the parents of children in the school, and how to contact them. The school secretary began trying to contact parents of children she knew of who worked downtown. All teachers seemed to agree they were not going to tell their classes about the bombing until there was confirmation on the status of the children's parents.

I went back to the classroom about 10:00 a.m. to tell Ms. Shook about the explosion. She went to the lounge next. The children were very busy creating houses for their eggs, egg jokes, paper mache eggs, and doing "eggsperiments" (see Chapter 5). I do not know what the other classrooms were doing, but teachers gathered in the halls outside their classrooms to discuss the event, which was highly unusual and I suspect, suspicious for some children. Then about 10:15 a.m. the P.E. teacher was walking back to the school from a nearby gymnasium and said children noticed that employees were leaving the post office, located directly behind the school (all federal buildings in the Oklahoma City area had been ordered closed). Around 10:30 a.m. our school was notified by local police of a bomb threat at a church across the street from the school, and it was subsequently announced on the television. Within minutes, parents were arriving at school to take their children home. This was my first observation of the children in Ms. Bright's class noticing

something was wrong. Their questions revealed their attempt to mesh what was a normal reason to leave school with the abnormal exit of four classmates in an hour: "Why is Ginny leaving early?" "Vince is not sick. Why is he going home?" "Emily was going to help me finish my house. Why did she have to go? We had plans?" and " We haven't eaten lunch yet. Why are they leaving?" and "What time is it?".

I felt it was not my responsibility to tell the children about the commotion and threats because I was not in charge of their class. I was "just a researcher". On the other hand, I did not want to lie to them, because I knew they would find out details soon, and because I could already feel the sense of community in this class and maintaining trust was important. I responded to their questions by saying "Their parents want them at home early today". No one questioned the statement and I didn't ask myself why. I was just relieved that they were somewhat content with the response and that I did not have to explain further.

Teachers and parents were becoming more agitated. "There is a bomb squad across the street and an evacuated post office behind us. Let's get these children to a safer place." Another teacher asked "but where?". It felt as if we were sitting ducks protecting our eggs (how ironic that the children in Ms. Bright's class were creating projects centered around eggs and their fragility and meaning of new life and many of the adults felt like "sitting ducks"). There appeared to be two threats to our security; the evacuation and threat to the post office behind us, which had been the scene of a mass murder nearly 10 years ago, but still very vivid at this moment for many adults, and the church across the street whose day care had been evacuated due to a bomb threat. The downtown terror felt real, right in our own "playground". By this time, what was initially reported as an explosion was now being reported as an explosion due to a bomb, and an act of terrorism. We had witnessed the destruction and maiming of adults and children 15 miles away and the idea of a possible bomb across the street was horrifying. By 11:15 a.m. the church across the street had been declared safe by a "stand-by" bomb squad, since the city bomb

squad was at work in downtown Oklahoma City, because there were still threats of additional bombs in the Federal Building.

Ms. Shook and I unspokenly agreed not to tell the children about the bombing since Ms. Bright would be returning to school after lunch. As Ms. Bright's class lined up for lunch, the first parent arrived from the scene downtown. I watched the graceful, tearful and thankful reunion of a frightened mother with a facial injury as she fell on her knees to hug her son, as if to be one again with her child, to be a child again. I closed my heart to the emotion of the moment because the children who saw this reunion could not figure out why she was crying and my tears and fears would have added to their confusion. Ms. Bright's class, of which three of nineteen had left early and one more would leave during the lunch hour, went off to lunch. I suspected they would hear the news of the bombing on the playground.

During lunch the mood in the teacher's lounge was quiet, concerned and apprehensive. Teachers were eating their lunch while watching the live coverage of the bombing. The window in the door to the teacher's lounge had been covered with brown paper sacks as if to conceal information or material that might be harmful to those underage. As I went back to the classroom, I saw that Ms. Bright had arrived. I was so glad to see her, and I could tell she was relieved to be at school. She was concerned, yet filled with energy. She told the school Principal that she was going to tell the children about the bombing, because she could not let them go home without knowing the news that would impact everyone's lives. The Principal agreed with Ms. Bright. The first thing Ms. Bright said to me was "What do the children know? Tell me what has happened in the classroom today". I told her about the activities the children had planned for the day; that three children had left and the remaining children were confused as to why they were leaving; that some children saw a mother that was injured hugging her son; and that I sensed no teachers had talked to their classes about the tragedy, except the fifth grade, because their field trip was cancelled. Ms. Bright said " I cannot and will not lie to these

children. "We are a community of friends and we will work through this together". The children came in from recess delighted to see Ms. Bright who asked them gently to take a place in the discussion circle. The first of many conversations about the bombing went as follows:

**Ms. Bright:** "We all need to be here together, I want you to make a circle so that we are all close to each other. This is very important. You know that I was gone this morning. How many of you heard a noise? Did you hear a noise and feel something like an explosion?"

**Child:** That's what it was?

**Ms. Bright:** That is what it was. The noise that happened about 9:00 a.m. You know I stayed home this morning to rest. I got up later and when I was in the shower I heard this terrible noise and it jarred my house. I called my father to see if anything has happened and he told me there had been a terrible explosion downtown. There have been some people very badly hurt. There have been some people who have escaped miraculously . . . the first thing I thought about was each one of you.

**Children:** My mom's there. My Dad's office is there.

**Ms. Bright:** They are safe, I have thought about all your parents, too. There are some people who got cut with glass and they bled a lot, so the pictures on TV will look really frightening but the medical people are there to help.

**Child:** How did the explosion happen?

**Ms. Bright:** The news is reporting that it may have been a bomb.

**Nicole:** It's probably a war.

**Children:** Yes! Bombs drop from airplanes.

**Ms. Bright:** No, it is not a war. It is not a war.

**Child:** If it was a bomb, it may explode down here too.

**Ms. Bright:** You know how hard it was for us to get in our building this morning? There is a reason. All the doors are locked. They are not usually locked all the time, are they? But just as a precaution they are. We are all safe here. All the adults in the school are taking very good care of you. Do you remember what we talked about in case we would ever have any kind

of explosion or any problem in school? What are some of the things we remember? (Several children talk) First of all, we are calm and we think.

**Forrest:** I have a question. In the cafeteria, we have fire drill and tornado drill papers on the wall.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, they are posted in every classroom so we will know what to do in an emergency. Now in the hospitals the emergency is called code black. That means that all doctors stop everything and go to the hospital to help the injured. Many people are getting helped at the hospital, they are flying people in.

**Ivy:** My dad works there.

**Yori:** My mother works there.

**Xavier:** My dad helps the children.

**Ms. Bright:** Your mother works at Children's Hospital? Your mother is very busy right now because there is a day care center in this building. And there were little children who were hurt. There may have been six children that died. But then I have heard that there were children who were taken to Children's Hospital where people who really know how to take care of children in emergencies are there. Ivy's daddy and probably Xavier's dad is there taking care of babies right now.

**Wyatt:** How can you hear it if you don't live in Oklahoma City?

**Ms. Bright:** That is an excellent question. It was heard for over 30 miles around. People in Stillwater felt the explosion ( children gasp). No, no, no, no one is hurt in Stillwater but they could feel the vibrations. Maybe we need to look into why that happens. That is why explosives are so dangerous.

**Nicole:** So was it by a war?

**Ms. Bright:** No, we are not in a war.

**Nicole:** Was it on purpose?

**Ms. Bright:** It was on purpose. Somebody made this. Somebody who is very, very sick and probably someone who has been very hurt and injured himself or herself.

**Child:** Why are they sick?

**Ms. Bright:** Something would have to be wrong with a person to kill other people. ...I don't know what the word is to describe an explosion and I am not an

expert in explosions but they have a megaforce. They shoot up into the air, they blast out windows.

**Child:** My dad was having a meeting down there.

**Ms. Bright:** He was at the Myriad and he is okay.

**Child:** It's like a tornado

**Ms. Bright:** It's not just like a tornado, it does have a great force like a tornado.

**Forrest:** This is an answer to Wyatt's question about how you can hear the bomb when you don't live in Oklahoma City. Well, it sorta has to do with earthquakes. When an earthquake happens it goes down toward the core of the earth and it bounces off the core and it goes up to separate places and that is why other people can feel earthquakes in other places.

**Ms. Bright:** And it's like a rippling effect.

**Wesley:** Will you check to see if my dad is okay?

**Ms. Bright:** Your dad is fine. I know where all your parents work and I am certain everyone's parents are okay. I heard on the news that at St. Anthony's they had a doctor and two nurses for every hurt person. That is because we live in a community of love and caring. One thing they need is blood.

**Children:** How do they get it? Do they stick you with a needle? They stick a needle right here.

**Whitney:** They took mine every day, like 10 times in the hospital.

**Ms. Bright:** Every day? Did they take it from your finger or from your vein?

**Whitney:** They took it from my vein. Mainly they gave me I.V.'s but they took my blood the whole time and they took it from my arm or my foot. I mean my leg.

**Forrest:** I know how much blood you give when you donate blood.

**Ms. Bright:** How much blood do you give Forrest? Sit and share it with us. Because maybe we could think of something that we could do to help.

**Forrest:** All of your life you have 5 liters of blood. All your life. When you give blood you give half a liter.

**Ms. Bright:** Half a liter. So if you have 5 liters and you give half a liter . . .

**Children:** You have 4 1/2 liters left.



**Forrest:** And then after you give, after you totally finish giving blood, they keep you in the hospital for about 4 more hours and give you lot of orange juice and cookies so your body can make more blood to take the place of the blood you have donated.

**Ms. Bright:** Did you know that you don't even have to go to the hospital to give blood? You can do it in churches, schools and offices. Everyone in our community is working really hard right now to help the people who have been hurt and to help the people who don't know where their families are, find them. We have to respond thoughtfully. Now are there any other questions or ideas about how we could help?

**Zara:** We could make the people in the hospital feel better, we could donate food and we could make them cards.

**Ivy:** I could take them down there. I could give them to my dad.

**Ms. Bright:** And you could. You could deliver them immediately couldn't you?

(Other children respond that they could take the cards to the people in the hospital)

**Child** (already working on a card): How do you spell bomb?

**Ms. Bright:** B-o-m-b. Bomb. The last b is silent but a bomb certainly is not silent, is it? Yale has a question.

**Yale:** I have two questions. Who did it?

**Ms. Bright:** We don't know who did it. It must have been someone very mixed up, very unhappy, very sad and very angry.

**Whitney:** Sometimes it means that they do not like themselves so they do things like that.

**Ms. Bright:** Did everyone hear what Whitney said? That is one reason it is so important that we treat one another with respect like we do in our classroom because we help each other feel good about ourselves even though we make mistakes. We make mistakes every day, don't we? I know I do, and when we make mistakes do we make each other feel bad or do we try to make each other feel better?

**Children:** Better

**Yale:** I have one more question. What kind of bomb was it?

**Ms. Bright:** A very powerful bomb. It was man-made, a human creation.

**Child:** Was it a nuclear bomb?

**Ms. Bright:** Not a nuclear bomb.

**Child:** Everybody's office is all bombed.

**Forrest:** I know my grandma will donate food and clothing and stuff cause she works with Feed the Children and we donate food. I'll give the food to my grandma cause I know she'll be there to help.

**Ms. Bright:** Great. And you know many of you may know people that are helping. Eva, do you have an idea?

**Eva:** I have a question. Can the people in Kansas City and Tennessee feel it?

**Ms. Bright:** I don't think so but I know that they will hear about it on the news this evening. They will hear about it all over the world because it is considered a terrorist bombing at this point.

**Child:** It's considered a natural disaster.

**Ms. Bright:** It is not a natural disaster but it is a national disaster. Quinn do you want to leave or do you want to stay? It is your choice.

**Quinn:** I want to go.

**Ms. Bright:** Okay, if there is something you would like to do, if you would like to write a card or something, I know that you would have time. Now I want to know, are there any other questions that you have or concerns is there something that you want me to check on. Yale?

**Yale:** When I was looking out the window I did see a little thing dropping from the sky.

**Ms. Bright:** This isn't something that drops from the sky. You might have seen something else, which would have been a coincidence. This was something they feel was planted in a car. That was the last report I heard.

**Yale:** I have one more thing. My dad does work in Oklahoma City.

**Ms. Bright:** Where does you daddy work in Oklahoma City?

**Yale:** For the federal government.

**Ms. Bright:** What building is that in?

**Yale:** It's a white building. It's big.

**Grant:** My dad works in Oklahoma City.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, I know, your dad is just fine. Yale, I will ask Lori to go down and check to see where your dad is.

I anxiously left to check the status of Yale's father. I remembered when Ms. Bright arrived at school, the counselor was trying to find out about Yale and his brother's dad. I checked with the counselor and she happily said that Yale's father was out of the building and was not hurt. When I returned to class, they were still in the heart circle and relayed the message that Yale's father was safe. Yale shook his head up and down, and seemed to have trusted Ms. Bright's response about his Dad.

**Ms. Bright:** Do you want to talk any more about this or DO something about it?

**Children yell:** "Do something!"

**Ms. Bright:** If you want to make some cards, we can deliver them today

**Children:** YES!

**Ms. Bright:** How many of you want to make cards?

**Child:** I want to paint a picture

**Ms. Bright:** I think you all know what you want to do, go to it!

The children proceeded to make their ideas reality. They were filled with energy. They talked shared ideas, and helped each other. The computers were constantly being used, sometimes with two people composing together. (See figure 3, next page).

Children were individually working and some were in groups. They were all focused on helping and healing. The card I remembered the most was drawn by Forrest. It had a large red heart with a broken line through it, then he wrote "Don't be broken, get well soon." In one hour and fifteen minutes this class of second graders had made cards, composed poems, and drawn pictures for the victims of the bombing. One of the fathers

# KABOOOM!!!!!!

During 9:00 in downtown  
Oklahoma City a bomb  
explosion entered a peaceful  
day. Many were killed.

## a bomb hit!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

today a bomb hit at 9:00 a bomb is very  
powerful it can go 35 mile. it was very scary.  
stay at your home and don't call people. it hit in  
downtown okc. your kid's should be ok at school.

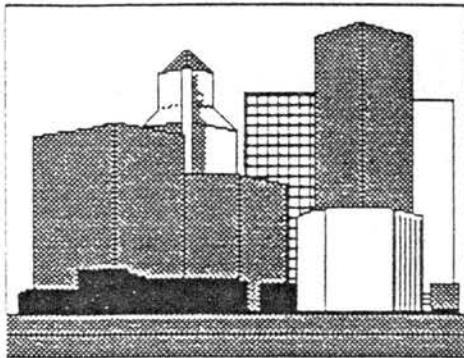


Figure 3 - April 19, 1995

who works at the hospital took the cards to the hospital that evening, possibly the first of millions of cards.

The conversation above became so relevant and clear to me in the days to come. I knew this discussion was going to take place but I did not know the impact it would have on me and how it would guide my research in the remaining weeks. This class was overwhelming to me, they were so powerful and thoughtful. I thought I would see these characteristics in a constructivist classroom, and it would take weeks to record, observe, and look for themes. After this day, April 19, 1995, I felt like I saw 20 autonomous natures interacting as one community, I saw the goodness and the best of human nature. I reaped the benefits of autonomy academically and emotionally.

The discussion about the bombing began with a sense of community (DeVries & Zan, 1994) Ms. Bright brought the children together with gentleness and importance. She used the words "all here together" and "all close to each other, this is very important". The children listen and believe in what she says. There was a feeling of importance and distinction in the class. Even the name the class has given to their discussion group, "heart circle" indicates how this discussion is the heart or important part of the day. The class told me that the way the circle got its name was that one day they were sitting in the group and Oliver, who was the helper of the day and sitting on the helpers stool, stated "Our circle doesn't look like a circle, we are sitting in the shape of a heart". From then on that is what they called group or discussion time, heart circle. The entire discussion evolves because of the sense of community that is evident in the class and later on the theme of sense of community as addressed directly. First when Ms. Bright was explaining how everybody is trying to help the injured and said "that is because we live in a community of love." She spoke again of community when the class was discussing who planted the bomb and how it was important to treat one another with respect and help each other feel good about themselves, even if mistakes are made. The sense of community established

among the children became more and more evident through the many discussions and interactions in the weeks to come.

Respect for yourself and others (DeVries & Zan) was apparent in so many of the teachers and children's statements. Ms. Bright spoke to the children with respect and honesty. She listened to their concerns and valued their questions and opinions. She spoke of the confidence she had in them. It was not just Ms. Bright that respected the children. The children respected Ms. Bright, each other and human nature. This human connectedness was one of the strongest relationships of this class and it became more and more evident everyday.

Throughout this difficult discussion children were choosing to talk, move, think, leave, or work. Children did not have to wait for a turn to talk, sit a certain way, or even stay in the circle. They responded when they had something to say, listened when they didn't and were busy if they were not actively involved in the discussion, in this case, children were creating a newsletter on the computer during the discussion and several were making cards and poems toward the end of the discussion.

The other outstanding attribute that was vivid in this conversation was the demonstration of empowerment the children felt. They were strong, confident, and sure of themselves. They felt like helping, not being scared, or quiet about the disaster. They were confident that Ms. Bright shared the truth with them. This empowered feeling was the beginning of emotional healing of hurting natures, caused by the news, pictures, reports and stories they would see and hear in the days to come.

Never planned for in a constructivist classroom, but always apparent, is the emerging curriculum. Just during this discussion there were curriculum facts, ideas and discussions posed by the children and encouraged by the teacher. The emerging curriculum in this discussion was the discussion of the vibrations and how they were similar to an earthquake; explaining how a person gives blood and the class discussed a mathematical equation of how many liters were left after giving blood; spelling, "how do

you spell bomb?"; and geography was discussed when they talked about who could hear and feel the bomb. It was clear to Ms. Bright through this discussion and the sharing of ideas that the children knew what they wanted to do and were ready to focus, "I can tell you know what you want to do, go to it."

The next issue is morality. The entire premise of the discussion, the bombing, is a moral issue, and the moral questions were raised by the children: "Was it a war?" "Was it on purpose?" "Who did it?" and "Sometimes it means that they do not like themselves.." The class seemed to be most agitated at the fact that the bomb was on purpose. When Ms. Bright said the bomb was on purpose so many children began talking that I could not get all the statements down, but many children had mad and disgusted looks on their faces, like they couldn't believe someone could do such a thing.

Initially, the children were concerned about their personal safety and their family's safety. Statements from many of the children like "My mom's office is there." and "My dad works there.", showed their concern for their family. Throughout the discussion children would hear something familiar (tall buildings, downtown, Oklahoma City) and state who they were concerned about. Soon after the discussion began, one child stated "If it was a bomb, it may explode down here too.", revealing fear for their own safety. Ms. Bright quickly tried to relieve this fear by reassuring the children that they were safe at school and that she knew their parents were safe. Late in the conversation when Yale had two questions that turned into four, his last question was a statement "My dad works downtown . . . for the federal government." Ms. Bright had inquired about Yale's father when she arrived at school and the counselor was attempting to reach someone that knew of the fate of Yale's father. By the time Yale had asked about it, the counselor had found the news that his father was out of the building, and in fact even though he worked for the federal government, his office was in another building. It surprised me that Yale had waited so long to share that his father worked downtown. Was he scared? Had he not picked up on the cues that the bombing was downtown?

Another interesting part of this discussion was the children's ideas and perceptions of war. These children were approximately five years old when Desert Storm took place, and possibly could have been exposed to media reports of other wars around the world. I do not know the extent to which these children were affected by Desert Storm, or how much they knew about war, but they just heard the term "explosion" and within a minute, one child brought up the notion of war and the idea that bombs drop from airplanes. Comments such as: "If a bomb exploded down there, it could explode here." and "When I was looking out the window I saw a little thing dropping from the sky", also are statements that show their belief in the mobility and possibility of a bomb at their school. Ms. Bright did explain later, that according to news reports the bomb was a "man-made" bomb and planted in a car outside the building.

The day ended with amazement and wonder at what I had just experienced. In a constructivist classroom, where the curriculum is created and constantly emerging from the child, the teacher wonders what will happen that day, too. Ms. Bright feels that it is a teacher's responsibility, and her nature, to be true and honest with the children. She did not know what the results would be. She wanted to help the children feel empowered to help, but the actions and activities came from within the children. We left the school that day suspecting that this disaster would have a serious effect on the class, our school, our city, and our nation, but we knew we had not heard the worst yet.

### I Found Out What Can Happen In a Minute

Thursday, April, 20, 1995. The day after the bombing. I was nervous and numb. It had been hard to watch live coverage of the rescue efforts, and hard not to. The news of the dead and injured was getting more discouraging than encouraging. Ms. Bright was calm, reserving her energy for a day I think she instinctively knew would be tough and productive, emotionally. The majority of the children came in the class chattering about



their perception of events surrounding the bombing, but not sharing or listening to each other. The discussion that took place on this morning had a new tone, experience and visual reality. In the 17 hours since we had been away from the children, they had seen the disaster on television, knew of family or neighbors that had been affected, and talked to people outside the community of their classroom. By this morning all of the children's lives had in one way or the other been touched by this national disaster. The conversation was long and poignant. The following are some highlights from the conversation:

**Ms. Bright:** Look what's happened with our circle, we are making a little bitty circle, and that's not bad. I like it too. I wonder why we are making a little circle today?

**Child:** We feel like being close to each other.

**Ms. Bright:** I think we feel like we need to be close together, to people who care about us and people we care about. OK, now, how will we do this, this morning? Everyone came in talking, everyone has very important feelings to share.

**Child:** We could all share.

**Nicole:** There was this lady..

**Ms. Bright:** Wait, wait Nicole. Could we all share? (Everyone shakes their heads, yes.)

**Child:** You start Ms. Bright.

**Ms. Bright:** Ok. How do I say this? I'm trying to make sense of something that is very senseless. It is hard for me to understand when people don't deal with the world with love and I just have a great difficulty with that. Wait, before we all share, let's let Vaughn do the office business, then we can continue, OK. We will do the things we need to do today. Whatever you think we need to do.

Vaughn quickly and with great cooperation from his classmates, takes attendance and the lunch count.

**Ms. Bright:** Ivy, go ahead.

**Ivy:** My dad, yesterday he went to work. He was helping deliver stuff to the children that got hurt. He gave them the posters that we made and then he

said the kids were very happy that somebody cared about them. One of the kids was badly injured and almost died last night because they got concrete in their skin (Gasps from around the room.). The concrete just fell down in layers upon layers. My dad said that he was still hurting when he delivered the stuff to the hospital.

**Ms. Bright:** Your dad was still hurting or the boy was still hurting?

**Ivy:** The boy. My daddy went to see the building. The building was cut in half. My dad's friend was looking out a window and saw the explosion and felt very badly when it happened.

**Ms. Bright:** Like all of us. The feeling that everyone has. Did you know that the whole world knew what happened in our city?

**Child:** Yes they do, my aunt lives in Baltimore and she couldn't get a line to call here, so my mom called her.

**Child:** They showed a picture of a baby on TV that was cut and it had blood all over it.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, we all saw some pretty scary things and they were real weren't they? That is what is really scary. Eva?

**Eva:** Yesterday when you said that guy was under his desk during the bombing, my mom's friend was in the building across the street and she said there was this girl named Jessica and that was Jessica's dad.

**Ms. Bright:** Oh, yes, the man that was a veterinarian?

**Eva:** And Jessica, her mom works at the bank and all her windows are broken out of the bank. Jessica's mom is Sandy. She got into her car and Robert got into his car and Robert started to go to Sandy's bank and Sandy started to go where he works and they missed each other. Then they saw each other. Then they came to our house in the middle of naptime and they got Jessica and they were lots better.

**Ms. Bright:** Why do you think they came to your house first and got Jessica?

**Eva:** Because probably they thought that they were really, really glad and they wanted to see Jessica safe.

**Ms. Bright:** Did any of you hear on the news that the rescue workers just wanted to go home and hug their \_\_\_\_\_?

**Children:** Families! Kids! Children!

**Yale:** The rescue workers are searching the building and they have German Shepherd Dogs.

**Child:** They are searching for more people.

**Ms. Bright:** Why are they using the German shepherd dogs?

**Child:** To try to find the people and see if there is anyone in there.

**Child:** The bomb, it was 9 feet wide and 8 feet deep.

**Child:** Yes, they have only found dead people.

**Child:** Last night they found a 13 year old teenager and she was alive in the basement and they had to cut her leg off.

**Ms. Bright:** Oh, yes and they took her to Children's Hospital.

**Ivy:** Yes, my dad was the one that took her there.

**Ms. Bright:** Did your dad help take care of her? That's wonderful! Ginny?

**Ginny:** My brother's friend Sara, her dad worked on the bomb squad and she doesn't know if her dad's OK or not, so her friend Breene spent the night with her last night to keep her company since she was crying a lot at school. She doesn't know if her dad's OK or not or when he's going to come back from the bomb squad.

**Ms. Bright:** Those people are still very busy. I'm glad she knew someone who could help her. We all need to reach out. Yori?

**Yori:** My mom was at work in her lab and most of the windows blew up. The whole one side of the building the windows are out.

**Ms. Bright:** That tells you how powerful the explosion was. Was your mom helping last night?

**Yori:** She was helping with the children. If anything was in their blood she would notice it and tell the doctors. She tells them what's wrong with their blood.

**Ms. Bright:** There are a lot of people from this class related to helpers too! Nicole?

**Nicole:** There was this one lady. Part of her ear came off and half of her face and they had to sew all of it back on. She said "I hope they find the person who did this", because she can't find her husband and her 3-year old son

and her 4-year old daughter. She doesn't know if they are at the doctor's or dead or what.

**Ms. Bright:** Did you see this on the news?

**Nicole:** Yes, the lady had this bandage on her face then it went all the way around and she was in a wheelchair and she had lots of blood over her. They could bleed to death if they got lots of cuts.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, that could happen.

**Child:** Then they need other people's blood.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, did you hear the part about giving blood?

**Ginny:** Yes, my dad went down to serve food to people in line.

**Ms. Bright:** Did you hear last night that they didn't need any more blood? So many people gave blood that they didn't need any more blood. Isn't that amazing that so many people give of themselves? It's the first time they have never needed blood.

**Child:** They said last night to pray for the people who were hurt so my mom and I did that together.

**Child:** When I went to bed I said prayers for the hurt people.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, sometimes people pray silently and sometimes people pray together and sometimes your heart just prays itself. Wyatt and Nicole, I understand what is happening here, you just can't wait to write. Grant, come over here until you share because I can tell you just can't wait. I wish we had a computer for everyone today, come over here.

**Grant:** At the TV station, its only five miles away from the bombing and they could feel it. One guy happened to be on the phone near the bombing and he ran to see what happened and it was the bombing. They told the helicopter driver to get in the helicopter and to see what's happened. He went down there.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, this was very real and the TV stations showed us what happened all day long. Yale?

**Yale:** Yesterday my dad was one block away from where the explosion happened and he said it sounded like an airplane crashed into the building.

**Ms. Bright:** A lot of people thought that. It must have been really loud.

**Yale:** And sparks came through the wall.

**Ms. Bright:** Really.

**Yale:** Also, when the explosion happened, three of my dad's friends were in the building when it happened.

**Ms. Bright:** Does he know how they are?

**Yale:** No, they were missing.

**Ms. Bright:** Oh, I'm sorry. I hope your Dad hears some news soon. Oliver?

**Oliver:** I sure found out what can happen in a minute.

**Ms. Bright:** What can happen in a minute, Oliver?

**Oliver:** Everyone's lives are hurting. Everyone is sad. Because an explosion can happen in a minute.

**Ms. Bright:** Did you hear what Oliver said? Everyone's lives are hurting. When we are having feelings that we don't understand we can do things for others that are hurting and help heal them and ourselves.

**Ivy:** I just wrote my letter.

**Ms. Bright:** Oh, all right do you want to read it to us?

**Ivy:** (reading her composition) Daily News. Attention to all moms and dads, you can help the kids in the hospital by donating baby food and food for kids and grown ups. Food and clothing for babies and grown ups and kids and blankets too and other stuff. Thank you.

**Ms. Bright:** Beautiful. We'll publish the newspaper today. Beautiful. OK, now does anybody have ideas about what we ought to do right now?

**Child:** Make worry dolls. (many children begin talking)

**Ms. Bright:** When four people talk to me at once, I can't hear. Do we need to make a list?

**Child:** Yes!

**Ms. Bright:** A list for what?

**Child:** People

**Ms. Bright:** List for people. List for things . . .

**Child:** To do.

**Child:** To bring.

**Ms. Bright:** To bring, St. Anthony's is full right now, and Oliver could deliver worry dolls to St. Anthony's. All right. A list for things to bring for the people. If you have a suggestion for what we need to list, give it to me. Yale?

**Yale:** Make a book for them.

**Ms. Bright:** Make a book! You know that might be something that could really, really help because you write very wonderful things. If they are in the hospital they're probably too sick to play. What could a person who's too sick to play do and enjoy?

**Child:** Draw.

**Child:** Read.

**Child:** Make coloring books.

**Ms. Bright:** Draw, read, make coloring books. (Writing as she speaks.)

**Child:** We can make those things where you make half of the picture and they do the other half.

**Child:** Make a little box with crayons and markers.

**Child:** Make posters.

**Ivy:** My dad says that they got a lot of stuff and all they need is food and clothing and coloring books and stuff. But he said some of the kids cannot write cause they got glass in their hands.

**Ms. Bright:** OK, so maybe we need to make posters.

**Lori:** We could make tapes of songs and poems for the people in the hospital to listen too.

**Children:** Yeah!

**Child:** We need some blank tapes.

**Child:** We'll have to take turns using the tape recorder.

**Child:** Can we start now?

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, let's do it!

This conversation was so intense, quiet and heartfelt initially, and then seemed to increase with intense energy and excitement. All nineteen, or twenty-one counting Ms. Bright and I, lives had privately and intimately been touched by tragedy, terror, and trauma. Some children were describing things they saw on television, but the majority were revealing real life experiences and their perception of the experience. The most symbolic reflection of experience for me was when Oliver said "I found out what can happen in a minute." Lives were ended, injured, and changed forever . . . in a minute.

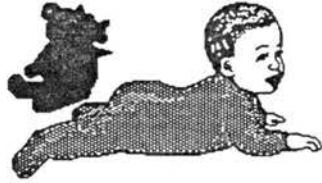
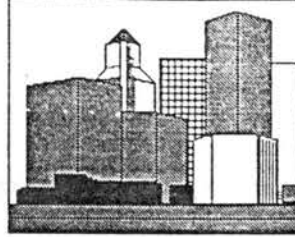
The children immediately went to work making worry dolls, reciting poems and songs into a tape recorder, creating cards, drawing posters, and composing "Daily News" newsletters. The energy seemed magical. It was contagious and had a medicinal effect on my heart. There were visitors in the classroom throughout the day: the librarian, the custodian, the artist-in-residence, the counselor, and a few other teachers. I know now why they were visiting, their hearts were hurting too, and to see nineteen children so involved, so empowered, so motivated to help, was therapeutic.

The writings the children composed on the computer and the spontaneous drawings were incredible and tugged at the heart of the people that read them. (See figures 4, 5 & 6.)

Figure 4- Terror in the heartlands

# HELP!!!

WE NED HELP TO RASE SOME STUFF FOR THE PEOPLE . THAT WERE IN THE BOMB . WE CUD RASE FOOD AND SLEEPING BAGS AND BRUSHE'S AND COMB'S AND TOOTHBRUSH AND BLANKETS STUFF THAT THAY NED . PLEASE HELP . STUFF FOR BABY'S TO .



daily news  
autichan all moms and dads

you can help the kids in the hospetel by donating baby food and food for kids and gronups food and clothing for babys and gronups and kids and blackes to and ather stoffe



thak you



Figure 5 - Help!



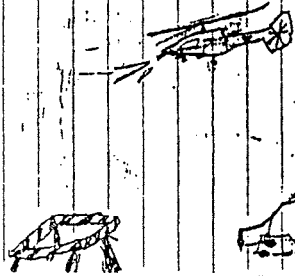
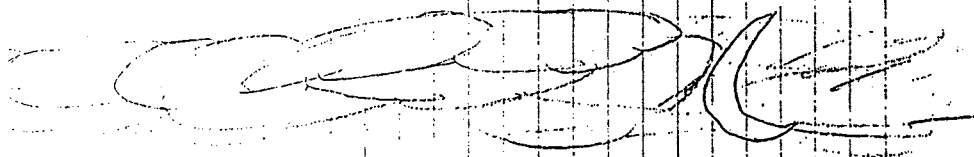
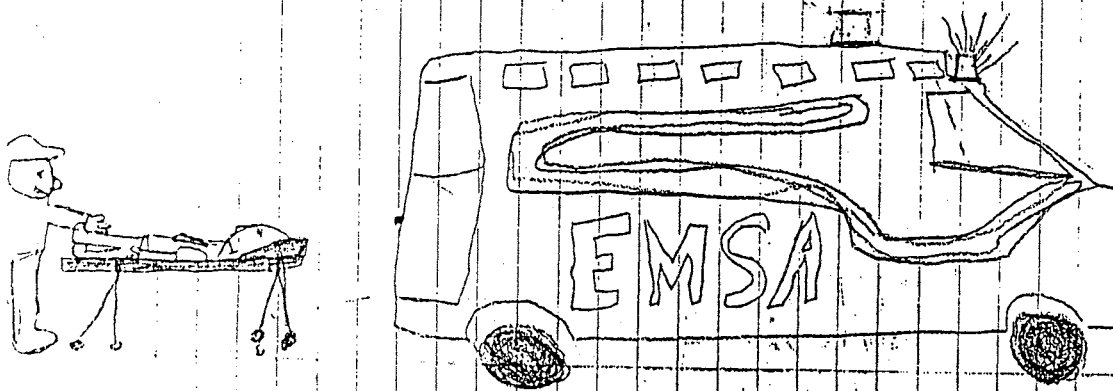


Figure 6 - Emergency  
118

Later on this day, Mrs. Griggs, the third grade teacher, read a book titled *Heartland* by Diane Seibert. The book had beautiful pictures depicting scenes from middle America. During the reading of the book children commented "I saw that at my Grandpa's.", " Oil fields, we have oil fields.", and finally, "It looks like Oklahoma City.". The book had a haunting picture of what appeared to the class, as downtown Oklahoma City and would eventually become the silhouette for the cover the all the Daily News reports and compositions the children had written about the bombing. Then a conversation began about the heartland and what it was.

**Child:** Why is it all about farming?

**Mrs. Griggs:** Why do you think?

**Child:** Our city is a farming place.

**Child:** Oklahoma is a farming state.

**Mrs. Griggs:** Think about what your heart does for your body.

**Forrest:** It's the central part. It helps you.

**Mrs. Griggs:** How?

**Forrest:** It keeps you alive.

**Child:** Also the heartland keeps our city alive, keeps Oklahoma alive.

**Nicole:** Oh! Oklahoma is a state and it has 16 towns in it. Oklahoma keeps all of them alive.

**Child:** All fifty towns.

**Child:** Fifty? Fifty states.

**Child:** Oklahoma is right in the middle.

**Child:** Yeah! The heart of America.

The term "Heartland" became a very important concept through this discussion even though it had been used in the media, the children now had some background to form

the concept of The Heartland. The acrostic poem that begins this chapter was one of many poems, stories, songs and descriptions created and used by the children. They knew the importance of the heart to the body and the heartland to the center of the nation and how many had been touched by this tragedy.

Kaye, Director of Art Education, also visited the class this Thursday. She came every Thursday afternoon and brought an art intern who had planned an art experience for the class. This Thursday was particularly hard, but important. She read the book *Life Doesn't Scare Me* by Maya Angelou. She then let the children discuss what frightened them. Several children said they were fearful that bomb would be dropped on them and that their parents might be somewhere and get hurt by a bomb. Another conversation went as follows:

**Kaye:** Do you think you had more fears when you were little or do you think you're having more fears as you are growing up?

**Child:** Growing up

**Kaye:** Why?

**Child:** More things happen when you grow up, you don't get smaller.

**Child:** When you are little you don't think about scary things.

**Eva:** I'm scared my house is going to get bombed.

**Kaye:** Yes, but do they bomb houses?

**Eva:** They bombed that building!

**Child:** They dropped a bomb in front of Martin Luther King's house.

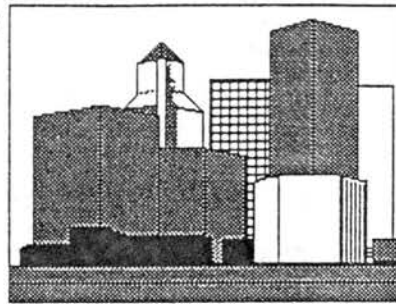
After discussing fears and again, the mobility, randomness and purposefulness of the bomb, Kaye, gave them each clay to work with and showed them a way to make faces by using your fists. Most of the children made masks and were deeply involved in the clay

experience. The children sat close together, on the floor as they worked with the clay. They were quiet and would occasionally show their work to their neighbors.

Exhausted we were at the end of the day. The children had published a two-page newsletter (See figure 7).

### a bomb!

wednesday at 9:00 a bomb hit downtown oklahoma city!  
a day care center got hit. Some kids were killed.  
It wasn't a nuclear bomb. It was planted  
in a car (so nobody will ever use the  
car!) one person was interviewed he said  
that he felt an earthquake.



# KABOOM!

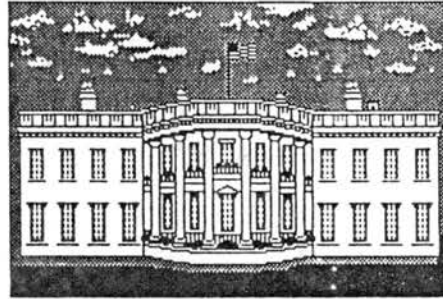
Figure 7 - April 20 - A Bomb!

**TERROR IN THE HEARTLAND!**

THE BOMBING IN DOWNTOWN OKLAHOMA CITY KILLED 36, INJURED 400, AND 200 ARE STILL MISSING!

**BOMBING! KILLS 36!**

PRESEDENT CLINTON IS EVEN WORKING ON THE CASE!



**IF YOU CAN HELP**

YOU CAN DONATE MONEY, FOOD, SHELTER, AND BLANKETS. TAKE THEM TO SOUTH MERIDIAN.

vrs.1

vrs.2

to the tune of take me out to the ball game.

Wednesday  
there was a  
bomb. it hit  
O.K.C. it had  
lots of  
explosives.  
so it could  
have killed  
me!! they had  
two or three  
suspects. It  
took 88  
lives. they  
had 1 2 3  
suspects for  
the O.K.C.  
bombing!

Figure 8 - April 20 - The Daily News

During this day they made posters to collect food and clothing for the injured and homeless; and made many, many gifts for the injured in the hospital. In this unfortunate theme it is apparent that the curriculum in Ms. Bright's second grade originates with the children's ideas, and could be said to be naturally integrated. An example of this was "Worry Dolls". The children that chose to make worry dolls gathered the materials they needed (sequencing); planned what they wanted to make by selecting size and color of the jute rope and thread, (classification, visualization); discussed the size of the worry dolls they were going to make, (math and social experience); measured and cut the jute and thread, (eye-hand coordination, math experience); positioned the jute in a loop and wrapped the thread around the loop, (eye-hand coordination, small motor skills); talked about how they made worry dolls earlier in the year and what they symbolized (repetition, cultural experience); helped one another (social interaction); wrote "directions" for the worry dolls on cards (writing, reading, spelling, communicating, mathematical concepts); and then they cleaned up (classification, reversal).

In this one activity five curriculum areas were experienced, math, social studies, writing, reading and spelling. Many skills were practiced such as: eye-hand coordination, recall, sequencing, classification, and many social skills. This activity originated from within the child, though it may have been stimulated by the discussion about the bombing and the hurt people, more important, it was based on a child's own perception of worry dolls and their shared belief that they help people. The worry dolls were not all alike. The children shared basic ideas of how to make them, but the size, color and quality were all different, but very acceptable to each child. The cooperation of the group, which fluctuated in the hour that the materials were out was stunning. Children helped each other measure, cut, find "just the right" rope and helped each other tie the thread and they shared ideas about how to make the worry dolls and what they would look like. The children did not have to participate in this experience, it was truly intrinsically motivated.

## The Third Day

Friday, April 21, 1995

The third day after the bombing. There are many things based around the number three: three wisemen; three ships a sailing; you can have three wishes; you get three tries; three strikes; three outs; the third time is a charm. This third day in Ms. Bright's room seemed to fit in with the superstitions of three, it was a very symbolic day. It seemed that we, maybe the adults more than the children, needed something to hold onto, something materialistic. On this day three things happened: feelings revealed in poetry; a visitor; and ribbons to wear in remembrance.

### The Heartland Poem and the Visitor

**Ms. Bright:** When I woke up last night and I was still worried about the situation, the tragedy that we have all been worried about.

**Child:** The bomb.

**Ms. Bright:** I was trying to work through the bombing and one of the things I thought about was all the people that are down there working night and day, sweating and straining and suffering and crying. You know it is such a hard, hard job to be around the people who have died and the little children. I was trying to think what we could do to express to them that we know how their hearts are aching and how they feel. Yesterday I noticed that your Daily News headline was "Terror in the Heartland." I noticed this morning on one of the news programs the headline "Terror at Home." One station was using "Heartache in the Heartland". I thought of you and how you like alliteration and how you really think poetically. When you write Haiku you talk about not using any words but the important words. So one thing I was thinking about is to create an acrostic poem to the book we read yesterday. What was the name of it?

**Children:** The Heartland.

**Ms. Bright:** How do you spell heartland?

**Children:** H-e-a-r-t-l-a-n-d

**Ms. Bright:** Let's start with H

**Child:** Hearts are hurting in the Heartland.

**Ms. Bright:** Repeats and writes. Now E.

**Child:** Ekks! It's true!

**Child:** Everybody is sad, everybody's hurting.

**Child:** Egsteamed at the people that did it.

**Ms. Bright:** I don't know how to spell "egstemed"

**Yale:** E-s-t-e-m-e-d

**Ms. Bright:** Oh! steamed at the people who did it.

**Yale:** Oh, it starts with an "S".

**Ms. Bright:** Writes and repeats. Everybody is sad, everybody's hurting.

**Child:** A happy world destroyed.

**Child:** An innocent state destroyed.

**Child:** All our friends are hurting.

**Child:** All the beautiful land is destroyed.

**Ms. Bright:** All the land?

**Child:** No, just two buildings.

**Child:** No, four.

**Ms. Bright:** What did the community do?

**Child:** Help them.

**Yori:** All the community helped the helpers.

**Ms. Bright:** Repeats Yori's statement and writes. Think about who the helpless are. What are important "R" words?

**Nicole:** Randolph School is wishing wonderful wishes for you

**Ms. Bright:** Repeats and writes Nicole's statement. "T".

**Child:** To You.



**Nicole:** Tacky, tacky that person must be.

**Child:** Touching you with love.

**Ms. Bright:** Repeats, touching you with love, "L".

**Nicole:** Lovely is what you are even if you got hurt.

**Child:** Love is in your hearts.

**Child:** Love is in our hearts.

**Ms. Bright:** Love is in your hearts, love is in our hearts.

**Child:** Let us help as much as much as we can.

**Ms. Bright:** Love is our hearts, love is in your hearts. Let us help as much as we can.

**Child:** A terrible thing has happened to Oklahoma City.

**Child:** It happened in America.

**Child:** It's on the earth, too.

**Ms. Bright:** Writes and repeats: A terrible thing has happened on Oklahoma, America, Earth. Next is "N".

**Child:** No more, please.

**Child:** Never has this happened before.

**Child:** Never let it happen again.

**Child:** Anywhere.

**Ms. Bright:** Never has this happened before. Never let it happen again. Anywhere.

**Child:** Don't let it happen anymore

**Ms. Bright:** I think that is what we said for "N", never let it happen again.

**Child:** During explosions . . .

**Child:** people get hurt.

**Ms. Bright:** During explosions, people get hurt. Do you want to end it with any thing special?

**Nicole:** Remember love.

**Ms. Bright:** Remember love. What a special poem, let's read it together. (Mr. Holbrook, Ivy's father enters the classroom.) Hello, Mr. Holbrook. Come in and have a seat we know you are tired from working.

**Mr. Holbrook:** Yes, it has been a rough time. But everyone is doing better.

**Ms. Bright:** They probably have some questions for you.

**Mr. Holbrook:** Sure.

**Child:** Did you help pull people out?

**Mr. Holbrook:** No, we took an ambulance and three helicopters to the bombing sites. There were plenty of ambulances at the site, but there were only a few people that needed to get to the hospital fast. The rest were trapped or had to wait.

**Child:** Did they have to cut off that girl's leg?

**Mr. Holbrook:** We had one lady that happened to. If you are trapped by the heaviest thing you can think of and it is on your leg and your leg is bleeding. You can't lay there and you can't lift it up, so what are you going to do? If you lay there you will die because you will lose too much blood and to save your life you go ahead and take off that part of the body. That way, they will be alive and heal and then they will adjust to having that arm or leg gone. But your life was saved.

**Child:** How will she walk?

**Mr. Holbrook:** Well, they have parts of legs, or false legs that attach, that can help her walk again.

**Nicole:** There was a lady that lost part of her ear and part of her face and they had to sew it on again.

**Mr. Holbrook:** Yes, there were a lot of people that got lots of stitches. There was a lot of glass. It would be like someone throwing glass at you with a lot of force.

**Child:** My grandparents felt the bomb in their home.

**Mr. Holbrook:** Yes, I did too. I thought it was an earthquake. I took your things to the hospital and took them to the volunteers because they can't put things in the children's rooms yet.

**Ms. Bright:** Do you have any more questions? Thank you so much for talking to the class. I know Ivy will love having lunch with you.

## Ribbons of Remembrance

**Ms. Bright:** I would like to give you something the teachers have gone together and paid for, for each of you.

Children gasp.

**Ms. Bright:** Let me explain these to you. There is a symbolic meaning. Do you know what a symbol is?

**Child:** YES!

**Child:** Like a sign, like a peace sign.

**Child:** It stands for something.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, it stands for something like a peace sign stands for peace.

**Child:** Like a ying-yang

**Ms. Bright:** Ying-yang, balance and harmony.

**Child:** Like an award, it's like we care about people.

**Child:** There is also a sign that is a circle with an "R" in it.

**Ms. Bright:** An "R" with a circle? Oh, it says registered, it's a registered trademark. OK, I'm going to tell you what is in the envelope. I'm going to pass the purple ribbon around because we are a circle of caring. Everyone will get one. You are going to get every color. Who doesn't have one?

**Noelle:** I don't have one.

**Ms. Bright:** Does anyone have an extra long purple ribbon that you would not mind cutting in half?

**Children:** I do, I do!

**Ms. Bright:** Wyatt thank you, I appreciate that.

**Child:** My dad has one of these. He has white, yellow and purple also.

**Nicole:** There is a reward for the two guys they suspect in the bombing.

**Ms. Bright:** Up to two million dollars.

**Ginny:** If I got the reward, I would not keep the money, I would give it to the people that need it.

**Ms. Bright:** Repeats Ginny's statement.

**Children:** Yes, Yes, Me too.

**Child:** If I got it I would give the money away.

**Ms. Bright:** You would give the money away. OK, If you want purple to mean something different you may, but the envelope says purple is for the children.

**Child:** What about yellow?

**Ms. Bright:** Yellow is for all the people that are missing. You can tie your ribbons in a knot once you have them all. Wesley, do you need yellow?

Wesley shakes his head yes.

**Child:** I'll cut mine.

**Ms. Bright:** Thank you. I think we have enough now. The blue? Look around the room and see if you see something that is blue that reminds you of our heartland.

**Child:** That box.

**Child:** The ball.

**Child:** That butterfly.

**Child:** The state flag!

**Ms. Bright:** The Oklahoma flag. It's blue, the peaceful color of our skies. Now the other thing I heard was that white is for the people that died. It doesn't matter what it means, you can have it mean what you want to.

**Child:** Isn't it amazing that the children lived?

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, it is amazing.

## Ending the Day With Poetry

The children tied the yellow, purple and white ribbons together in their heart circle, then Ms. Bright played quiet, soothing music and the children wrote Haiku poems. I can't comment about these poems, the strength of the words they chose to fit the 5-7-5 pattern is obvious. Notice in some poems it is not the pattern that drives the prose but the word itself. The children would work to get the pattern to fit the meaningful word they had chosen.

Why did this happen?  
We were innocent people  
People are dying.

Ginny

Today in Heartland  
A bomb went off in downtown  
Buildings are breaking.

Wesley

On Wednesday, April 19  
1995 a bomb went off. Lots of  
people died from the bomb.

Oliver

A bomb exploding  
In the morning  
People were killed.

Quinn

Feelings are hurt bad  
They found a lot of people  
I love you all.

Eva

A bomb exploded!!!  
A bomb went off yesterday!!!  
People got hurt bad!!!

Whitney

A bomb, a bomb, oh!!!  
A bomb, a bomb went off  
At 9 o'clock . . . BOOM!!!

Zara

A man planted a bomb  
A bomb has been discovered  
A bomb killed people.

Noelle

Buildings are breaking  
A bomb went off downtown!  
It was very bad.

Grant

He killed some people  
He killed some people very bad  
The man is very bad.

Wyatt

Bombing destruction  
Real terror in the heartland  
Real terror right here.  
Forrest

A thing happened  
A bomb went off and the  
People are killed.  
Yale

A bomb hit Oklahoma  
Everybody is very scared  
It had a big boom.  
Zane

Everybody is sad  
Because there is a bomb  
In Oklahoma, now.  
Xavier

A bomb went off in  
Oklahoma City, help,  
Help the children, help.  
Vince

A man planned a bomb!  
A bomb is very scary!  
Please help the children!  
Nicole

### We All Speak!

Saturday, April 22, 1995

The weekend saw many emotional events take place, the first is that Oklahoma City had become the focus of national and international attention. The number of dead was slowly rising, and no survivors had been found since the day of the bombing, Wednesday, April 19th. The news of the dead and missing was discouraging and the media began to focus on the people of the heartland that were helping in the rescue and how Oklahomans were dealing with the trauma of the bombing. Ms. Bright's class had an article in the city's newspaper on Thursday about the special way the children were dealing with this crisis and their feelings of empowerment to help and do something positive. Saturday morning at 6:30 a.m. an agent for Nickelodeon studios called Ms. Bright at home and stated that they were in town one day preparing for a special program dealing with disasters and children. They asked Ms. Bright if she and the class could meet and talk about the bombing. The crew from Nickelodeon studios had gone directly from the airport to the bombing site and the area where media representatives from around the

world were located in an area called "Satellite City". They were close to and knew how to get to Children's Hospital, so that was designated as the meeting place. Ms. Bright made two calls to parents and those parents called other parents and by nine o'clock, eleven children, their parents, Ms. Bright, and I were there to talk with the Nickelodeon crew. Zane, Oliver and Xavier, while waiting for everyone to arrive, wrote this poem:

There was a bomb that hit downtown OKC. It  
Had 2,000 pounds of dynamite.  
Everybody was scared. It had a big

**Boom!**  
Only some children got out.  
Moms and dads were in the  
Building.

The children were restless, fidgety and did not feel comfortable until Ms. Bright spoke these words, to help them focus and come together:

" I want you to close your eyes and breathe deeply. This is real life. We are presenting these things to the children, all the things we have done and how we have tried to make our hearts expressive to all the people that are hurting for one reason or another. You know all the different kinds of hurt. Tell them why we are here and why we have come together. We are in our room right now for a minute. We are safe in our room. Everything is fine. We have been working for days expressing our hearts' feelings. OK, look at each other. Isn't it like we are in our classroom? You know people walk in and talk to us and visit us, when we are gathered? We are the classroom. This is our heart circle. Can you see the heart in this shape? All our hearts are in the right place and we just want to share with the people at Children's Hospital and Nickelodeon all our songs, poems and work we have done this week."

At one point the director of the crew asked, "Do you have a couple of spokes persons?". To which Ms. Bright immediately replied, "OH, no, no, no, WE ALL speak!", and they all did, if they wanted. After the filming we found out why the crew was in such a rush, the program was going to be aired nationally the next day, Sunday, April 23, 1995!

Ms. Bright and I tried to think of a way to let the parents of the children that did not get to attend the taping and others in the local community that the show was going to be broadcast on Sunday. We went to the local newspaper, wrote a brief article, typed the Haiku poems the children wrote (to possibly get parent's attention and to share the meaningful poetry) and submitted the article. It was published in the Sunday newspaper and many taped the Nickelodeon program that aired that day. This Saturday began at 6:30 a.m. and "ended" at 5:00 p.m.

### Rescue Workers, Prepare For a Ton of Letters!

April 24, 1995

The initial day of the bombing, emergency rescue squads were rotating in and out of the building. FEMA, Federal Emergency Management Agency, had brought a rescue team also. It became apparent by Saturday that time was running out for the hope of more survivors and the recovery of bodies was going to be a painfully slow process, due to the lack of structural integrity in the bombed building. Rescue crews were working very, very hard in the worst of conditions and after each shift they immediately went to a stress management program to deal with the devastation that engulfed them. They needed relief. Rescue squads with expertise in collapse rescue arrived approximately 12 hours after the bombing and another group of out of state rescue workers arrived about one week after the bombing to relieve the Oklahoma City rescue teams (Hanson, 1995). While looking for survivors the teams were marking areas where bodies were found. Rescue dogs went into narrow, humanly impassable places to search. The media coverage of the rescue efforts was live and around the clock on the three large network stations, and by one national news station. The reports of people from around the nation supporting the rescuers was overwhelming. The rescuers had notes, candy, cookies and mementoes from school children on their cots every night. Reports that rescue dogs were depressed because they were not finding survivors tugged at the hearts of many viewers. On



Monday, April 24th a volunteer came by Randolph School and gave the office a list of rescue squads that had arrived in town on the weekend and had not received any mail from children, and asked if Randolph Elementary could help. Ms. Bright got the list of rescue squads at lunch. The following is the conversation of the evolution of ideas created by the children after recess.

Ms. Bright begins writing the names of the rescue squads on the chalkboard.

**Ms. Bright:** Read this to me so I can see if I have written clearly.

**Children:** Virginia Beach; Los Angeles; New York; Fairfax, Virginia; and Metro Dade K-9 unit.

**Child:** Isn't there an Oklahoma rescue squad?

**Ms. Bright:** Oh, yes, there are Oklahoma rescue teams and teams from all over.

**Child:** Everywhere in the world.

**Ms. Bright:** These people are listed because they haven't gotten any letters, at all.

**Yori:** Oh, we'll send them letters.

**Ms. Bright:** They don't have any family here and they are all alone because they came without their families.

**Grant:** (at the computer) HEADLINES: Rescue Teams Prepare to get a Ton of Letters!

**Child:** We can write on the computers and make copies of our work.

**Ms. Bright:** If you have seen these people, the doctors, the nurses, the firemen, the policemen, the rescue workers, if you have seen them on television and you particularly want to thank them, this would be a perfect time. Express yourself!

**Child:** I'm going to draw a picture for them.

**Wesley:** I'm going to make a book for them.

**Child:** That's what we are doing.

**Child:** These can be book packages.

- Child:** Yeah! We are doing book packages.
- Ms. Bright:** A volunteer is going to pick up our things immediately after school. I can tell you are putting all your concentration in this effort. This is beautiful.
- Child:** I know what K-9 means.
- Ms. Bright:** This is how they have written K-9, does anybody know if this is the correct way to write K-9?
- Child:** Yes, it is.
- Ms. Bright:** K-9 I know is spelled this way, this is another way, c-a-n-i-n-e (writes on the chalkboard as she spells).
- Child:** I like that better.
- Oliver:** Hey, Grant, Vaughn, let's make something for the dogs.
- Oliver:** I've got to tell Ms. Bright something. Ms. Bright, the news said that the rescuers needed pads for the dogs' feet!
- Ms. Bright:** Pads for the dogs' feet! Oh, that's great!

The children discussed the need for the pads to protect the dog's feet from shards of glass. They looked for leather but could not find any. Then one child ignited the rest of the class when he said he suggested making ribbons for the dogs. Ribbons had become a strong symbol of love and remembrance in Ms. Bright's class and throughout Oklahoma. Several children attempted paper ribbons. After a quick discussion with others, analyzing the weather, and the durability of paper, they moved to where the fabric was located in the classroom and began getting improved supplies. They chose the colors purple, yellow, blue, and white because those were the colors of the ribbons that Oklahomans were wearing. As Oliver and his friends were making ribbons for the rescue dogs, other children were writing letters, composing poems, and drawing for the unseen, unsung heros. There were several thank you letters that were designed on the computer (See figures 9, 10 & 11.)

THANK YOU RESCUE WORKERS !!!

Thank you for helping  
Helping the children , thank you  
All around the world people are helping  
Never give up  
Kind you are, kind enufe to help

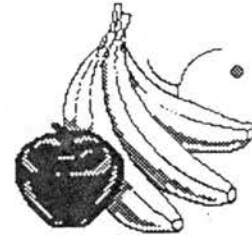
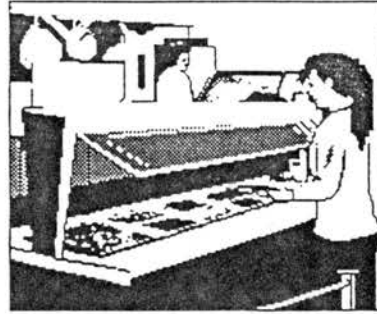
You are our favret rescue workers!  
Oh how you helped , so much  
U sa needs a lot of help!!!!

A HUCU  
THANK YOU FOR HELPING  
WE APPRISHEATE YOU TO  
WE LIKE YOU A LOT



Figure 9 - Thank You Rescuers!

DEAR rescue teams thank you for all the things you did for the people in the bomb, so much that I could say I love you. This note is for all the things you have done for the people in the bomb. Thank you very much .



*thank you!*

thank you for help  
help was on the way  
a bomb is very sad  
nobody is nice as you  
kind you are

you are the people we were looking for  
o but we still ned some stuff  
usa is still looking for help!

thank you for the food  
we still ned help to help thim  
the bomb was very sad.

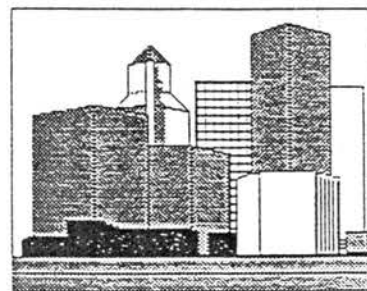


Figure 10 - More Thank You Rescuers!

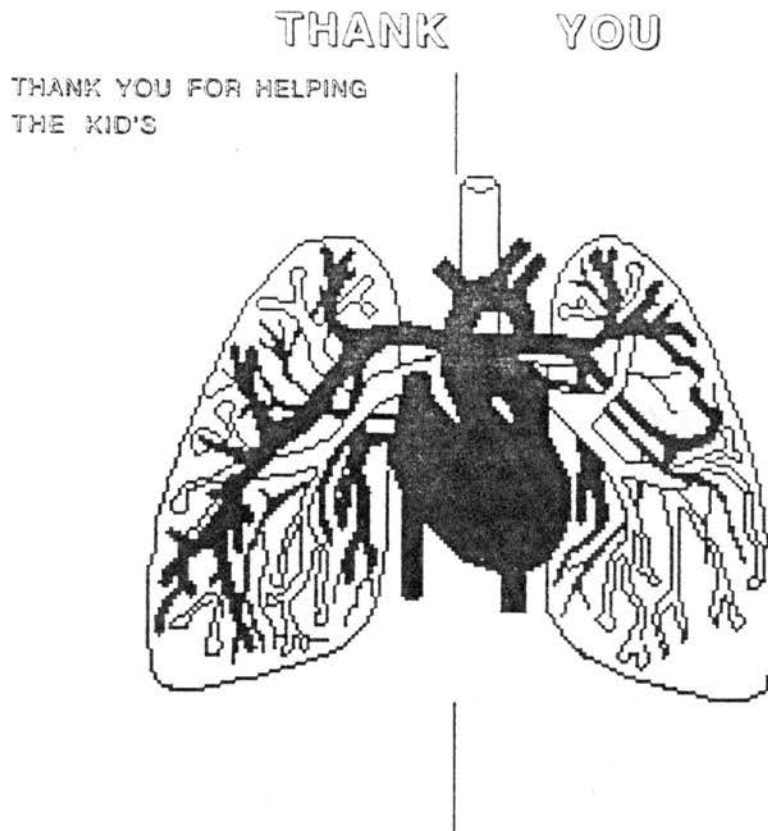


Figure 11- Thank You!

One hundred copies of a twelve-page class-produced newsletter was printed at the school and tied together with purple and blue star ribbon. They were then distributed and placed on the cots of the rescue workers that night, the evening of the same day the children had first learned of the out of state rescue workers.

#### A Suspect May Have Done It

Tuesday, April 25, 1995

The three major networks and many local radio stations had live coverage of the rescue and recovery at the Federal Building for five full days. On Monday, April 24th,

they attempted to return to regular programming, but the day the FBI, Federal Bureau of Investigation, was to transfer Timothy McVeigh to Oklahoma City there was again live coverage. People were very, very angry and jeered and booed at the suspect as he exited the jail surrounded by law enforcement agents. There were periodic reports of people being brought in for questioning, sightings of John Doe #2, and descriptions of automobiles that suspects might be driving. The media uses the terms "suspects" and "witnesses" so carefully, but to my knowledge it had not been discussed in class. This short discussion was more important to me, not because of what happened, but what didn't happen.

**Zara:** I have a song I made up about the hospitals that helped the children.

**Nicole:** I brought \$5.26 that I collected from my neighbors, 4 cans of food, 2 cans of pop, one pair of pajamas, and look here is a story that was on the first page of the newspaper. Read it Ms. Bright.

**Ms. Bright:** "Bomb Suspect Charged" Does anyone know what this man's name is in the orange prison uniform?

**Children:** Timothy McVeigh.

**Children:** They caught the other guy too!

**Yale:** They have already caught three of the bombers.

**Ms. Bright:** Nicole you can put this up on the board with a magnet.

**Grant:** All those guys arrested aren't bombers, they are witnesses.

**Ms. Bright:** OK, what is the difference in a witness and a suspect?

**Forrest:** A witness is someone who saw something. A suspect may have done it.

**Yori:** Where are his parents?

**Ms. Bright:** I don't know where they are.

**Nicole:** Do you think he was spanked or yelled at or treated mean when he was a kid? Cause why would he be so mean to hurt so many people.

**Oliver:** Maybe he didn't have parents.

**Forrest:** Maybe nobody cared about him.

In the first discussion in this chapter the moral dilemma of "Was the bomb on purpose?" was posed. The children were agitated about the fact that it was on purpose for what seemed like all week. They also discussed what kind of person would cause such a fatal crime. In their writing in the first few days after the bombing you can tell what their thoughts about the bombing were, but they did not talk down or angrily about the unknown person (See figure 12).



The person who  
planted the bomb  
must have not been  
feeling good about  
himself.

Figure 12 - The person

On this day when there had been so much coverage, over the arrest of this man, I thought the children might be angrier at this person. I thought they might attempt to prescribe what punishment they thought would be appropriate (most Oklahomans were) for the injustice they so deeply felt . . . and deeply felt is what they did. Still, a crime beyond all imagination, this class was feeling for this "suspect" not punishing or stereotyping his behavior. They know how important it is to care, be cared for and respect one another. They knew of a person that possibly had never felt any of those feelings.

## Is That All?

Wednesday April 26, 1995

One week after the bombing there was to be a national moment of silence at 9:02 a.m. Oklahomans were honoring the victims, survivors, families and rescue workers by driving with the headlights of their cars turned on. I joined others in turning on my headlights and was amazed at the unity I felt just driving down the street. It was 8:15 a.m. and everybody's lights were on, if they were not, when they noticed other's car headlights on, they would engage their lights too! It was contagious! It gave the feeling of involvement, support and togetherness. When I arrived at school, the morning routine was very usual until the moment of silence.

**Ms. Bright:** In just a few minutes Mrs. Ethridge is going to be on the intercom. Did you hear that all of Oklahoma and probably all of the nation and maybe people all over the world are going to have a moment of silence for what happened at 9:02?

**Child:** The bombing

**INTERCOM:** Students, we would like to take just a moment out of our day at 9:02 and remember all the rescue workers, all of the victims, and all Oklahomans that were involved in this incident. Please take a moment.

**SILENCE**

Thank you, have a good day.

**Zara:** (Big sigh.) Is that all?

**Nicole:** Yeah, is that it?

**Ms. Bright:** Oh, you want more?

**Zara:** I think we could do something different.

**Ms. Bright:** We could do something different?

**Zara:** Yes, just not sit in the quiet.

**Ms. Bright:** You know, Zara said something really interesting that I would like some comments on. She said "Is that all?" and then what did you say?



- Zara:** That we could to something different.
- Ms. Bright:** So you are disappointed in just a moment of silence, just sitting here being quiet?
- Nicole:** That wasn't even 2 seconds!
- Ms. Bright:** You don't think that was long enough?
- Xavier:** Could we have three minutes?
- Children:** Yes! No!
- Child:** I want to pray.
- Ms. Bright:** You want to pray?
- Child:** Yes, if everybody else wants to.
- Child:** Me, too!
- Vince:** Is that allowed in school?
- Ms. Bright:** Well, I think anything children want to do themselves is allowed. If I were to say "Now it's time." and make you do it, that would not be the thing to do, that would not be legal. But in a classroom like this if that's what you are thinking that you would like to do then you could do it. Usually a moment of silence is so that if you want to pray, that is the time for you to make your prayer.
- Nicole:** I did it!
- Child:** Me too!
- Ms. Bright:** You did? OK and that is usually the reason we have a moment of silence, so you may do things in your own way.

The children were so disappointed by the lack of ceremony and thoughtfulness of this moment and they were searching for meaning in this discussion for a special moment. They did not pursue a plan to make the moment of silence different, they knew the moment had passed. I did not ask them, but I can speculate, that if they had planned the "moment of silence" it would have been surrounded with their writings, poems, songs and art work.

A research note: during this moment of silence is the only time during the study that my voice activated recorder, turned itself off. It was very silent.

Another meaningful and symbolic statement in this discussion evolved when several children wanted to pray during the moment of silence and then a child asked the question, "Is that allowed in school?". The complex issue of separation of church and state had risen from the desire to honor and commemorate people in the midst of this tragedy. Ms. Bright's response was truthful, accepting and revealed the child's right to choose. The statement "Well, I think anything children want to do themselves is allowed. If I were to say 'Now it's time.' and make you do it, that would not be the thing to do, that would not be legal." appeared to be symbolic in a larger context also. This is not only a response to the question of prayer in the classroom, but her personal philosophy of teaching, also. If she were told she had to do worksheets in her room, or had to have all the children do math at one time or reading at the same time "that would not be the thing to do". For her personal belief about what is right and good for children, it would not be legal. Ms. Bright believes children should be allowed to pursue their interests; build upon ideas; question each other; and research facts through many facets of the curriculum. This second grade classroom essentially "took care of themselves"; they conducted business in the morning, planned activities for the day; helped each other; and made, enforced and modified the rules of the classroom. It is through her philosophy and her relationship with the children that their autonomy gets exercised vigorously in this classroom.

### Are You the One That Carried the Baby?

Wednesday, May 3, 1995

Several pictures of the tragic bombing were published in newspapers and magazines around the world. One picture was of a police officer surrendering an infant to a firefighter. The police officer in the picture was Sergeant John Avera of the Oklahoma

City Police department. Ms. Bright met Sgt. Avera at a church she attends. She told Sgt. Avera about her class and the many things they were doing to help support the community and heal from the bombing. Sgt. Avera said he would like to meet this class and scheduled a visit for Wednesday, May 3rd. The morning heart circle discussion began this way:

**Ms. Bright:** How many of you saw this picture in the paper of the disaster and the people helping? (She held up the front page of the city newspaper and the children raised their hands and/or exclaimed "I did") This police officer, here, is going to visit our class today. (Children gasp) This man's name is Sergeant John Avera.

**Child:** Who is he carrying?

**Ms. Bright:** Her name was Bailey Almon and she died.

**Children:** Oh-h-h-h.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, these stories are starting to get very personal. I met this man on Sunday at my church. His wife also works for the police department. I told him about all the poems, songs, and newsletters you have written and he wanted to meet you. You are free to ask questions. Think about how much he has helped. He is very sad because there were some people he could not help. How can we help him?

**Child:** We can make cards.

**Child:** My dad knows him.

**Ms. Bright:** Cards are one suggestion. Do you have any others?

**Child:** Show him our newsletter.

**Child:** Write about him in our newsletter.

**Child:** He's here!

**Ms. Bright:** Welcome to our class Sgt. Avera, come sit down. Let's get together around Sgt. Avera and introduce ourselves.

(Children introduce themselves.)

**Child:** Why do you have that thing over your badge?

**Sgt. Avera:** A lady at the bombing site was handing out ribbons and she pinned this one on me and I have not taken it off.

**Child:** Are you the one that carried the baby?

**Sgt. Avera:** Yes, I am, but many people were helping with the rescue, the photographer just happened to take my picture and the firefighter's picture. There were many people that were helping that did not get their pictures in the paper.

**Child:** Did you go inside the building?

**Sgt. Avera:** There was really not an inside to go into. It was just a pile of rubble. All the people that were there first just went to where they thought they might find someone to help. The building is too dangerous to go into, and now the rescue squads are trying to make the building safer and retrieve people.

**Child:** Have you been there everyday?

**Sgt. Avera:** I have been there, but the rescue workers know how to safely work in the building.

**Child:** Did things collapse on police officers?

**Sgt. Avera:** Yes. Debris was still falling, but we were trying to help the people get out of there. Now the rescuers wear hard hats to protect their heads.

**Child:** Did you find all the people?

**Sgt. Avera:** No, there are still some people missing.

**Child:** I saw the building on TV and it looks terrible.

**Sgt. Avera:** Yes, but there are some important things there. There are cards and letters posted on the building; rescuers eat at a site near the building; counselors are there to talk to rescuers; and they can get clothes that have been provided from donations. It looks like a little city around the bombed building. Oklahoma City is taking care of the volunteers real, real, well.

**Vince:** Is there anything they need?

**Sgt. Avera:** Everything they need is provided by the community minutes after they ask for it. It's like a team. Everyone can't be the pitcher, some are on the bases, and some are in the outfield, some are on the bench, and others are in the reserves. You played a very important role with your letters and posters and things you sent to the rescuers.

**Ms. Bright:** What would you like to do now ?

**Child:** Write on the computer.

**Child:** Draw.

**Child:** Do something to thank him.

**Ms. Bright:** I think you all have ideas of what you want to do. Sgt. Avera will stay here and sign cards for us.

The children got right to work. Sgt. Avera sat at a table and signed cards and talked to the children. They brought him their pictures and creations. The children remembered that two classmates were absent and asked him to sign two extra cards so they could give them to their friends when they return. Sgt. Avera left with an armful of treasures from children who were thoughtfully motivated by what they are doing, felt a strong sense of value in the community and they know they can make a difference. Below are several thank you letters created on the computer given to Sgt. Avera (See figure 13 & 14):

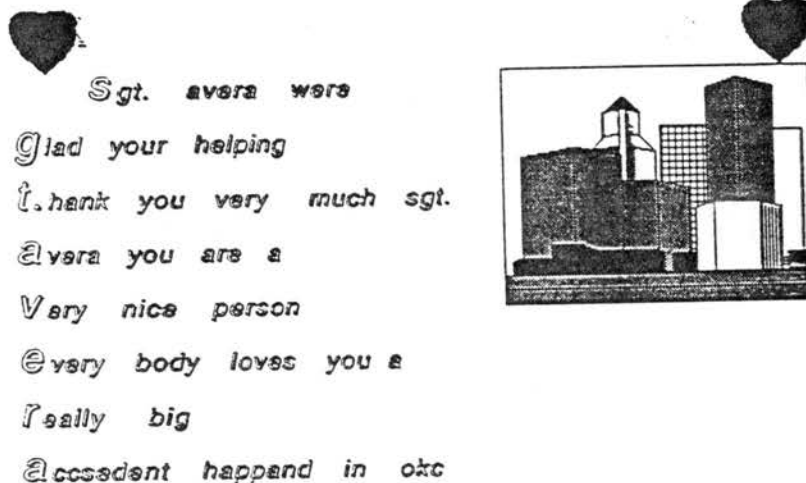
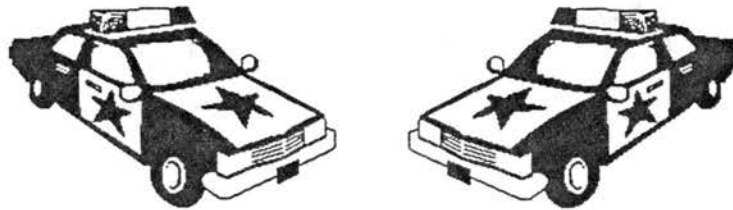
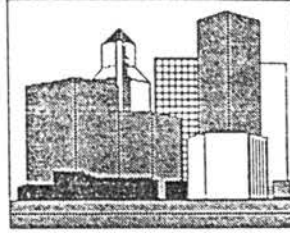


Figure 13 - Sgt. Avera poem

*dear sgt. avera*

thank you for helping the  
peple that was in the  
bomb! how many buildings  
were broken!\_\_\_\_\_.



dear Sgt.Avera,

Thank you for all that  
you have done for  
Oklahoma city and the  
world. Thanks.

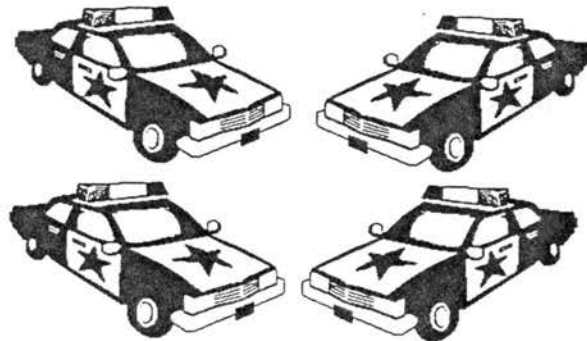


Figure 14 - Dear Sgt. Avera

## I Think the Bomb Did Have a Reason

Friday, May 5, 1995

In the last few weeks the incidents of crime had decreased in the Oklahoma City area. There were no public reports of looting around the bomb site. Oklahoma City was experiencing kindness from its community and around the world. If rescue workers or volunteers needed something it was announced on television or radio and within hours they had an overabundance of the item. Special tools were needed in the rescue to cut rebar and other heavy materials, and there were reports of people driving to the bomb site and giving the rescue workers their personal tools or equipment (Hanson, 1995). Merchants could go into area stores and purchase goods for the volunteers, victims, or rescue workers and the stores would deliver the merchandise to the site for the customer, often at a reduced price. There were many, many stories of giving and kindness during these days.

The day before this, Thursday, the class had a visitor who came to observe the children and the curriculum in a constructivist classroom. Ms. Bright felt the day was very hectic and messier than usual and she had a meeting after school and did not get to talk with the visitor. She was not sure the visitor saw what she expected to see or even understood what she did see! After her meeting she came back to the room and found a thank you note with a piece of candy on her chair. She was surprised at the unexpected gift. The next morning (Friday) there was an article in the paper about random acts of kindness and Ms. Bright recalled the note and the piece of candy and the many, many acts of kindness that surrounded the "random act of violence" that had made its presence in Oklahoma City. When the morning discussion began Ms. Bright told the children about the candy, read the note to the children, then read "The Elves and the Shoemaker". The conversation went as follows:

**Ms. Bright:** What made this story so special?

**Child:** The shoemaker didn't know who was doing it.

**Ms. Bright:** What would that feel like? Would you think you had done it and forgotten it?

**Child:** It would feel like a surprise.

**Child:** Like magic!

**Ms. Bright:** The reason I asked you was because this fits in with what has been happening here the last few weeks. See if you think it does. (She reads the newspaper article on random acts of kindness.)

**Ms. Bright:** Have you ever heard of random acts of violence?

**Children:** No.

**Child:** What does random mean?

**Forrest:** Like attacking someone with no reason.

**Ms. Bright:** I'm going to pick someone from this class at random. (Closes her eyes and circles her arm around.)

**Child:** Circles.

**Child:** Accidentally picking someone.

**Ms. Bright:** Close, picking someone and giving not thought to it. Have you heard of any random acts of violence lately?

**Children:** The bombing!

**Ivy:** Tornadoes are random.

**Vince:** I think the bomb did have a reason. That guy thinks he had a reason.

**Ms. Bright:** He thinks he had a reason.

**Forrest:** If you want to find out about bombs, I can do that, I have a book.

**Ms. Bright:** I know we have talked about the force of the blast and why it travelled; the sound travelled so far and that we haven't had time to research. Your book would be good for that.

**Grant:** I have an encyclopedia that explains bombs and how to make them but it doesn't tell you in the way that you can make bombs.



- Ms. Bright:** So it wouldn't be a recipe book for bombs? Would a recipe book for bombs be a good thing?
- Children:** No, No
- Forrest:** Stupid people set bombs. Sometimes people get older but not smarter.
- Ms. Bright:** Really. Random acts of violence. Vince said that maybe the bomb wasn't random and they did intend to blow it up there. That is a possibility and it is becoming clearer that might be true.
- Whitney:** It's not about violence, but it's about random. My mother called a plumber at random out of the phone book, one time.
- Ms. Bright:** She called a plumber randomly! Great! Now listen to this phrase, "Senseless act of violence. What would be an example of this?"
- Child:** Destruction.
- Child:** Attacks.
- Child:** Threatening someone.
- Child:** Stalking someone, where you follow a person and they don't know it.
- Ms. Bright:** OH! I'm going to erase these words! I don't even like them.

Ms. Bright then proceeded to introduce another saying "Practice Random Kindness and Senseless Acts of Beauty". She spoke of the way one person will be kind to another, then that person will be kind to another, and then soon many people are being kind to one another. The children commented like the domino effect or a chain reaction! One child said "Kindness can spread even more than violence" and Vince said "Love is stronger than hate". She then suggested that the children break into groups and brainstorm a list of "Acts of Kindness" that nobody would find out about and that would make the world a better place. Some children put their ideas on the computer. (See figure 15).

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS III

DROPING A DOLLOR AND  
SOMBODY BEHIND YOU PICKS  
IT UP AND SAYS "YOU DROPE  
A DOLLOR". SHE SIAD "KEEP  
IT".

IF MY SISTER DROPS  
SOMTHING I CULDE PICK IT  
UP. AND PUT IT IN HER ROOM  
THAT IS IF SHED LET ME .

5/8/95

A HAIKU !!!  
RANDOM MEANS DONT KNOW  
ITS GOING TO HAPPEN THEN  
THE BOMB ICSPLOUDID

WELL MS. 2'ed GRADE  
CLASS IS TAIKING ABOUT  
RANDOM ACTS  
OF KINDNESS AND  
SENSELESS ACTS  
OF BEAUTY .

WELL I'LL SEE YOU ON THE  
NEXT PAGE.  
OK.

BUY  
GOTU  
GO!!!!!!

Runing and rushing to help  
sombody.

Always trey to help sombody.

Never quite helping.

D

On our chalk bord we wrote  
random acts of kindness.

Marvilis work you do.

" PRACTCE  
RANDOM  
KINDNESS  
AND  
SENSELESS ACTS  
OF  
BEAUTY!!!!!!"

WE ARE HAVING FUN WITH  
RANDOM KINDNESS AND  
SENSELESS ACTS OF  
BEAUTY !!!!!!!

HERES AN "EGGSAMPUL" OF  
SENSELESS ACTS OF  
BEAUTY. GIVE A  
ROSE TO SOMBODY.



Figure 15 - Random Acts of Kindness

This was such an abstract concept that was accomplished by materialistic deeds. These seven and eight-year-old children, by age, are moving from preoperational to concrete operational thought, according to Piaget. In this discussion the children could not get beyond the concrete idea of random and much of the time associated the concept with the concept of purposefulness or cause. Ms. Bright visually described and kinesthetically demonstrated the term "random" and they began trying to understand the concept based on their own lived experience such as tornadoes and hearing a discussion about calling a plumber from a phone book. They now had a phrase for what they had been doing for so long. Their own experience and construction of knowledge, gave them their own concept of "random acts of kindness".

### Dynamite Can Go In and Out

Wednesday, May 17, 1995

The rescue efforts unfortunately were over by now. There were still two people unaccounted for and that number rose to three when an out of state relative could not reach her brother in Oklahoma City. She discovered he was frequent visitor at the Federal Building. The rescuers knew where the three bodies were located, but could not reach the site because of the ton of debris above them. It was determined by the General Services Administrators, who own the A.P. Murrah Federal building to destroy it, because it was beyond repair. There had been a tremendous amount of coverage and diagrams about the destruction of the building by implosion and how it would be done. The beginning discussion in the heart circle this morning was mainly about Book Character Day and the characters the children were dressed up to represent. The discussion took a serious turn when Zara stated this:

**Zara:** We went to the bomb site. They lost everything. The playground of the 'Y' is destroyed and there is glass everywhere.

**Ms. Bright:** It did get torn up.

**Wesley:** I know how they are going to demolish the Federal Building. It's going to go like this, then like this. (Wesley is making inward motions with his arms.)

**Forrest:** It's called implosion.

**Grant:** They are going to put ropes leaning in the middle. Then when the dynamite goes off it will collapse.

**Forrest:** The difference in implode and explode is implode is where it caves in and explode it blows up, like what happened to the Federal Building when it was the bomb.

(Many children begin moving their hands inward and outward.)

**Zara:** Dynamite goes in and out.

**Forrest:** But they are going to make it go in because experts can make dynamite to implode.

**Ms. Bright:** It sounds like a science problem to me. Vince?

**Vince:** They are going to fill the building with 200 pounds of dynamite. That's what I heard on the news. They put it on the edges so it will cave it in.

(A child is drawing implode and explode diagrams on the chalkboard.)

**Wesley:** I know why they are doing this, because it's not safe anymore.

**Forrest:** It's not safe and they can't repair it.

**Grant:** There is no possible way to repair it.

**Forrest:** Unless it was the 24th century.

**Grant:** Well yeah, but Forrest, we're not talking Star Trek here.

**Forrest:** (laughing) I know!

**Emily:** There are still two people in the building.

**Ivy:** Why do they want to push everything inward? All that stuff will fall on top of the people still inside.

**Grant:** They are already dead.

**Ms. Bright:** How do we know that?

**Vaughn:** There are two people in there all sealed up.

**Zane:** They could be anywhere.

**Grant:** 'Cause if it's too dangerous for the rescue workers, they are dead.

**Xavier:** They have to be, it's been a month.

**Forrest:** It's been over a month.

**Wesley:** They haven't had any food and I don't know how long you can go without food.

**Vince:** You can't go without water for 4 weeks.

**Vaughn:** There may be broken pipes, what about that?

**Vince:** I've never heard anyone going without food for a month.

**Grant:** The longest I've heard is 2 weeks.

**Ms. Bright:** Does anybody have any additional information about this question?

**Forrest:** Remember when they said on the news that there was a total dead of 168? I found out it isn't because they found some body parts that they did not know belonged to others and they finally identified the person and now the actual total is 167.

The term implode was concrete, understandable and visual. They knew first hand what explode was and the consequences of an explosion. The implosion was premeditated, publicly. The company hired to take down the building held news conferences to show how the demolition was going to take place, the sound the explosion would create, and how the building would fall. There were computerized graphics. In the midst of all this physics was the hope and sanctity of life the children felt. They had not talked about the missing people in quite sometime, and I was so surprised to learn through this discussion that some believed that the three people missing for about a month, could still be alive. The children that believed this were comfortable enough to say so and the

others considered it, then began discussing the sustenance of life, food and water. In the end there was no unanimous conclusion as to whether the missing victims were alive, but the hope and respect for life emanates from these children.

### What is a Memorial?

Monday, May 22, 1995

The discussion of what to do with the area on which the Federal Building once stood began, even before the building was demolished. There was talk of a park and a memorial. Money and donations were coming into Oklahoma City from groups and individuals. Some volunteer organizations said that they had gotten too much and the excess would be used for other needs around the country. Several types of funds were established such as: hospitalization; college; funeral; daycare building; and funds for a memorial. For the Randolph Elementary school fundraiser, Ms. Bright's room was going to create a book basket to auction. The homeroom mother donated paper mache baskets to the class. The children had brainstormed how to use them and invented the idea of planting seeds and giving them to the families of the victims of the bombing. They then took this a step further, to auction the spring baskets and raise money. It was just one more way they created to help the people. They said they wanted the money to go to the bombing victims, the people who were hurting. "Tell everybody in the P.T.A.". They very devotedly painted the baskets and planted rye grass. They attached a note on the handle of the Heartland baskets that read, "Water daily with hope and love". On this day Ms. Bright read a thank you note from the PTA for the things the class brought to the school auction. The note also stated that the Hope for the Heartland Baskets raised \$592.00!

**Ms. Bright:** What shall we do with the money that we raised?

**Child:** Give it to the people that were hurt in the bombing.

**Ms. Bright:** Does anybody know anyone that needs help from the bombing? What do you think would be a good idea to do with the money that you raised?

**Child:** Donate it to Children's Hospital.

**Nicole:** They have so much money. They don't need anymore. They said on the news that they had enough. They have too much. We need to stop giving money to them.

**Ms. Bright:** You really ear-marked that money for the bombing didn't you? What do we need to do? Figure it out.

**Ivy:** If they don't need the money for the bombing we could give it for the windows for the building. Help them get stuff fixed down there.

**Child:** We could buy windows.

**Ms. Bright:** Do you know what is going to happen to the building now?

**Child:** Some kind of memorial.

**Nicole:** We could give them money to buy some equipment for the memorial!

**Forrest:** That's what I was going to say, give them the money to help them make the memorial.

**Zara:** They are going to make some kind of park. There is a big hole where the bomb was and they are going to have to fill it up. If we give it to the "Y" they could spend it somewhere else because they are going to dynamite the "Y".

**Ms. Bright:** How long do you think we will have this memorial?

**Child:** Forever.

**Whitney:** What is a memorial?

**Child:** It's like a park that we are going to remember everybody.

**Forrest:** A memorial is something that is built to remind everybody like something important in the past like here in town. Do you remember where the camera shop is? That used to be Oklahoma's first school and it has a plaque that is like a small memorial. It reminds people of certain things, that are important things in the past.

**Child:** There is a memorial in Washington D.C. A big shiny wall for the Vietnam war.

**Ms. Bright:** Is that what it is going to look like?

**Forrest:** The amazing thing about the Vietnam memorial is that all the people's names that died in that war are on it. Every single person.

**Ms. Bright:** Do you think that is a good idea?

**Children:** YES!

**Forrest:** It even has the year they died.

**Ms. Bright:** It's hard to believe they could do that isn't it? It's an awfully big job. Do you have any wishes about what you wish the memorial would look like? I don't think it's planned yet and maybe if you have an idea, who could we write?

**Child:** Tell the Governor. Call him up and tell him we have some ideas for the memorial.

**Ms. Bright:** Would you like to talk to the Governor?

**Children:** Yes!

**Whitney:** I went to Oklahoma City. We went to where the bomb had been and people were hanging flowers, balloons, cards and letters on this big fence.

**Ms. Bright:** How did it make you feel when you saw that?

**Child:** Sad that all these people died.

**Ms. Bright:** Could you tell how others felt?

**Forrest:** Not by looking at their faces, because I saw people that had no expression on their face. They weren't sad, they just had a straight face, their mouths were straight.

**Noelle:** We could write to the governor. We could make a poem for him and some of the letters we have written in the past. We could make a story.

**Ms. Bright:** Remembering through writing Å like we've done in the past. Interesting thought. I almost see things in my mind. What do you see? When you are grown up and you are moms and dads with children would it be something you would want to take your children to?

**Children:** Yes!



**Ms. Bright:** You wanted to help the people. That's what was in your hearts when you made the baskets for the school auction. Now, what we have to decide is what to do with the money, as a community. You were talking the other day about dividing the money up. Is that really a choice?

**Children:** No -o-o!

**Ms. Bright:** Why doesn't anybody like that idea?

**Child:** Because it is selfish to raise money for yourself.

**Ms. Bright:** Why did people spend so much money on our baskets?

**Child:** For us.

**Child:** To help the people.

**Child:** For the Heartland.

The money raised by the auction of the heartland baskets, was important to the children because it symbolized their individual efforts to do something for the bombing victims and the support from their families who bid on their baskets. The children had been talking about a memorial and then one child asked what a memorial was and the children explained it to her by giving concrete examples taken from their own life experiences with memorials and what they had interpreted.

There was debate about whether the memorial would be a park or a monument, but this same debate was taking place with the citizens of Oklahoma City. The children acknowledged most of their information they had "heard". They did propose some ideas and most of the ideas, at this point, were concrete, visual ideas, like replace broken windows. The boarded up windows and the glistening broken glass on the ground was a very disturbing and an unforgettable site, to the majority of the children who had viewed the destruction first hand with their families.

When the idea was suggested that the class could help plan the memorial the children thought of sending their ideas to the top, the governor! (See figure 16)

Dear governor

We rasde 594 doler. And ms. class  
Wut to give the money to you. For  
you to git some okwit mot for the  
memorial park it was very sad and we  
Wut to help.

Figure 16 - Dear Governor

There had been some discussion earlier by a few children, that the relief efforts had enough money and they could divide the money up among themselves. In this small group discussion, one girl said to the others "Well, if we do that, I'm going to give mine to the children in the bombing." The others thought about it and some agreed to do that also, then the conversation ended. Ms. Bright heard this conversation and reminded the class of why they made the heartland baskets and that it would be their decision about where to send the money, as a community.

#### It Will Never Be Over

Tuesday, May 23, 1995

The implosion took place at 7:00 a.m. this Tuesday morning. There was live coverage on the three major networks and some state radio stations. It seemed that the tragedy was one step closer to closure, but I found that idea to be different for this class. There were still many lingering emotions, fears and beliefs.

**Ms. Bright:** Did anyone see the implosion this morning?

**Grant:** When they blew up the Murrah building there were 250 pounds of dynamite. There were supposed to be three alarms, but there were only two. One guy had a danger-cam right in front of the building and it wiped out danger-cam

**Zane:** What's danger-cam?

**Grant:** All the other cameras were on top of the buildings and far away and danger-cam was mounted in front of the building on the ground. When the building imploded all the debris covered up danger-cam. They couldn't even see it.

**Forrest:** The reason they are going to implode the building, then look for bodies is because it is easier that way.

**Zara:** And it's safer.

**Forrest:** Yes, a lot safer.

**Emily:** I know the person who chose the day that they would dynamite it.

**Ms. Bright:** Who is that?

**Emily:** Mr. Londigan. It's one of my friends, Cole Londigan. It's his dad.

**Ms. Bright:** Really!

**Vince:** Cole Londigan, he is on my baseball team. Is he an adult?

**Emily:** No. His dad is.

**Vince:** That's him, he is on my team.

**Ms. Bright:** It's a small world.

**Zara:** After they dynamite it down, they are going to look for one of my Mom's friends. She is still in there and they haven't found her yet. She has long hair down to here that is blond and she is tall. I forgot her name.

**Forrest:** I was watching the news this morning and I found out there are actually three people left in the building.

**Vince:** They know there are two people, but they think there are three.

**Zara:** After it is down they are going to spread it all out and look for the two people, the bodies.

**Ms. Bright:** What are your impressions of the site before it was bombed?

**Oliver:** I was surprised how much damage a bomb could do.

**Wesley:** I saw the big crater that the bomb made and the church. The big bell got caved in.

**Child:** I thought it looked bad.

**Zane:** When I went down there Sunday, you could see all the way through it.

**Zara:** I saw that big hole that Zane was talking about. A car was parked there and when it exploded it made that hole. I saw the church too, the stained glass window was broken.

**Lori:** How are you feeling about the bombing? Is it over?

**Nicole:** It's not over.

**Child:** I still feel bad. My friend's aunt is still missing and they don't know where she is.

**Lori:** Do you feel safe?

**Children:** Yes. No

**Ms. Bright:** Why don't you feel safe Yori?

**Yori:** I don't know. There was more than one person who did the bombing and they haven't caught the others. The others might try and rob the jail and get him out.

**Ms. Bright:** You are worried about that? I think a few people are worried about that.

**Nicole:** I'm worried because there are still people missing that they think might have done it and they could set off a bomb right by us. Before it even happened everyone knew there were bombs. But, when it happened I got really scared and now that people think it's done, it's really not. Since they knocked over the building, now they could do another bomb, and another bomb, and keep on going.

**Lori:** When will it be over for you?

**Nicole:** Never.

**Child:** Because there are always people out there that might do it.

**Zane:** My parents used to work in that building.

- Xavier:** Well, all I can say is it is a good thing they quit!
- Ms. Bright:** Did that scare you, Zane?
- Zane:** Yes.
- Ms. Bright:** Does anyone have any feelings you want to share?
- Child:** I'm so glad my Mom wasn't down there. She goes a lot and her secretary goes to deposit checks and do paperwork.
- Ginny:** On the day it happened, I came home early and said "Why is everyone leaving?" and I heard my Dad talking to my Mom and she said there was a bomb threat and I was really scared. Mom came and got me early because of the scare at the church.
- Ms. Bright:** It was a bomb threat across the street.
- Ivy:** My Dad flew over it. He said that the top of the building was crashed. He got some pictures and then he said it looked so scary to have to climb like the rescue workers were doing.
- Yori:** There was a bomb threat where my Mom works in the lab. A man wearing a black jacket went running through yelling "Everybody get out" because that is where all the gas tanks are and he said everything was going to blow up.
- Ms. Bright:** That sounds really scary.

This national disaster was up close and personal. It had been experienced by all and therefore it was a real possibility that it could happen again, anytime, anywhere. A bombing was something that was associated with a war, far away. Now it was a possibility, here. There was also a lack of security and a chance that it could happen again, because the perpetrators had not been caught or could escape.

Many children in this discussion revealed for the first time stories of people they knew who had died or were missing. All the families of the children in Ms. Bright's class were alive and safe and these children spoke of being scared and fearful of the unknown. I could not help but wonder how schools and families who had a close member killed were

dealing with the great loss. I hope they were able to discuss their confused feelings with people or a group that shares and cares.(See figure 17 & 18)

## DAILY NEWS

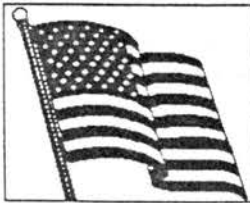
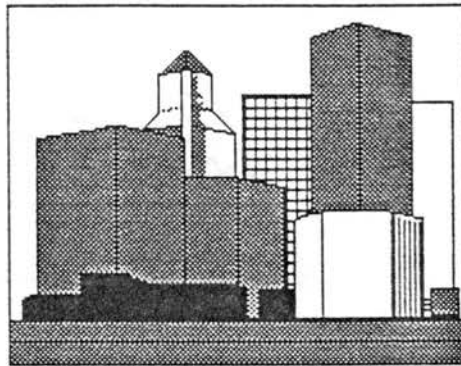
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# IT IS DONE

On Tuesday May 23, 1995 the A.P. Murry federal building was imploded at 7:00 clock. The people have decided to have a memorial for the people who died in the blast. Governor Keating has decided that the people of Oklahoma decide what the memorial will be.

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## SCHOOL



Today at Randolph elementary school, read around the clock is going on. Ms. Bright's class is helping decide on what the memorial should be.

Figure 17 - It is done

*Daily News*

A.P. MURRAH  
FEDERAL  
BUILDING  
IMPLODED AT  
7:01 A.M. MAY  
23 1995

Figure 18 - Implosion

Because of Memories

Tuesday, May 23, 1995

This day of the implosion of the A.P. Murrah building, the conversation again focused on what was to become of the land where the building was. The people of Oklahoma City spoke out for a memorial in honor of the victims, the injured and all the people that came together to heal the heartland. The children in Ms. Bright's room had raised \$594.62 to donate. They were trying to decide what to do with the money and they created many ideas.

**Ms. Bright:** I have some 11 X 17 paper because yesterday you discussed what to do with your money. One of the things that you discussed was the memorial. What is it going to be like? Are they going to plant grass? That is what our Hope for the Heartland Baskets symbolized. We planted grass in them for what reasons?

**Child:** Hope for a better future

**Child:** A new beginning

**Nicole:** Can I sing the song I wrote for the bombing?

**Ms. Bright:** Yes. Stand and deliver, Nicole! (See figure 19)

evry boty will never forgit what hapin we may have some sadnys in our hart we will never forgit but elest thay are going to yos the stuff in our hart that was brokin in to in our hart that was brokin we will never forgit we will owas remiber lost of peple help we wert to gether thats the thank about oklanoma we owas wert to gether it was a terble trajtey.

to  
the people  
that was in the  
BOMB  
and that help.

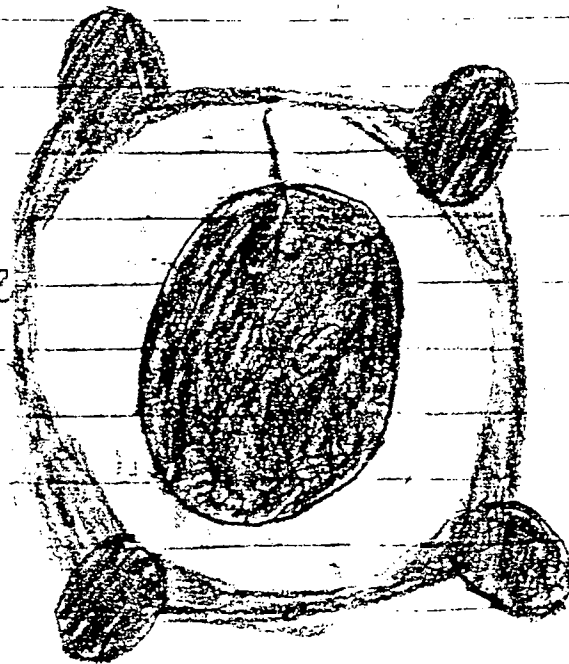


Figure 19 - We'll never forget



**Ms. Bright:** That is beautiful. Thank you.

**Ivy:** Yesterday on the computer I typed a thing to parents to say if they have any ideas they can write it down on a piece of paper and send it to school with their kids.

**Ms. Bright:** I don't think I saw that, but I would like to see it.

**Ms. Bright:** What do you want to do for a memorial?

**Nicole:** We could write the governor, tell him about the money, and that we want to give it to the people.

**Ms. Bright:** You want to write the Governor. OK, what would you say to the Governor?

**Nicole:** Ask him questions and tell him about the money we raised.

**Xavier:** I would ask him if we could help with the park or something.

**Ms. Bright:** Visualize for a minute. We talked about the types of memorials yesterday that have statues and names of all the people so we can remember and never let it happen again. Can I be a class member and give an idea?

**Children:** YES!

**Ms. Bright:** I usually don't give ideas, but I visualized a big stained glass window with your poetry and writings around it and the ways you helped the heartland. What would be the best medium to make stained glass on our paper?

**Vince:** I know how to make stained glass.

**Noelle:** It is hard to buy.

**Emily:** Tissue paper looks like stained glass.

**Child:** Tissue paper and liquid starch.

**Ms. Bright:** Tissue paper! Yes!

**Vince:** I have some stained glass I could bring.

**Yori:** My friend is Tulsa makes stained glass.

**Child:** We have some stained glass in our classroom.

**Ms. Bright:** We do? Where? Yes, that is pretend stained glass. It is painted, I forgot we had that.

**Child:** . . .because it is made of plastic.

**Yori:** Stained glass is colored glass.

**Forrest:** When the sun shines through, it is more colorful.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, stained glass is very beautiful.

**Yale:** They are going to build a park. It said so on the news.

**Forrest:** I disagree with him. I've been watching the news and I haven't heard anything about a park.

**Ms. Bright:** Really? Have any of you heard anything different?

**Noelle:** I heard it on the news about a park.

**Ms. Bright:** You heard it too?

**Forrest:** What channel did you watch? I watched channel seven.

**Yori:** I don't know.

**Wyatt:** I heard that they might rebuild the building, again.

**Child:** They said people would always look at it and be sad.

**Forrest:** I know why they didn't build it back. It has to do with my Mom and Frances, her mother. They called her "Ohma" that is German for Grandmother. They lived in Oklahoma City and there was this restaurant. My Mom and Grandmother were at a restaurant and Grandmother had a stroke and she is dead and my mom doesn't want to go back there because it brings back bad memories. That's the reason they are not building the building again.

**Ms. Bright:** Because of memories.

**Vince:** I heard that they were going to build a memorial, I didn't hear anything about a park.

**Zara:** We could give the money for a memorial park. They may need money to buy grass to fill up the hole where the building was.

**Whitney:** Five hundred and ninety-four dollars is not enough for a memorial.

**Zara:** But it would be enough for half.

**Ms. Bright:** Yes, it would help.

**Wyatt:** I heard that they were going to ask the people what they wanted.

**Ms. Bright:** How perfect! Some of you talked to your families about ideas for the memorial last night. This morning Zara's mom called to tell me she knows Mrs. Keating's secretary, and she could talk to her about visiting our class. Do you want Governor Keating's wife to come to our class?

**Children:** Yes!

**Ms. Bright:** I will talk to Mrs. McCauley today.

The children began by sharing their creations and work. Nicole proudly shared her song and Ivy shared the list of ideas that she and Grant had created the day before. The writings the children composed are very much a part of them. Sometimes they wrote or created drawings then would go put the pieces of work in their cubbies, or just leave them in the location they were created. It is like a diary, they write because the moment moved them, not to get an "A" or a "Good Job" sticker or a response from Ms. Bright. Some of the children's writings, Ms. Bright never sees because the children keep it private. She does invite them to share their work and they have the choice to decline with no consequence or begging. She will assist them in editing their writings, if they ask, but usually the children reread their own writing and edit or self-edit with another child and some are just strongly confident and completely pleased with what they have composed.

The children were still discussing whether the land where the Federal building was would be used as a park or a memorial. I thought on this day that someone would comment that no matter which it is, a park or memorial, they are both to honor the bombing victims. Some drew parks, some drew their idea of a memorial and some drew a memorial with a park around it, on the 11 X 17 paper.

In this conversation, it was the first time I had ever heard Ms. Bright give an idea. She did it with forethought and with the permission of the children. I could see previous instances of her ability to subtly guide the children to discovery or certain areas of

knowledge through her questioning or commenting to the children, but never did she offer ideas or give answers. This idea was open-ended and a visualization that the children could build upon. Some children drew stained glass for their idea of the memorial and some did not. The power of suggestion, is just that, suggestion. This autonomous class invented their own idea of a memorial, with no fear of reprisal or failure. They trusted they did not have to conform. Each one created from his/her heart, authentically.

The idea to give the money the class raised to the Governor evolved from idea to a possibility. A mother of one of the children knew the secretary of the First Lady of the State of Oklahoma and arranged a visit from Mrs. Keating on the next to the last day of school! This was a great surprise to the children. I thought it was evident in this discussion that the children did talk to their parents about things that happened at school. Through the children's belief in possibilities, their creations, thoughtfulness, and involvement in a national disaster, a visit from the Governor's wife was possible.

### Good Has Triumphed Over Evil

Wednesday, May 24, 1995

It happened! Arrangements were made for Mrs. Cathy Keating to visit this unique and dedicated classroom. Zara's mother sent cups, napkins with teacups on them, pastries and Ms. Bright had English tea, for refreshment to serve Mrs. Keating. The children were eager and excited about this special visit. After the children arrived, the morning discussion went as follows:

**Ms. Bright:** Mrs. Keating will be here in 45 minutes. How do you want the morning to go?

**Child:** Lets make a sign to welcome her.

**Child:** I want to make an American flag.

**Child:** I want to make an Oklahoma flag.

**Child:** I'm going to make a flag for the Heartland.

**Ms. Bright:** A Heartland flag. There is something else that needs to happen. How can we visualize the money? Do you want Mrs. Keating to take the money with her? Let's vote.

(Children vote to give Mrs. Keating the money today.)

**Ms. Bright:** How could we do that?

**Child:** We could give her a check.

**Ms. Bright:** The P.T.A. has the checks, we will have to figure out a pretend way to give her the money.

**Child:** A credit card!

**Ms. Bright:** Who has a credit card with \$672.00 left on it?

**Whitney:** It is \$692.00.

**Ms. Bright:** Are you sure? Whitney go call your Mom and get the exact amount since we seem to be confused.

**Nicole:** We could give her a basket with a card tied to it that says how much we are going to give her

**Ms. Bright:** That is an idea. What else?

**Noelle:** We could make a card that would be from the whole class and everybody could sign it and it could say "From Bright's Stars".

**Ms. Bright:** Who wants to make the card?

**Children:** I do! I do!

**Wyatt:** When we go to lunch there will be people who say "You got to see the Governor's wife." They will be mad they didn't get to see her.

**Ms. Bright:** Do you think that is how they will feel?

**Nicole:** We're the ones that raised the money.

**Ms. Bright:** That is a thought. What do you think about what Wyatt said? Why did we raise this money?

**Child:** For the bombing victims.

**Ms. Bright:** That is what we need to keep at the heart of this. I don't think we need to start screaming "Oh, we saw the First Lady today!". People do this for publicity, but we are not. We are going to welcome her as the community we are.

**Nicole:** I want to get ready for her because we only have 35 minutes and this is special.

**Ms. Bright:** OK, let's get started.

The class went straight to work on the ideas they had suggested. A group worked together to make a big check; another group worked on an American flag; another group made an Oklahoma flag; and another group made a Heartland flag; several children worked on the computer; and other children worked individually on cards and letters. When Mrs. Keating arrived the class was calm, they kept busy with their work because they wanted to present it to her. Mrs. Keating strolled around to all the tables and visited with all the children. They all spoke to her with poise and confidence. Twenty minutes later the class gathered in the heart circle to talk with Mrs. Keating and present her with their gifts. Although this may have seemed planned, it was not. All questions and ideas for gifts were spontaneous and prepared by the children that day. Noelle presented Mrs. Keating with a journal of all their writings about the bombing.

**Ms. Bright:** This class began writing the day of the bombing and you can tell by the packet that their hearts needed to speak.

**Mrs. Keating:** You have put your heart to work by writing and making these baskets to raise money for the victims of the bombing. This will help change people's lives. It will make a difference. My life has changed too, because of the goodness of the things you have done. One of the tragedies was that so many of the children were injured or died and for adults it is hard to understand, but for children it is even more difficult to understand. By your deeds to help the families, it will make a difference, more than any adult could give them because this is what you have raised, as children, to help them get over their loss and to help them go forward in their lives

because they will never, ever have a day that they don't remember their child that they lost. I am meeting with some families at noon. It is called Project Heartland and I am going to take your check and basket and they will be so thankful for your efforts. We are so appreciative.

**Whitney:** Grant and I were on the computer and made a list of suggestions about what to do with the money. (She read the suggestions. See figure 20).

**Mrs. Keating:** These are beautiful suggestions. I will make sure they get to the right people.

**Forrest:** There is this family in my neighborhood. We took them some food because their mother died in the bombing, and now they are all alone with their Dad.

**Mrs. Keating:** Yes, that is terrible to lose a mother, but keep supporting the father. Even later in the year, the family will need it. There were fifty children left without parents and fifty more with only one parent. The building is down now and they found the last three people yesterday.

Nicole read the book "Heartland" by Diana Siebert.

**Mrs. Keating:** Oh, what a wonderful story, I will have to get that author's name. It was so good that you all got to talk about this. This is a wonderful country, a wonderful state and a wonderful community. A few people did something bad, but the whole world has done something good. Good has triumphed over evil.

Mrs. Keating left an hour and fifteen minutes after she arrived with an armful of memories from Ms. Bright's Stars.

## *Ideas for the heartland baskets!!!!*

#1: There's a boy in presbiterian Hospital that is not getting as much money as other kids in children's Hospital because everybody thinks all the kids are in children's Hospital.

#2: There's two children that are still in the Hospital . and when they get to go home they are still going to need special medical equipment to help them survive.

#3: At Children's hospital there's A playground and if your A patient that's the only place you can go. and when you go outside you can't play on it because you usually have an I.V pole. so they are going to make A playground so they can play on it.

#4: The children's Hospital is going to make a memorial for bombing victims.

#5: There's going to be A memorial so maybe we could give it there and are stained glass and other pretty stuff. and our poetry and letters.

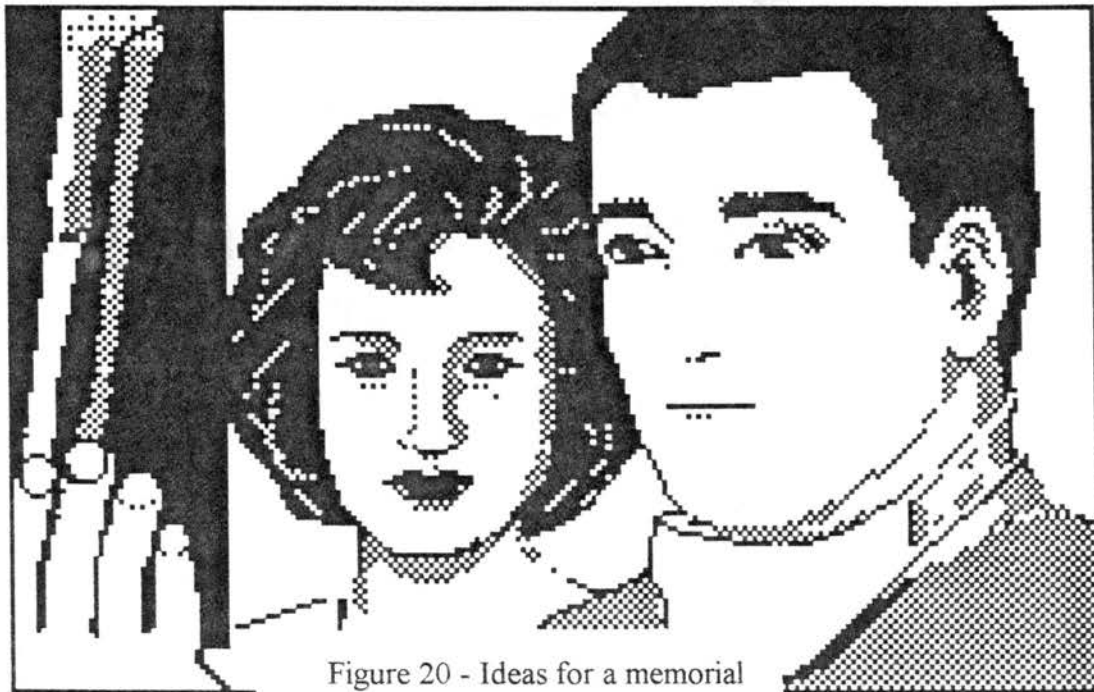


Figure 20 - Ideas for a memorial



## Voices That Heal and Help

The conversations of this second grade class and the purely intrinsic deeds of this class will never leave me. I was astonished and amazed at the thoughts that were considered and spoken; the ideas they created that could never be found in a book; but most of all by the utmost respect they felt for each other as a community and the people who entered and departed their community.

As I wrote at the beginning of this chapter, the nation's worst act of terrorism is not what I proposed to research. It was a coincidence that I was in a classroom with my tape recorder on April 19, 1995, when a bomb exploded in Oklahoma City. The beauty of the passionate words and actions of this constructivist class was more than I could grasp on tape and synthesize, then describe in words. The narratives with the children's actual utterances and the progression of the discussions, tell it all. These discussions and activities did not take place because Ms. Bright planned them detail by detail or thought they should talk about the bombing and do things for the victims for a week. They happened because twenty autonomous children and one autonomous teacher regarded the trials and triumphs of human nature. In this disaster the trials of the people in Oklahoma City were not over in a week. The children continued sharing their emotions about the tragedy as they chose to. This class touched many lives that had been turned upside-down and that were swamped with grief. They know they helped.

I now have a vivid and vast experience to build new knowledge upon, myself. I experienced this class first-hand and up-close. I was drawn in, totally accepted and began modeling my behavior after this class in my life, outside of this classroom. About two weeks after the bombing I questioned why I was not emotionally distraught about the bombing, why I wasn't so terribly sad? At the time, I said that I was just blocking the sadness out so I could concentrate on my research. Now, I know the truth. I was not blocking the sadness out. I was healing. I let the everyday events of this class consume

my troubled heart. I lingered on their every word. I was healing through the words, actions and creations I observed in this classroom. The voices of the children's insights cried out in my head and my dreams to be heard. Their energy and thoughtfulness were therapy for my soul and sustenance for my intellect. As I transcribe tapes, read and reread notes, and vividly recall many conversations and actions, my soul swells with wonder and thankfulness for the events I was a part of on a journey from tragedy to triumph.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### REFLECTIONS ON AUTONOMY IN A CONSTRUCTIVIST CLASSROOM

... for an experiment not carried out by the individual himself with all freedom of initiative is by definition not an experiment but a mere drill with no educational value: the details of successive steps are not adequately understood.

Jean Piaget. *To Understand is to Invent*, 1973, p. 20.

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter will reflect on the significance of autonomy in a constructivist classroom as it was experienced in Ms. Bright's second grade classroom. The main question that drove this study was what is autonomy in a second-grade classroom? What are the lived experiences of the children who are participating in a constructivist classroom? Chapter four presented the essence of autonomy in a constructivist classroom through vignettes in which the children's voices were the data. This chapter will discuss: what autonomy in a constructivist classroom means to children; the role of constructivism in a traumatic event; the context of autonomy; and the reader's personal interpretation of autonomy. Recommendations and suggestions for further research will conclude chapter five.

## WHAT DOES A CONSTRUCTIVIST CLASSROOM MEAN FOR CHILDREN?

Autonomy in a constructivist classroom is an extraordinary experience for children. The quality experiences that were evident in Ms. Bright's classroom of second-graders were: classroom ownership; self governance; decision-making; and respect.

CLASSROOM OWNERSHIP. The children have ownership of the classroom and know they can influence what happens in the classroom and what happens with their peers. The children in a constructivist classroom know the classroom inside-out. Every area is accessible, investigatable and usable! They have suggestions for room arrangements, room decorations and room use. They feel comfortable and confident in the classroom that they created. Evidence of this characteristic in Ms. Bright's classroom was plentiful. The room was covered with objects the children had brought to school, work the children deemed as important, and evidence of their changing interests throughout the school year. Children would move the tables, chairs, and supplies according to what the needs of the day or week were. Class members had a certain responsibility in the classroom such as pencil sharpener or floor cleaner. They helped each other with these responsibilities. But when there was a problem in a certain area they went to the child responsible for that area to ask for help. Cleaning up the room was the responsibility of each class member. Ms. Bright monitored clean-up, but she did not tell children where to put things, or tell them what to pick up. The entire class had to agree that the room was cleaned up before they proceeded to the next activity.

SELF-GOVERNANCE. Children in a constructivist classroom that promotes autonomy are given the opportunity to govern themselves individually and in a group situation.

Children take responsibility for their own actions. If there is a disagreement about the meaning of a child's action or deed, there will be a discussion and an exchange of perspectives with the people/person involved. Children are not punished, given sad faces, or put in the hall because of what some may perceive as an inappropriate act. Children are allowed to discuss the incident in order to better understand their responsibility to themselves and the class.

Class members were responsible for themselves at all times and occasionally responsible for leading their class members in activities or class responsibilities. This happened daily as the special helper-of-the-day conducted attendance and lunch count. The helper-of-the-day was the leader and children listened to him and he listened to the group in order to get the business of the day completed. The Computer Care Company was an example of children taking responsible for class jobs and classmates. There were other occasions when a child would bring an activity from home that they wanted the children to do. This child would be in charge of getting the materials together, preparing a place for the activity in the classroom, and explaining the directions to the class. The class was responsible for listening, asking clarifying questions, and cooperating with the child that was explaining.

Moral autonomy was certainly fostered in this class that practiced self-governance. Children had many opportunities to construct moral values and rule through their interaction with the group, individuals, or within themselves. Children exhibited the ability to think for themselves and to decide between right and wrong.

DECISION-MAKING. Decision-making opportunities are plentiful in a constructivist classroom. Decisions are continually made by children throughout the school day in the areas of discussion, curriculum, behavior, and in areas where a determination is needed. Children begin the day with discussion. This discussion is not about a topic that Ms. Bright wants to be introduced. Discussion time begins with the children's thoughts and

comments and ends with their ideas about what they want to study and what projects they want to do that day. Through discussion children make choices about their behavior during the discussion time, whether they are willing to share their ideas or comments, and group decisions about a matter at hand.

Children in a constructivist classroom, such as Ms. Bright's, create the curriculum daily. Curriculum in a constructivist classroom is not pre-determined. It emerges from each child's thought, understanding, and ideas. This opportunity for decision-making was truly a creative one. The children, through discussion found topics they were interested in or wanted to know more about. They would share them with their classmates and together the class would create projects to do for the day or the week. This decision making process was not only creative, but simulated the idea of brainstorming. A child would share a thought and then someone else would comment and build upon it until the idea had jelled and participants agreed upon the newly created idea. When children decided to begin working in the classroom they chose what to do and began the project themselves. If they have any questions, they ask one another, or Ms. Bright. They then proceed to make decisions and discoveries through active participation in the classroom.

Children make decisions during the day about their behavior in the classroom. Children decide when they need some "time-out", time to be alone, or when to be with others. Children do not have to tell Ms. Bright what they have decided about their behavior unless they are leaving the classroom or need some help. Children who feel they need to regain their composure ask to leave the room to go into the hall for a few moments. Children who want to be alone for awhile go to a quiet area in the room. If they are disturbed they just say they want to work alone. If a child's behavior is not appropriate, it is discussed by the people involved. Children are encouraged to be responsible for their actions and to try and make better decisions the next time. Occasionally, role play was used to recreate the scene, so the child could make a different decision and understand the difference in the outcomes of his behavior.

There were occasions that required a decision to be made by the entire class. In this case, the children would usually discuss the options, then vote. The discussion that preceded the vote was a persuasive and passionate discussion. The children would try and convince others of their position, but they would also listen to others as if to gain more information. They understood "the majority rules" and accepted the majority when it outnumbered the minority.

What do all these qualities mean for children? They mean more opportunity to exercise the abilities that children have available to them and more opportunity to be confident in themselves. The children had time to listen to their hearts. They did not think about pleasing the teacher, getting the right answer on a paper, being sneaky or finishing an assignment. Children in a constructivist setting are relaxed and peaceful. They are secure and therefore, they do what comes naturally. They use all their senses to experience the environment around them, they take risks, experiment, make decisions. They are all leaders in some way. In a constructivist classroom that promotes autonomy, all children contribute to the class, are respected by others and are successful.

## AUTONOMY IN A CONSTRUCTIVIST CLASSROOM

### DEALING WITH TRAUMA

The opportunity for autonomy in Ms. Bright's classroom had been extended at the beginning of the year. When the A.P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City was bombed on April 19, 1995 most schools, administrators, counselors, and teachers questioned or were told what to do. On April 19th in Ms. Bright's second grade classroom, the children decided what to do. From the first moments after their discussion with Ms. Bright about the bombing the children's, actions were alive and expressive. They determined the activity and the rhythm of projects that were done in relation to the bombing. Daily News

articles on the computer, poems, songs, posters to collect items, and worry dolls were all suggested and carried out by the children. The children worked on bombing related activities, almost exclusively, for a week. Then a few children moved to other interests and by the end of the second week only about one-fourth of the children were still focusing on bombing related activities. When news of major interest was heard, such as the arrest of a suspect and the implosion of the bombed building, the children seemed to go back to previous activities and discussions were more lengthy. Toward the end of school when most children only talked about the bombing tragedy at home or in a counseling group, Ms. Bright's class was donating money they had collected and trying to influence the First Lady of Oklahoma, Kathy Keating with their ideas for a memorial in remembrance of the bombing victims.

The children in this constructivist class through their autonomous actions were actively engaged in their own healing and understanding of this tragedy. Some children focused on the bombing longer than others. Some children focused with more passion. Some children drew pictures, others wrote poems or made things. Children in Ms. Bright's classroom were not in despair or denial. The children never appeared to be angry. Instead they were concerned for victims, rescuers and even the men suspected of setting the bomb. They had an extraordinary ability to look at both sides of the story, take all relevant factors into account and come to conclusion. In other schools, children were required to continue their studies in spelling, math, and reading, while the children in Ms. Bright's class were active in projects that centered around helping victims of the bombing. In other schools, children and teachers were angry about the bombing and angry at the suspects that were arrested. In this constructivist classroom community tried to understand the reason for the bomb and the consequences of its tragedy. They were all individuals dealing with a trauma that so closely affected all their lives and they were supported by their classroom community.



The anecdotal narrative about the bombing gives rise to the question, could a benefit of autonomy help children actively cope with traumatic situations? Could autonomy in a constructivist classroom encourage children to make decisions which would benefit them later? Kamii (1994) writes that "schools would be safe, orderly and free of drugs and violence if autonomy were the aim of education because individuals who can take relevant factors into account do not take drugs or resort to violence" (p. 626). Children that have early experience in making decisions about responsibility, peers, curriculum, rules and behavior have a strong foundation on which to begin making important decisions later in life on important educational and social issues. Piaget's theory of constructivism along with Kamii's (1994, 1985) idea of autonomy reflects the belief that the education of human beings requires a much deeper, long-range commitment . Kamii, Clark, & Dominick (1994) state:

If all the public schools in the United States educated children for autonomy during every hour of the thirteen years the children are in school, the nation's prisons would be less crowded, the federal deficit and the drug problem would be more amenable to control, and we would be working more positively to solve many of our human and societal problems (p. 677).

### THE CONTEXT OF AUTONOMY

The context of autonomy in this study was the classroom, the children and the teacher. Although the study focused on second-graders the question of "What is autonomy in the classroom like?" would not have been possible to study without considering and including the environment and the teacher. This context was whole. It worked with, because of and sometimes in spite of one another. To separate autonomy into small, isolated features and concentrate on one, is to forget that one feature doesn't happen without the others.

The themes that arose from this study were from the data that were collected during daily observations for six weeks. The themes did not happen in sequence, because

I looked for them, or because they were the area of concentration that the teacher was focusing on that week. I speculate that these themes had been taking place all year. I broke the themes into groups to present vignettes in chapter four, but with a close look, the other themes of autonomy are usually present in some way.

### PERSONAL INTERPRETATIONS OF AUTONOMY

The purpose of this study was to describe autonomy as it is experienced in a second grade classroom. As a researcher, I entered a second grade class and observed, listened, experienced, produced fieldnotes and tape recordings, and collected documents. Then, most importantly, I interpreted the data and then reported it. The interpretation of autonomy that I have presented is my own and has meaning and significance for me. Another purpose was that "through this interpretative observation the significance of autonomy in education will be more clearly established" (p. 7). But the meaning and significance that it has for the reader is not for me to determine. The interpretations that the reader has are also his/her own and will not be reportable in this paper. The interpretations that the reader has are going to originate with his/her own experience with autonomy or constructivism or second-graders or teaching or research . . . or perhaps all of them!

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

The vignettes of children experiencing autonomy in a constructivist classroom are strong examples of children who are exercising their decision-making skills, thought processes, and creativity. The children's voices in the vignettes are thoughtful, respectful and secure. They consider other's perspectives, learn from others and share with others. Children in the classroom work from a knowledge base that is comfortable, their own.

Children are motivated to learn and work in the classroom through inventions, projects, research and experiments. They have misunderstandings, share their misunderstandings and learn from their misunderstandings. Through the observations of this study it is highly recommended that educators seriously consider constructivist theory to guide teaching of young children. Teachers who provide a constructivist atmosphere for children are not plentiful. Many teachers say they are constructivist, but in the same theoretical sense of Piaget, Kamii, DeVries and Ms. Bright's belief in constructivism, they are not. Further research in the area of constructivism and autonomy is needed in order to better understand the possibilities of constructivist education.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Autonomy in a constructivist classroom in this study was observed during the last months of the school year. The question remains "How does it begin?" What does a constructivist teacher do in the beginning to create an atmosphere of respect, community, and child-driven curriculum? Further research to investigate the beginning days and months in a constructivist classroom would be useful for teachers and teacher educators.

This study presents autonomy in second-graders. What would autonomy mean in other grades? In middle school? In high school? In addition, inquiry may take a longitudinal approach by investigating the long term effects of experiencing autonomy in a constructivist classroom. There is a need for research into how emergent curriculum in a constructivist classroom compare to curriculum in a traditional classroom?

This study presented an experiential anecdote on the Oklahoma City bombing, a tragedy that affected the children in the classroom. Further research on traumatic events in a constructivist classroom may be informative to the fields of teaching, sociology, psychology, and crisis intervention. Do children in a constructivist classroom handle traumatic events differently than children in a traditional classroom setting? Are they

better able to handle crisis and trauma? What are the long term effects of children who work through a crisis in the comfort of a constructivist classroom?

Qualitative research in early childhood education allows for rich description and lived experience in the chosen setting. Constructivist teachers know that they cannot expect one school year to be like the next year, because they have different children who have a variety of different experiences. Qualitative researchers understand the uniqueness of each classroom. Research in one context, with one group of participants, will not be the same in another context with other participants. This study of autonomy in a constructivist classroom is a rich, unforgettable moment in time. The observations that took place are insightful and powerful, but they will not occur again, at another time, or in another context. They are presented to the reader in order to increase understanding of what it is like for children to be a member of a classroom community. This can only be done through qualitative research.

#### AUTHOR'S END NOTE

As this experience draws to a close I reflect on the results this research has brought to me. I knew I initially wanted to research children, but the idea just grew and grew. From children to Piaget, to cognitive development, to moral development, to autonomy, to constructivism, then to a combination of autonomy and constructivism. I was most confident in the area of observation, because it is a strength I developed from working with preschool children. I choose subjects that I love (children) and a method that is natural for me (observation) and walked into a classroom ready to research. I honed my observation skills, but I was surprised at what I saw and experienced. I was taken into a classroom, accepted, and incorporated into the daily scene within days, not because of anything I did, but because the children were so respectful, thoughtful and

sensitive. The tape recorder was my constant and trusty companion, but my senses gave me the ability to see, listen, smell and touch experiences that occurred in the classroom. Autonomy in a classroom was contagious and felt renewing. I grew as a researcher and a person. The experiences were beyond what I had imagined.

As a qualitative researcher, I entered the classroom with no preconceived notion about what the results would be from this study. I walked into this classroom with previous experience with children and observation and with the book knowledge of what second grade children were like, what a constructivist classroom was like, what autonomy was defined as, and what qualitative research was about. I walked out of the classroom with the lived memories and pictures of what second-graders are like, the benefits and assets of a constructivist classroom, the feel of autonomy as it happened and the qualities of qualitative research.

Now, as I end the research that will help me achieve the highest degree in education, I don't want to stop. I wrestle with the long term goal of teaching in higher education, with the new found desire to continue researching. Can they be combined? I certainly hope so. Time will be the crucial struggle, but desire will hopefully prevail.

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## APPENDIXES

## APPENDIX A

Lori A. Beasley

Dr.  
Superintendent  
Public Schools

Dear Dr. (Superintendent of Public School),

I am currently in the process of earning my doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction, Early Childhood Education, at Oklahoma State University. The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to conduct research in \_\_\_\_\_ School in Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_'s second grade class. This study will be conducted in the month of March, 1995.

The purpose of my research is to describe incidents of children experiencing autonomy or self-regulation in the classroom. Through daily observations during the fourth quarter, written descriptions of children engaged in normal daily classroom activities such as reading, writing, math, and interacting with other children, will be made. The observations will be recorded through field notes and an audio tape recorder. The study requires no cost to the Public School System. The code of ethics adopted by the American Psychological Association will guide the ethics and confidentiality of the study. The subjects will be voluntarily solicited and informed of their freedom to withdraw from the study without reprisal. The parents will be sent a consent form. No child will participate in the study without consenting to do so or without the consent of the child's parents or guardian. Please be assured that the school system, administration, teacher and students will remain anonymous.

You may contact me if you have any questions regarding this proposal at 555-5555, or you may call my advisor, Dr. Kathryn Castle at 405-744-7125 or University Research Services, 001 Life Science East, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK. 405-744-5700. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you in regard to this matter.

Sincerely,

Lori A. Beasley

Lori A. Beasley

Ms. Beth Bright  
Randolph Elementary School  
Oklahoma

Dear Ms. Bright,

I am currently in the process of earning my doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction, Early Childhood Education, at Oklahoma State University. The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to conduct research in your second grade classroom at Randolph Elementary School.

The purpose of the research is to describe incidents of children experiencing autonomy or self-regulation in the classroom. Through daily observations written descriptions of children engaged in normal daily classroom activities such as reading, writing, math, and interacting with other children, will be made. The observations will be recorded through field notes and an audio tape recorder. I would like to use your classroom as a research site for observing and collecting examples of children experiencing autonomy.

This study will require daily observations in the fourth quarter of the 1994-95 school year in order to compile field notes and tape recordings of examples of autonomy. I will be in your class as an observer-participant, with my primary goal of observing children in the classroom, not participating. The code of ethics adopted by the American Psychological Association will guide the ethics and confidentiality of the study. The parents will be sent a consent form. No child will participate in the study without consent to do so or without the consent of the child's parents or guardian. Please be assured that the school system, administration, teachers, and students will remain anonymous. I have enclosed a brief summary of my research to make clearer the purpose and the process involved.

You may contact me if you have any questions regarding this proposal at 555-5555, or you may call my advisor, Dr. Kathryn Castle at 405-744-7125, or University Research Services, 001 Life Science East, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK. 405-744-5700. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you in regard to this matter.

Sincerely,

Lori A. Beasley

Lori A. Beasley

Principal  
Randolph Elementary School  
OK.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am currently in the process of earning my doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction, Early Childhood Education, at Oklahoma State University. The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to conduct research in Ms. Bright's second grade classroom, at Randolph Elementary School.

The purpose of the research is to describe incidents of children experiencing autonomy or self-regulation in the classroom. Through daily observations in the fourth quarter of the 1994-95 school year, written descriptions of children engaged in normal daily classroom activities such as reading, writing, math, and interacting with other children, will be made. The observations will be recorded through field notes and an audio tape recorder. Ms. Bright's classroom has been recommended by the \_\_\_\_\_, and I would like to use the classroom as a research site for observing and collecting examples of children experiencing autonomy.

This study will require daily observations in the classroom in order to compile field notes and tape recordings of examples of autonomy. I will be participating in class as an observer-participant, with my primary goal of observing children in the classroom, not participating. The code of ethics adopted by the American Psychological Association will guide the ethics and confidentiality of the study. Please be assured that the school system, administration, teachers, and students will remain anonymous. The parent's will be sent a consent form. No child will participate in the study without consenting to do so or without the consent of the child's parents or guardian. I have enclosed a brief summary of my research to make clearer the purpose and the process involved.

You may contact me if you have any questions regarding this proposal at 555-5555, or you may call my advisor, Dr. Kathryn Castle at 405-744-7125, or University Research Services, 001 Life Science East, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK. 405-744-5700. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you in regard to this matter.

Sincerely,

Lori A. Beasley



**LORI A. BEASLEY, M.Ed., DOCTORAL STUDENT**  
**Department of Curriculum and Instruction**  
**Oklahoma State University**  
**Stillwater, OK. 74074**

April 10, 1995

Dear Parent:

Your child is a student in Mrs. Bright's second grade class and I am writing to ask your permission for him/her to participate in a study I am doing to complete my doctoral program in Early Childhood Education at Oklahoma State University. The title of my study is "Autonomy in a Constructivist Classroom". The purpose of my study is to describe activities in which children experience autonomy of self-regulation in a classroom designed to promote choices, problem solving and respect.

Officials of the \_\_\_\_\_ Public Schools and Oklahoma State University have read and approved my study which will be conducted during April and May, 1995. I will make daily observations of daily activities in you child's classroom noting the way children make choices. I will make audio tape recordings of my observations as well as hand written notes and both will be treated confidentially and kept secure at all times. No tests or other written tasks will be used with the children. All information gained will be treated confidentially and at no time will you child's identity be disclosed.

Please read and sign the attached form and return it to school with your child by April 13th, 1995. Thank you in advance for your assistance. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 555-5555, or contact my OSU faculty advisor, Dr. Kathryn Castle at 404-744-7125 or University Research at 405-744-5700.

Sincerely,

Lori A. Beasley, M.Ed.

Attachment (1)

Dear Parents of Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ Second Grade Students:

My name is Lori Beasley. I am completing my doctoral program at Oklahoma State University in Curriculum and Instruction, Early Childhood Education. I recently received permission from the \_\_\_\_\_ School Board, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ to conduct educational research in Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ second grade class. The purpose of this letter is to briefly explain my intent and to request permission for your child to participate in this educational research.

The research study will be conducted during the last quarter of the 1994-95 school year. The purpose of the research is to describe activities in which children experience autonomy or self-regulation in the classroom. The researcher will observe typical daily classroom activities looking for examples of children's choices, such as children choosing to read a book or participate in a math game. This study will require daily observations of the children engaging in regular classroom routine. I will keep paper and pencil field notes and will occasionally audio tape record classroom activities. The research will not require administering tests or other written tasks, questioning children, or removing children from the classroom. Observations will be done only of regular classroom activities.

Please be assured that all information gained will be confidential and the identity of your child will not be disclosed in any way. If you do not want your child to participate in the study, you are free to decline. If you give permission for your child to participate in this study, I will verbally ask your child's permission in class as well. If your child indicates at any time during the study that he/she does not want to participate, your child will not be observed or recorded. Children that do not have parental permission or do not want to participate will continue with their normal classroom routine, but will not be observed or recorded by the researcher. It is possible for you to withdraw your child or for your child to withdraw, without penalty, at any time.

Please read and sign the attached form, and return it to school with your child by \_\_\_\_\_, 1995. If you have any question, please feel free to contact me at 555-5555, or you may call my advisor, Dr. Kathryn Castle at 405-744-7125, or University Research Services, 001 Life Science East, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK. 405-744-5700. Thank you for your consideration in allowing your child to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Lori A. Beasley

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: AUTONOMY IN A CONSTRUCTIVIST CLASSROOM

RESEARCHER: Lori A. Beasley, Oklahoma State University

I, \_\_\_\_\_ give permission for my child,

\_\_\_\_\_, a student in Mrs. Bright's second grade class, at Randolph Elementary School, to participate in the research study.

**PURPOSE:** The researcher will observe typical daily classroom activities, looking for examples of children's choices, such as choosing to read a book or participate in a math game. The researcher will observe but not participate in the normal classroom routines and activities.

**PROCEDURE:** This study will require observations of the children in the class. The observations will be recorded on paper and pencil (field notes) and audio-tape. This research does not require administering tests or other written tasks, removing children from the classroom, or questioning children.

**DURATION:** The research will begin and end during the fourth quarter of the 1994-95 school year. Observations in the classroom will be daily.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** The information gained will be confidential. Audio tapes will be on during class discussions or activities, and for dictation by the researcher. Audio tapes will be kept in the researcher's locked file cabinet for the duration of the study. Upon completion of the study and approval of the dissertation the audio tapes will be erased. Real names will not be used in the study and the researcher will verbally discuss her presence in the classroom to the children. There will be no written record kept of children who do not have parental permission or have not given verbal consent. Children and/or their parents have a right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**RISKS:** To the researcher's knowledge, no possible risks will be incurred beyond those of a typical school day.

I understand I may contact Lori Beasley at 555-5555, or her advisor, Dr. Kathryn Castle at 405-744-7125, or University Research Services, 001 Life Science East, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK. 405-744-5700.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I hereby give the researcher my permission for my child's participation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Guardian's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## OUTLINE OF VERBAL CONSENT FORM

This information will be provided to the students in Mrs. (teacher's) second grade class prior to soliciting their voluntary participation in the study and after consent has been granted by the district, school, teacher and subjects parents.

### Purpose of the study

- \*to look at what is happening in your classroom
- \*to use audio tape to record class discussions and descriptions of observations

### Describe the study

- \*the daily routine of the classroom will be the same
- \*the researcher will observe children participating in their daily routine
- \*the researcher will write up or dictate on audio tape what is being seen or observed

### How were subjects chosen

- \*because of the special activities that take place in this classroom everyday

### Duration of the study

- \* April and May

### Confidentiality

- \*all statements are anonymous and confidential

### Subjects rights

- \*free to choose to participate
- \*free to choose to withdraw by telling the researcher
- \*all subject will be treated fairly

## VITA

Lori A. Beasley

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: AUTONOMY IN A CONSTRUCTIVIST CLASSROOM

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction, Early Childhood Education

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, September 27, 1956, daughter of Charles D. Jr. and Anne Johnson, granddaughter of Leslie and Eva Newmark and Charles D. and Marjorie Johnson.

Education: Graduated from East Central High School, Tulsa, Oklahoma in May 1974; received Bachelor of Science degree in Family Relations and Child Development from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in August 1978; received a Master of Education degree from the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma, in May, 1982; completed requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in May 1996.

Professional Experience: Associate Professor, Department of Human Environmental Sciences, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma, Fall of 1996.

Adjunct instructor, Department of Human Environmental Sciences, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma, August 1988 to 1996

Director, Child Study Center, Department of Home Economics, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma, August, 1979, to May, 1985.

Adjunct instructor, Department of Family Relations and Child Development, Northeastern A&M College, Miami, Oklahoma, August 1978, to May, 1979.

**APPENDIX B**

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date: 02-23-95

IRB#: ED-95-050

Proposal Title: AUTONOMY IN A CONSTRUCTIVIST CLASSROOM

Principal Investigator(s): Kathryn Castle, Lori Beasley

Reviewed and Processed as: Modification

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

APPROVAL STATUS SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AT NEXT MEETING.

APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR ONE CALENDAR YEAR AFTER WHICH A CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD APPROVAL.

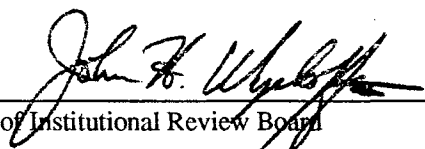
ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

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Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reasons for Deferral or Disapproval are as follows:

Signature:

  
Chair of Institutional Review Board

Date: April 10, 1995

VITA

Lori A. Beasley

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: AUTONOMY IN A CONSTRUCTIVIST CLASSROOM

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction      Emphasis: Early Childhood Education

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, September 27, 1956, daughter of Charles D. Jr. and Anne Johnson, granddaughter of Leslie and Eva Newmark and Charles D. and Marjorie Johnson.

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Professional Experience: Adjunct instructor, Department of Human Environmental Sciences, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma, August 1988 to 1996

Director, Child Study Center, Department of Home Economics, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma, August, 1979, to May, 1985.

Adjunct instructor, Department of Family Relations and Child Development, Northeastern A&M College, Miami, Oklahoma, August 1978, to May, 1979.