

THE ESSENCE OF CHOICE IN A CLASSROOM

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Choice sustains a double relation to the self. It reveals the existing self and forms the future self. That which is chosen is found congenial to the desires and habits of the self as it already exists...every choice is at the forking of the roads, and the path chosen shuts off certain opportunities and opens others. In committing oneself to a particular course, a person gives a lasting set to his own being... Superficially, the deliberation which terminates in choice is concerned with weighing the values of particular ends. Below the surface, it is a process of discovering what sort of being a person most wants to become (Dewey, 1980, p. 149).

As an artist determines upon careful thought, the subject to be painted, every deliberate stroke creates change, adding new elements to enhance the scene imagined. As the artist stands back to ponder each guided stroke, she considers options, knowing the next stroke will continue to guide the final piece. The artist's imagination revealed on canvas is a mixture of prior discoveries and future strokes.

As I reflect upon the images of choice, the past reveals my present self, shading and highlighting various stages of my life. My recollections as a young child are brightly colored memories of security, love, and close family relations. As with many large families, lines were drawn by my father to insure structure and an accurate head count. All forks in the road, as mentioned by Dewey, were not imagined by my own father as he painted a middle path for

his five children to follow. Although his intentions were morally right in his mind, I longed to search for other mediums. As an adult, I continue to seek other landscapes to explore. I have encountered numerous opportunities and in the deliberation process I have met with difficulties. As a teacher, I was conscious of alternatives where my classroom and students were concerned. My interest in choice began weaving its way into my interest in children. The connections became conscious between the two. From that point on, the children and I began sketching our path into possibilities.

During graduate school, I studied Jean Piaget's work and my ideas about choice began forming a broader design. After almost 60 years of research, Piaget developed a scientific theory on how human beings acquire knowledge; which he called Constructivism. "The constructivist view is that if children coordinate points of view, or relationships, they will develop their natural intelligence, and this development can tend only toward autonomy" (Kamii, 1985, p. 50). Piaget was not an educator, yet his conclusions on how children learn convinced him that the overall aim of education should be autonomy. He described autonomy as being governed by oneself, therefore he maintained, being governed by someone else was heteronomy.

According to Piaget, there are two types of autonomy: moral and intellectual. Moral autonomy is the ability to make moral judgments and decisions, free of being motivated by rewards and punishments. Moral autonomy is based on considering others' points of view when deciding right from wrong. Rules of conduct are constructed by coordinating viewpoints. The idea of constructing moral autonomy is the ability to make decisions for oneself. Decisions are based on taking all relevant factors and points of view into consideration.

Intellectual autonomy is also governing oneself and making one's own decisions but involves questions of truths and untruths. Heteronomy is the opposite of autonomy and is considered following another's view without considering all relevant factors. Intellectual autonomy is the construction of relationships among bits of knowledge and what is already known and can be constructed through debate and the exchange of points of view. To be intellectually autonomous, one must come to understand the truth by oneself (Piaget, 1965). If autonomy in the moral and intellectual realm is to be the aim in education, educators must make thoughtful decisions about their classroom. Educators, who provide students with an environment promoting autonomy, will encourage students to think and accomplish their own goals in their own way.

Choice plays a significant role in the lives of those who govern themselves. "Children learn to make decisions not by being obedient, but by making choices and decisions" (Kamii, 1984, p. 13). Kamii also wrote,

We cannot expect children to accept ready-made values and truths all the way through school, and then suddenly make choices in adulthood. Likewise, we can not expect them to be manipulated with reward and punishment in school, and to have the courage of a Martin Luther King in adulthood (Kamii, 1991, p.398).

Teachers, on the other hand, should be at liberty to make decisions, in order to share possibilities with students. Mandates and regulations, rather than autonomous teaching are the focus found in several classrooms. Within these same classrooms, students' heteronomy is promoted. As Alfie Kohn (1995) states, "those who resent being deprived of autonomy-often turn out and treat their students exactly the same way, tightly regulating their behavior" (p. 100). William Ayers (1993) describes school as a place of

impersonal systems, teachers become obedient, they conform, and follow rules-(they) are expected to deliver the curriculum without much thought, and control the student without much feeling. Students are expected, in turn, to follow the rules and go along with whatever is put before them (p. 19).

Like an artist who creates change to enhance the scene imagined, I seek to capture the lived experiences of those who encounter choice within the school setting in search of autonomy. If autonomy is the ability to make decisions for oneself, and if autonomy is to be the aim of education, then choice must play a significant part in the development of autonomy.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Much has been written about the importance of student choice in educational literature and studies related to student autonomy (Kohn, 1998, Wakefield, 1993, Kamii, 1991). Choice has rarely been the primary focus in the literature even though it serves as an integral part of constructivist education. The problem lies in classrooms, which do not promote choice, hindering student's ability to develop their full potential. Without opportunities for choice, students may become dependent or conform by following others' views resulting in obedience. When provided with opportunities for choice, students think for themselves by considering relevant factors or other points of views. Therefore, in classrooms where autonomy is promoted, opportunities for choice should be present.

This study attempted to uncover the nature of choice as it relates to the school experience. The focus was to explore the lived experiences of teachers and their students who develop autonomy within the school setting. Included were interviews and observations of teachers and their students who consider autonomy to be their aim.

WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF CHOICE IN THE CLASSROOM?

Alfie Kohn, a leading advocate for student choice in the field of education, has written several books and articles concerning choices for children. In his book, What to Look for in the Classroom...and Other Essays, he outlines four questions to examine which he believes “reveal(s) that the question of choice is both more complex and more compelling than many educators seem to assume” (Kohn, 1998, p. 251). The following questions have been taken from his book and served as a guide for this study when exploring the essence of choice.

1. Why is it so important that children have a chance to make decisions about their learning?
2. How might this opportunity be provided with regard to academic matters as well as other aspects of school life?
3. What limits on students’ right to choose are necessary, and what restrictions compromise the idea too deeply?
4. What barriers might account for the fact that students so rarely feel a sense of self-determination today?

MEANING OF TERMS

Autonomy: “the ability to make decisions for oneself, about right and wrong in the moral realm and about truth and untruth in the intellectual realm, by taking all relevant factors into account, independently of reward and punishment” (Kamii, 1994, p. 4).

Heteronomy: “the opposite of autonomy in which one is governed by others” (Kamii, 1994).

Essence: “is that what makes a thing what it is (and without which it would not be what it is); that what makes a thing what it is rather than its being or becoming something else” (van Manen, 1990, p. 177).

Choice: *n.* 1) Choosing, deciding between possibilities; a necessity to choose, a selection. 2) The power, right, or faculty of choosing; option. 3) Variety and abundance to choose from; a scope or field of possibilities. 4) Care in choosing, judgement, discrimination. *a.* 1) Carefully chosen; apt, appropriate. 2) Careful in choosing; discriminative (Brown, L., 1993, p. 391-392).

Pseudochoice: Disguised choices linked to coercion, bludgeon, manipulation, or consent to conformity (Kohn, 1996).

Decision: *n.* 1) The action of deciding a contest, dispute, etc.; settlement, a final judgement or verdict. 2) Determined character; firmness, resolve. 3) The action of coming to a determination or resolution with regard to any point or course of action; a resolution or conclusion arrived at (Brown, L. 1993, p. 608).

Constructivism: “a theory that explains the child’s acquisition of knowledge as a process of construction from within, in interaction with the environment, rather than as one of internalization from it” (Kamii, 1984, p. 1).

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY

The artist’s intent is not to merely paint a picture, for if that were the purpose, then a paint by number would suffice. Conforming to the rules set by numbers de-personalizes and de-skills the process of the artistic endeavor. All possibilities abruptly end in meaningless

effort and senseless imagery. The intent of an artist is to capture the subject as she sees it and it is for the viewer. Oh, how the artist fancies in the secret desire to inspire another.

The purpose of this study was to explore the essence of choice in an elementary educational setting as it is and as it is for teachers and their students. Viewing autonomy as the aim of education lends significance for exploring the essence of choice. By exposing the themes of choice through lived experiences, I hoped to provide insights for those who share in my desire for a deeper understanding of autonomy in education.

SIGNIFICANCE OF INQUIRY

The artist *is* because of passion. Passion is the internal drive of inspiration. As the artist develops technique, her sense of pattern space, and balance blend to illustrate the passion from within. The artists' inspiration is meant to satisfy the self, yet outsiders may take an interest in her work. It pleases the artist if others are provoked.

Those who are inspired by autonomy are passionate about choice. The notion of choice in education has been recommended by, those who believe teachers and their students should engage in opportunities embedded within autonomous thoughts and actions. "Teaching is more than transmitting skills; it is a living act and involves preference and value, obligation and choice, trust and care, commitment and justification" (Ayers, 1993, p. 20). Almost universally, teachers acknowledge the importance of their student's interest, confidence, and choice, but they do not "know what to do with them. One hopes, perhaps, that if [they] are good at teaching knowledge, the others will necessarily develop too" (Duckworth, 1987, p. 58). Educators should be conscious of helping students take an active part in those decisions that indirectly relate to academics. William Ayers (1993) states, "The teacher must find ways

to choose and act in a shifting, uncertain world. She must find ways to take responsibility for her teaching without guarantees. This requires a teacher to be wide-awake and fully present in her teaching; it requires a kind of heroism in the classroom” (p.21).

Literature related to teacher choice uses such terms as decision-making, teacher reflections, teacher agency, shared decision-making and site-based management, teacher autonomy, and teacher empowerment (Pasch, et.al., 1991, Conway and Calzi, 1996, Paris, 1993, Geraci, 1996, Wilucki, 1991, Kamii, 1981, Fosnot, 1988). Choice and decision-making are important aspects in moving toward more autonomous teaching. Teacher's who are empowered, have choices concerning educational decisions on what is best for children. Teacher education programs must provide practicing teachers with a solid foundation based on scientific theory on how children learn to make educated decisions. Teachers should reflect thoughtfully about their practices and become knowledgeable about theories on teaching and learning. Those involved in making uneducated choices and decisions about the process of teaching and learning should give up the power to those who are well informed- those who are qualified practitioners-teachers.

Teachers who act autonomously foster autonomy in their classrooms. Promoting autonomy in the classroom offers a variety of ways to encourage children to make decisions. The literature suggests that children engaging in choice make decisions about curriculum and classroom management procedures. Choices provide implications for student learning in the cognitive, aesthetic, social, emotional, and moral realms. If students are given opportunities to make decisions about things that matter in the classroom, they develop a sense of control and responsibility which influences the child's well being, behavior, values, achievement, and motivation (Kohn, 1993 and Katz and Chard, 1993).

I believe there is enough interest in choice as it relates to teachers and students, from educators, to explore its essence. My interest was to record the presence of and/or absence of choice with those I encountered during this study. The significance of this study is not to seek a generalizable theory on what constitutes choice. I was in search of themes, which would deepen my understanding of its essence, which may not be applicable to other situations.

Proponents of constructivist practices have urged educators to provide choices in the educational setting. In order for choice to be present, we must uncover its essence. My intent was to illustrate my passion of choice, which has inspired this piece and welcome those who want to interpret in their own way, the contents within, choice and its essence.

Once inspired, the artist revels in the idea of possibilities as she approaches the canvas. The imagination is overflowing. She knows the disequilibrium experienced before wetting the brush will pass, and soon, the images will illuminate the canvas in a mosaic of complementary colors.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Let him know nothing because you have told him, but because he has learned it for himself. Let him not be taught science, let him discover it. If ever you substitute authority for reason he will cease to reason; he will be a mere plaything for other peoples thoughts (Rousseau, 1762;1948, p. 131).

Introduction

When a student aspires to become an artist, she must study the masters and their work. The insight gained generates style and a philosophy. The artist hopes that her work will not merely recreate the same images of its past but at the very least enhance them. The artist envisions painting to open minds, present another point of view and offer new insight in the work created.

"Constructivism is not a theory about teaching. It's a theory about knowledge and learning. [...] The theory defines knowledge as temporary, developmental, socially and culturally mediated, and thus, non-objective. Learning from this perspective is understood as a self-regulated process of resolving inner cognitive conflicts that often become apparent through concrete experience, collaborative discourse, and reflection" (Fosnot, 1993 p. vii).

Many constructivists propose that the aim of education is to promote autonomy. Autonomy is viewed as governing oneself in consideration of others. Choice can lead students toward more

autonomous thoughts and actions. The purpose of this section is to analyze the research concerning choice. Why choice? In the process of self-regulation, both intellectually and morally, one has the ability to decide. The deciding comes by way of choice. Choice reflects an aspect of the theory of constructivism and what is essential in education. First, it is necessary to trace the historical roots of the notion of choice.

A Philosophical Debate: Free Will versus Determinism

For centuries, philosophers have debated such questions as, whether human beings are free to determine their own destiny? Do humans actually make choices or does it appear as though choice is present in a deterministic world? Is the world governed by the laws of probability or is it just coincidence a great deal of the time (Shubert, 1986)? These questions bring about two distinctly different points of view, namely, the libertarian and the determinist.

Both perspectives argue whether humans exercise a freedom of will or whether human actions are determined and causally explained. The libertarian believes “that there are at least some human actions of the volitional type in which the individual, by the exercise of his will-power, acts independently of conditioning factors” (Wood, 1973, p. 427). The determinist on the other hand,

insists that all actions, even the most carefully planned and deliberate, can be causally explained and that if we knew enough about a man's hereditary traits and the environmental influences which have molded his character, we could predict just how he would behave under any specified set of circumstances (Wood, 1973, p. 427).

Libertarians believe humans possess a free will and have the ability to choose their direction in life. The determinist explains human actions as a series of cause and effect situations, which determine a human's course in life.

The logical empiricist and the existentialist represent two extreme views of the libertarian and determinist. The logical empiricist aligns with determinism believing “that all human behavior is determined by prior causes” (Bigge, 1982, p. 91). The existentialist argues from the libertarian perspective that “one is not a determined object, but a conscious subject who can freely choose and will the relationship to oneself and to one’s world; choice is the main aspect of human life (Bigge, 1982, p. 129).

The meaning of choice has been debated as well. The libertarian argues,
that in which the will makes a choice between two or more actions which are equally attractive, or equally objectionable. If, after a careful weighing of all the considerations for and against each of the alternative actions, the mind finds the rival claimants exactly equal, a decision is possible, {...}, only by a free act of will (Wood, 1973, p. 429).

For the libertarian, in order to be a choice, the choices must be equal. The determinist disputes the notion that choice must be equal by explaining that “the mind would have remained indefinitely in a state of suspended judgement and consequent action or would, {...}, have oscillated between the two incompatibles, never able to yield to one or the other” (Wood, 1973, p. 429). Instead, the determinist views choice as “the motives on the one side or the other become momentarily stronger because of some new external factor injected into the situation or because of the inner reorganization of forces and then action immediately ensues”

(Wood, 1973, p. 430). For the determinist, a decision is made resulting from an accident, circumstance, chance, or impulse.

With either perspective, “the phenomenon of decision after deliberation is an indubitable fact” (Wood, 1973, p. 429). Each view debates the process for which a decision is made, yet, the ability to make decisions relies on the presence of choice. Autonomy involves decision-making, therefore, classrooms where autonomy is promoted, choice should be present. The notion of autonomy as the aim of education is imbedded within the libertarian perspective. Humans have feelings of self-assertion and independence at the moment of decision. The ability to choose is “the force that guides, molds, and directs the life of a person” (Bigge, 1982, p. 17). If autonomy is the ability to govern oneself, then the mind should possess the ability to choose, in the sense of freedom to make decisions and carry them out morally and intellectually.

Origin of the Word Choice

Not only has the notion of choice been debated for centuries, there are multiple meanings for the word "choice". Choice was rooted in the word *chois*, which ultimately derived from a Germanic source during the Middle English period about 1300. The etymological dictionary refers to choice as a noun meaning "selection, alternative". About 1350, the adjective choice is referred to as "distinguished, excellent". (Barnhart, 1988, p.168). As defined in the Oxford dictionary, choice and its meaning as it relates to this study is as follows:

Choice- *n.* 1. Choosing, deciding between possibilities; a necessity to choose, a selection; 2. option; 3. A person or thing (to be) specially chosen or selected. 4. Variety and

abundance to choose from; a scope or field of possibilities. 5. Care in choosing, judgement, discrimination. 6. An alternative. Choice- *a.* 1. Carefully chosen, apt, appropriate. 2. Careful in choosing; discriminative.

Several words are used to describe choice or used in conjunction with choice. The action of choosing is considered an *option*. A proposition containing two or more mutually exclusive things is referred to as an *alternative*. A *selection* is a thing or person selected or a range of things from which one or more may be selected. *Elect* means to pick out or select, usually for a particular purpose. *Preference* is that which one prefers or one's prior choice. *Decision* is the action of coming to a determination or resolution with regard to any point or course of action; a resolution or conclusion arrived at. (Brown, 1993)

Philosophically, both Plato and Aristotle pondered the notion of choice and align themselves on the side of free will. In Plato's Republic, according to White (1991) Plato deemed a person unhealthy if they possess a soul which lacks freedom, self-control, and intellectual clarity. A person is unethical when driven by physical and emotional wants and therefore, not able to distinguish between right and wrong. Plato believes, as White mentions,

When their minds service their wants, they cannot examine the morality of their actions.

Only the freedom, control, and balanced perspective that come with the soul's health result in ethical behavior. If you aren't dominated by your physical or emotional wants, you can make good decisions. Thus, virtue is an expression of the strong, healthy soul, one in which a clear mind is the dominant force in someone's life (White, 1991, p. 224).

Plato's philosophical perspective is rooted in the idea that "people are good-active substantive minds; they are absolutely real selves endowed with free will or genuine moral choice" (Bigge, 1982, p. 25). "Aristotle raises the question of voluntary versus involuntary action in

the process of discussing moral responsibility and how human character is formed" (White, 1991, p. 133).

Aristotle starts from what he takes as a self-evident fact that we can deliberate about our actions and make choices. Basically, he believes that we are responsible for those actions we choose and we are not responsible for those we don't choose. If an action results from constraint or ignorance, it is involuntary. If we are free from force or pressure and know everything we should about what we're doing, the action is voluntary. (White, 1991, 133).

John Dewey (1960; 1932; 1908) referred to choice as "the most characteristic activity of a self" (p. 148). Before decision, comes a spontaneous selection or preference, preferring one thing to another; selecting one thing and rejecting another. Externally, they are equal and accessible and with an attraction to certain objects or valued above others. After hesitation, comes deliberation; weighing values and then a preference brought on by deliberation based on conscious values. The mind decides between two conflicting things what it really wants. "That is choice. We prefer spontaneously, we choose deliberately, knowingly" (p.149).

Dewey added,

Deliberation has an important function in this process, because each different possibility as it is presented to the imagination appeals to a different element in the constitution to the self, thus giving all sides of character a chance to play their part in their final choice. The resulting choice also shapes the self, making it, in some degree, a new self (p.149).

Jean Piaget and Barbel Inhelder (1958) discussed choice in relation to possibility and necessity in that thought is proceeded by a combination of possibility, hypothesis and deductive reasoning. They state,

possibility enters the adaptation process, in the field of adaptations indispensable to action, in the form of the potential future, since, when an internalized action becomes an operation, possibility intervenes at each bifurcation-i.e., in every case in which the subject, after having imagined were each of two or several possible courses of action leads, must make a choice (p. 263).

Out of necessity, a hypothesis is formulated by a child when a construction is not visible through direct observation, "thus as a holding true even if the conditions are modified" (p. 12). If and when the hypothesis somehow contradicts the facts, "this can be only done by a thought process able to deduce the consequences of simple hypothesis with necessity" (p. 37). When a child tries to make sense of a choice situation, he or she reduces the number of possibilities (choices) and the necessity to make sense results in a hypothesis.

Confusion about choice

There has been some confusion with the term choice and absolute freedom. It is important to address the difference between an environment that promotes choice and one, which might promote absolute freedom. There is a distinct difference. John Dewey (1916; 1944) discussed freedom in relation to individuality and control by others. He states, "Regarding freedom, the important thing to bear in mind is that it designates a mental attitude rather than external unconstraint of movements, but that this quality of mind cannot develop without a fair leeway of movements in exploration, experimentation, application, etc" (p.

305). He concluded that in a democratic society, the ideal is to "allow for intellectual freedom and the play of diverse gifts and interests in its educational measures" (p. 305).

Maxine Greene (1988) considers freedom in relation with others. Rather than from an individual stance, she stated,

Freedom shows itself or comes into being when individuals come together in a particular way, when they are authentically present to one another (without masks, pretenses, badges of office), when they have a project they can mutually pursue. When people lack attachments, when there is no possibility of coming together in a plurality or a community, when they have not tapped their imaginations, they may think of breaking free, but they will be unlikely to think of breaking through the structures of their world and creating something new. It does not matter whether those structures as everyday as constraining family rituals, as banal as bureaucratic supervisory systems, as shabby as segregation practices. There must be a coming together of those who choose themselves as affected and involved (p. 17).

DeVries and Kohlberg (1987) state, "Piaget did not suggest that children be given complete freedom. He criticized such a view in the following way".

A few years ago the main trend, especially owing to the widespread influence of psychoanalysis, was carefully to avoid frustrating the developing child in any way. This led to an excess of unsupervised liberty which ended in generalized play without much educational benefit (Piaget, 1948; 1973, pp. 6-7, in DeVries and Kohlberg, 1987, p. 28).

Piaget (1948; 1973) discussed the misconception of what some may view as teaching

methods promoting freedom. What he describes as active methods are "that every truth to be learned be rediscovered or at least reconstructed by the student and not simply imparted to him" (p. 15-16). He mentions two misunderstandings of the teacher's role in the use of active methods. He stated,

The first is the fear (and sometimes hope) that the teacher would have no role to play in these experiments and that their success would depend on leaving the students entirely free to work or play as they will. It is obvious that the teacher as organizer remains indispensable in order to create the situations and construct the initial devices which present useful problems to the child. Secondly, he is needed to provide counter-examples that compel reflection and reconsideration of over-hasty solutions. What is desired is that the teacher cease being a lecturer, satisfied with transmitting ready-made solutions; his role should rather be that of a mentor stimulating initiative and research.
(p. 16)

He called for experimental procedures to be learned in the active method otherwise, "an experiment not carried out by the individual himself with all the freedom of initiative is by definition not an experiment but mere drill with no educational value" (p. 20). In order for students to become productive and creative in the future, schools need to be places where students discover to understand, or rediscover by reconstructing through active methods.

Piaget believed the active school must consider both moral and intellectual development. He contended,

No real intellectual activity could be carried on in the form of experimental actions and spontaneous investigations without free collaboration among individuals-that is to say, among the students themselves, and not only between the teacher and the student. Using

the intelligence assumes not only continual mutual stimulation, but also and more importantly mutual control and exercise of the critical spirit, which alone can lead the individual to objectivity and to a need for conclusive evidence (p. 108).

He suggested that it would be ridiculous to think a child could formulate problems themselves without guidance to their awareness. The teacher-organizer should not only have an understanding of content but an understanding of child development in providing for the active method.

Edward L. Deci (1995) speaks of a human's need for relatedness by growing toward respecting their surroundings, socially and physically. Being free "involves concern for others and respect for the environment, because those are the manifestations of the human connectedness. "[D]oing your own thing" without considering others does not constitute freedom. "Freedom involves being open to one's inner nature, and there one finds the tendencies for both relatedness and autonomy" (p. 205).

DeVries and Zan (1996) view freedom through cooperation. In classrooms where cooperation is present, the goals of the social interaction are regarded as treating each other as equals. They stated, "when the adult is able to respect the child as a person with a right to exercise his or her will, one can speak about a certain psychological equality in the relationship. Piaget, of course, was not advocating that children have complete freedom because such freedom is inconsistent with moral relations with others" (p. 108). The relationship is based on autonomy rather than heteronomy. An adult refrains from unnecessary authority. To seek an environment based on autonomy, "the adult opens the way for children to develop minds capable of thinking independently and creatively and to develop moral feelings and convictions that take into account the best interest of all parties" (p.108).

Van Manen (1991) contends, "freedom that knows no boundaries or standards is not real freedom" (p. 152). He explains adults need to understand when to "hold back, when to pass over things, when to wait, when "not to notice" something, when to step back, rather than intervene, draw the attention, or interrupt, is a gift to the child's personal development" (p. 151). He maintains that there are appropriate times to step in such as when there is risk, a danger, or things are out of control. There are times for adult's active involvement. "Total" freedom results from permissiveness and a "stepping completely out of the pedagogical relation with young people" (p. 151).

Clements and Battista (1990) interpret Bruner's thoughts on freedom and constructivism by stating,

"Some see [constructivism as it relates to teaching] as inefficient, [a] free-for-all discovery. In fact, even in its least directive form, the guidance of the teacher is the feature that distinguishes constructivism and unguided discovery. [Practices based on constructivism offer] appropriate tasks and opportunities for dialogue, guides the focus of student's attention, thus unobtrusively directing their learning (p. 34).

Selma Wasserman (2000) explains that respect for children's choices gives them opportunities to make decisions that affect their lives especially when they are acknowledged and valued. Adults show respect when children have the right to function on their own. Children view themselves as independent persons influencing their environment and developing a sense of self-worth. She notes, "This is not to suggest, of course, that children should have choices about everything they do; that would be absurd. We would not allow choices in life-threatening situations, nor would we allow choice where certain options are unwise or unwarranted or simply inappropriate. Choices do not have to be made from among

unlimited options" (p. 10). She maintains that empowering children, or providing some freedom means increasing choice and respecting the decision.

The common thread running through the above statements on children and absolute freedom is that choice does not mean freedom in the absolute sense. Choice and freedom come with guidance, consideration of others, cooperation, and respect.

Another negative term often confused, as a choice is what Alfie Kohn (1996) refers to as a "pseudochoice". A pseudochoice is a disguised choice. Kohn outlines three types of pseudochoices, namely "obey or suffer", "you punished yourself", and "choose...and suffer". "Obey and suffer" refers to incidences disguised as choices or options such as a teacher addressing a child with, "you may do your work now or during recess". When a child's action goes against what the adult wanted the child to do, the adult might say "you punished yourself". For example, a child did not finish his or her work because he or she was not focused during the work period. When it was time to go outside for a break, the adult might respond, "Oh, I see you've made a decision to stay indoors to finish your work while the others are out playing." The third pseudochoice is "choose...and suffer". Children are encouraged to make decisions in order to learn from their mistake. An example of this would be if a child chose to get into a fight. The consequences of his or her action may be that the child is beaten up. The adult may view the experience as a consequence of his or her action while the child may view the experience as the need to win the next aggressive encounter. I am reminded of a personal experience of what I consider a pseudochoice. My daughter's coach asked the girls to anonymously elect a captain for their team by writing their selection on paper. He followed with, if he did not think the person elected from the majority vote was appropriate, he would decide for himself who their captain would be. Considering the process

would be a waste of time, my daughter responded with, "then why don't you just pick." The process did not make sense to her if their vote may be vetoed anyway. Her suggestion, in my opinion, seemed reasonable and not just a sixteen year old rebellious statement.

Unfortunately her comment was met with a reprimand. These types of pseudochoices promote neither, moral or intellectual development. Kohn contends, "A caring adult wants to help children learn to make responsible decisions about the things that matter to them-and to help them see the results of those decisions" (p. 52).

What do those who have devoted their lives to analyzing and pondering the school experience have to say about choice?

After her work with Jean Piaget, Constance Kamii has continued research in the area of mathematics. She believes that educators need to "change their goals from conformity and obedience (heteronomy) to critical thinking and choice making (autonomy)" (Kamii, 1991, p. 382). She (1984) states, "the most important elements for children's development of autonomy are opportunities to exchange viewpoints with other people and the possibility of making decisions. The morality of autonomy is based on an individual's personal values, rather than the reward system. This means that children need many opportunities to construct personal values for themselves" (p. 13). She believes that children begin to make wise decisions not by obeying an adult but through opportunities to make choices and decisions. She provides two reasons for the need for children to make decisions. "First, children cannot find out about the wisdom of one decision if they do not have opportunities to compare its consequence with the consequence of a bad decision" (p. 13). For example, a child who decides not to wear a coat outside on a chilly day and becomes cold, may consider and learn

from his or her experience when trying to decide on a coat for the next outdoor adventure.

"Second, children become responsible only when they are truly responsible for the decisions *they* make" (p. 13). When they obey an adult directive, they are not responsible for a decision.

Kamii believes good judgement begins early. Children begin with small decisions and gradually increase with more complex decisions. As children coordinate their point of view with another, they "think critically, and this critical thinking often leads to a higher level of reasoning." She continues, "[m]erely correcting the surface behavior or the answer serves only to confuse children and to make them lose confidence in their own ability to think" (1991, p. 385). When teaching mathematics, Kamii suggests games to provide the exchange of viewpoints rather than worksheets. Games are more active and conducive to autonomy. She explains, "[c]hildren can choose the game they want to play, and the people with whom they want to play, and develop socially and morally as they negotiate solutions to conflicts and disagreements" (p. 385). She believes children "must be encouraged to do their own thinking and to choose their own ways of solving problems" (p. 386).

Rheta DeVries and Betty Zan (1994) discuss the importance of choice with respect to constructivism and the sociomoral atmosphere in the classroom. Drawing from their research in three kindergarten classrooms, they discuss the distinctly different educational paradigms found in each classroom concerning the sociomoral atmosphere. Their view concludes that "a significant component in sociomoral development is intellectual. Conversely, a significant component in intellectual development is sociomoral" (p. 252). This interplay of the intellectual and sociomoral development is present in situations of choice. They discuss choice in relation to rule making and decision-making, voting, and choosing activities. In classrooms supporting constructivism, teachers and students share the decision-making

experience as a community. Students have the means to decide how to run their classroom. They suggest the main purpose for rule-making and decision-making is to foster an atmosphere based on mutual respect where cooperation and self-regulation are practiced. This means, "giving children the possibility to regulate their behavior voluntarily" (p. 125). The interrelated goals of the decision making process are "to promote feelings of necessity about rules and fairness, [...] ownership of classroom rules, procedures, and decisions, [...] and shared responsibility for what goes on in the class and how the group gets along together" (p. 126).

Children's intellectual and moral growth is involved in making choices. DeVries and Zan suggest students can make decisions concerning activities, procedures and special problems. They believe children should make "choices about activities in which they want to engage during at least some part of everyday" (p. 139). They also recommend group decisions concerning activities.

Voting as a means of group choice has three main benefits for children. First, they state, *voting is a process of self-regulation. When children exercise initiative to make a group decision, they feel in control of what happens in their classroom. They are motivated to formulate and express opinions. Through exchanging points of view, children may be persuaded or make new efforts to persuade others. Children have the opportunity to construct the idea of equality as they see that each person's opinion is valued and given equality as they see that each person's opinion is valued and given equal weight in the decision making process (p. 145).*

Individual needs can be transformed into a sense of group cooperation through the voting process. Children can gain an understanding of the minority and majority rule. Voting

provides genuine situations to think about writing and number sense in a personally meaningful context. They also suggest choosing activities gives students opportunities to freely move about and develop autonomy through the pursuit of interest and through cooperation to settle disputes in a fair manner. By involving children in decision-making, creating rules to live by in the classroom, and choosing activities, teachers reduce their adult authority and student heteronomy and promote children's autonomy.

Eleanor Duckworth (1987) considers the essence of intellectual development as the "having of wonderful ideas". She suggests providing for occasions of wonderful ideas by "being willing to accept children's ideas" and "providing a setting that suggests wonderful ideas to children" (p. 7). Knowledge should be cultivated in a way that seems interesting and accessible to the child. "That is, one can familiarize children with a few phenomena in such a way as to catch their interest, to let them raise and answer their own questions, to let them realize their ideas are significant-so that they have the interest, the ability, and the self-confidence to go on by themselves" (p. 8). Students accepting their own ideas and working them through can lead to the formation of new ideas. Duckworth suggests new ideas are not generated through verbal summaries of someone else's knowledge but through the student's "own repertoire of thoughts, actions, connections, predictions, and feelings". Even through their own initiative or reading or hearing something, "the individual had done the work of putting them together for himself or herself, and they give rise to new ways to put them together" (p. 13). In relation to the transmission of knowledge found in the traditional classroom, knowing the right answer is what is valued. "Knowing the right answer requires no decision, carries no risk, and makes no demands. It is automatic. It is thoughtless" (p. 64). She proposes a good learning situation as what Blanchet proposed as a good experimental

situation as "It must permit the child to establish plans to reach a distant goal, while leaving him wide freedom to follow his own routing" (Blanchet in Duckworth, 1987, p. 48). She interprets this to mean that learning situations should involve students in solving practical problems. They should spend time not only reorganizing their levels of understanding in real situations but also in developing multiple access routes to their knowledge.

Selma Wasserman (2000) suggests that when children are in situations with the "power-to", it increases their pleasure which is related to ego strength, self-confidence, and heightened personal autonomy. She suggests:

Power-to needs are fed when adults allow children choices; when even very young children may exercise their own options in situations that genuinely matter to them. Allowing children options implicitly communicates that we believe in them and their ability to do. When they are given options, when they are allowed to choose, when their choices are respected, they grow to believe in themselves. They learn that they can do. A sense of can-do and feelings of personal power are thus intimately connected. Children learn to believe that they have the power to make a change, that they have control over their environment. (p. 7)

She views choice as "one of the most pervasive acts of life" (p. 84). Most of our actions require choice and whether trivial or profound, they affect our lives. She argues that choice is not included in our educational goals for children and is most likely considered a by-product of other learning. She believes there are life long benefits in learning to choose wisely which can be achieved through repeated opportunities to choose. In order to learn from choices made, discussion should follow concerning a critical, "nondefensive examination of how and why the choice was made. In other words, it takes practice and reflection-on-action" (p. 85).

Wasserman believes lack of choice in the classroom creates habits of obedience in students. Without choice, teachers can not hope for students to grow as independent thinkers.

Christine Chaille and Lory Britain (1997) refer to choice through self-direction. They believe a self-directed environment provides for experimentation either collaboratively or alone. The environment is designed from the child's perspective to encourage children to rely on themselves to figure out what to do, how to do it, and what not to do. In classrooms supporting constructivism, socialization is emphasized as well as models, strategies, and encouragement for self-direction. The curriculum should be based on the children's thought processes and activities. The materials and activities allow for multiple possibilities. The curriculum provides for "guidance by creating learning situations that encourage a diversity of approaches. Such settings will let children produce and test many different ideas and hypotheses, creating an environment that actively supports theory building" (p. 23).

Linda Darling-Hammond suggests schools should be aimed at a more child-centered education by providing for democratic decision-making. In order to embrace democracy, she believes schools should cultivate in their students the skills, knowledge, and understanding, leading and arming students with the intelligence of free thought. She writes, "Schools must provide an education that enable critical thinking *and* communal experience, so that citizens can intellectually debate competing ideas, weigh the individual and the common good, and make judgements that sustain democratic institutions and ideals (Ayers & Miller, 1998, p. 80).

van Manen (1991) suggests "the modern child is born into a world that can be experienced, within limits, as a life of possibilities-though the possibilities are certainly not the same for all." With the life experiences children bring with them into the classroom,

positive or negative, they should "experience a certain openness of choice and possibility in life" (p.3). He continues,

They must make active choices in their lives for fear of not becoming anything or anyone. The modern child must actively realize that he or she is born into a condition of possibilities. He or she is the body of possibilities. To become a person, to grow up and to become educated, is to transform one's contingency into commitment, responsibility-one must choose life. This means that the vocation of pedagogy, of being educationally involved with children to give active shape to their life's contingencies" (van Manen, 1991, p.3)

Negative contingencies can lead to self-destructive lifestyles. Positive contingencies "means that each young person must make choices and commitments in life, that they all must come to terms with the possibilities. The child is in a real sense the agent of his or her own destiny-at both the individual and social level". In relation to theory and practice, the pedagogue must "live in a relationship of thoughtfulness and openness to children rather than being governed by traditional beliefs, discarded values, old rules, and fixed impositions" (van Manen, 1991, p.3). Students are not merely vessels to be filled, they are present at school in the same manner they live their lives outside of school. The experience of pedagogy is to relay the connectedness of responsibility between themselves and the world around them (van Manen, 1991).

From the field of cognitive psychology and literacy, Smith (1990) discusses thinking and its' relationship to decision-making. There are no all-purpose techniques to decision-making. He explains that decisions depend on the circumstances and that "making better decisions about particular matters or states of affairs requires more experiences of those

matters or states of affairs" (p. 17). On certain occasions, a willingness to make decisions depends on personal and personality consideration and not on cognitive strategies. Then, for educators, "facilitating thinking is more a matter of attitude than of lesson plans" (p. 126). Thinking is first brought on by interest. If students are interested, they are engaged in thought and learn no matter how important or trivial. According to Smith, interest does not guarantee we will think efficiently yet, "when our interest is aroused, we strive to join the company of people involved in the activity that interests us" (p. 127). He believes classrooms are interesting when they make thinking possible and worthwhile. The imagination can run free. Respect is another essential element in a positive classroom. Respect for those who are taught and for what is taught. He states, "When teachers respect the feelings and opinions of their students, then teachers and students become partners in whatever is thought about, to the advantage of both parties" (p. 127). In the partnership, students need opportunities to recognize that knowledge can be challenged and that fact may be opinion and that argument can be constructive. Creative thinking considers alternatives and "resists mechanistic modes of decision-making. Thought flourished as questions are asked, not as answers are found" (p.129).

Other proponents of constructivism in education have had some opinions about choice in the classroom. Yetta Goodman (1990) responds to the years of research on literacy from Emilia Ferreiro and Ana Teberosky in recommending teachers "appreciate the strengths children have in controlling their own learning." She believes teachers should attend to how children invent their understanding of the process of writing and reading. She encourages teachers to collaborate with students as they read and write together as a social community. Environments should be organized for children to "speak, listen, read, and write in order to

think about problems and try to solve them, to answer self generated questions, and to wonder about the world in areas significant to their daily lives" (p. 120). Brooks and Brooks (1999) expand Goodman's idea by suggesting "it's more effective [...] to permit budding writers to invent their own spelling and publish their own material for others to read and for themselves to re-read than to teach the rules of grammar and conventional spelling and then ask students to put the skills together in an original piece of writing" (p. 49).

Marjorie Fields and Cindy Boesser (1994) suggest to "allow children the freedom of choice among a wide variety of interesting activities" (p. 67). They believe, as children make choices, they almost always choose an appropriate level of challenge. In considering the value of choice, "not only does it enhance the development of autonomy, but it also is invaluable for matching the curriculum to the child" (p. 67). William Ayers (1993) recommends choice as a means of understanding students through their work, play, and relationship. He suggests keeping a journal or diary for record-keeping as an "instrument for thinking about teaching and children" and for "seeking a deeper understanding of growth and development" (p. 39). As children pursue their interest through choice at either "activity time" in the primary classroom or for the older children through project time, independent research, free-reading time, or break time, teachers can document the choices students make and note their approaches. "If autonomy, initiative, and leadership are nurtured", according to Brooks and Brooks (1993), students are prompted to make connections among ideas and concepts. "Students who frame questions and issues and then go about answering and analyzing them take responsibility for their own learning and become problem solvers and perhaps more important, problem finders" (p. 103). Student's are guided by their own ideas

and ideas of others. "These students ask for it, if not demand, the freedom to play with ideas, explore issues, and encounter new information" (p. 103).

Edward L. Deci (1995) writes about his research and that of Richard M. Ryan's, related to personal autonomy, intrinsic motivation and choice. Deci explains that as psychologists, each tested their ideas by examining what happens to motivation in people when they were externally controlled verses intrinsically motivated. Their research indicates "that *self*-motivation, rather than external motivation, is at the heart of creativity, responsibility, healthy behavior, and lasting change. External cunning or pressure (and their internalized counterparts) can sometimes bring about compliance, but with compliance comes various negative consequences, including the urge to defy" (p. 9). They claim that providing choice "is a central feature in supporting a person's autonomy" (p. 34). Therefore, those in positions of authority should consider how to provide for choices. Their studies revealed that patients should help plan their treatment regimen, employees in the workplace should take part in deciding the responsibilities, and students should have opportunities to choose during their school experience. Deci writes,

The main thing about meaningful choice is that it engenders willingness. It encourages people to fully endorse what they are doing; it pulls them into the activity and allows them to feel a greater sense of volition; it decreases their alienation. When you provide people choice, it leaves them feeling as if you are responsive to them as individuals. And providing choice may very well lead to better, or more workable, solutions than the ones you would have imposed (p. 34).

Studies from Deci and Ryan, as well as many others concerning choice can be found in several books and articles written by Alfie Kohn (1993a; 1993b; 1996; 1998; 1999). He

has written on the subject of choice, referring to his personal interactions with others and through his extensive literature reviews. Kohn (1998) concludes that choice for students offers several benefits. First, choice gives students a sense of self-determination. There are positive effects on their general well being when they experience a sense of control over their lives. They are better adjusted emotionally. Opportunities for choice affect student's behavior and values. He states, "if we want children to make good values their own over the long haul- then there is no substitute for giving them the chance to become actively involved in deciding what kind of people they want to be and what kind of classroom or school they want to have" (p. 252). Choice positively affects student's academic achievement. He sights several studies supporting the benefits of choice and concludes from his review that students became more engaged in their work, interest level was high, they missed less school, tested higher on a national test, were more self-regulated and their reasoning was more sophisticated. There is an intrinsic value with the opportunity for choice. Rather than being controlled, students feel respected and have a chance to practice living democratically in preparation for their adult life. Lastly, teachers benefit from student choice, in that, they are more interested in their work when they collaborate with their students. Teachers are freed from a position of monitoring and supervising and are able to interact more freely with their students.

He provides examples of how choice can be offered both academically and through social and behavioral issues. He suggests offering choice does not mean choices are limitless. Limits can be established when considering the rights of others, age-appropriateness, time, and structure. He believes students have very little say about what happens to them each day at school. Kohn argues, "Schooling is typically about doing things *to* children, not working *with* them" (p. 251). In regards to working *with* students, he states, "(t)he truth is, if we want

children to *take* responsibility for their own behavior we must first *give* them responsibility and plenty of it. The way a child learns how to make decisions is by making decisions, not by following directions" (p. 253).

David Boud's (1988) book on developing student autonomy outlines several suggestions on how students might take the initiative to be self-directed in their learning. Although he refers to students at the university level, much of what he suggests can be applied to the early years of education as others have suggested in this review. Students can identify their own learning needs and set their own goals. They can plan their learning activities and find the necessary resources for their work and use the teacher as a guide. Students can take the initiative to choose an independent project that is student-directed. They can work independently or collaboratively with others. Students can select their own projects or create their own problems to solve. Opportunities can be provided for choosing where and when to learn. They can decide on the criteria to apply to their work and engage in self-assessment. They can determine when learning is complete and reflect on their learning processes. He suggests students can take responsibility in their own learning yet the degree of autonomy in learning varies with different approaches (p. 23).

Research related to choice

Educational settings offering some degree of choice for children have been considered student-centered (Brooks & Brooks, 1993), child-centered (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1996), learner-centered (Kohn, 1993), child-initiated (Weikart & Schweinhart, 1998), and self-directed (Chaille & Britain, 1997). Literature suggests choice for children can be present during free play (Wakefield, 1994), activity time (DeVries & Zan, 1994), project work (Katz

& Chard, 1993), and when governing "the social life of the classroom" (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987). Fortunately, the importance of choice in a classroom and the benefits for children have been given some attention in the educational literature. Unfortunately, there are few research studies specifically centered on choice. The following are studies involving choice in some aspect of the school setting.

A longitudinal study, (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1998) concerning the effects of preschool programs involving children of poverty found ten significant advantages of child-initiated curriculum programs over a teacher directed curriculum program. The researchers followed the lives of sixty-eight participants from the ages of three and four to age twenty-three.

Students who participated in the child-initiated preschool programs had fewer emotional problems, fewer felony arrests, fewer personal property crimes, were involved in fewer acts of misconduct as adolescents, and fewer incidents of work suspension. Participants from the child-initiated curriculum programs reported a willingness to accept responsibility for their actions and volunteered more as adults. More students from the child-initiated programs were married and still living with their spouse, and planned to graduate from college. The study suggests that child-initiated learning experiences have "the best potential for supporting successful child development" (p. 60).

A conclusion of research conducted by Edward Deci, Richard Ryan, and several of their colleagues is presented in Deci's book, (1995) Why We Do What We Do. He concludes that people need to have some control over their lives through choice and decision-making to fulfill needs of competence, relatedness, and personal autonomy. Their work indicates that people are intrinsically motivated when they feel some control over what they are doing.

They found external controls imposed by someone else can have negative effects and reduce intrinsic motivation. One study examined autonomy in children's learning (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987) by comparing students in different learning environments. They found that students in non-controlling environments were given more control over how to approach their assignment, which increased their interest level and conceptual learning. For the controlled, directed learning environment, student's rote learning had deteriorated approximately a week later in a follow-up. It was tentatively suggested "that conceptual learning may be optimized under conditions that facilitate active, autonomous involvement on the part of the learner" (p. 897). The findings compliment theories which support "the role of autonomy or self-determination in children's assimilation of that which surrounds them" (p. 897). Stiller & Ryan, (1992) reported that student choice in an academic environment had an impact on student engagement, the use of positive coping strategies, control understanding (choosing paths toward goals), and self-regulation.

An investigation examining the characteristics of civic participation in two upper elementary classrooms found that students participated in their democratic classrooms through real and meaningful choices, shared responsibility, and shared decision-making. Obenchain (1998) recommended "allowing students to become responsible in the classroom through rule-making, classroom jobs, [and] choice in assignments" (p. 23). Students should be involved in establishing the classroom environment, which helps lead them toward responsibility for their classroom community.

Student's perspectives on choice

In one study (Allen, 1995), student and teacher points of views were expressed concerning democratic schooling. JoBeth Allen interviewed groups of students from five elementary schools and six grade levels associated with a Program of School Improvement which works with schools in supporting student and teacher decision-making (Allen and Glickman, 1992). From their responses in interviews, a pattern emerged from what students considered an ideal school. Their views concerning choice included the belief that they should have choices about what they read and write, whom they work with and where they sit, and about what they learn. They said they would like to have the authority, time, and support to make decisions about their own classrooms and about the school as a whole. In the most democratic classrooms, students made decisions that were substantive. Means of decision making were demonstrated through class meetings and student council. Students reported making individual and class decisions. A few students requested changing a curriculum practice, which lead two teachers to accept a new style of teaching with positive results. In three of the five schools, teachers reported their shared governance extended to their students. Some students felt the teacher made all of the decisions while other students felt they could change anything. Allen concluded that variations in student opinions from feeling powerless to feeling powerful, suggests examining practical models of democratic schools and the commitment to the ideal.

In another study, preschool children and their teachers were interviewed and finding that the children can and should have choices on how to structure their activities and be able to assert independence in the classroom. The children believed they should have control over their personal decisions. The study implies that choice for children increases their self-confidence and positive relations with others. It was speculated that teachers who offer choice

facilitate children's motivation to learn. (Killen & Smetana, 1999). However, teachers offering choice in the preschool setting do not necessarily actively negotiate in unexpected choice situations with children. The study found negotiation is primarily found in the home. (Nucci, Killen, & Smetana, 1996).

Helwig & Kim (1999) examined children's evaluation of decision-making procedures. Interviewing children from first through sixth grade, they assessed student's decision-making by providing them with three decision-making options including consensus, majority rule and authority-based in the contexts of peer, family, and school settings. Students in all grade levels endorsed consensus for peer and family settings and considered authority-based decisions for school curriculum.

What is being done to promote choice in the classroom or the school environment?

Several ideas, based on research, have surfaced in recent years concerning how choice can be incorporated in the classroom. To foster thoughtful self-direction, students are encouraged to set goals, design strategies, monitor their progress and evaluate for self-improvement. Thinking journals invite student's to participate by reflecting on the process. (Barell, Liebmann, Sigel, 1988). Students can design the curriculum with their teacher through selecting a target theme, establishing guiding questions, and design instructional activities (Nelson & Fredrick, 1994). Creativity can be fostered by giving children control over deciding what materials they want to use and how they want to approach their project (Smith, 1996). Choice can be promoted through children's invented games, offering them occasions to decide how to make a game and how to play (1990, Castle). Children can establish rules, which give them more opportunities for choice in the classroom (Castle &

Rogers, 1993;1994, Devries & Zan, 1994; Kamii & Housman, 2000). Resolving conflicts is one way to engage student's participation in problem-solving concerning situations that are relevant to their lives (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992, Tudge & Caruso, 1988).

Programs Promoting Choice

The Reggio Emilia school was founded in Italy and developed project work for early childhood age children. In project work, the teacher observes and listens to children's questions and conversations to better understand their interests. Children then choose from the range of the options provided by the teacher or through a provocation, which arouses student's interest. Teaching with the project approach is based on offering "multiple options, suggestive ideas, and sources of support" (Edwards, Gandini, and Foreman, 1996). With plenty of space, choice of materials and forms of expression, children will engage in a more in-depth study allowing for creativity and long term engagement. Children have time for investigation, reflection, revision, and may revisit their projects. They engage in problem solving and collaboration. At the end of their project, they prepare a presentation of their work, summarizing their experience.

The Foxfire approach was developed and constructed by a group of interested teachers. It is an active learner-centered approach to teaching and learning. It is defined as "an interactive relationship between teachers, learners, and curriculum and involves learners in making significant decisions about how they will learn, how they will assess what they learn, and how they will use what they have learned in meaningful ways" (Starnes & Paris, 2000, p. 393). They developed a set of core practices, which include teacher and student collaboration on student choice, design, and revision. Peer teaching, small group work, and

teamwork characterize active learning. The teacher is a facilitator and the integrity of the work is clear from the beginning. There is an audience other than the teacher and classroom, and includes connections to the community and beyond. Lessons build on previous lessons and ideas. Imagination and creativity are encouraged. Students engage in reflection through their work, ongoing assessment, and evaluation. Knowing students ultimately have the ability to choose not to engage in their work, the Foxfire goal is "for students to want to choose to learn and choose in order to learn" (p. 397).

The Child Development Project (CDP) has a central goal of helping schools become "caring communities of learners". Caring communities is considered,

a social context in which all students feel supported and valued, can actively participate in and contribute to school life, and where there is a common commitment not only to learning but to fairness, respect, responsibility, and concern for others. [The] basic assumption is that a school that meets all children's basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and belonging, and also facilitates their intellectual, social, and ethical development, including their knowledge of subject matter, conceptual understanding, reasoning and thinking skills, and understanding of self and others. Satisfaction of students' basic needs is expected to result in their attachment or bonding to the school community, which, in turn, promotes commitment to and internalization of the community's prosocial norms and values, and behavior consistent with them (p. 5-6)

Research findings (Roberts, Hom, Battistich, 1995) were obtained from schools across the country working with CDP. Questionnaires provided the information gained from participating teachers and students. Their perceptions of the school as a community were

examined. According to the findings, CDP intervention shows classrooms and school-wide practices and activities significantly increased school community. Results indicated significant increases in student's "liking for school, learning motivation, academic achievement, and commitment to education; significant increases in concern for others, conflict resolution skills, prosocial motivation, and prosocial behavior; and reductions in ATOD [Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug] use, and delinquent behavior" (p. 6). Student responses indicated their involvement in choice and decision-making in certain classroom communities. They suggested that they get to choose what they will work on and in their own way. Teachers reported students in their classroom's work together to solve problems. They enlist help from their students in deciding what the class should do and what the rules will be together. Teachers reported that students help decide what goes on, they plan together what they will do, and that students can get a rule changed if they think it is unfair. The Child Development Project emphasized their intervention program does not target individual students but a change in the social environment of a school.

The state of Missouri has adopted Project Construct in association with the CDP, which has implemented developmentally appropriate practices based on constructivism. Many school districts in Missouri are voluntarily establishing practices that are child-initiated and teachers are taking responsibility for creating a learning environment, which motivate students to construct knowledge. Knowledge is constructed through "hands-on, minds-on" learning experiences. They participate in learning communities in which they work independently and collaboratively with others to resolve problems that integrate a variety of curricular areas" (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2001). One venue for student choice is through class meetings. Class meetings "provide opportunities for

children to strengthen their ability to communicate and to reason, thus laying the foundation for their understanding of the principals of a democratic society. Practices such as class meetings or cross-age buddies provide opportunities to empower children and to promote their development as autonomous individuals" (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2001).

A synthesis of studies, programs, and recommendations include choice as a necessary component in the school experience to contribute to the success of each student. To question the importance of choice, one must begin by considering its roots. Choice has been the topic of philosophical debate for centuries. It has been under scrutiny in its definition and has even been associated with absolute freedom. Choice has been mentioned in relation to autonomy, both intellectually and morally. Many studies revolve around activity time (Meier, 1994) and free play (Wakefield, 1988) and are terms associated with early childhood classrooms. Additionally, activity time and free play have been misconstrued as "non-academic periods". Once more, where are the studies in elementary, middle, and high school? Admittedly there are some, but too few. The topic of choice in the literature is written as if it's "just common sense" that children, should, need, and desire to have some choice in their daily school experience. Although, those mentioned in this review have provided some sound justification for choice, more research is needed specifically on choice to provide solid evidence in order for it to exist in *every* classroom.

This review of the literature illustrates the benefits of choice for the learner. In summary, choice promotes...values, critical thinking, negotiation, community, respect, self-regulation, responsibility, confidence, interest, initiative, goal setting, problem-solving, problem finding, access to knowledge, ego-strength, pleasure, wisdom, independent thinkers,

academic achievement, engagement, resourcefulness, active involvement, willingness, self-determination, self-direction, control over learning, invention, collaboration, generating questions, challenge, hypothesizing, theory building, a curriculum match for a child, motivation, healthy behavior, tenants of democracy, debate, judgement, decision-making, imagination, opinion, experimentation, perspective, self-reliance, developing strategies, multiple possibilities, and diversity of approaches. Additional advantages for programs promoting choice have resulted in reducing emotional problems, fewer delinquent behaviors, reduction in alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, increase in college graduates, greater conceptual learning, better coping strategies, and positive student attitudes toward school. Students believe they can take the responsibility of choice in curriculum decisions, classroom and school-wide procedures. They believe as a community they can arrive at decisions through consensus and through democratic tenants. To name a few, programs succeeding in the promotion of choice are found in the Foxfire approach, Reggio Emilia, Project Construct, and other schools involved with the Child Development Project. Above all, the promotion of choice through multiple avenues develops moral and intellectual autonomy which is embedded in a theory of epistemology; namely constructivism. It is my hope, this study will be my springboard for exploring if, why, and how it exists in the school setting. It is my conclusion from this review, more research on choice is needed.

The study of various masters and their interpretation of art have created a sketch of imagery and a focus in the direction the artist intends to explore. The artist must first gather a palette, canvas, and experiment with tools in order to create a form of art she may share with other interested viewers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The challenge facing the human science researcher is to describe things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection. The process involves a blending of what is really present with what is imagined as present from the vantage point of possible meanings; thus the unity of the real and the ideal (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27).

As an artist narrows her selection of tools for a creative endeavor, the tools help focus and give direction only to uncover along the uncharted journey self-discoveries and offer the observer another point of view. Thus, the union of the real and the ideal emerge.

Introduction

This study was based on a form of interpretive inquiry, combining phenomenological and hermeneutical elements in search of the essence of choice. I used tools of qualitative research to identify participants, request protocol writing from each teacher, conducted interviews engaging in purposeful conversations with participants for the gathering and interpretation of data, conducted observations, and an analysis of themes. The following sections outlined in this chapter are: Methodology, Identification of Participants, Participant Selection Process, Design of the Study, Protocol Writing, Interviewing, Observation, Theme Analysis, Follow-up Hermeneutic Conversation, Trustworthiness, and Ethical Issues.

Methodology

In the quest to uncover the essence of choice, this research lent itself to a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is the search for the essence of the particular. According to Patton (1990) phenomenology is based on “the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experiences. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through phenomenon commonly experienced” (p. 70). It was the study of lived experiences in natural settings. “The aim (...) is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence-in such a way that the effect is at once a reflective re-living and reflective appropriation of something meaningful (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). As the researcher, I attempted to gain insightful descriptions of teachers and their students who encountered choice in their everyday experiences in a school setting.

Hermeneutics is the interpretation of text expressing the lived experience. “Hermeneutics is about creating meaning, not simply reporting on it” (Smith, 1991, p. 201). This study was an attempt to interpret “ what it means for participants to be in (the) setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in (the) particular setting, and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting” (Patton, in Merriam, 1998, p. 6).

In this study, I observed students and their teachers from two elementary classrooms. I documented evidence of choice as it existed in the classroom setting through field notes and audiotaping. Through field notes and transcribed audiotapes, I uncovered themes related to choice in the form of vignettes and anecdotes. It was through these descriptions that I hoped to gain a greater understanding of choice and its essence. As Pinar (1988) states, “The measure of our openness which is needed to understand something is also a measure of its

depthful nature. Rich descriptions, that explore the meaning structures beyond what is immediately experienced, gain a dimension of depth” (p. 451).

Identification of Participants

I first sought permission to conduct research from the Institutional Review Board to insure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects were properly protected. The participant selection process began after my proposal approval and Institutional Review Board was granted. After each group of participants had been selected for this study, the school districts, building principals, classroom teachers, students, and their parents were sent a letter requesting permission to conduct this research. Parents of students involved in the study received a letter requesting permission for their child to participate. (See Appendix B) The students' consent was requested verbally after a brief explanation of their involvement of this study. Students were informed at the time of explanation that they may leave the study situation without question at any time.

I purposively selected the participants for this study by utilizing the gatekeeper method. According to Creswell (1998), the gatekeeper is the initial contact for the researcher and informs the researcher of possible participants who will enhance the quality of the study (p.117). Gatekeepers for this study were educators who were well versed in the promotion of autonomy in the classroom. In seeking a teacher who promoted autonomy through choice, gatekeepers were asked for referrals located in the metropolitan and surrounding areas in which I live. After referrals were given, I began the process of selecting participants by contacting a teacher by telephone to arrange a time to observe her classroom if she was willing to participate. A teacher and her classroom were chosen based on evidence of choice

and decision-making in the classroom setting. Classrooms with little evidence of choice and decision-making for the teacher and students were not selected for this particular study. I observed eight different classrooms for approximately one and one-half hours each. Three additional teachers were contacted by telephone and through our telephone discussion, together, we decided their classroom might not be appropriate for this particular study. I brought closure to my involvement with any teacher who was not suitable for this study by politely thanking them for allowing me to visit their classroom and returned to the gatekeeper for another referral.

Participant Selection Process

After observing eight different classrooms, two were chosen for this study. In the classrooms chosen for this study, there was strong evidence of choice. At the conclusion of my initial observation, I waited to speak with each teacher privately to ask her permission to continue observations for my study. Both teachers agreed to allow me to observe their classrooms for the study. I explained to the teachers how I would be conducting the study and what was required of them such as a protocol writing response, interviews, and occasional clarification from questions I had during the observations and data analysis phase. I observed two classroom teachers and their students approximately three days a week for one month in each classroom. “The criterion invoked to determine when to stop sampling is informational redundancy” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 202). When the same themes emerged from each classroom situation, I considered a sufficient amount of data had been collected and discontinued the referral process. I found classrooms promoting choices for children at different age levels and multiage settings. During the research, I obtained protocol writing

samples, conducted an initial and concluding interview, and observed teachers and their students. The richness of the information [was] the goal, not the volume (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen, 1993). Another goal was to observe each classroom beginning the first day of school. One setting operated on a year round calendar and the other setting operated on a traditional calendar enabling me to observe the first month of school in each setting. After I completed an in-depth study of one teacher and her students, I began my observation of the second teacher and her students. This process continued until I collected a sufficient amount of data from the two classrooms.

Design of the Study

The design of this study was emergent and flexible in nature. The methods described for this inquiry were considered a rough framework of my intentions. “The naturalistic researcher recognizes the complexity and allows structure to build only as his or her understanding of that context and of the respondents’ constructions of reality allows the design to emerge” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, p. 73, 1993). This study was an investigation of the experience of choice as lived and a reflection of themes characterizing the phenomenon of choice. “Instead of working with predetermined categories, observers construct theories that generate categories and posit the linkages among them. At any point in the process, observers are free to alter the problems and questions they are pursuing as they gain greater knowledge of their subjects” (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 382).

Protocol Writing

Protocol writing is a written description of lived experience. “The most straightforward way to go about our research is to ask selected individuals to write their experiences down” (van Manen, 1990, p. 63). I began the study by asking each teacher selected to write about an experience either personally or professionally, which significantly impacted her views on choice as they lived through it. I asked them to reconstruct the experience from the inside and to focus on a particular example or incident (van Manen, 1990). Their written experiences guided our first conversational interview. Each teacher's protocol writing response was included in the findings as a way to introduce the teacher and to illustrate the significance of choice both personally and professionally in their lives. (See Appendix A)

Interviewing

The conversational interview is “a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon” and may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 66). I requested an initial and a concluding interview with each teacher during this study. The initial interview began by using the participant's protocol writing as a springboard for our first conversation. In keeping with the emergent design of this study, there was not specific set of questions asked of the participants at the onset of the study. Rather, questions emerged from their experience they chose to discuss in their protocol writing on choice and how the experience may have impacted her views about teaching. The initial interview was used to develop a conversational relation with the respondent concerning the essence of choice (van Manen, 1990). (See Appendix A) The concluding interview

focused on themes, which emerged through observations in the classroom. During the concluding interview the respondent and I discussed themes which emerged as well as clarified any questions I had from observations or from data collected. Again, the interview was conversational in nature and focused on the meaning of the experience of choice.

Observation

One source for entering another's lifeworld is through observation. It was in search of others' lived experiences of choice that I sought observation as a tool to become involved personally with the phenomenon of choice.

Observation...maximizes the inquirer's ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, customs, and the like; observation...allows the observer to see the world as his subjects see it, to live their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own natural, ongoing environment; observation...provides the inquirer with access to the emotional actions to the group introspectively-that is, in a real sense it permits the observer to use himself as a data source; and observation...allows the observer to build on tacit knowledge, both his own and that of members of the group (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, p. 193).

In this study, observation was used to capture the lived experiences of those involved in situations related to the essence of choice. My purpose for observation was to enter the lifeworld of those whose experiences were relevant to this study. My intent was to observe students in the classroom setting involved in experiences related to choice. I observed the first teacher the day the school year began. I observed three full days a week for one month. Due to different school calendars, I was able to observe the second teacher on the first day of

school as well. It was not possible to observe three days a week for one month in the second classroom due to several interruptions in the school day. I made up the time lost during the first month by extending my observation period for a total of sixteen days in the second classroom. I documented the choices available to students as well as the choices they encountered. Through field notes and audiotaping, I documented in the form of thick descriptions, noting dialogue, interactions, subtle factors, and personal behavior. I acted as an observer-participant. "In the observer-participant mode the researchers participation in the group is secondary to his or her role as an information gatherer" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 97). My role during classroom observations was considered a peripheral membership role as I "observe[ed] and interact[ed] closely enough with members to establish an insiders identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership" (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 380).

Observations were written in narrative form. I captured the lived experience of students who encountered choice through the use of anecdotes or vignettes. "The researcher who is involved in closely observing situations for their lived meaning is a gatherer of anecdotes" and "in collecting anecdotes one has to recognize what part of the "text" of daily living (is) significant for one's study *while* it is happening" (van Manen, 1990, p. 69). It was through the anecdote that I framed the lived experiences of creating meaning for the essence of choice.

Erickson (1986) refers to the anecdote as narrative vignette (p. 149). It is a "vivid portrayal of the conduct 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 occurrences in real time" (Erickson, 1986, p. 149). He suggests the researcher collect field notes during observation and shortly, thereafter write the vignette in a way to communicate the purpose of

the scene from an interpretive perspective. “Within the details of the story, selected carefully, is contained a statement of a theory of organization and meaning of the events described” (Erickson, 1986, p. 150). Ongoing analysis through the use of story, stimulates the writing early on in the project. The anecdote or vignette is meant to compel and to lead one to reflect on the significance of the story. It is meant to teach, to transform, involving one personally. (van Manen, 1991). To insure a sense of “being there”, I audio taped observations and interviews for recollecting and reflective purposes. Observations and interviews were transcribed from audiotapes to interpret data collected.

Theme Analysis

Data were collected through interviews, observations, and protocol writing examples. “Interviews and observations have a reciprocal relationship similar to that by which language and experience structure and enrich each other” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 99). The modes of data collection were fused in the form of narrative anecdotes or vignettes. From the anecdotes or vignettes, themes of meaning were derived through data analysis. Theme analysis is referred to as “the process of recovering the theme or themes that are dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work” (van Manen, 1991, p. 78). From a phenomenological perspective, themes are viewed as “structures of experience” (van Manen, 1991, p. 79).

Themes were uncovered through what van Manen (1991) describes as the selective or highlighting approach. He explains the process as listening and reading a text several times for statements or phrases which describe the phenomenon or experience being studied. These statements are then highlighted and used to note certain recurring commonalties to describe a

theme related to the phenomenon being studied (van Manen, 1991). After reading or listening to a text several times, I narrowed my focus of the text by selecting statements and phrases which were essential or revealing about the phenomenon of choice (van Manen, 1991). I first read phrases and assigned categorical titles to each phrase, entering them into notebooks. Eventually, some phrases were placed under the same category. At the completion of this process, I ended with approximately thirty-five categories. I took the thirty-five categories and determined how some could be combined into a more general category. As I continued, I was able to broaden the categories even further. I then cut out each phrase arranging them on poster boards. After multiple readings and rearrangements, four distinct themes emerged including several sub-themes. One set of phrases, which I did not consider a theme, eventually became the foundation for all themes. During data collection, I made comments in my field notes for possible transcriptions of situations pertaining to choice. I listened to each section of audiotape that I had noted in my field notes. I transcribed only those vignettes significant to this study and included them under each theme. Theme analysis took approximately eight weeks for each classroom setting. Interpretation guided the final stages of the data analysis process.

Follow-up Hermeneutic Conversation

Once data were written in semi-final form, I distributed to each teacher, a copy of the section concerning her classroom. After reading the data section, the final stage with each teacher concluded with an informal telephone interview. Follow-up hermeneutic conversations between the interviewer and the interviewee

attempt to interpret the significance of the preliminary themes in the light of the original phenomenological question. Both the researcher and the interviewee weigh the appropriateness of each theme by asking: "Is this what the experience is really like?" Both partners self-reflectively orient themselves to the interpersonal or collective ground that brings the significance of the phenomenological question into view (van Manen, 1991 p. 99).

When I completed writing the data section on the teachers and their classrooms, I gave them a copy of the data section related to their written response, interview, and classroom observations. After they read their section, I elicited their oral commentaries in an informal telephone conversation. One teacher's reaction was more reminiscent of the anecdotes and vignettes rather than a specific discussion of themes. Both teachers did not request any changes to the data section pertaining to their classroom and were pleased with the final draft.

Establishing Trustworthiness

"Trustworthiness is established in a naturalistic inquiry by the use of techniques" to insure credibility of the findings in a research study. It is through persistent observation, triangulation through multiple sources, peer debriefing, and member checks I hoped to provide methodological soundness in the study.

Persistent observation was the primary source for gathering data providing depth and to maintain a sense of purpose for the researcher. I observed three days a week for one month in one classroom. Due to school related interruptions concerning the second classroom, I extended my observation period to ensure a sufficient amount of data had been collected. Trustworthiness was established through persistent observation adding "salience to a study

that otherwise might appear to be no more than a mindless immersion” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 304).

Triangulation through multiple sources was established. The use of multiple sources provided depth and richness to the context of the study. I obtained written protocol samples and conducted initial and concluding interviews with each teacher. I collected data through field notes and audiotaping from classroom observations. Children's artifacts and documents were added to provide more depth of the study. The convergence of multiple sources were used in an effort to provide an "expansion of meaning” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993, p. 139).

Peer debriefing allows a peer who is a professional outside the context and who has some general understanding of the study to analyze materials and emerging designs, and listen to the researcher’s ideas and concerns (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). I discussed information gathered during the study with a university professor who I believe is knowledgeable about the research process and constructivist education.

Member checks were utilized during the study to discuss categories, interpretations, and conclusions with participants (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Throughout the observation period, my questions for the purpose of clarity, were addressed and discussed with each teacher. I furnished the teachers a copy of the data section concerning their classroom. Through the follow-up conversations, I elicited oral commentaries to discuss themes and to ensure accuracy of the information reported. The first teacher confirmed emergent themes and was reminiscent of anecdotes and vignettes. The second teacher discussed the accuracy of the information. Both teachers did not request any changes or additions in regards to their section of the data reported.

This inquiry attempted to invite readers to interpret in their own way, the text, in search of meaning and an understanding of the essence of choice. “Negotiation of outcomes is a continuous process that goes on, formally and informally, from the very inception of the study” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 213). Due to the emergent design of this study, the trustworthiness was in constant check until committee members reviewed and approved the final version.

Ethical Issues

The study began only after I had received permission to conduct research from the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board and all written consent forms were gathered from participants and parents. Safeguards were used to insure that those involved in the study were protected. I insured participants confidentiality and privacy remained anonymous. All participants' names and the school setting were changed. My committee chairperson was the only one privy to the participant's true identity. At any point during the inquiry, participants were able to withdraw from participating from the project without question. Topics which respondents suggested “off limits” were honored. Participants did not have access to information or data regarding another participant until the study was completed. All data were secured in a locked file in the possession of the researcher. Once the dissertation was approved, all data were destroyed through erasing the audiotapes and shredding all papers related to the participants in the study.

I “welcome(...) the opportunity to daily renegotiate and expand the basis for informed consent as new opportunities for collaborative activities emerge” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 155). It was my hope as the researcher to “establish a partnership with the

stakeholders in the study that requires a free and honest exchange of the separate constructions of all participants and in return offers opportunity for growth and empowerment” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 160).

...And so the inquiry begins. The artist gathers tools in search of meaning. Vision unfolds among artist, tools, and canvas. Anticipation slowly fades as color begins to surface.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

...art[...] can reach and build a sense of individual hope, which then can be translated in the classroom into a sense of public possibility (Botstein, 1998).

Introduction

The findings for this study were gathered from two teachers in two different school districts. Observation in each classroom began on the first day of school. I planned to observe the beginning of school in both classrooms to capture the "setting up" for choice. My intention was not to select different teachers for the purpose of comparison. Rather, my intention was to find different teachers, settings, and age levels to document a variety of ways choice may play out in the classroom. Theme analysis revealed the same themes from both classroom settings. Present in each setting was a foundation for themes. Essential themes in the two classrooms studied included daily routine, community, self-determination, and necessary limits. I believe I have captured various situations, which illustrate my question, "What is the essence of choice in the classroom?"

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section illustrates a classroom, Portrait of Room 11, which is considered a year round school and began in the middle of the summer months. The next section illustrates the second classroom; Portrait of the Blue Area, which is in a school on a traditional calendar and began at the end of summer. The first two sections begin with a portrait summarizing information obtained from a written protocol and

initial interview with each teacher. The remainder of the first two sections describes themes and vignettes gained from observations. The third section will conclude with a blending of the two portraits reflecting essential themes and similarities and differences between the two teachers and their classroom setting. When an artist paints a picture, subjects and a landscape are the focus of her painting. In order to paint portraits of participants in this study, I refer to the participants as subjects. The primary subjects are the teachers and the secondary subjects are the students. The observation setting is referred to as the landscape.

PORTRAIT OF ROOM 11

Mary Cassatt, an Impressionist painter in the late 1800's, was recognized as a master of the portrayal of mother and child in the visual arts. Her family was a great source of strength and inspiration for her paintings. Mary was a modern painter who "tempered tradition with an open mind, an honest vision, and on occasion, a willingness to challenge the rules" (p. 56, Mancoff). Her painting style was considered harmonious, using freer brush strokes, and a luminous palette. The teacher in the first section of this chapter possesses many of the same qualities and ideals as Mary Cassatt. In order to give anonymity to the teacher in room 11, I have chosen to give her the name Mary.

THE SUBJECTS

Mary's Story-

When asked to describe an experience of choice either personally or professionally, Mary began with her life after college. After teaching for five years, Mary left the profession temporarily to begin a family. She was home for seventeen years with her three boys, now 31, 29, and 20. Mary wrote,

I think I learned a lot by being a mom about how children learn best. Every time I tried to force my boys to accomplish a task it was met with a strong willed rebellion that put us at odds with one another. A power struggle would follow. I learned over the years that if I gave them choices they would respond much more positively. I still had control over the choices many times but at least they had the final say. It was always much more fun if it was their idea. After seeing how effectively this worked when the boys were young I continued to allow them to make as many decisions as possible on their own. This doesn't mean I left them without any guidance but by being allowed to make decisions time after time they became experts at making wise decisions. That was my goal! By the time they were in high school I didn't have to tell them where they could go or what time they needed to be in very often. They had experienced making decisions enough that I trusted them. They knew they had the responsibility of making wise decisions because along with choice comes responsibility.

Mary believed her children should have some say about their daily routines such as cleaning their rooms, bathing and bedtime. She thought giving her sons opportunities to make many decisions prepared them for life as experienced decision-makers. She explained that many of her friends had set house rules. She felt their children were not given very much say about their lives and as a result, many of the children rebelled. As parents, Mary and her husband tried to leave things open for discussion. Mary recalled a time when it was difficult as a parent to watch her son go through the consequences of a decision he had made. She explained:

One particular incident, my middle son who was probably the most headstrong of them all, had gotten a lot of money for his birthday. He was going to spend his money and I said, "Would you like for me to carry your money for you so that you don't lose it, because that's quite a bit of money." "Nope, nope, I'll carry it. I'll take care of it", he said. I told him, "O.K., fine." He was looking around and of course had it in his little wallet and was looking at things and he laid his wallet down and walked off and left it. He went back to find it and it was gone. I didn't replace it. I thought it was very tempting to say, Oh well." I just think that was a very important lesson for him to say, "Well, maybe that was not such a good decision." That has always stuck in my mind. I felt so horrible for him and he cried and cried but boy, I didn't

come to the rescue. He learned a valuable lesson to be careful, to be responsible because along with choice comes responsibility.

Mary, as a child, grew up with a strong sense of responsibility. She feels it is an important part of development for her children and students. After seventeen years at home, Mary went back to the classroom. She has been teaching for the past eleven years. Whether she has three children or a whole classroom of children, she wrote,

It has taken me many years to discover a very basic truth about teaching. That is that children learn when THEY WANT to learn. When they feel ownership and control of their learning, not only will they enjoy that learning, but also they will challenge themselves to ever higher learning. I have always worked to have a child-centered curriculum but changing from being the director of what happens in my classroom to allowing children to take responsibility and ownership for their learning has been a long trip. I've learned that as hard as I may try, I can't make them learn. Instead I lead them to discover, on their own, that learning is fun! I believe allowing children to make many decisions and take responsibility for their learning is key to my philosophy of teaching.

Mary tries to give students as much choice as possible about what they are studying. She works within the boundaries of the mandated curriculum and believes there is a wealth of information that students can use to pursue their interests. If students come up with ideas that are not on her agenda, she sends them to the library or they research the topic at home on the internet. Mary encourages her students to bring back their discoveries to share with the group whether it is a report, a drawing, or something they constructed. She feels when they are interested in a topic, they delve in deeper, on a higher level than what she could ever do with them.

Students also have a voice in the general running of the classroom. Mary asks her students, "Now, what do you think we can do to make the room run right?" She then has them suggest the rules for the classroom. The rules are open to change at anytime. She stated:

If we need to change them or if something else comes up or a rule isn't working very well, then let's reword it, let's fix it so that we can make it better fit our needs. The children are free to come to me and say, "you know, I'm having a hard time concentrating. It's too noisy in

here." Then I will say, "I've had a complaint. Someone said it's too noisy. What can we do about that?" Letting them feel that control. I don't have to have control. I don't have to be the stepper. My job is the facilitator. I'm just here to help everybody stay together.

Mary considers her students one big family. She created a newsletter called the Mrs. M. Family News, which reports happenings within the classroom family and is shared with the families at home. It is a weekly newsletter to help keep the student's family informed. She also encourages parents to help with centers in the classroom each day. She explained that a parent volunteer "is just somebody they can go to if they have a problem." Mary wants students to rely on each other. She stated, " My rule is that you go to two other people first, before you ever come to the adult worker."

A relationship based on trust is an important aspect Mary wants to develop with her students. She explained:

I think there is that process that you go through. I think that at the beginning they follow me because I am just the adult person. As I begin to loosen up and let them take more and more of the responsibility in the choice of how things are done in the classroom, I think they begin to see that they can trust me because I trust them. So I think it is a reciprocal type of thing.

Over time, Mary begins to notice students gain independence through the mutual trust they have developed together. Toward the end of each school year, she watches her students working in different directions. Mary believes she and her students gradually build a relationship where students feel they have some say in the way things are done.

Mary recognizes the advantages of her multiage classroom. She explained:

I think they see the others and they catch on so much faster than if I had an all new group. Those elders just kind of take that responsibility in showing this is the way we do things. And I'm here to help you if you need help. I'm going to be here for you. They work together so much better because the older students kind of take that mother instinct and pull the younger students underneath their wings and kind of teach them how we do things in here. They have a lot of freedom that they might not have experienced somewhere else.

Mary believes the beginning of the school year runs smoothly because half the class knows the routine and they do not have to spend much time getting acquainted and adjusted. The younger students, she explained, "quickly want to be like the elders and they fall right into that little family plan."

Mary tries to offer some choice within the curriculum. She plans what they will cover based on the state objectives. She develops loosely structured themes in the areas of science and social studies. Her plan is to cover the necessary information and then let students go in whatever direction they choose.

An important goal for Mary is for students to learn how to get along with each other and how to treat each other with kindness. She believes developing character will enable the students to work as a team. She recognizes the uniqueness in each student and emphasizes acceptance. Mary hopes students accept one another's ideas even if they are "way out there". She believes that everyone is unique and has a different way of thinking about things.

Mary finds a variety of ways to offer choices for her students. She explained:

When they come in, they have certain things they have to do. They have to mark the lunch board. They have to make a center choice. They have to do this and this and this. Those are just housekeeping things. They go over and write the news, our Mrs. M. Family News, they can write whatever they want to write there. That's a choice. They can write or not write. It is not a required thing they have to do. They write in their journals in the morning. That's a choice. They can write about anything they want to write about there. At times, we do a lot of charts and brainstorming types of things. They are just their ideas. Presenting their ideas or answers to questions or what do we want to know about this topic. I would really like to get to the point where they would make a choice sitting where they want to sit. I would like to give them that choice. They have a choice when they go to the rug. They can sit any place they want to on the rug. They can sit with their best friend or whoever.

Mary's students-

Mary had eighteen students in her class. She taught in a multi-age classroom with first and second graders. There were 4 boys and 4 girls considered first grade level and 5 boys and 5

girls considered second grade level. The second graders were Mary's students from the previous year.

THE LANDSCAPE

Mary's school is set in the middle upper-class suburb of a metropolitan area. The school building is a modern design and was established in 1995. The focal point of the school is the library located in the center on the lower level. The second floor overlooks the library. On both floors, classrooms are sectioned off from the library with hallways leading to general meeting areas and continue into four self-contained classrooms. Each hallway provides a private girl and boy's bathroom, a community sink for hand washing and a water fountain.

The particular classroom under investigation was a self-contained classroom. Within the four-wall room, four tables were located in the center, one rectangle and three circles. In the corner of the room, tucked away were a teacher's desk, file cabinet, and a bookshelf with a variety of adult literature related to education. From the teacher's corner along the wall, were children's cubbies, and coat hooks for their personal belongings. Near the entrance were personal mailboxes for the students' mail from the office, teacher, or classmates. Learning centers lined the remaining space. The centers included art, big book, literacy, listening, math, science, poetry, writing, overhead, read the walls, and two computer centers. The walls were sparsely decorated. The teacher had one wooden shelf high above on a wall decorated with her own personal items of interest. Included in the items were award plaques and gifts from students in years past. Above the shelf were posters on life skills such as responsibility, citizenship, and so on. A chalkboard hung on a different wall with several empty pocket charts as well as a list of classroom jobs. Another wall sported only a small bulletin board with

calendar activities. Located on the entrance wall above the cubbies were cabinets with extra supplies.

Within each center, floor space was available for students to work, in addition to the tables in the center of the room. Computers rested on tables with chairs. One computer center was for writing and illustrating their stories. The other computer center was for computer programs. The big book center had a cushioned rocker for comfort and a collection of books related to a theme. Warmth and hominess were provided by plants and lamps located throughout the room. The language center was supplied with tubs of books and a puppet theater tucked in the corner. The classroom meeting area was also in the language center with a rocker and a large area rug. The morning meetings took place on the rug to discuss the Mrs. M. Family News, calendar, jobs, a shared reading experience and speech bubbles. Speech bubbles were decorative cutout sheets of paper. A student shared a sentence about a recent event in their life and students helped dictate the correct spelling. The teacher wrote the sentence and date on the decorative paper. The speech bubbles were taped high on the wall. Each day, a new speech bubble was added next the one from the day before creating a horizontal line around the room. The purpose of the speech bubble was for students to view an event from each school day throughout the year.

Additional space was available for students extending beyond the four walls. Outside the classroom was a sitting area used for meeting which required a quiet atmosphere for students to discuss and plan. The area was decorated with items from the school wide theme. The theme for the year was patriotism.

At first glance, the classroom looked like many classrooms with centers and busy children doing their work. What set this classroom apart is the opportunity for choice. I was impressed

with the dynamics of the teacher and students relationships, the multi-age influence, the trust, the care, the responsibility, and the initiative.

ELEMENTS OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE-THE ESSENCE OF CHOICE

The elements of the lived experience are themes, which emerged from the data analysis. After highlighting various phrases in the data analysis phase, four distinct themes were present which are daily routine, classroom community, self-determination, and necessary limits. Additional incidences reoccurred which were not specifically choice situations, yet they seemed to be tied to choice in some way. These incidences are not a theme of the essence of choice but a foundation, giving shape to the themes and I consider necessary to discuss.

Foundation for Themes

During data collection, I tried exclusively to concentrate on choice and choice situations yet, I was drawn to something else that was happening. I wasn't sure whether it was an element of choice or something completely different. After analyzing the data I came to the conclusion that the teacher and her students had established a climate necessary for choice to be present. The climate was based on mutual respect, the teacher as part of the community, humor, students taking an active part in classroom ownership, and the teacher stimulating students' thinking. The climate was not specifically choice, yet it was indirectly related to the essence of choice. It was the foundation of the classroom climate that enhanced the possibilities of choice.

Mutual Respect

Several incidences of building a mutually respectful relationship between and among the students and teacher were evident. In countless situations, Mary displayed respect for students by listening to them in a variety of ways. While counting by one's a student blurts out, "let's count by two's." They began counting by two's. In the middle of a story, a student asked if it's an inside or outside day for lunch recess. The teacher responded with, "it's inside because it's 105 degrees" and resumed reading. While discussing the idea of community, a student stopped the teacher from writing community on the board and said, "Wait, let me see if I can spell it." She paused while he attempted to spell community. Mary also showed respect for students by asking their permission to show their artwork on parent night. When a student walked in late for school, Mary approached her by explaining that certain centers were full and discussed with her, choices of centers that were available. Mary's caring nature appeared to quickly get the student involved with ease.

Students showed their respect for Mary in many ways. Mary was discussing with her students certain words and wanted to post them on a wall for their use during journal time. Roni asks Ashley, "How is Mrs. M. going to get through there when she puts up a word on the wall?" Ashley moved her chair so Mrs. M. could get past her table. Mrs. M. responded, "Thank you for thinking of me." There was always a student willing to help Mary when she needed it.

Several times throughout each day, I observed students showing respect for one another through their help and support. They helped each other tie shoes, spell words, find things, helped with chores, and volunteered to help one particular student gather things at the end of the day to go home. The second year students supported and helped the younger students. An incident of support was when the teacher had introduced a math card game and Roni explained,

"Some people think it's hard and some people think it's easy. That's not nice to say "oh it's easy"." The teacher commented, " You have to do what's just right for you. Everybody's different." Another incident that illustrated support was during the morning meeting while the teacher was reading a story with rhyming words. Rosie, a student at the beginning of the story who was not yet engaged started to involve herself in the discussion of the rhyming words. Mary commented on her responses a few times in a row. Ashley asked, "How come you keep calling on Rosie?" Haley suggested, "She doesn't have to call on the second graders because they know more." Ryan added, "She's trying to get the first graders the hang of it." During a discussion about community, Matt explained that a community is "a whole bunch of people that work together." Haley commented, "Man, is he smart."

The teacher worked with students by suggesting subtle reminders for students to respect others. While on the floor in a circle, introducing a math card game, Mary asked, "Tom, are you thinking of others?" Tom scooted back and Mary added, "Thank you." At the end of the card game lesson, Mary suggested, "Take turns because good friends always share."

Teacher as a Community Member

Mary viewed herself as part of the classroom community. During journal time, she wrote at her desk while students were writing. When she thought she misspelled a word or students thought she did, they would take the time to look it up in the dictionary. Many times Mary said she wasn't perfect and made mistakes just like they did. She didn't have to have control of the classroom; it was shared with the students.

Humor

A situation involving humor was when Brent went to the nurse after hurting his foot. His good friend, Ross, went up to the teacher to ask where he had gone. Mary explained that he had to go to the nurse. In order to be with his friend, Ross said his knee hurt. Mary said, "Oh, I think you'll be alright." Ross then asked if he could go to the nurse. Mary responded in a joking manner by asking Ross, "Do you want me to cut it out?" Ross said, "No", smiled and walked away laughing. Mary laughed also. Another moment brought about laughter during the Mrs. M. Family News. A news segment told of Todd's birthday from the day before. Mrs. M. asked Todd to stand beside her. She asked him several questions such as did you get your drivers license, did you get married, and are you twenty- one? She began to look on his head for gray hairs? After much laughter, they sang the birthday song together.

Shared Experience

Classroom ownership was a shared experience. The teacher encouraged her students to participate and work together to keep the classroom running smoothly. I observed students taking responsibility for their classroom environment, relying on one another, taking care of their own needs, suggesting ideas, and sharing discoveries. The teacher often removed herself from situations that she felt the students could work out for themselves.

Students took responsibility for their environment by taking the initiative to pick up trash on the floor whenever necessary. Students reminded each other to push in their chairs. On several occasions, I noticed students either helping or reminding others to put away their supplies, activities, or their work. On occasion, students either suggested or reminded the teacher to take care of her messes. The initiative was taken by the students and not suggested by the teacher.

Relying on each other was another way students shared in the ownership of the classroom. When students were unsure of what to do or where to put things, others were always there to help. On the first day, Matt began to cry at the end of the day. He was worried he did not know where to go. Another student assured him that he would help him find his bus and be with him when he loaded. Another incident illustrating reliance on one another was when Todd asked out loud how to spell golf. Danny spelled it for him. The teacher added, "Good, your neighbor knew."

Mary encouraged students to take care of their own needs whenever possible. She suggested to Tom to get a menu from the office when he was curious about what was for lunch that day. As the school year progressed, Mary tried to include a variety of ways for students to become self-sufficient. They used the walls, signs around the room, books, previous work, and their peers to figure things out on their own. During journal time, Ashley asked how to spell neighbor. The teacher responded, "Just guess and go." Haley suggested to Ashley to look in her writing folder from the day before. Ashley smiled and said, "Good idea."

When students were stumped by something, others provided many suggestions. While Tom was filling out his daily report at the end of the day and realized the class hadn't worked in centers, he suddenly blurted out, "What should I put down for centers?" Roni suggested to just put an X. The teacher followed with, "Good idea." When filling out a birthday slip, one student said he didn't know his birth date. Tom suggested, "How about June 7th?" The teacher added, "He could do that." When Angela and Brent tried to figure out how to sit together during a partner activity, Tom suggested, "I know, Angela can sit in Haley's seat." Angela smiled and moved.

Sharing discoveries happened frequently on a small and large scale. While writing a story, Brent called the teacher over. He shared, "If you write the date, you will remember the day you wrote it. If you don't write the date, you won't remember what day you wrote it." The teacher responded, "You're right. Tell everyone else." Another discovery was when Mrs. M. asked the class after self-selected reading, "Has anyone finished a book?" Haley stood up and shared her book explaining to others that they could find it down in the library. Mrs. M. asked which section and Haley said she thought picture book. After a short discussion, Ryan stood up and shared his book.

Mrs. M.: Where did you find the book? Is it an easy reader or picture book?

Ryan: An easy reader.

Mrs. M. : Any questions?

John: Was it a good book?

Ryan: uh-hu

Haley: Is it for first or second graders?

Roni: You know the number is on the side. That's how you can find it.

Haley and Ryan looked at their books. Several students got their library books and checked the spine on their book. A big crowd formed around the teacher. After much discussion, the teacher threw her arms in the air and exclaimed, " What a discovery!"

Stimulating Thinking

Mary's style stimulated student thinking. Students were encouraged to think about time, responsibility, why they do certain things, and to take the initiative to figure things out on their own rather than rely on her for answers. Mary used singing to get students to manage their

time. At the end of the student's morning chores, she would begin to sing the school song to signal students to finish up their chores. She rang a bell and sang an original song when it was time to clean up in their centers. After the center police song ended on one occasion, Holly and Marla discovered they hadn't started picking up soon enough. The incident prompted a discussion about organization of time. The teacher addressed the whole group and asked, "What could they do to help the situation at clean up time?"

Ryan: They could start to clean up a little earlier.

Mrs. M.: They could do that. What else?

Haley: Since they have so much to do, as soon as the bell rings they start cleaning.

Ryan: When you do something, clean it up so you have only one thing to clean up when the bell rings.

Mrs. M.: So if you're working, you might clean up as you go. Do you think that's a good idea?

Haley: They could put all their paper in a pile as they go and then they have it in a pile when it's time to clean up and they just...

Mrs. M.: So clean up as you go.

Roni: Maybe when you finish, like when you're reading a book, when you finish it, you put it away first before you do anything else. Like when you finish with a paper, throw it away before you do something else.

Mrs. M.: Anything else?

Ross: I worked on computers and it took forever to turn it off.

Mrs. M.: It does, doesn't it? So as soon as the bell rings, you need to...

Students: Clean it up!

Mrs. M.: Start right then. These are just little tips these people gave us to help us clean up a little faster.

Rather than keep reminding students to clean up when it's time to move on, Mary lets students regulate their time. Rosie didn't clean up her math game when it was time to go to art and found herself frantically cleaning up as the teacher and students left for art.

Mary worked with students to help them recognize why responsibility is important. The teacher suggested to Tim, after reading a book to her that he may read the book at home. She explained to him, he needed to put his book in his baggie and put the baggie in his folder.

Tom: I can't find my baggie.

Mrs. M.: What are you going to do?

Tom: Get a new one?

Mrs. M.: Yes, but what happens if you need to do this every time?

Tom: We'll run out.

Mrs. M.: Yes, so please take care and be responsible with your bag.

Tom: (nodded) Okay.

Mary wanted her students to think about why they had certain procedures. After a fire drill, the students came back to the classroom. Mary led a discussion by asking, "Why do we have all these practices?" The students shared their ideas.

A major influence of stimulating thinking was Mary answering student's questions with a question. Her questions prompted them to take the initiative to figure out situations on their own. Questions such as, "Can we write then draw?" were answered with "What do you think?" or Someone needed a pencil and asked the teacher. The teacher responded, "What should you do?" These are examples of numerous situations I observed. During a drawing activity, the

teacher asked students to finish up and get ready for self-selected reading. Claire asked the teacher what self-selected reading was and the teacher responded with, "What do you think? We talked about it yesterday. Think real hard." Claire paused for a moment, looked around the room watching others and proceeded to get her books to read. Another situation where the teacher paused was when Brent called the teacher over.

Brent: Mrs. M., When I look up there (he looked behind him at the alphabet on the wall above the teachers desks), when I look up there, the E goes that way but on my paper it goes that way (motioning opposite directions).

Mrs. M.: (paused)

Haley: Well, if he took his nametag off and held it up like this (she demonstrated pretending to hold his nametag up facing the wall).

Mrs. M.: (Puts her hands on her face) Ohhh. (And walked away)

Ashley: See Brent (holding his paper up with an E on it). If you hold it up in the same direction of the wall, it would be the same. Do you get it?

Brent: (Looks up at the wall for a moment and nodded yes to Ashley)

The classroom climate was based on a shared experience. Students believed their opinions, thoughts, and suggestions were valued by their peers and the teacher. Trust and respect were present in a non-threatening environment. The teacher played an integral part in creating a community where students relied less on the teacher and more on each other. Without the foundation for choice, the following anecdotes and vignettes may not have existed.

Theme 1: Choice in Terms of Daily Routine

Mary wrote lesson plans to establish a routine for each day. (See Appendix C) She organized each day into morning business, family time, curriculum areas, and lunch. Time frames were planned for each part of their day yet, the schedule was loosely followed. Curriculum areas were organized in such a way that many of the activities were designed to naturally progress from one to the other. Daily plans were not always carried out from start to finish. Spontaneous events often were given precedence over planned activities.

I observed many aspects of choice in each segment of their daily routine. Mary planned for a variety of choices while many unfolded as the students worked through their day. In several cases, planned choices led to additional choices students made on their own. The theme, daily routine, is organized into four sections, classroom organization, morning business, family time, and curriculum.

Classroom organization

The classroom was organized in such a way that students could move about freely both inside and outside the room. Students sat in seats at tables during whole group discussions yet were able to stand up and walk around as they spoke. Often, students would stand up to demonstrate or point out something.

Most of the time, students were free to get a drink or fill their water bottle. A pass was used to go to the bathroom. Before leaving the room, students were required to put a pass on their table indicating they were out of the room. Each student table was equipped with a "tool box" containing pencils, markers, crayons, glue, and scissors. I noticed during several activities, students were using the materials they preferred to use from their box. Student's

paper work was required to have their name and date. Mary gave them the option to write the date either the "long way" or "short way". She wrote both ways on the board each morning.

Mary had assigned seating for the students at each table. She explained to me that she would like to get to the point where students could sit where they wanted, but she wasn't there yet. Through observation, I noticed students were arranged with first year students and second year students at each table.

Morning business

The morning business consisted of putting personal belongings away as they arrived, changing helpers, making a lunch choice, signing in on the center choice sheet (See Appendix C), making self-selected reading choices, writing the Mrs. M. Family News, and journal writing. Students went about doing their daily chores in whatever order they chose. After the first week, Mrs. M. posted a list of responsibilities for their morning business as a visual reminder. While doing their chores, conversations were going on throughout the room. Situations happened frequently such as when Haley arrived and said, "I want to go to the library today." Mrs. M. simply responded, "All righty". A lengthy discussion broke out when Tom brought in bones for the science area. Several students, including the teacher, stopped what they were doing to observe and discuss the type of bones Tom brought to share.

Helpers were determined on a rotation basis. Mary switched the names each week after students arrived. Helpers for each week were lunch monitor, paper monitor, teacher's assistant, gardener, messenger, line leader, and clean-up supervisor. The older students were always willing to help the new students when needed. When Ross realized he was the lunch monitor he turned to the class and said he didn't know what to do. Mrs. M. said, "Then what should

you do?" Five hands went up in the air, volunteering to help. Ross questioned, " Ask someone?" Mrs. M. replied, " Look at all the people willing to help." Mary returned to what she was doing and Ross picked a volunteer to help. The line leader chose a partner to help them carry the lunch tub to the cafeteria. The tub was full of student lunch boxes and was too heavy for one person to carry.

The lunch choice area was a pocket chart with a picture of lunch box, cafeteria tray, extra milk, and salad bar on separate rows. Cut out male and female figures were labeled with each student's name. Students were to choose which lunch they preferred and place their figure in the pocket next to their choice. After a few days of school, the teacher explained to the students that she wouldn't be reminding them anymore to make their lunch choice. The next day, three students forgot to make their lunch choice and others reminded them. Mrs. M. did not say a word. The lunch choice chart brought about discoveries and suggestions. One incident began when Haley noticed there were the same amount of lunch boxes as trays. Mrs. M. asked, "Did you count them?" Haley walked back to the chart to count. Haley reported, "There are nine in each." Mrs. M. commented, "So how many in our classroom?" Haley answered, "Eighteen." Mrs. M. continued, "So $9+9$ must be 18." Haley nodded and moved on.

The next day, several students chose lunch box for their lunch choice. The lunch box row was full after the first nine people selected so those who followed stacked their figure on top of others in the pocket chart. While Ryan was making his lunch choice, he pondered the unorganized situation. Todd joined him and they figured out a new way to arrange the figures in the lunch pockets and called the teacher over to the chart. They explained the problem to Mrs. M. and offered her their suggestion.

Mrs. M.: (Addressing the whole class) These guys just came up with a good idea. They said that if we had the lunch box line and it was full that there is one more line before tray starts. They thought it would be a good idea if instead of stuffing them two in a pocket, you could go down to the next row. (While demonstrating, she explained the same procedure if students selected a tray for the lunch choice.) Can everyone remember that?

Haley: Then every single person would be in.

Mrs. M.: Would we have enough?

Students: uh hu

Mrs. M.: How many in each row?

Students began discussing all at once to figure it out. Mrs. M. steered the conversation into a "mathematical moment". Through a lengthy discussion, students figured out with each lunch choice (box, tray, milk, or salad), the top row held nine figures and the bottom row held ten. The conversation ended with Mrs. M. asking,

Mrs. M.: (pointing) So we have 10 here and 9 here. How many would that be?

Tom: That would be 19.

Ashley: So you could do it.

Mrs. M.: So I could make my choice too.

Student: You need to make a person.

Mary smiles and the discussion ends.

Students signing in on the center choice sheet in the morning provided many opportunities for discussion. Student's center choices were based on their interest or working with a friend. Tom chose an area based on interest when Ross was with him at the choice sheet. Ross tried to convince Tom to choose the language center. Tom picked up a pencil and signed his name

under computers and excitedly said, "Yes, I'm in computers!" The computer center was an overwhelmingly popular center for many of the boys. Haley signed up for the poetry center and told Mrs. M. that every time there is a new poem on the poetry chart she was going to select the poetry center. Mrs. M. asked Haley to share her idea with the class. An incident involving friendship was when Angela, a first year student, signed her name under science and shyly called over Roni, an older student, to tell her she did not see her name on the sheet. Roni looked the sheet over and chose read the walls center where her close friend Ashley signed up. Although Angela looked a little disappointed, another second year student signed up with Angela.

The center choice sheet was a social meeting place for many of the students. On several occasions students were gathered around to see who signed up for what center. A few students had difficulty committing to a center. They spent several minutes deliberating where they wanted to go. Danny very rarely signed the sheet quickly. On one occasion, he stood over the sheet for a very long time, studying the choices available, then selected the poetry center when he heard the principal over the intercom leading the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Another time, Danny finished his morning business except his center choice and began writing in his journal. He watched Todd walk over to the choice sheet and sign his name. When Todd returned to his seat, Danny walked quickly to the sign up sheet and signed his name under Todd's name. During the first week of school, many of the older students helped the younger students with the options on the sign up sheet. Mrs. M. wrote art area on the sign in sheet for the first few days. She said her purpose for adding the art area was to acquaint the new students with the supplies and materials in the area. She did not want to consider the art area as a permanent choice, rather she wanted students to use the art area as a place to get

materials they may need while in other centers. The third day of school she purposely did not include the art area. After studying the choice sheet, Rosie questioned why the art area was not on the sheet. Mrs. M. said she forgot. Rosie said she would write it in for her and Mrs. M. agreed. Rosie signed her name under art area. After that day, I never saw the art area as a choice and never heard it mentioned again. A few weeks later, Rosie was using supplies from the art center while in the language center.

Students looked forward to making their center choice. They enjoyed it either because they could spend part of their day in an area of interest, with a friend, or exploring something new. Those who arrived early to school were very excited to have all the options available to them and often chose a center with great care.

Another responsibility of the student's morning business was their self-selected reading choice. Mrs. M. had a classroom library in the language center. Books were arranged from easy reader to more difficult. Self-selected reading was a time in the afternoon that students read books independently. Students picked three books in the morning that were considered "just right" books for themselves. Mrs. M. explained the five finger test. Students selected a book and read the first page. Each time they did not know a word, they were to hold up a finger on one hand. If they had five fingers up before completion of the first page then the book would not be a "just right" book for them. If they missed less than five words, the book would be considered "just right." During the first week, new students were selecting books that were too difficult. As Mrs. M. and the second year students worked with the new students during the first week, most students began finding "just right" books. Students chose books based on interest and reading level. Mrs. M. noticed Brent choosing the same Arthur book over and over. She mentioned to Brent that there were several Marc Brown books from the Arthur

Adventure Series in the library. Ashley told the teacher that she would show him during reading where the books were located. In addition to the classroom library, Mary had volume books resting on a shelf near the library. Ryan and Todd occasionally asked if they could pick a book from the volumes for their self-selected reading. She got them down and let them find a book they were interested in reading.

In addition to making a lunch choice, choosing a center, and selecting their "just write" books, the Mrs. M. Family News was another choice during the morning business. The Mrs. M. Family News was written on chart paper resting on a large easel in the language area. Students had the option to write news on the chart each day if they had something they wanted to share. For the first week of school, second year students were the only students writing news. As new students became comfortable with the routine, some began to write news. On one occasion, Mrs. M. noticed there were several people waiting in line to write the news. She explained it is a waste of time to wait in line and asked what they could do instead. One student suggested they could be writing in their journal. Mrs. M. remarked, "Great idea. Let's do that until we think of something different."

Each day, as they finished their morning business, students wrote in their journal. At this time, students were able to write on any topic and with whatever they chose. They could draw in their journals as long as they wrote something as well. Mary encouraged them to get their thoughts down and not to worry about their spelling. At the beginning she asked the students, "If you don't know a word, what do you do?" Students gave suggestions such as look it up in the dictionary, ask a friend, guess and go, or just do the best you can. Students never offered the suggestion, ask the teacher. They knew Mrs. M. encouraged them to rely more on themselves or on each other. What to write about in their journals was another discussion.

After noticing Roni had written quite a bit, Mary asked her to share how she did it. Roni explained that she reread what she had written from the day before and continued her writing where she left off. Mary said she noticed that Roni had written about what she did the night before. Ashley added, "You can write as much as you want." Mary suggested that students might write a note to her, to friends or classmates or to someone at home. Brent shared that if someone is too scared to tell a friend that they like him or her then they could write them a note. Students placed their journal on Mrs. M.'s desk when they finished writing a story. Mrs. M. read through their journal and made comments. Only volunteers shared their journal writing with the class.

Family Time

During family time, students gathered together on an area rug in the language center to discuss the news, calendar, speech bubbles, and read a book based on a theme. Students sat anywhere on the rug and sat with anyone they chose. Family time began with the Mrs. M. Family News. Each news segment was read aloud by the writer. On one occasion, the chart appeared as follows:

Mrs. M.'s Family News

7-30-01

~~O~~n the ~~first~~ ~~day~~ ~~o~~ fourth

Of July I got to ~~g~~et git

On top of ~~X~~top ~~car~~ of the

Car to woch ~~fix~~wrks.

(Roni)

yesterday ~~X~~was Todd's

bithday ~~p~~~~r~~~~r~~y. (Ashley)

Yesterday was my Bir~~x~~nd-bBirday!

(Todd)

A typical scenario of how they handled the news is as follows:

Roni: (read) On the fourth of July I got to get on top of the car to watch fireworks. (The teacher read it aloud again pointing to the words with a marker.)

Haley: I couldn't really read it because there were quite a few scratch outs.

Mrs. M.: What do you notice about her news?

Ashley: "Get" is wrong. It's spelled g-e-t.

The teacher repeated Ashley's spelling and corrected it on the sentence. A discussion began about how to pronounce the word get or git. They discussed and corrected watch and works.

Mrs. M. ended the first news segment as follows:

Mrs. M.: Roni, that was a very good piece of news. (She began to reread from the beginning.)

On the fourth of July, I love the way she made July with an upper case. Why did you do that?

Roni: Because it's the name of a month.

Mrs. M.: Excellent. (After she finished reading) Good job! Ashley?

Ashley: I noticed something else.

Mrs. M.: That's O.K., I think we'll go on.

Mary stopped working on a particular student's news after correcting some of the mistakes with the children. She stopped in order to have time to cover everyone's news without losing their interest as well as directing attention away from several mistakes made by one student.

Ashley: (read) Yesterday was Todd's birthday.

Mrs. M. repeats the news.

Mrs. M.: Todd had a birthday yesterday. (She began to sing) Someone's having a birthday and I'm so glad. (Other's chimed in) Hope it's the happiest birthday that Todd ever had. Come on up Mr. Todd. (He stood beside her) Let's see Todd. Did you get your driver's license?

Haley: Did you get married? (Todd nodded his head no)

Mrs. M.: You didn't get married either? Let's see how old do you think he is? Probably about sixteen. (Students shouted out ages, the teacher heard twenty-one) Twenty-one? Are you twenty-one? (Todd nodded, no.)

Haley: Seven? (Todd nodded, yes.)

Mrs. M.: Seven years old! Let's see do you have any gray hair up there? (Students laughed) It's starting. You're getting old. They begin to sing the birthday song. (After the song and a short discussion) All right. Let's look at Ashley's news. Anyone notice anything there? (A long pause and then students suggested the words birthday and talking) What do you think about birthday?

Todd: Yesterday! It's y-e-s-t-e-r-d-a-y.

Student: I can look in my journal.

Mrs. M.: You have it spelled there? Okay, let's sound it out. Yes, how do you spell yes? ter? day? (Students spelled out each section correctly) I think it's right. There's something about yesterday though. (Several students were talking)

Ashley: It needs to be uppercase.

Mrs. M.: Uppercase! Because sentences always start with a...(Students all shouted uppercase) Uppercase letter. (The teacher acted confused) Is that? Let's see. How do you make an

uppercase Y? Let's look up here at the wall. It's kind of different. (She modeled how to write it on the chart paper)

Ryan: It's on the other yesterday, down at the bottom. (Referring to the next news section)

Mrs. M.: Yes! It sure is. (She repeated the sentence. When she read the name Todd's, she pointed to the uppercase) Why did you put an uppercase there?

Students: Because it's a name.

Mrs. M.: Because it's a name. Why did she put that little mark there? (Pointing to the apostrophe)

Haley: That's because it's Todd's, it's Todd's party.

Mrs. M.: If you're talking about something belonging to them.

They discussed the rest of the sentence, pointing out the "w" in was and corrected party. Todd read his news and they corrected birthday together. They finished the news as follows:

Mrs. M.: You know what? You did a great job on your news today and you know, please don't feel bad about making mistakes because Mrs. M. makes mistakes all the time. I've been looking on my chart up there. (Pointing to classroom procedures) I've been thinking about that word interrupt. It says friends don't interrupt. I don't know if that word is spelled right. When I wrote it I wasn't sure and the longer I look at it, I'm still not sure.

Haley: I'll look it up.

Mrs. M.: How could I find out how to spell it?

Haley: Look it up in the dictionary.

Mrs. M.: What letter would you look under if you were looking in the dictionary?

Students: I

Mrs. M.: "I", what letter would you look for next? (They discussed a few more letters) Now I don't know if it's spelled correctly or not. It might be and it might not be. Would you mind looking that up for me Haley and would you help her Ryan? Not right now but during center time. Would you do that? (They nodded, yes) When you come back from center time, would you have it on a piece of paper so we can see how it's spelled? (Discussion continued briefly about what dictionary to use.)

After the helper made the necessary changes, they briefly discussed the calendar. The helper then picked a popsicle stick from a jar with a student's name written on the stick. The person chosen shared news, which was written on a speech bubble by the teacher. Students offered suggestions on how to spell the words in the sentence. On one occasion when Todd was the helper, he picked Holly's name. She did not want to share news so she decided to select a first year student. Common news stories included information such as their mother had a birthday yesterday or I went to Tyler, Texas. Speech bubbles were posted on the wall in a horizontal line where they wrapped around the room by the end of the year.

Family time ended with a big book the teacher had selected. During the story, students were free to ask questions or add comments. Though most discussions revolved around reading skills pointed out by the teacher or students, a theme for the week was often woven into the shared experience.

Curriculum

Mary considered the morning business and family time part of the curriculum. The remainder of the day was set aside for activities related to content areas. The day was filled with journal activities, centers, reading groups, word wall writing, math, special classes, self-

selected reading, and daily reports. After family time, students discussed their math journals where they documented findings for the number of days of school and their weather graph. They shared ways they documented their counts. A typical discussion on the weather count is as follows:

Mrs. M.: While students were looking in their journal at their seats) Let's look at your August weather graph. What kind of combination did you have...? (Volunteers raised their hand)

Todd?

Todd: $10+2=12$ (The teacher repeats while writing the combination on the board. Todd refers to 10 sunny days and 2 windy days.)

Mrs. M.: Okay, Who has a different way of showing that, Matt?

Matt: 10 sunny, 1 windy, and 1 cloudy.

Mrs. M.: (While writing on the board) Oh, so $10+1+1$ would make 12. How would you think about that Matt?

Matt: Well, um... $10+2$ is 12.

Mrs. M.: So you put these two together? (Pointing to the two 1's.) So $10+2=12$.

Several other students shared their combinations such as, 12 sunnies and 0 other, 2 cloudy and 10 sunny, 11 sunny and 1 cloudy, 4 cloudy and 8 sunny and so on. Students kept track of the weather and decided on what category they would classify the weather for each day. The teacher used this opportunity to show students variations of addition problems with the same sum. Students shared their own strategies for adding their findings to make twelve. After students put away their journals, they were to work in their centers while the teacher called students to the reading table for their guided reading groups.

Students chose what center they would work in for the day. As students worked in their centers, they were able to decide how to spend their time in each center. For each center, the teacher provided a variety of materials. Some materials were designed with a specific purpose such as puzzles or books to read. Other centers were meant for students to invent ways to use the materials. Several centers were stocked with basic materials for exploration purposes such as pattern blocks, scales, magnifying glasses, collections of objects and paper. As the year progressed, concepts were introduced giving students new ways to use the materials.

During the first week of school while students were learning the routine, a few students forgot to sign up for a center. When it came time for centers, the teacher announced that if they hadn't chosen a center yet then they would have to settle for the leftovers. Mary rarely reminded students to take care of their chores. She wanted them to deal with the consequences of not taking care of their responsibilities. In order for students to become familiar with the materials in centers, the first few days Mary asked students to decide what to do in their center and at the end of center time report back to her what they did. After center time, students dictated to Mrs. M. ways they used materials in the center. She wrote their suggestions on a piece of paper and taped it in the area where they worked. Mary's purpose for doing this was to give the newer students ideas of what to do while working in each center. The most popular centers were language, overhead, computer, writing, science, and math. Least popular centers were big book, read the walls, poetry, and listening.

Language, which was mainly the classroom library, was a center student's chose often and combined other centers to invent something new. Although combining centers was not encouraged, I rarely observed Mary put an end to a creative endeavor by students. Generally students could be found reading books or writing words from them. They might be reading or

writing alone or with the other person in their area. They might be on the floor working, in the rocker, or at a table. Student's used pointers to read the Mrs. M. Family News or the big book they read earlier in the day. On several occasions, students used stories to create puppet shows. They performed puppet shows using a portable puppet theater tucked away in the area. Students used materials for their puppets from the art area.

On one occasion, Marla and Holly wanted to do a puppet show in the language center. They called Ryan over from the math center and asked him to read a book to them. Ryan sat down and read the story to the girls. The girls gathered materials from the art area to make puppets. Ryan and Mrs. M. pulled out the puppet stage for Marla and Holly to perform their show after writing their lines and making their puppets. Later that afternoon, the girls put on their puppet show. When students performed in front of the class, Mrs. M. always led a discussion on how the audience and performers viewed the performance. She asked what they liked and asked what suggestions they might have to improve the performance.

The overhead center was located at the front of the room enabling students to project images on the whiteboard. I observed the overhead being used by students for math problems, patterns, art, color mixing, map drawing, working puzzles, and creating shadows with their hands and objects. (For examples of student work, See Appendix C) Materials included in the center were number templates, color templates, blank transparencies and wipe-off markers. The overhead even became a stage light for a puppet show. Students explored the materials by inventing ways to use them and by watching others and their discoveries.

The computer center was popular with a group of boys. New students learned a great deal about the computers from the second year students during the first few weeks of school. Those with a competitive spirit spent time on the computer trying to win certain games. Tom, a new

student, turned to John in the big book center and said proudly, "Hey John, I just got an academy award!" John smiled. Often times, students in other centers wondered over to watch the excitement at the computer center.

The writing center was stocked with paper, envelopes, and writing journals. Tables in the center of the room or floor space were used for students to write. Students wrote letters or drew pictures for one another, family members, or friends. The writing center was a social place as well. Students had several conversations while writing. John and Todd were together in the writing center. While they were writing, John told Todd, "I'm going to write my mother and ask her if you can come to my house on Friday." Todd wrote his mother to ask her if he could go. Danny, from the science center, joined them. Danny read John's letter and John explained that he would be giving Danny a note also. Danny said, "But I don't know where you live." Todd suggested that John write down his telephone number. John wrote down his telephone number for both of his friends on each letter. Todd placed his letter in his mailbox and Danny took his note back to the science center with him. At times, students gathered materials from the art area to make something to put in their letters. Roni and Todd were cutting out red hearts and placing them in envelopes. Roni gave one to Ashley. Todd made several and labeled each envelope. He walked over to John in the language center carrying his letters and said, " Hey John, look at all these letters I wrote."

John: Wow! Who are they all for?

Todd: My mom, my dad, my friend Eric, and...

John: (laughing) You made one for yourself?

Todd: (laughing) Yea, I'm going to put them in my mailbox so they will get them. (While near the mailboxes, he showed Danny his letters.)

Danny: Why didn't you make me one?

Todd: I'm not finished yet. (He gets more envelopes and goes back to the writing table.)

Roni: I put an envelope in an envelope. (Todd laughs)

Students pulled from books, writing folders, and walls around the room when trying to figure out what to write or how to spell a word.

The science center was filled with exploration and discovery. Students had access to scales, weights, kaleidoscopes, measuring tools, and magnifying glasses. Mary added several items for them to explore, observe, measure, or weigh. On one occasion, Ashley and Marla were trying to identify rocks. Danny and Roni were sitting at the same table writing letters. Ashley left the science center with some of her rocks to talk with John in the language center. He identified the rocks as crystals and rubys. When Ashley returned she said they were rubys and crystals. Roni disagreed about the ruby. Ashley insisted because John said they were. Danny added that his grandmother had some like Ashley's and that his grandmother bought them in a bag. Ashley explained the ruby was her birthstone and her brother's also. John and Ashley located a book in the language center and brought it over to the table with the rocks. They tried to identify them in the book. Ashley began to explore another rock and held it up to the window to see if it made a rainbow. The conversation ended when they were called over by the teacher for reading.

In the math center, Mary provided a variety of counting and pattern materials. Students used materials to invent their own math games such as laminated number charts, game markers, dice in plastic water bottles, dominos and paper. During my observations, students explored the materials through counting, building, and inventing their own games. During the first few days of school, Ryan and John counted 239 unifix cubes and grouped them into

baggies. They also counted 498 dots on the dominos. Ashley and Haley invented a math game using a laminated number chart from 1 to 100. Each had their own chart, two unifix cubes, and two water bottles with one dice in each bottle. The girls were responsible for moving two cubes by shaking each bottle and moving their cubes the number of spaces on the dice. The object of the game was to keep moving both of their cubes until they reached 100.

The remainder of the centers offered fewer choices, minimizing more inventive experiences for students. The big book center was filled with big books and trade books for students to choose. They sat on the floor, at a table or in a rocker, either alone or reading with a friend. On one occasion, I noticed Haley and Todd pulled out a box of magnetic letters and arranged them in sentences on the front of the teacher's desk. The "read the walls" center was a shelf with supplies such as paper, clipboards, pointers, glasses and dictionaries for students to use. Mrs. M. provided file folders with words written inside the folder revolving around a certain theme. The center was designed for students to read and write words from the walls around the room. I observed several students reading the walls with pointers and writing words. They would read the morning news or the big book from family time earlier that morning. On one occasion, Ashley tied string to her clipboard creating two arm holds and wore it on her back. She read the walls and as she came to something she wanted to write down, she took the clipboard off her back to write. Poetry was a poem written on sentence strips and placed in a pocket chart on the wall. Under the chart was a box with poetry folders and copies of the poem. Students had a specific skill to work on with the poem such as circle all the rhyming words and then they were free to do whatever they wanted with the poem. I observed students rearrange the poem to make a new poem or mix the poem up on the floor and put it back in order. On several occasions, the poetry center and listening center were

chosen so they could work with their friend. The listening center was equipped with storybooks, tapes, and headphones.

Students looked forward to center time. Centers provided students the opportunity to explore materials in their own way and were able regulate their own time for part of their school day. I observed only one incident of concern during center time. After finishing his journal, John asked the teacher what center he should go to. Mrs. M. went with him to the choice sheet and they discovered which centers were full. John said, "Well, the overhead, math and science are closed." Mrs. M. suggested read the walls or the big book center. John did not respond. Mrs. M. added, "You'll need to make a choice for yourself but you should soon so you'll have some time." She left him at the choice sheet to make a decision. After a long period, he drifted to the computer center, which was full. He stood over a few boys and watched. He later walked to the art area and began to bother two students in the area. Mrs. M. noticed the situation and asked him, "Where's your center?" John said he did not know. Mrs. M. stood up and said, "I'll choose for you." John quickly replied, "No." She led him to the poetry center saying, "I'm sorry but it's not a choice." She quietly spoke with him for a few moments and walked away. John gathered some markers and a poem and began writing.

Mary grouped her students by ability for reading. She had a specific reading table for her group time. While students were in centers she called students over by name to read or discuss their book. The reading series she used provided students with their own individual books rather than a textbook. Throughout the week, students were to use their book to make predictions, preview, read, and retell the story. During guided reading groups, students constantly shared ideas and added information to what they already knew about the topic in their story. Mrs. M. introduced specific skills during the story yet students often led the

conversation in different directions. At least once a week, they were asked to pick a partner and read to them outside of the classroom. On another day during the week, after their guided reading group, Mrs. M. explained they could go to the main library to select a book. She did not set any limits such as the "five finger test" on the book they chose. They picked their book based on interest. Some students chose to go to the library while others stayed in the classroom. She also gave them the option to keep their library book from their last visit. Mary encouraged them to go to the library and just be a looker. Occasionally, students would go to the library as a looker.

A guided reading group situation directed by students' interest was as follows:

Claire, Ashley, Roni, John, Todd, and Ryan were called to the reading table to discuss a new story. They began to look over the cover of their book.

Claire: These cats in this picture are Chinese.

Mrs. M.: How do you know that?

Claire: Because of the China girl and I saw the Chinese word.

Mrs. M.: How do you know she's a China girl?

Claire: Because she has strong features.

As a group, they began to discuss the artist and the painting in the book. They struggled as a group to pronounce the artist's name. They finally figured it out and then Roni noticed written at the bottom of the picture, age three. Student's debated whether age three meant the cat was three years old or the artist painted the picture at age three. They decided the artist painted the picture when she was three. Mrs. M. called attention to the writing in the book.

Claire: It's Chinese!

Mrs. M.: Do they have a different alphabet then we do?

Ashley: Yes, they actually have words.

Roni: Do you know Sara? She's in the 7th grade and she's taking Chinese and Spanish. She wrote the whole alphabet in Spanish and Chinese. I will see if she will let me bring it to school.

Ashley: They actually have a couple of extra letters.

Mrs. M.: They do?

Roni: They have 2 n's

The students begin discussing letters of the alphabet.

Mrs. M.: I wonder about the numbers?

Students: I don't know, yeah, they do, and maybe they do it in different order.

Mrs. M.: I wonder how you could find out?

Claire: I have an idea. My mom has a Spanish and French dictionary. So I'll bring her French dictionary.

Roni: And I'll bring her Spanish paper.

Mrs. M.: Great, why don't you bring them tomorrow? (She draws their attention back to the book.) Look down here. (Pointing to a stamp)

Claire read a caption under the stamp and discovered when the artist was eight years old; they used her painting for a stamp in China.

Mrs. M.: Wow! They used her picture on a stamp to mail letters. Look at the number on the stamp. What is that? Is that like ours?

Ashley: Let me get a magnifying glass. (She returns with a magnifying glass) Oh, it says 1983!

Mrs. M.: Oh, so she did this in 1983? Does she look 8 years old in this picture of her?

Students: No.

Ryan: She was 8 years old in 1983 not now.

Mrs. M.: Maybe the librarian would let you check out a book on Chinese numbers.

Roni: Can we check it out in your name?

Mrs. M.: Sure if the librarian will let you.

They moved on to the next page. A student read about how the artist wrote a story and the steps she went through during the writing process. They discussed a few specific skills on the page and then began to share several thoughts about what they already knew about the topic and speculated with some of their own ideas. One student was interested in the difference between a Chinese stamp and a United States stamp. Another student was interested in comparing Spanish, French, and English. Ryan mentioned the Chinese writing tools. Mrs. M. interrupted, "Maybe you guys could research these questions. Maybe you should go to the library and find some of these answers."

Roni: Can we bring clipboards and paper?

Mrs. M.: Sure

Ashley: We should go as a group and help each other.

Ryan suggested he could get on the computer and look up books. Roni explained that there was paper near the computer to write the book number down so someone could find the book on the shelf. Ashley suggested that 3 or 4 people could be on the computer, while one person found the books.

Mrs. M.: Cooperation...That's the key. You guys need to work this out. Just remember; make sure it is a book that you can...

Students: Read.

Mrs. M.: Yes. Remember to do the five finger test.

Danny: Hey, I was going to say that.

Mrs. M.: You were going to say that? I'm sorry I beat you to it. (She sent them off to the library) They did not finish the story that day. It appeared Mrs. M. knew they were too interested in finding out the information first. The conclusion to the story is unknown because it was my last observation that day.

Each day, after lunch, students worked on word wall activities. Mrs. M. introduced new sight words at the beginning of each week and called them word wall words. She selected words her students frequently used for journal writing. Mary introduced the words and displayed them on a wall for students to easily see when writing in their journals. Each day of the week, they played games or created activities with the words. On one occasion, she introduced a word from the week before and Todd noticed her mistake. He pointed out the word on the wall to Mrs. M. She asked him if he had any suggestions. He thought for a moment and then said, "tried." She accepted his idea and included the word on the wall. While writing the words down on a sheet of paper, two times for each word, she asked them to assess their writing by having them circle their best writing for each word. Haley noticed when she was finished, she had made a pattern and Ryan added, "Me too!"

Mary had specific objectives in mind when planning her math program. She provided several opportunities for students to have options and make decisions on their own. During math, I observed a relaxed atmosphere with children getting drinks, going to the restroom, sharing their work with others around the room, and conversations on and off the subject. I noticed students working alone, with a partner of their choosing, and working in several areas of the room. Students had opportunities to choose what materials to use, what games to play,

what information they wanted to share, and whether they agreed or disagreed with certain math problems.

During the first week of school, Mrs. M. introduced the math materials by giving students the opportunity to explore them. Students made suggestions on how to explore the unifix cubes. Claire suggested since there were four tables and four tubs, each table could have a tub. Mrs. M. agreed. Students built patterns, made letters, built objects such as ducks or remote controls, and added on to each other's cubes. On another occasion, Mrs. M. explained to the students that they would be working with geoblocks, pattern blocks, and unifix cubes. A student expressed that he wanted to work with all the materials. Mrs. M. asked how they could make it fair? Haley suggested, "Maybe each table could switch off for a while." Students began to discuss with each other how they could work it out. The teacher interrupted after a few minutes and said, "There are three types of blocks and we have thirty minutes. How can we divide that?" Ryan shouted, "I know, ten minutes each!" Mrs. M. said that would be great. Haley added, "I know! We could go to different tables when it's time to change. Mrs. M. nodded yes and said, "Let's get started. I'll let you know when ten minutes is up." I focused on the geo block table. The first group worked together to build a skate park. The second group made individual structures and shared their inventions with one another. The final group made towers and knocked them over. As they became familiar with the materials, Mrs. M. used them to introduce games. A game she called Today's Number was to use the day's date to make number sentences using a certain amount of unifix cubes. For instance, if it were the tenth of the month, students would gather ten unifix cubes and stack them together. They would break them apart in any variation such as $2+8=10$ or $1+3+6=10$ and so on. They would write their number sentence down and re-break the stack to create a new one. Students came

up with a variety of equations and shared their findings with the class. As they began to understand the concept, their methods became more sophisticated. Some students began to use the hundred number chart and were able to add or subtract using larger numbers. For example, if the date was the fifteenth then they might write $82-67=15$. Materials were available to them and they were able to make it as challenging as they wanted. On one occasion, Ashley and Matt were working together with the number fifteen for the day. They were using both the number chart and unifix cubes. They come up with $5+10=15$.

Ashley: I know that one by heart.

Matt: I know. Let's get rid of the number board. (He picked up the unifix cubes, stacked them and then karate chopped them. They broke in three places.) $3+4+6=$

Ashley: Wait! That's only thirteen. (They counted the blocks and added two more. Ashley karate chopped them.) $4+5+6=15$

Matt: We made stairs. We didn't even try to. (Ashley chopped them over her head. Matt wrote $5+5+5=15$)

Ashley: Oh my gosh! We need to show Mrs. M.

Meanwhile, Matt broke a karate chop over his head and wrote $3+3+2+2+5=15$. Ashley explained her discovery to Mrs. M.

Mrs. M.: That's a multiplication problem. What would that be? How many groups?

Ashley: Three.

Mrs. M.: How many in each group?

Ashley: Five.

Mrs. M.: What would that be?

Ashley: 5×3

Mrs. M.: Equals...?

Ashley: Fifteen.

Mrs. M.: Oh, you figured it out.

A short while later, students picked out a sentence to share with the class and the teacher wrote it on the board. Ashley and Matt discussed which one they would share.

Ashley: Which one's the hardest? (Both looking at the paper) Oh, $3 \times 5 = 15$

Matt: No! What's that big one I did?

Ashley: This is the hardest one, I swear. (When called on Ashley spoke up and reported 3×5 .)

After the teacher wrote each sentence on the board, she asked if students agreed or disagreed.

If a student disagreed, they were asked to explain their thinking. They were free to get up and use the number chart to illustrate their thoughts.

Mrs. M. demonstrated card games for the students to play such as Turn Over Ten or Ten's Go Fish. When the students learned how to play both games, they were given the opportunity to choose which game they wanted to play, pick their partner, and find a place to play. As students settled, they decided who would go first, who wrote the math problems down, whether each others calculations were right during play, and what problems they would share with the whole class during group time.

Student's had some say about what was happening during math time. While students were working with unifix cubes, several students asked Ryan if they could borrow his cubes he had counted and bagged during center time earlier that day. Ryan said yes but explained that they needed to count out how many they took and return the same amount in the same bag when they finished. During a whole group discussion on tally marks, Angela began to write twenty-two tally marks on the board. Ashley interrupted her and asked her to start over because they

were too small and the people in the back were having difficulty seeing them. She erased them and wrote them larger. As students were making a square to add to the birthday graph, Mrs. M. suggested, "How about draw a picture and then write your name?" Tom said he did not want to draw a picture. He just wanted to write his name. Ryan suggested, "How about you do what ever you want?" Mrs. M. replied, "You could do that." Negative aspects of letting students decide happened occasionally such as when Claire, Roni, and Dusty formed a group for a card game. When looking for a place to play, Claire was holding the cards and followed Dusty to a table. Roni stopped both of them and said, "I'm the manager." Claire responded, "But Dusty wants to sit at a table." Roni snapped, "No! We'll sit here by math and science on the floor." Claire and Dusty followed her to the math and science area and began the card game.

When students returned from their special classes such as music or art, they prepared for self-selected reading. They gathered their book choices they had selected at the beginning of the day. Students found a quiet place somewhere in the room and read for approximately twenty minutes. Students sat at a table, on the floor in areas, against the walls, behind shelves, in rockers, and on the area rug. While students were reading, Mary called individual children to her desk to read to her.

Self-selected reading was a time set aside for students to read independently for pleasure. Mary explained to her students that they should select books based on the "five finger test" and should find a spot they can read without bothering each other. Choices Mary offered during self-selected reading were book selection, where to read, and selecting a partner for sharing their book at the end of self-selected reading. Students created additional options during self-selected reading. Although the options created were not what Mary intended, I rarely observed

her put an end to their decisions. I watched students read to one another, ask others for help with words, read a book together, write words from their books on a clipboard and paper, or use pointers to read their book or other reading material around the room. I observed Haley holding her book between her fingers like the teacher, sitting in a chair and reading to Angela on the floor. Todd supported Holly by listening to her read and helped her when she had trouble figuring out certain words. Together, Tom and Brent discussed pictures in their books and talked about what they thought was happening. Matt later joined them and listened in on their conversation. Ryan read a chapter book while John listened. Matt asked Dusty if he could read to him. They sat on the area rug together. On one occasion, Tom roamed around the room the entire period, listening to others read. Some read to themselves and others read aloud. Books were selected based on interest. Tom, Matt, and Ross continuously selected science related books. Brent was drawn to the Arthur Adventure Series. Ashley, Roni, Ryan, and John involved themselves in several chapter books. For beginning readers, Joy Cowley became a favorite author. Friends selected the same book to read together. Brent, Matt, and Ross sat together on the floor near the overhead projector with their books. They were having contests of who could read their book the slowest and who could read their book the fastest. They listened to each other as they read.

I noticed at the beginning of school, the second year students appeared to be more self-regulated on their book selection and often read by themselves. The first year students read with others and had difficulty at the beginning finding "just right" books. Mrs. M. let students deal with the natural consequences when forgetting their responsibilities. Ross told the teacher that he could not find a book. Mrs. M. replied, " Oh, maybe tomorrow morning you could find a friend to help you pick out a book." He nodded and then walked around the room for a

moment and joined a friend reading on the area rug. Rosie and Marla forgot to choose their self-selected books. They sat together reading the one book Marla had picked from the day before. After a few weeks of school, I observed the newer students more self-regulated when selecting their "just right" books. Their gradual independence was due to the second year students and the teacher helping them find "just right" books during the first few weeks.

Disputes were often settled by the student's themselves. Disputes were usually over where to sit. "I was here first" was a common response. Ryan, Marla, Danny, and Tom were sitting on the area rug reading. Ross, Matt, and Brent were sitting on the floor nearby. Tom moved over near the three boys and interfered in their reading circle. They began to discuss who should actually be sitting on the area rug. Each boy felt they should be able to sit on the rug. Ross suggested he would ask Ryan what he thought. Ryan responded, "We're permanent, me, Marla, Danny, and Tom. You all have to leave." Ross did not move. Tom told him he had to move. Ross said, "You're not using the word." Tom looked puzzled. Ryan explained to Tom, "You have to use the word. Say please." Tom said please and Ross moved back to the carpet with the other boys. Tom gave the boys a big smile and moved back to the rug.

At the end of self-selected reading, students were to find a partner and sit knee to knee and eye to eye to discuss one of their books. Mrs. M. asked students one day before sharing what they were going to share with their partner. The conversation began with Haley.

Haley: You can tell by the title and if it's good or not.

Roni: You can tell what's happening.

Mrs. M.: (referring to what they could share with their partner) What you've read so far...a problem in the story.

Haley: Don't tell them the whole book, just...

Mrs. M.: Just enough to tease them?

Holly: The people in the book.

Mrs. M.: Who's your favorite or who the characters are?

Roni: Who wrote or illustrated the book.

Mrs. M.: What's the setting?

Todd: Where the story is.

Mrs. M.: So those are the things you can share with your buddy.

Mary planned for a variety of choices within the daily routine. Students were responsible for taking care of the pre-arranged choices. Many choices evolved from the planned curriculum. Mary worked to offer choices as students engaged in various activities. Other choices surfaced for students, either individually or in groups, as the need arose.

The classroom was organized in such a way that students had several opportunities for choice. Students were allowed to move around the room to explain or illustrate an idea or thought, many chose to do so. They were able to get a drink, go to the restroom, and interact with others most of their school day. They had a variety of writing materials to choose from and were given the option to write the date the "long way" or "short way". They had the right to pass when they did not want to participate or share. They had the option to agree or disagree with others.

Student responsibilities provided opportunities for choice. They chose how to organize their time with their responsibilities. They were responsible for making a lunch choice, center choice, selecting reading materials based on interest, and what to write in their journals. They had the option as to whether to read their journal writing to the class and whether to write and share a news segment.

Throughout their day, students had opportunities to choose someone to help them and opportunities to volunteer to help someone else. Students often chose where to work and with whom. They were able to select partners or form groups on their own. Some chose to work with others and some chose to work alone. Students shared ideas and their work with others and offered suggestions in a variety of situations.

Part of the student's morning was spent with students working in centers. Deciding how to spend their time, choosing materials, and determining how to use them was an essential part of working in centers. They had opportunities to create and perform for the class. Planned activities gave way to student initiated ideas. Student interest and curiosity led activities in different directions and on occasion, were abandoned completely. The daily routine provided students structure yet, within the structure, a multitude of planned and unplanned situations provided choice and prompted decisions to be made.

The daily routine was the structure or framework which all activities were centered. The structure lent itself to community within the classroom. There were several situations involving daily routine, which relate to the classroom community. The next section revolves around the theme of classroom community.

Theme II: Choice in Terms of Classroom Community

Promoting community in the classroom was very important to Mary. She felt cooperation, mutual respect, and helping each other were key to creating a successful community. The multi-age influence enhanced the community atmosphere with older students helping younger students. The younger students looked up to their elders and quickly caught on to the routine by observing those who were already acclimated to the routine. Students worked together to

solve problems and make classroom decisions as a whole group or in small groups. They solved procedural problems and problems related to small group situations such as who goes first, who to work with, and where to work.

Students Helping Students

Students chose to help one another on a daily basis. They took the initiative or volunteered. During a writing activity, partners were responsible for creating a sentence they would dictate to Mrs. M. while she wrote them on the board. Brent suggested to Tom, his partner, that he would write the sentences from the board. Tom called out each letter for Brent to write from the sentences on the board. During the first week of school at center time, Tom loudly called for Mrs. M. to come help him turn on the computer. Ashley, sitting near by, said, "I'll help you" as she got up to help. Tom thanked her and Mrs. M. smiled from across the room.

While Mrs. M. was explaining a math activity, she pointed out the large hundreds chart on the wall. All numbers were black and white except the numbers by 5's and 10's were blue. Suddenly, Tom said, "I noticed something. When you count by 2's, there's one number between each one of them." Mrs. M. replied, "It's like a pattern." Ryan stood up and walked to the chart to point out the odd and even numbers. Students began to recognize several combinations on the chart and helped one another figure out why. The conversation ended with Roni noticing the 1, 11, 21, 31, and so on. Ryan ended with, "Roni, you're a great noticer." Students listened to others ideas while figuring out relationships on the numbers chart and were respectful toward one another.

Another situation where they worked together as a community was when a small group met for reading. They were discussing the author of the story when Claire pointed out that the author was from England. Ashley said, "I'll get the globe." When she returned, they located England on the globe. Claire recognized Saudi Arabia on the globe and said her mother used to live there. She shared a story about her mother's experience. As a group, they all began to locate various countries. Several comments and stories were shared before they began to read the story.

Whole Group Decisions

Mrs. M. and the students solved problems and made decisions together as needed. During the first week of school, Mrs. M. had passed out journals in the morning. When it was time to put them away, the conversation went as follows:

Mrs. M.: How can we put them away? What if everybody came up at once?

Ryan: It would be ughhhh.

John: Just choose one at a time.

Mrs. M.: One at a time? How am I going to choose who goes?

Claire: Call them in ABC order.

Everyone agreed and Mrs. M. began to call out each letter.

Center police was a student responsibility. Students volunteered after centers to check if each center was cleaned properly. When center time was over, Mrs. M. rang a bell to signal clean up time. She gave them a few minutes to clean. To signal center police time, she began to sing, "I'm looking for my center police." When students finished cleaning, they returned to their seat. Students raised their hand if they wanted to be a center police. As Mrs. M. called

out each center name, she selected a volunteer to check a center and gave them a pair of police glasses to wear. The duties of center police were to check an assigned center for cleanliness and straighten up anything that needed to be done. They were not to volunteer to check the center they had worked in that day. After all centers were checked, students returned their glasses and sat down. Mrs. M. called out each center name and the officer checked the center and gave their opinion of its condition. The center police gave a thumb up for a good report, thumb down for a bad report, and a thumb sideways for a warning. The purpose of center police was to make sure students cleaned centers properly. Mary took the opportunity to allow students to earn an extra recess. She explained to me that recess time was dwindling due to administrative decisions to increase instructional time. She believed students needed the time for physical interaction and viewed earning recess as a way to give them the "much needed" break. Therefore, each day they received a thumb's up report, they earned a letter to spell recess. When they completed the word, they were able to take advantage of the opportunity to go outside.

On several occasions, the center police process caused some controversy. On the second day of school after centers, students cleaned their center, volunteered to be a center police and checked their assigned center to make sure it had been cleaned properly. Everyone returned to his or her seat. Reports were beginning to be taken. Haley spoke up. She did not feel the process was working. She suggested that there should be only one thing wrong in a center to receive a warning. The controversy was as follows:

Mrs. M.: So if you have to do one thing...

Haley: It would be a warning. If you have two to do, it would be a down.

Ryan: Three a down.

Tom: Three isn't a lot.

Ashley: It is too many. (Louder) It is too many.

Marla: That's way too many things to do.

Ashley: Yeah. It wastes the policeman's time.

Holly: I did four.

Haley: One should be a warning and the rest should be down.

Mrs. M.: Then how should we solve this problem?

Ashley: Let's vote. (Several students shouted, "vote")

Mrs. M.: We seem to have a difference of opinion.

Students: (shouting) Vote!

Mrs. M.: Let's vote? Okay, all right. So the voting is for if you think it should be two things, it would be a down. (Writing the numbers on the board.) If you have to do two things in a center, it would be a down. Or, do you think it should be three things and then it would be a down?

(A few students then shout out four) Four should definitely be a down, don't you think?

Students: Yeah.

Claire: Three should be a down.

Mrs. M.: (Looking at Claire) You think three should be a down? (Claire nodded yes)

Ashley: Yeah.

Tom: I don't think three should be a down.

Ryan: Me either.

Several students began discussing their preferences.

Mrs. M.: Let's vote. Let's see, we have, if we have two it's okay. Does everyone agree that two is okay? It's a warning?

Students: (Shouting) Yes and no.

Mrs. M.: Some yes and some no. Okay, we have two things that would be a down. This is what you vote for. You vote for two. (Pointing to the 2) If you think three things, you have to do three things, that would be a down. (Pointing to the 3) If you think that four things you have to do, like you have to turn off the computer, you have to pick up a piece of paper, put up the head sets, and push in a chair then that would be a down. You have to have four things wrong.

Students: (Shouting) Four.

Mrs. M.: Now think. Now think. Now think. Are you being fair to yourself? (Students said yes.) Are you fair?

Claire: I would think three and all the rest is down.

Ashley: Yeah.

Mrs. M.: Well now, think it over. We don't want it to be that the policemen have to do all the work.

Ashley: Yeah.

Mrs. M.: Other people should do their own job.

Haley: I think three should be a down.

Ashley: I think four should be a down.

Ryan: We're just trying to make it four, we're not, because of recess, we're not doing it to be fair.

Mrs. M.: Right, say that again.

Ryan: We shouldn't be doing it to get recess. We should be doing it to be fair.

Mrs. M.: (agreeing with Ryan) To be fair.

Ashley: We're not just because we uh...

Holly: Want to play.

Ashley: We are doing it because we don't want the other kids to have to pick up after what we did.

Claire: I think four should be a down.

Mrs. M.: Okay, let's take a vote. Are you ready?

She pointed to each number and students voted. The vote came out as the following:

2 things wrong is a down / 1 vote

3 things wrong is a down / 3 votes

4 things wrong is a down / 13 votes

Mrs. M. counted the total as seventeen and ended with, "Great! Glad that decisions made."

She did not hesitate with their decision.

Eight days later, another problem with the process came up. While taking the reports, Mrs. M. wrote a warning beside language on the board. It was the first warning given at that point. Mrs. M. asked the class how many warnings should be allowed in order to receive a letter for recess. Students shouted 2, 3, or 4. Tom suggested they vote. Haley thought it would be easier to keep track of if they decided on 4 things wrong and 4 for warnings. Mrs. M. mentioned they were being lenient. They decided to vote. The voting was as follows:

2 warnings / 0 votes

3 warnings / 4 votes

4 warnings / 14 votes

They voted that if more than 4 warnings from center police were reported, they would not receive a letter for recess. Although Mrs. M. nudged them to think about what might be fair

and felt they were being too lenient, students voted and ignored her suggestions when it came time to vote.

On occasion, the whole group could not decide together. Mary had a way with including everyone's preference and explaining that each opinion would be considered appropriate. The following vignette is a situation during the Mrs. M. Family News. Students could not agree on how Haley wrote a segment in her news.

Haley wrote:

I brot my book mune back

I got 9 book ordrs!!!!!! (Haley)

After students discussed and corrected a few errors in the news, the discussion was as follows:

Mrs. M.: Do you notice anything else?

Students: Books.

Ryan: It needs to have an s.

Ashley: No wait, book, no order. Order can't be there. It just can be books.

Mrs. M.: Now does she get 9 books or did she get 9 orders?

Students: (Several disagreements and shouting.) Books, no orders.

Ryan: She didn't get books. She just got 9 book orders.

Haley: Yeah, 9 book orders.

Mrs. M.: So it was the order that she got? (She reread the sentence.) How would it sound if she said I got 9 book?

Ashley: I said books.

Mrs. M.: I got 9 books.

Ashley: That would sound better.

Haley: I didn't get 9 books. I got 9 book orders.

Mrs. M.: Would that make it more clear?

Ryan: Not 9 books orders. I got 9 book orders.

They all discussed among themselves.

Ashley: Book orders doesn't sound right.

Mrs. M.: It doesn't sound right to you?

Brent: It does too.

Roni: It does to everybody else.

Mrs. M.: What do you think, Brent? Do you think it should be books or book orders? (She reread the sentence and several students raised their hand.) How many of you think it should be 9 books? (A few raise their hand.) How many think it should be 9 book orders? (Several raised their hand) Okay, which ones the most?

Haley: 9 book orders.

Ryan: Cause 9 books orders? I don't think so.

Mrs. M.: I'm thinking you could probably say it either way but I think this way she said it (pointing to her sentence) probably makes it a little bit more clear. She really didn't get 9 books did she?

Haley: No, I didn't get 9 books. I didn't order them.

Mrs. M.: It sounds better and I think it makes it more clear.

Roni: I know a way she could say it. I ordered 9 books.

Mrs. M.: Ahhhh. That would be an idea too. That would be another way of saying it.

Ashley: What I was thinking was that it doesn't sound right the way it is now.

Mrs. M.: You don't think so.

Ashley: Huh uh.

Haley: I could say I am getting 9 book orders.

Roni: I think it should be I ordered 9 books.

Mrs. M.: There are different ways you could say it and they are all right. It's just that you want to say it the most clear...that makes the most sense to you.

Roni: I think it's the most clear that to me, I...

Ryan: I think it's because you didn't get 9 *book* orders.

Ashley: Yeah, because the book orders are the piece of paper.

Mrs. M.: That's kind of what she got, some people just signing up, isn't it, on the book order form?

Holly: I think it should be, I just ordered 9 entertainment books.

Mrs. M.: If she used the word entertainment book, that would probably work.

Ryan: It's her writing. She makes up her own mind.

Mrs. M.: That's right. You're exactly right. (She moved on)

Small Group Decisions

I observed several situations where students handled problems on their own. Although Mary sometimes chose the activity they would be working on and even chose their groups, decisions by students were made about where to sit, how to get started, and how to manage the activity. They worked in small groups and found themselves in situations with others that needed to be dealt with immediately. In most cases, they took the initiative to handle the circumstance.

On the second day of school, students were asked to work in centers and to select a different center from the previous day. As students chose centers, Ryan, Claire, and Rosie all chose the overhead center. Ryan explained to Mrs. M. that he was going to work in the overhead center. He told her that Claire and Rosie were there also. Mrs. M. suggested that they would have to work it out. Ryan went back to the center and explained to the girls, "The teacher said we have to work it out." Rosie said, "Well, I was here first." Ryan replied, "But we have to work it out." Claire added, "Well, you'll be able to choose tomorrow (the overhead center) because we're here right now." Ryan as he was leaving said, "You can have it" and chose the computer center. Many scenarios did not resolve as easily.

During self-selected reading, Tom, Ross, Matt, and Brent had all chosen to read on the area rug in the language center. Ross remarked to Tom, "You're not part of our group." Tom replied, "Matt has to leave." Matt shook his head no. Tom said, "I want to do eenie, meenie, miney, moe". Ross recited as requested. He landed on Brent and it was assumed that if it landed on a person, they would get to stay. Tom interrupted, "I want to do it." Ross said, "Okay, fine." Tom recited the rhyme and landed on Brent. Matt suggested, "How about let's do it, who leaves?" Ross recited the rhyme but did not include himself." No one noticed. He landed on Brent and they told him he had to leave. He moved to the overhead area nearby.

During reading, Mary had two different groups play vowel bingo. Deciding who was the "letter caller" was handled differently in each group. One group voted on who they wanted to be the caller. After the second group played bingo with the teacher, she asked them if they wanted to play on their own. They all agreed. Mrs. M. suggested, "Marla and Angela, since you both won the last one, how about one of you call? You two decide which one." Angela said, "Marla, she can do it." Mrs. M. remarked, "Wow! Marla, Angela is trying to be such a

good friend." Being the "letter caller" was considered a privilege among students during vowel bingo.

As a whole class, Mrs. M. introduced a math card game called Ten's Go Fish, similar to the traditional Go Fish card game. She then called certain students to form groups to play their own game. Danny, Rosie, Tom, John, and Ryan formed their group and found a spot to play. They tried to decide who would go first. Tom said, "I'll go first." Ryan interrupted, "No, I will." John said, "No, we go clockwise." Ryan suggested that Rosie go first. As Mrs. M. walked by Ryan asked, "How do we write them all down?" Mrs. M. responded, "You decide." She walked away and Ryan left to get a clipboard and paper. Students were to write down the cards they turned over that added to ten. He wrote down each student's set of cards and their name beside the problem. Ryan changed his mind and began to write their initials. He recognized he was going to run out of room on his paper. Ryan said, "Okay, I know what we'll do." Without consulting the others, he wrote down the problems and not their names. In small groups, occasionally, one student took on most of the responsibility to make decisions for the group.

On another occasion, students finished playing Today's Number and put their materials away. Mrs. M. announced, "Today is choice day." Students were going to play a math card game and the situation was as follows:

Mrs. M.: You may play either game. (10's Go Fish or Turn Over 10) You only have about fifteen minutes to play. If I were you, I would get busy quickly or your time is going to be up. I want you to get yourselves into groups of three and find your spot.

Chaos broke out as students tried to form their groups. I focused on a situation between Ashley, Angela, Roni, Dusty, Danny, and Todd. Ashley, Roni, and Angela ran to one another

to form a group. Todd grabbed Danny and stood near the girls group. They had formed a group of five. Dusty joined them.

Roni: (to Ashley and Angela) I'll be with Danny and Todd and sit by us so we can be kind of close. (Ashley and Angela walked away to look for a third person while Dusty followed them.)

Ashley: (Looking at Dusty) Go find a boys group.

Dusty walked quickly to his seat, put his head down and began to cry. Ashley watched him for a moment and then began to look around the room for another partner. She looked at Dusty again. She started to walk over to him and stopped herself. Again, she looked around the room, yet kept an eye on Dusty. The look on her face expressed sadness as if she was sympathetic toward how Dusty felt. After another short hesitation, she walked to Dusty's table and asked Dusty to join them. He looked up at her crying and said no. Mrs. M. happened to walk by his table.

Mrs. M.: Would you like to be in their group?

Dusty: No. (He put his head back down on his table.)

Mrs. M.: Okay (Walking away).

Ashley and Angela found a spot in the science center on the floor. Dusty watched them. He stood up and crossed his arms on his chest and stomped over to them in the science center. They all smiled.

Mrs. M. then interrupted the class by clapping a pattern. Students joined in and quieted down.

Mrs. M.: Did you notice that yesterday I picked who you were going to be with? Why do you think I picked yesterday?

Ross: Because we wouldn't fight.

Mrs. M.: Ahhhh. Because today when I gave you the choice, what did you do? Were peoples feelings kind of hurt today?

Students: No.

Mrs. M.: Think about it. When you're choosing, do you have to be with your best friend?

Students: No. (Mrs. M. agreed.)

Ryan: You don't have to.

Mrs. M.: All you're doing is finding a partner to play with.

(Students began to talk and Mrs. M. asked for their attention. She asked them to stop what they were doing.)

Mrs. M.: I want you to think about when you make choices. You don't want to hurt other people's feelings do you? So when you run and grab somebody up, how is that making other people feel?

Students: Bad.

Ryan: Because like if you push another person, you're pushing and you're running.

Mrs. M.: Some of the people are not paying attention to what they are doing. You're wasting some of your time. So let's think about that next time when you have a choice. (Softly speaking) Make wise decisions.

Mrs. M. moved on to explain something about a wild card in the game. Students resumed play with their groups. As groups started to play, I recognized two groups in the science center having trouble deciding if a group needed to move. Ashley, Angela, and Dusty were in one group and Claire, Marla, and Holly were in the other group. Claire spoke up.

Claire: We were here first.

Marla: Let's vote. (They voted 3 to 3.) Opps! (They all laughed after they realized the tie vote).

Claire: We were here first.

Holly: Let's just get on with the game. (Everyone became quiet as if they were thinking of what to do.) They should leave.

Claire: We could flip a coin.

Ashley: (Adding to Claire's statement) If they don't want to be close.

They never resolved the conflict. The bell rang which meant time was up and they needed to go to their special class.

The two groups discussed a variety of strategies to resolve their conflict in order to make a decision such as voting, flipping a coin, getting on with it, or staying in the same spot. Other strategies used as a whole group or small group were negotiation, debate, "eenie meenie miney moe" or one person giving in to another.

As a classroom community, the need to choose in a small group or as a whole group occurred in a variety of situations. As a whole group, they decided how to go about an assignment or a project. Students chose to share ideas and discoveries. They determined whether centers were cleaned properly. Through debate, new procedures and solving problems were decided together as a class.

Problems were handled and solved in small groups as well. At times, students chose their groups. They decided how to form groups and who to include or exclude. Students always had the opportunity to decide where to sit, how to get started, and how to manage their activity. They decided who had certain responsibilities and who would go first. Whether students offered suggestions or the teacher planned for choice, in most cases, students had some say

about what was happening during their day and made decisions as a community in their classroom.

Students were viewed as valued, contributing members of the classroom. They took the initiative individually and as a group to take part in the sense of democracy they helped to create. Within the classroom community, students experienced self-determination by making decisions, sharing ideas and opinions, and making choices. The theme self-determination will be discussed in the next section.

Theme III: Choice in Terms of Self-determination

Self-determination refers to the "experience of oneself as the origin of decisions rather than the victim of things outside one's control" (Kohn, 1996, p. 9). In chapter one, I listed four questions Alfie Kohn (1998) posed concerning choice. Through observations and data analysis, part of the information I gathered led me to examine the fourth question, "What barriers might account for the fact that students rarely feel a sense of self-determination today?"

After organizing the data, self-determination surfaced as a theme. I observed situations where students experienced self-determination as a whole group, small groups, and individually. As a whole group, student's ideas were respected and accepted. Ideas were often carried out to completion or, at least, tried. Small group decisions resulted in responsibility and self-regulating their thoughts and actions. They learned from their mistakes and were willing to help others in need. Individually, they had the right to pass if they desired. Student's decided on how to use materials or how to go about an assignment. They had a voice on how to spend their free time and shared their interests with others.

Whole Group

In a group setting, students took the opportunity to share their work or their ideas with the class. As students returned to the classroom from music, they gathered at the area rug. Ashley stopped to discuss with the teacher that she had a journal story she would like to read to the class. Mrs. M. announced to the class, "Ashley has finished her journal writing and wants to read it to all of you." Ashley explained, "It's long but not when I read it, just when I'm writing." She read her story about camp. After she finished reading, a discussion began as student's shared stories about their camp experiences during their break. On another occasion, Mrs. M. announced to the class, "Claire was doing some brainstorming this morning." Claire began, "I was thinking that we could use our lunch count and line up by the way we are in the pockets." Students immediately responded, "No!" Tom then suggested, "We could line up by our cubbies." Mrs. M. questioned, "How are we going to solve this problem?" Ashley responded with, "Let's vote." As students made suggestions Mary wrote them on the board and they voted. The following is a list she wrote on the board:

<u>Suggestions</u>	<u>Votes</u>
By boy/girl	0
By pocket	1
Same	11
By choice	1
By cubbie	3

After they voted, Ashley announced, "Same is the majority." Mrs. M. ended the discussion with Ashley explaining what she meant by majority. Mrs. M. commented, "It's

always good to think up new ideas." Keeping the same procedure meant that students usually lined up by tables that were ready and Mrs. M. called them to line up.

Small Group

As students worked in small groups, they regulated their own thoughts and actions and took the initiative to be responsible. Often times, they worked to solve problems or make decisions together. During a group activity, Roni, Ashley, Angela, and Holly got an idea to perform a patriotic song they had learned in music. During the planning phase, they decided to make costumes. They discussed their idea with Mrs. M. and she said they could perform their song later in the afternoon if they were ready. During lunch recess, the girls made their costumes for the performance and were ready that afternoon.

Occasionally, students preferred to work alone while in a group situation. When Haley and Marla were working in the science center, Haley chose to work alone with the scales. I noticed Haley was very involved with what she was doing. She was weighing rings and using gram weights to balance the scale. Marla began to observe what Haley was doing. Marla suggested she weigh other objects. Haley said, "No." She was going to weigh the shells after she used the weights to balance the scales. She took out the rings and used only the weights to balance. Marla continued to watch. Haley gathered the shells together but her time was cut short when Mrs. M. called her over to the reading table.

One situation, when a student discovered a way to show he was doing what he thought was right, was between Dusty, Ross, and Tom. All three were in the language center at center time. Dusty was quietly roaming around in the language center. Usually, Dusty spent part of his mornings in a different classroom. He was not accustomed to having so much free time in

centers. Ross and Tom obviously wanted to work together. Ross said, "You go over there, Dusty," pointing to the teacher. Dusty pointed back at the language center and walked over to the center choice sheet. Ross and Tom followed him. Dusty looked at the boys and said, "See, Ross." Ross agreed and confirmed, "He is in the language center."

Students took responsibility for their work. While writing numbers by 2's, 5's, and 10's as the teacher requested, Ashley commented to Haley, "I have a feeling I have some wrong so I'm going to go back and check when I finish." Haley agreed to do the same. Mrs. M. noticed, after Angela finished writing in her journal, she read over what she had written. Angela found a misspelled word and corrected it. Mrs. M. acknowledged Angela by saying, "I see Angela, you caught yourself. That's one way to catch your mistakes."

Students were constantly helping others clean up messes, find things, and figuring things out together. Almost daily, students helped Dusty gather things at the end of the day. Dusty had difficulty gathering his belongings and carrying his backpack. Students were always willing to help Dusty when he asked. Many times I noticed students taking the initiative without Dusty ever asking.

Individually

Individually, students made several decisions on their own. When called on by the teacher or when it was their turn to share, students had the opportunity to pass. As explained earlier under daily routine, students had numerous experiences deciding on how to work with the materials in the classroom. I observed many situations where students decided how to go about an assignment. They chose the materials they wanted to use, how to create their work, and took the necessary time to complete the assignment. When students had finished creating

a friend out of paper for an assignment, they cleaned up and worked in centers. Andrea was far from finished. She noticed she was in the way of those students working in their centers. She picked up her picture and moved to the art easel. She spent the remainder of the morning busy finishing her friend. Students used their lunch recess to work on projects they engineered such as plays, puppet shows, and performances. Mary almost always gave students the time to share their ideas. After centers, students were seated at their tables, Claire exclaimed, "I can do sign language." She spelled recess using finger spelling. Roni stood up and said, "I know the alphabet", and spelled friends. Many segments of the day revolved around the unexpected. When Tom walked in the classroom in the morning, he told the teacher he brought bones for the science center. "I can leave them here for two days," he told Mrs. M. She asked, "What are these?" Tom replied, "Those are jaw bones. Can't you see the teeth?" Several students left their chores during the morning business to see what they were discussing. Claire joined in the discussion and remarked, "It's a small animal because you can see the teeth." This couldn't be just one animal because I found not only two backbones. I have three. I don't think an animal has three back bones," Tom said. Mrs. M. ran her fingers down her back. Several students began to feel their backbones. Mrs. M. replied, "I feel my backbone. I feel quite a few of them." Students were looking at the bones and discussing what type of animal they thought it might be. The conversation faded and students resumed their daily chores.

Students played an active role in what happened each day in the classroom. From what they brought to school to share, to expressing their ideas on a number of topics. Many were eager to share their work; others chose to pass. They took the initiative to carry out ideas by creating performances for the class. They chose to work alone or in a group. Students took the responsibility for their work and for the care of the classroom.

Throughout each day, students decided how to work with materials, how to go about an assignment. They chose to help those in need and stand up for what they believed was right. Mary welcomed their interests and opinions. She recognized the benefits of letting the students decide. As a result of self-determination, students were respectful of one another and their teacher. They took their responsibilities seriously and were actively involved in contributing to their classroom.

Barriers to students' self-determination were mainly imposed by the school or district and even beyond. Mary worked through the barriers by creating a climate where students would feel some sense of responsibility for what happened to them each day and how their classroom would be run. Both, the teacher and students recognized certain limitations were necessary for their classroom to run smoothly.

Theme IV: Choice in Terms of Necessary Limitations

In Room 11, options for students and decisions made by students were a large part of each day. Classroom control was shared between the teacher and students. The presence of structure and organization was evident. Limits were necessary for the structure and organization to exist. Necessary limits were due to time, structure, care of materials and hygiene, curriculum mandates, school policy, teacher preference, and student preference. Certain limits were non-negotiable, while others reflected the personality of the classroom.

Time

Obviously, schools run on time schedules. Time was regulated as to when school began, when to go to lunch and when students left for the day. Time in the classroom was somewhat a

different matter. Mary planned each school day with time as a guiding factor. Her agenda was based on a daily routine. She was very flexible spending unplanned time discussing student's thoughts, ideas and suggestions. Mary set limits when she felt time may be wasted over incidental matters. Ryan asked if he could write in his journal at the end of morning business. Mrs. M. explained there was only a few more minutes until family time and suggested he get a piece of paper from the read the walls center. Students brainstormed several topics related to cooperation as Mrs. M. wrote them on the board. When they finished, students were to select a topic, join their partner, and write a cartoon using the topic they selected. As she read each topic, partners raised their hand to signal which topic they wanted to select for writing a cartoon. After all topics had been chosen and partners found a place to write, Tom said he wanted to change his topic to something else. Mrs. M. said he couldn't. She anticipated a change might trigger a chain reaction and did not want time to run out for the activity. A similar situation was when Mrs. M. discussed the stages for writing. She wanted to give them a new folder for their papers. Ryan asked if it mattered what color of folder they get. Ashley responded, "It doesn't matter what color." Mrs. M. smiled and agreed with Ashley. When Ryan was handed his folder he exclaimed, "Yes! I got my favorite color. Mrs.M. , mines really shiny." She responded, "Yes, but it doesn't matter which color does it?" He shook his head no.

In order for the day to run smoothly from one activity to the next, Mrs. M. gently reminded her students about time. During morning business she would say, "You need to be making your final selections on your books" or "Remember to check your list of things to do. We only have a few more minutes before we start our day." Other times, she would limit students' time on certain activities. One Friday, she set up stations in her room for a friendship

fair. She wanted students to have time at each station. She had them travel in groups. She explained, "You have 10 minutes in each station and when the bell rings, it will be time to move to the next station." She had allotted approximately one hour for the fair and believed 10 minutes each would give all students a chance to visit each station.

I observed only one incident when Mary stepped in to deal directly with a problem among students. It was at the end of the day and the beginning of self-selected reading. They had only a short time for reading so she asked them to get settled quickly so they would have some reading time. Claire, Marla, Tom, and Ryan were in the language center. They all began to argue about who was going to sit in the rocker. After a few minutes, Mrs. M. went to their area and asked about the problem. They all began at once. She finally said, "Let's discuss this later. For now, the chair is closed." They quickly began to argue over the area rug because only three were allowed and four were in the center. Mrs. M. interrupted, "Do I need to close the carpet or can you work it out?" They responded, "Work it out." Without further discussion, Ryan left and found another place.

Structure

A variety of limits were set to encourage multi-age interactions, exposure to other experiences, independence, and responsibility. She also set limits to prevent chaos and to avoid interruptions. Through observation, I noticed the only time Mary selected groups was when she felt an assignment might be too difficult for a first year student to handle alone. When students were planning to work on their cooperation cartoons, as mentioned earlier, the discussion was as follows:

Ashley: Can we pick our own partner?

Mrs. M.: I'm going to pick today because I want you to both be able to help each other.

Roni: How about second graders work with first graders and work where we want and pick a spot.

Mrs. M.: Good idea. Let's do that.

Students got their paper and clipboards and found a spot. Ryan, Claire, Andrea, Haley, and Matt asked Mrs. M. if they could work together. Mary said yes and suggested the carpet.

Mary set limits in order for students to be exposed to a variety of experiences. She deleted the art center as an option on the center choice sheet as soon as students had visited the center during their first week. She wanted students to familiarize themselves with the materials so they would know what was available to them. After the center was marked off the sheet, students were free to use the materials as needed in other centers. As a way for students to expose themselves to all the materials available around the room, during the first week she asked students to pick a different center each day.

Limits were set to encourage independence and responsibility. Mary required students to do the five finger test to locate "just right" books so they would be able to read independently during self-selected reading. Rosie displayed a sense of responsibility when she set her own limit. She told Mrs. M. that she took home one of her self-selected books from the day before. She explained that was why she only picked out two for the day. Mrs. M. responded, "Great. Just remember to bring it back tomorrow."

Limits assisted in preventing interruptions and chaos. Only on a few occasions I observed Mrs. M. requesting that students not leave during group time to go to the restroom. When Tom got up to look for the bathroom pass, Mrs. M. asked him if it was an emergency. He said, "Yes." He left the room and Mrs. M. discussed with the class how she preferred they wait until

after group time to leave. Classroom rules were disguised as ways to treat a friend. The teacher and students developed a list on friendship and posted it on a bulletin board. One suggestion by a student was "friends don't interrupt." A few weeks later, Mrs. M. was explaining an activity to the class. Roni interrupted her. Mrs. M. pointed to the bulletin board chart and asked, "Are you my friend?" Roni answered, "Yes." Mrs. M. proceeded with her explanation.

I never observed what I would consider a chaotic moment in the classroom. Limits were either designed to cut down on potential chaos or were created at the time of need. Mrs. M. asked students to gather at the poetry center to introduce them to a new poem. She asked that students sit on the floor near the poem rather than the chairs near by. They were at the poetry center for a short period of time and space was limited. She wanted to prevent a chaotic situation on where to sit. The area rug was limited to three people during self-selected reading. Mrs. M. explained on a few occasions that it gets too crowded if there are more than three people. The three-person limit was carried over from the last year. Second year students assumed the limit and the first year students never questioned why. Many times, Mrs. M. explained why she felt certain limits were necessary. While sitting with Ryan and John on the floor during self-selected reading, she asked them, "Is it a good idea to sit next to your friend?" Ryan answered, "No, because you would probably talk." Mrs. M. added, "Because if you sit by your friend, it is tempting to talk isn't it?" Ryan agreed and moved to another area of the room.

Occasionally, Mary set limits based on an immediate need due to time. As mentioned earlier, for example, John did not choose a center. Mrs. M. asked him a few times to choose a center. He continued to wander around the room and then began to bother other students in

their centers. Mrs. M. explained to John she would choose for him. He resisted by saying no. Mrs. M. said, "I'm sorry but it's not a choice" and led him to the poetry center. Another limit set because of immediate need was when Mrs. M. closed the rocker during self-selected reading because students could not resolve the situation quickly.

Care of Materials and Hygiene

Mary set limits due to care of materials and hygiene. Haley was at the overhead center and placed plastic color templates on the hot part of the lamp to see how it projected on the wall. Mrs. M. explained why that could be dangerous if it melted. While Holly and Andrea were using wipe-off marker on the overhead, Mrs. M. discussed the care of the markers and how they may last longer if they did not push down so hard. While two girls were making a fruit loop necklace during the friendship fair, they put their hands in the box of fruit loops to refill the bowl. Mrs. M. explained that was not very hygienic because of the spread of germs. She said she would pour more in the bowl for them if needed.

Curriculum Mandates

Curriculum decisions were limited by the state-mandated curriculum. Mary worked around the mandated curriculum by trying to offer a variety of ways to introduce concepts she was responsible for teaching. At the beginning of the school year several activities were limited because Mrs. M. had not yet had the opportunity to introduce all the materials. More choices were available as the year progressed and concepts introduced. When introducing a math concept such as addition facts, Mrs. M. limited their activities to two card games, which she had introduced. She had introduced each game on different days. She explained they

could choose between the two games. Other options were not available until more games or activities were introduced.

Mary was responsible for assessment. During a tally mark test, it was difficult for students to remember not to help one another. Ryan was helping Angela and Ashley was helping Brent. Mrs. M. explained to them that she appreciated it but that it was one of those times she wanted them to do it all by themselves. She was responsible for individual assessment. She utilized individual portfolios for record keeping of student progress. Both, students and Mrs. M. had some say about what went into the portfolios.

School Policy

Non-negotiable limits were based on school policy. Hallways were considered no talking zones. Specific lunchroom procedures such as following the blue line while entering the cafeteria were school-wide limits. After a fire drill, Ashley began to take attendance in the classroom. Mrs. M. explained to her that school policy requires the teacher to take attendance after a drill. Mrs. M. completed the attendance report.

Teacher Preference

Certain limits were based on the teacher's preference. Mary preferred assigned seating at tables during group time. At the beginning of school, Ryan asked the teacher if he could take his shoes off during self-selected reading. Mrs. M. hesitantly agreed. Other students took off their shoes for the following few days. Students began to switch shoes with one another. A few days later, Mrs. M. discussed with the class that she preferred for them to leave their shoes on for a few days and they could discuss it again later. I never observed a student ask again after that point. She required students to push in their chairs when they left their table. With

humor, Mrs. M. and a few of the second year students explained to the class that there may be blood on the floor or they may have to scrub toilets if chairs were not pushed into their tables. Later, Mrs. M. told me that the blood on the floor and scrubbing toilet ideas came from the class from the past school year.

Student's Preference

Student preference set limits in the classroom. When involved in quiet group activities, students either dealt with an issue on their own or addressed their concern with the teacher. Ashley asked the teacher to get Matt quiet. Mrs. M. responded by asking, "Did you ask him?" Ashley turned to Matt and said, "Please be quiet Matt." Another time Ashley complained, "I think it's too loud in here." Mrs. M. responded, "Some like it louder and some like it quieter. We need to respect each other." On another occasion, Roni told Mrs. M. that someone was whistling and it was bothering her. Mrs. M. announced, "Would the person whistling please show respect for others?" Holly stated, "I think it's Tom." Mrs. M. motioned with her hand suggesting that she did not care who was whistling and replied, "Well, that's not the concern. Whoever it is, I'm sure will show respect." When students felt someone was taking advantage of the situation, they spoke up to resolve the circumstance. A dispute over who was able to choose the computer center broke out at the center choice sheet. Tom and Matt were at the center choice sheet when Tom noticed Matt had signed up for computers. The conversation was as follows:

Tom: Matt you signed up for computers three days in a row. (Matt shook his head no.)

Ashley: (Listening to the boys.) Mrs. M., someone signed up for computers three days in a row.

Mrs. M.: (Not too concerned or even aware of what was going on.) Who did?

Ashley: Matt

Mrs. M.: Oh, Matt. What do you think about that?

Matt: I have not.

Mrs. M.: Did you sign up for computers today?

Matt: Yes.

Mrs. M.: What do you think about that? (Matt gave no response.)

Claire: Not fair.

Ashley: Not fair to other people.

Mrs. M.: Hmm. So what do you think you ought to do Matt?

Haley: No he didn't. He went to listening yesterday.

Ryan: Yeah, me and John went to computers.

Mrs. M.: How many days have you been in computers this week?

Tom: He was doing what I was doing. He did the computers the day before yesterday.

Mrs. M.: Okay, you know what? (Looking at Matt) I think you need to think about that. I'm not going to solve that problem. I think you're the one that needs to solve that problem. So think about what you might want to do. If that was somebody else, how would you feel about it? Just think about that. Say to yourself, "If I was somebody else, how would I feel about what I was doing?" That would help you think about it and make some decisions. Wise decisions. I'll just leave that up to you, Matt.

Mrs. M. went on to help others. Matt stayed with the computer choice. After looking back through my notes, Matt did not work in the center the day before.

Necessary limits were established to create structure and organization for the classroom. Some limits were established at the beginning of the school year, while others were created when needed. Time was a factor in many of the limits I observed. Time was limited by the school-wide schedule. Within the classroom routine, Mary limited time due to her planned activities and keeping a loose schedule. Group needs were considered over individual needs. Imposed time limits gave all students the opportunity to participate in certain activities. Limits were quickly established because of time to avoid a potentially involved dispute.

Mary sometimes selected groups to allow for multiage interactions. Self-selected reading choices were limited by the "five finger test" for independent reading. On occasion, bathroom breaks and interruptions were limited during whole group discussions. During poetry readings, seating was limited to the floor to prevent chaos. By center time, if students had not chosen a center, they either settled for the leftovers or Mary decided for them. Mary discussed limits with materials to preserve them or for hygiene purposes.

Mary was confronted with necessary limitations due to curriculum mandates and school policies. She worked within the boundaries of the mandates and was able to include student interest. Assessment limited student interactions and helping one another. School policy limited talking in the hallway. Lunchroom and fire drill procedures were specified.

Mary preferred assigned seating during certain periods throughout their day. Students were asked to keep their shoes on during class. Students limited noise levels. They preferred a quiet classroom when working independently. Students discussed limiting center selections in order to be fair. They wanted to prevent students from signing up for the same center several days in a row.

Limits in the classroom appeared to have a reasonable purpose in most cases. Whether the limits were due to preferences or policies, there was still ample opportunity for students to have options and make decisions. It was apparent that students felt they had a voice in how the classroom was run and that their preferences counted. Students accepted limits when given an explanation for their purpose.

Because several incidences could have fallen into more than one theme, it was difficult to organize and specify the data. To illustrate my point, three major incidences will be discussed in the next section, which include all themes.

Vignettes Illustrating All Themes

The following vignettes were captured in a series of three days each week throughout my observation period. In some cases, I was not able to observe and record all the events taking place related to each vignette. I selected these vignettes because I believe I obtained enough rich information for their stories to be told.

Puppet Show "Stop!"

I observed a group of student's initiate and perform a puppet show for the class. They were involved in choices related to their daily routine, classroom community, self-determination, and limitations due to personal preferences. The idea for a puppet show began when Roni and Todd were working in the language center during the morning center time. Danny was working nearby in the "read the walls" center. Danny joined Roni and Todd to create a puppet show using Joy Cowley's book, "*Stop!*"

The story read as follows:

"Stop", said the milkman but the truck went on.

"Stop", said the boy but the truck went on.

"Stop", said the girl but the truck went on.

"Stop", said the mail carrier but the truck went on.

"Stop", said the police officer but the police officer went on.

Stop! Stop! Stop!

"Stop", said the traffic light.

CRASH!

They created characters from the story using construction paper and popsicle sticks from the art area. Along with the characters, they made a road and taped it at the bottom of the puppet stage. They also made hand held traffic lights. They had access to a small puppet stage with a wipe-off board on the lower portion.

During the early stages of the making of the puppet show, Ryan and Angela, from the poetry center, pulled up chairs to watch them practice. Todd narrated while Roni and Danny worked the puppets. Ryan and Angela assisted by giving suggestions from the audience's perspective such as not being able to hear or not being able to see certain puppets. They went back to their center after the practice.

Ashley, from the overhead center, asked the group if they needed any lighting. They welcomed her idea. Roni asked Ashley if she could project the light onto the front of the stage. They worked together to move the projector. Ashley suggested she could use color templates to project other colors and also wanted to write "Liteing by Ashley" on the front of the stage with a wipe-off marker. Roni nodded okay. After writing, Ashley explained that she would use a red template for the red stoplight and a green for the green stoplight. Roni then announced, "This is rehearsal." Ashley got a chair to sit next to the projector while she worked

the lighting. Danny began to narrate the story while Todd and Roni worked the puppets. A student from another area walking by, stopped to watch for a moment and moved on. In the middle of rehearsal, Roni stopped the show because she was frustrated by the disorganization. She began to write down directions for the play. As she wrote, she explained the directions as Todd and Danny listened. Ashley interrupted with an idea. She suggested she would use the color templates moving them around on the overhead for the end of the show. Roni replied with a sharp, "No" and called a meeting back stage with "just the girls". While back stage, I heard Roni tell Ashley that she was the manager and Ashley quickly replied, "I'm the second manager." Neither one looked very happy. As they came from behind the stage, Roni tried to encourage Ashley not to use all the colors on the projector. Brent, who was working at the overhead center, began to help Ashley locate certain templates. Roni tried to keep Ashley away from the projector but Ashley responded, "You're not in charge of me." She resumed by looking for number templates and announced she needed numbers one and three. Todd helped her look for them. Roni stated, "We've got a meeting to do." Ashley continued locating her numbers and practiced a countdown on the overhead. Roni noticed what Ashley was doing and said, "No!" Roni told Danny and Todd that they could have a boy's meeting next. The two girls went back stage again. I could not hear what they were saying. After a short period, they called the boys back stage for a moment. They all came from behind the stage, seemingly, in a good mood and organized. Ashley suggested to Todd, "Give me a thumbs up," to signal when he was ready.

Todd put his thumb up and Ashley lit the stage with red. Todd read the wipe-off board, "Stop!" by Todd, Roni, and Danny. Lighting by Ashley." Todd asked Ashley to put her thumbs up when she was ready. Ashley took off the red template and exclaimed, "Yea," holding both

thumbs up. She displayed number tiles one at a time on the overhead and counted down, "5, 4, 3, 2, 1," and changed again to the red light. Brent grabbed a chair to watch. Danny narrated the story while Todd and Roni worked with the puppets. Brent clapped at the end of the show while Roni and Danny took a bow and walked behind stage. Ashley and Todd took a bow and walked off. Mrs. M. began to sing which meant center time was over. Everyone started to clean up their centers. As the puppet show group cleaned, they organized the characters for their show, each volunteering to play a part.

Before lunch, Mrs. M. explained to the students, they would need to stay in for lunch recess due to the heat index outdoors. Todd asked her if they could work on their puppet show during that time. Mrs. M. responded, "That would be fun."

After lunch and a short lesson, the group performed their puppet show. When the show was over, Mrs. M. asked the class what they liked about the show. The responses were as follows:

Brent: I liked the part when it crashed.

Haley: I think I liked...I liked it all.

Ryan: I liked two parts, chasing the police off and when the red light fell.

Holly: I liked how they put on the color.

Mrs. M. then asked "What could they do to make it better?" The suggestions were as follows:

Haley: Maybe...I liked the lights.

Brent: They could make a space (on the wipe-off board) and write at the bottom who made the idea.

Roni: We drew a picture of the idea.

Ashley: I asked if they needed light.

The idea for the puppet show was initiated from options students were given through their daily routine during center time. They chose what center they would work in for the day. Often times, they chose a center based on who they would work with. Materials were provided in each center and students were to choose how to use them. They had the option to pull from various resources to create the puppet show. Although mixing centers was not encouraged, Mrs. M. was aware of what the students had created while planning the puppet show and did not put a halt to the situation.

They formed a small community to work together to share ideas and solve problems together. Some students from other centers were helping or observing at various times. The rest of the class was busy working in their centers or with Mrs. M. in guided reading groups. The group working on the puppet show was given the opportunity to share their work with the rest of the class. The class was given the opportunity to share their ideas and suggestions about the show.

Self-determination was certainly displayed by the two girls, Roni and Ashley. They originated several ideas to create the puppet show and stood their ground when they disagreed. The boys involved seem to enjoy being a part of the group and took their parts seriously. Todd even wanted to give up his free time during lunch to work on the show.

Limitations were established through their meetings behind the stage. Although I was not able to hear the conversations, I believe Ashley wanted to take care of the lighting and wanted to be the decision-maker for her part in the show. Obviously, her ideas were accepted. She carried them out as planned. The idea of the puppet show was a big success. The very next day, Marla and Holly signed up for the language center and started to create a puppet show from one of their favorite stories.

I Have an Idea!

During center time, Mrs. M. called for Claire, Todd, John, Ryan, Ashley, Roni, and Danny to meet at the guided reading group table. They gathered to discuss the book, *The Rat and the Tiger* by Keiko Kasza. While discussing the story, Ashley exclaimed, "I have an idea! We could act this out." As Mrs. M. sat back, students began brainstorming how to carry out the idea. "Someone could be flowers. We could make costumes. I have fabric at home. We could take turns...the boys could be tigers and the girls could be rats. We could make curtains. We could make the tiled area our stage. We could move all the tables over there. The parents could come here to watch us." All the while, Mrs. M. responded with only "oh" and "um hum". After several minutes, she interrupted, "Sounds to me that you all have some great ideas. You need to think about what all of you need to work out, to do this right." Students began talking all at once. Ashley's voice rose above all others.

Ashley: Well, we could each have our own job. One of our jobs could be to get the stage ready. One of our jobs could be like to set the background.

Mrs. M.: Ryan, would you get a piece of paper? (Ryan brought a piece of paper back to the reading table and handed it to Mrs. M.) Help me out and decide because we need to move on quickly so we can get to some of the other groups too.

Claire: We could do it when the parents are here.

Mrs. M.: I'm not sure because a lot of parents work. (After students discussed the idea of parents coming, they decided to perform the play for only the class because too many parents worked during the day.) Okay, so we are going to do this for the class. (Mrs. M. wrote on paper.)

Claire: But what time?

Mrs. M.: Well, what do you think would be a good time? (Several students began talking.)

Claire: At center time.

Ashley: Wait! I have an idea. You know when we do the puppet show stuff.

Mrs. M.: After lunch?

Ashley: Yeah, after lunch.

Mrs. M.: How are we going to divide up the parts?

Ashley: I know...uh...well, okay. We could have the girls be rats and the boys be tigers.

Mrs. M.: Is that okay with everyone? (Everyone agreed.)

Claire: We could each have two parts.

Mrs. M.: Each have two parts?

Ashley: No, one part.

Claire: If we have two parts that would be better.

Ashley: Then okay, we could just divide it up into how many minutes. (She was referring to how many minutes a person would get for each part they were playing.)

Roni: We need to have two part costumes. Some of us are going to be a rat and some of us are going to be a rat and a flower.

Claire: We're probably going to need to make two costumes.

Mrs. M.: What other characters are we going to need?

Claire: I know one part we're not thinking about...the rocks. We've got to do something to make them fall down.

Ashley: Me and my brother, we have a bunch of wood left over because we've been working on our house. We're really good at making stuff and we could make a big hill and we could cover it with paper and then there would be steps behind it and then we could just jump off.

Claire: Actually, I know how. You could make a stair going up and down. It would work like you're actually falling but you're really going down stairs.

Mrs. M.: Danny, do you have anything to add? (He nods his head no.) Can you think of anything we need to do? (He nods no again. She looked at Todd.)

Todd: Um, well...since we're going to do it over there (Pointing to the tile) we could go onto the carpet. The flowers could be on the carpet. (Several students interrupted.)

Ashley: But flowers don't say anything.

Mrs. M. suggested they finish their plans, work, and conversations without her. She asked the students to take their book and a piece of paper to write down what they were going to do. She asked them to form a girls group and a boys group since they were going to be similar parts and to write down what they were going to do. She said she wanted a copy so she would know what they had decided. She cautioned them against planning anything too difficult because it might be too hard for them to finish. Ashley suggested they work out in the pod area and everyone agreed. They gathered their materials and left.

The boys and girls went to the opposite ends of the pod area. I sat near the boys to observe their conversation. The girls were quite loud due to an argument between Ashley and Roni. A teacher walking by quieted them down. Meanwhile, when the boys found their spot, they began planning. Ryan suggested he would write the information down. John said he would be a tiger. While looking through their book, Ryan and John discussed how the castle could be knocked down. They both stood up and demonstrated as Danny laughed. John said, "Let's start at the beginning of the story and work our way through." Danny and Ryan both wanted to be the one to kick the castle down for the play. Ryan stated, "We've already decided." He felt it was decided earlier that he would kick it down. He had explained in the

classroom to the group how it could be done. Danny suggested that Ryan could rebuild it after he knocked it down. His comment was ignored and they moved on to writing the information needed.

They discussed who had the best handwriting and decided on Todd. When it was time to write, Ryan had the paper and wrote the first sentence anyway. The next sentence nobody wanted to write. Danny took the paper and began writing. Ryan decided he wanted to write and tried to take it away. Danny reluctantly gave it to him. As they worked through a few more pages in the book, they noticed the girls messing around in the hallway. Ryan got up to join the girls. John left to get the teacher. He was bothered by the situation and Todd and Danny quietly watched. Mrs. M. came out after a few minutes. She approached Todd and Danny. Ryan and John joined them. The boys told Mrs. M. that it was getting too loud. She asked them if it would be easier to work in the classroom. They agreed, gathered their materials and went back into the classroom. Mrs. M. asked the girls if they were making any progress? They told her yes and began to get to work.

I moved near their group. Ashley recorded the information needed. They calmly discussed the items they needed for the play. They agreed to try and bring items they had at home. They decided to take turns being a rat and a flower. When trying to decide on who would be the rhinoceros, the conversation was as follows:

Roni: We're not sure who's going to be the rhinoceros.

Ashley: One of the boys will be the rhinoceros.

Claire: We need a huge rhinoceros.

Ashley: It will be the tallest boy.

They moved on and agreed that they would make as many costumes at home as they could. Roni said she would make the rest of the costumes at school. Ashley said she would be in charge of the backdrop and the props. Claire volunteered to make the masks and bring the bandages. At the end, Claire remembered that they would need a sign at the beginning of the play with the title. Ashley said since she was making the backdrop that she would make the sign also. Mrs. M. came out to tell the girls it was time to wrap it up. They explained to her what they had planned and they all walked back to the classroom.

The play idea had originated on a Wednesday and I was not back in the classroom until the following Monday. During that time, they had made an enormous backdrop. Monday was the deadline for their play. Mrs. M. put a time limit on the preparation period so they could get back to their regular reading schedule. On Monday morning she called the "play group" to the reading table to discuss their progress. When she asked them how it was going, Ashley began by saying that they still needed to make their costumes. She explained that they would only need to make two rat and two tiger costumes. She felt since there was only two of each character in the story that they could switch costumes backstage when it was their turn in the play. Mrs. M. added, "Well, you need to think about your audience and if your audience has to have a lot of waiting time. How do you think that's going to work?" As the conversation progressed, the students began to recognize they were not very organized. They started sharing several ideas on how they could organize their play. Mrs. M. stated, "I'm a little concerned that we might not be ready today. Today is the deadline, when you have to be ready. I'm sure hoping that you guys can make your decisions and be ready. After lunch was the time you decided you wanted to do it (the play) so we'll have to be ready by then. What are some of the things that you still need to do?"

Ashley: We need to make the rat costumes, the tiger costumes, and the rhino.

Mrs. M.: Have you decided how you're going to do that?

Roni: Well, how about we all just work together on everything?

Claire: If we need help with something, we could just ask you (referring to Mrs. M.) or my mom.

Mrs. M.: But you know, Mrs. M. isn't going to tell you what to do and your mother isn't going to help.

Claire: She said she could help.

Mrs. M.: It's your guys' idea. I want you to be able to make your plan and work it out.

Ashley: Can we set up chairs like in a row?

Claire: So we can pretend there is an audience.

Mrs. M.: We could do that.

Roni: Someone could build the castle out of those blocks (Pointing to blocks in the room).

Mrs. M.: Think about how much time it's going to take and what you'll need to start doing next.

Ryan: After our group is done (before lunch) we could build our castle then when we come back our castle is already done.

Ashley: If we all work together and try to get it all set up, we could probably get it done by lunch recess.

Mrs. M.: If you all cooperate, it would probably really help. Won't it?

Claire: Probably we meet after lunch if we're going to meet in the gym (for lunch recess). We should not go in the gym. We should just work on it (in the classroom).

Ashley: We just come back to the classroom and that would make it easier because we could concentrate.

Mrs. M.: It would, wouldn't it?

Roni: We've got one more problem. (They all began discussing how they could make a tree stand up.) What are we going to tie it to?

Todd: We can tie the chair with the tree and use the blocks.

Mrs. M.: Does it have to look like a tree?

Students: No.

Mrs. M.: Can we use our imagination?

Students: Yes. (They all began talking.)

Ashley: Or we can use the easel.

Mrs. M.: All right...I really like the way you guys are thinking now. You're all listening to each other. Does it work very well if all of you are talking at the same time?

Students: No.

Mrs. M.: Sometimes somebody else might have a better idea. You need to listen to them. Do you always have to have your idea?

Students: No. (Students began planning.)

Mrs. M.: I'm thinking that you need to make sure of your reading parts then work on the other.

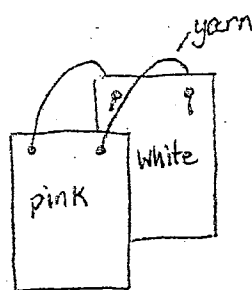
Ashley: Yeah. (They all began talking.)

Mrs. M.: Two people talking at the same time, my ears don't work that way.

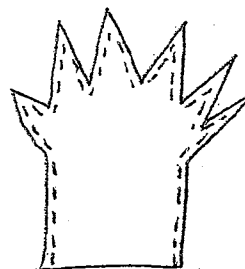
They discussed a few more plans about how to do the reading parts. Ryan suggested they go out in the pod and continue working. They all gathered their things and left.

The group met in the pod area with their books and materials needed to make their costumes. John, Danny, and Ryan began to "play around" at the beginning to prove who was the strongest. They were testing their strength by picking up Claire. Roni and Todd calmed

them down. Roni said, "Whisper if you're going to talk. Let's get to work." Todd added a few, "Shhh's." The students decided they should make their own costume. They started making their costume by cutting them out of construction paper. Claire was the narrator and did not plan on making a costume. She assisted others with their costumes and picked up trash as they worked. They assembled their costumes with tape, glue, staples, or sewed them using a whole punch and yarn. Ashley and Roni assembled their costumes in a similar fashion. (See figure 1)



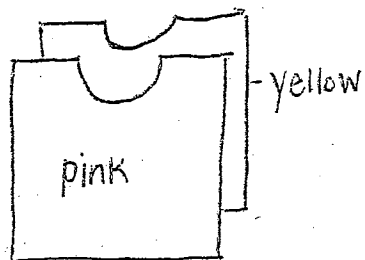
(Worn over shoulders.)



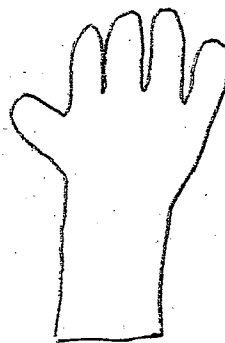
(Fastened with staples.)

(Figure 1 - Girls Costume)

Ashley mentioned she wore pigtails because she was a rat. Roni said she was wearing her new overall's for the play. The boys made their costumes in a similar fashion. (See Figure 2)



(Taped and stapled, glued, or sewn)



(Glued)

(Figure 2 - Boys Costumes)

As Ryan began to make his paws, Claire and John helped. The conversation was as follows:

Ryan: I need someone to trace my arm. (Holding a black marker)

Claire: Are you sure? Black marker will get on your arm.

Ryan: Good point.

Claire: I think you should do it with a pencil.

John: Just an outline? (He outlines Ryan's arm on construction paper.)

Throughout the costume making process, Roni, Todd, and Ryan practiced reading their lines.

They talked and planned as they worked until it was time to return to the classroom.

During lunch recess, Mrs. M. and the "play group" set up the stage. They hung a large backdrop with string and clothespins near the ceiling. It hung down to the floor. The top half of the backdrop was construction paper with clouds and green on the bottom half. They taped the papers together. Tables were moved and chairs were arranged in rows to provide audience

seating. They built their castle out of blocks. They used only materials from the classroom rather than items from home as they had originally planned.

After lunch recess, students were seated in the audience chairs. Characters were behind the backdrop and Claire, the narrator stood in front of the backdrop holding her script. Claire began by reading a paragraph about the author of the story. The group had decided to alternate parts. They decided each character would be responsible for two pages of their character and then the next few pages would be taken over by another person. Some students were responsible for two different characters. They became confused and unorganized early on in the play. Claire turned to the audience and said, "We're having a little problem." Todd added, "We're having technical difficulty." Ashley and Ryan accidentally knocked over the castle. John suggested they needed more time as Ryan rebuilt the castle. Mrs. M. stopped the play and wanted to discuss what was happening. She began:

Mrs. M.: How's it going?

Roni: We are having trouble organizing times to go out.

Todd: We need direction.

Roni: We need to get in a certain order for our time.

Haley: (from the audience) They could start over.

Brent: If it's not their turn, they could wait back there. (pointing behind the backdrop)

Mrs. M.: Maybe everyone should go over there and get organized. (behind the backdrop)

Roni: Let's start over.

They started from the beginning. Claire read. Todd found his list of who read when. After a few pages into the story, John looked at the teacher and said he ripped his costume. Mrs. M. asked, "What should you do?" He went to her desk to fix it with tape. They continued the play

for a few more minutes when Claire noticed everyone was on stage at once. She said, "Nobody should be up here except Ashley." They all moved behind the backdrop. Todd looked for his paper to find out who was next. The audience waited quietly. Claire finally stated, "We need to start over." Ryan replied, "No, it would take too long." They realized they skipped a page in the story. The play continued with several interruptions in between. They were trying to figure out what characters were next.

Once the play ended, Mrs. M. suggested they talk about it.

Ryan: Can we take these home? (referring to the costumes)

Mrs. M.: You organized it all. (She turned to the audience.) Let's talk about what you really liked.

Haley: I liked how they skipped a page.

Mrs. M.: Who can tell me what happened in the story?

Brent: They were not good friends.

Mrs. M.: Who were the main characters?

Tom: Tiger and rat.

Mrs. M.: How did you know they were not good friends?

Holly: Tiger kicked the castle.

Mrs. M.: They were having a lot of problems. Can you think of anything that would make it easier to follow the story?

Roni: Maybe next time we could write down our pages.

Ryan: We could have taped our names on.

Haley: Use a bookmark.

Claire: Get paper to write down the page numbers.

Mrs. M.: What about so many people playing the main character?

Roni: We all wouldn't have had a chance to play the main character.

Mrs. M.: So you were trying to be fair to everybody?

Roni: Yeah.

Mrs. M.: Oh yes, I understand.

Holly: If you could be quieter in the back. (back stage)

Ashley: I would have liked to use the overhead projector, turn out the lights and use natural light.

They wrapped up the discussion with a few more comments and began to clean up.

Ashley and Roni were trying to figure out what to do with the backdrop. The conversation was as follows:

Ashley: I have an idea. (Ashley and Roni quietly talked together and walked over to Mrs. M.)

Roni: Since we dedicated the play to you, we want you to have the backdrop.

Mrs. M.: I didn't know you dedicated it to me.

Roni: Yeah. That's what the card is for.

Mrs. M.: Oh great. Thank you.

Without the foundation Mrs. M. and the students built together, the thought of creating a play on their own may have never existed. Students took the initiative, knowing their ideas were respected. The daily guided reading group routine was interrupted by Ashley's idea. Her idea of a play created a new direction for the guided reading group for several days. They created their own options on how to go about the play presentation. With Mrs. M.'s assistance, she nudged them to focus on a few areas to keep them on track and left the rest for them to

figure out. Students had several choices throughout the process such as how to organize the set, props, costumes and materials for making them, character roles, and responsibilities.

The group shared ideas and worked together to solve problems and help one another. Conflicts were resolved through discussion or debate. They considered all points of view when deciding on character parts. To keep it fair, they shared the parts.

Certainly, some students were more self-determined than others, as far as planning how things would be carried out. Although some students were less vocal, they displayed self-determination through the organization of their character part and costume making. The students took the opportunity to express themselves creatively through their work.

Limitations were set by students and by the teacher. Students squelched ideas too difficult to carry through. Certain students requested the "playing around" to stop and noise levels lowered. Some wanted to "get down to business" sooner than others. The only limit Mrs. M. set was what day they had to be ready for the play. She played a small part in the planning process. She offered a few suggestions for them to think about when organizing their play. Mrs. M. let students find their way and discover on their own how to prepare for a production. Through the process, students adjusted plans and discovered mistakes they had made. Although the play was not as organized and visually stimulating as if the teacher had played a major role, the students enjoyed themselves. They found ways to work together, accept others ideas, and began to understand what it takes to put on a successful play.

Friendship Theme - Good Friends Stick Together

On the first day of school at the end of the day, Mrs. M. had the students gather at the carpet area. She explained:

Mrs. M.: I have a story I want to read to you just before we go home. It's about friends and today you've already met some new friends, people you didn't know before.

Student: I met John.

Mrs. M.: Yes, see, and you didn't know them before and some of you met me. I didn't know some of you and some of you didn't know me. (Holding the book, Friends by Helme Heine)
So this is about friends. Good friends always stick together. That's what it says.

She began to read the story. The story was about a group of animals that were good friends and adventures they encountered. She emphasized certain statements in the book and students commented or asked questions. Midway through the story, the principal interrupted with announcements and students had to get ready to go home.

The next afternoon at the end of the day, Mrs. M. continued the story where she had left off. After reading the story, Mrs. M. wanted to discuss the story. The conversation was as follows:

Mrs. M.: What do you remember about this book? About good friends? What did they say about good friends?

Roni: Whenever you see them, they stick together.

Mrs. M.: Oh, let me see. I want to use that on one of my strips up here and see how many things we can remember that they said about a good friend. Good friends...What did you say?
(Looking at Roni. She wrote it on a sentence strip)

Students: Stick together.

Mrs. M.: What does it mean to stick together?

Ashley: They will always be together. They always hang out together.

Ryan: Or they never grow apart like go bowling with each other.

Mrs. M.: Can you have just one good friend?

Students: No.

Mrs. M.: Can you have two good friends?

Students: Yes.

Tom: You can have a thousand good friends.

Mrs. M.: You can have lots of good friends?

Roni: You can have as many as you want.

Mrs. M.: Could we have 18 good friends in here?

Students: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Mrs. M.: Could we all be good friends?

Students: Yeah.

Mrs. M.: How could we all, as a class, be good friends and stick together?

Claire: By helping each other. (Mrs. M. repeated her)

Mrs. M.: Anything else? What could we do to stick together?

Claire: Work together. (Mrs. M. repeated)

Holly: Team work. (Mrs. M. repeated)

Ashley: Yeah, everybody wins with teamwork.

Haley: Play together.

Students began to share stories on how not to be a good friend.

Mrs. M.: (After listening to their stories) What else did they say about good friends besides they stick together?

Holly: It's not really in the book but if someone falls down and gets hurt on their bike, you should help them up. (others began to talk.)

Mrs. M.: (Looking at Holly) Excuse me. (She addressed the class) You know what? Holly was talking. And it's not very polite for you to talk when someone else is talking. That's not showing respect. When someone in our classroom is talking, we need to be a good friend and show respect. We need to listen to what they have to say. It's kind of rude to be talking when somebody else is talking.

Ashley: Even though they are strangers.

Mrs. M.: Yes. What else did they say about good friends?

Students shared incidences about how to be good friends. She prompted them by rereading a section about how the animals decided something together. They finally came up with good friends always decide together.

Mrs. M.: Did we decide something today together? What did we decide?

Student: We voted.

Mrs. M.: We voted, didn't we?

Roni: We decided how many things we should have put away in centers for it to be a down.

Mrs. M.: Yeah. So we decided things together. Let's put that on our list. Can you think of another time? (They shared a time from the year before.) Can you think of a time today that we decided together? Sometimes just two people can decide.

Roni: When we were making a puppet show, we decided which book. One of us wanted one book and one of us wanted another book so we just found a book we both wanted.

Mrs. M.: So you had to decide. When you were in groups and you were sharing, you had to decide who was going to go first, didn't you?

Ashley: In our group, we let the first graders go first.

Mrs. M.: oh, that was nice. Is there anything else they talked about in the book about being good friends?

Claire: That page they talked about...Johnny Rooster said it wasn't fair.

Mrs. M.: Ahhhh. (Ryan yelled out. She pointed to Ryan with a smile.) Was that what you were going to say? What were you going to say?

Ryan: To be fair.

Mrs. M.: Friends are always fair. Have you been fair today?

Students: Yes.

Mrs. M.: Tell me a time you've been fair.

Ashley: Letting the first graders go first. (Mrs. M. repeated.)

Mrs. M.: What else?

Roni: I've got an idea that we could do for groups. We could always have four people and the younger...

Mrs. M.: Excuse me just a second. (She paused for a few students to stop talking.)

Ashley: I have a tradition. You want me to finish? (She asked Roni. Roni nodded yes.)

Mrs. M.: What's the tradition?

Ashley: When we have group time, the youngest always goes first.

Mrs. M.: Would that be fair?

Roni: We could always have groups of four. There could be two younger and two older and that way there could be someone to help them.

They continued a short discussion among students about helping the younger when they messed up.

Mrs. M.: Let's put this up here to remind us. (She hung a pocket chart with sentence strips she had written down from their discussion.) Friends are always fair. What does this one say?

(She pointed to the next sentence strip.)

Students: Good friends always decide things together.

Mrs. M.: What does this one say?

Students: Good friends always stick together.

Mrs. M.: I'll put these up here and that will remind us. We want to be good friends, don't we?

Roni: I have one more.

Mrs. M.: Okay, what is it?

Roni: Friends don't interrupt.

Mrs. M.: Oh, I like that one. Save that one and we'll write that one up tomorrow. Okay?

Roni: Okay.

The conversation ended and they prepared to go home for the day.

The next day, after family time, Mrs. M. had students brainstorm what they liked to do with their friends. She created a web of their ideas on the board. Students were asked to write what they like to do with their friend in their journal. Mrs. M. began to highlight activities with a friendship theme. She took the opportunity to add friendship into their daily routine. Ideas about friendship became the focus for students as well.

During center police reports, Mrs. M. announced she was ready for the reports. After Holly reported a thumb's up for the math center, Roni spoke up. The conversation was as follows:

Roni: Sometimes Holly says it's going to be a down but she said it was an up.

Mrs. M.: How do you feel about it when people joke about that? Does that make you feel pretty good or not?

Ashley: She said a bucket of stuff was on the floor.

Roni: But it wasn't.

Mrs. M.: Does that make you feel pretty good or not? (Some students shook their head no.)

Ashley: She lies about stuff a lot.

Ryan: Not really a lie, just pretending.

Mrs. M.: Do you like it when people tease?

Students: No.

Mrs. M.: How many like when you're teased? (No hands up.) I think the majority said they don't like to be teased. So what could we do about that? (Several students began talking.) Let's work on it then, that we will always be honest and true. We won't tease each other.

Ashley: That could be one of the uh...(Pointing to the friends pocket chart.)

Mrs. M.: You're right.

Roni: I had one too. You said save it for yesterday (tomorrow) and I have one.

Mrs. M.: You still have another one?

Roni: I have the same one. Friends don't interrupt.

Mrs. M. wrote on blank sentence strips, Friends tell the truth and friends don't interrupt. They finished the center police reports.

Later that day, the students were going to work with the math materials. As mentioned earlier, Mrs. M. introduced students to three types of materials to explore and placed a tub on each table. After her introduction, a student commented that he wanted to work with all of the materials. Mrs. M. walked over to the friend's chart, pointed and said, "Friends are always fair.

How can we make this fair?" She posed a problem and students worked out a solution.

Everyone was satisfied with the arrangements and eagerly got started.

As the days progressed, they continued to read stories about friends. They had discussions and wrote about friends. One morning, Mrs. M. asked students to close their eyes and visualize a good friend. She called attention to their characteristics as they visualized their friend. Students were asked to make a picture of their friend. Mrs. M. provided pre-cut construction paper for their bodies. She asked them not to cut the paper too skinny because she would have them do some writing on the body parts later. She explained that she had provided a variety of materials to choose from to create their friend. A conversation followed:

Ashley: Can we do our own thing?

Mrs. M.: Sure you can.

Ashley: If we all do it the same, how could we tell them apart?

Mrs. M.: I want you to think about a friend. You have great ideas. You can do it however you want. I'm just going to lay the materials at this table. You can pick up what you need. As you are working and you need something else, let me know. I'll do my best to see if I can find it.

They worked around the room at tables, in centers, and on the floor. They were busy talking, sharing, and engaged in their projects. They were checking their friend for eye color, clothing, and other features. Ashley asked for a tape measure to measure her friend. She wanted her friend to be life size. Some traced their hands and shoes on their feet. Todd felt his arms were in the wrong spot. They hung down too far. He did not know what to do and asked Mrs. M. She asked the class, "Any suggestions?" Ryan offered, "He could cut the arms off and move them up." Todd agreed and said, "I'll go operate." They used the body limbs and stomach to describe qualities they liked about their friend. Students helped each other carry their friend

project out into the hallway to dry. At clean up time Mrs. M. announced. "Friends are always fair. Make sure you do your fair share."

On Friday's, Mrs. M. broke away from the morning curriculum routine and tried to provide a variety of activities focused on a theme. She planned activities to end the friendship theme by preparing a friendship fair. They began the fair with a friendship song on audiotape. They formed a circle in the room. The song included actions for students to move around the room. After the song, students sat on the floor and they brainstormed what they remembered from the past few weeks about friends. She wrote their ideas on the board. Students were having difficulty coming up with ideas. She had them break into groups and continue brainstorming ideas. Each group shared one idea for Mrs. M. to write on the board. She then explained she wanted students to make a big book about friendship for the classroom. They would be responsible for writing and illustrating one page. They decided as a class how they would break into groups and what statement they wanted to illustrate. Mrs. M. counted ten statements they had suggested and asked, "How are we going to do this?" The conversation was as follows:

Haley: Let's do it by tables.

Holly: Do it by tables and have them pick.

Mrs. M.: (Counted tables out loud.) That would mean we would have four pages in our book.

(Ryan suggested teams of three and several students were talking.) Let me put these ideas down. (She wrote on the board, table partners and trio's)

Ashley: I have an idea. We could sign up for the science lab to do it.

Mrs. M.: How would that help us?

Ashley: We would have enough room and wouldn't have to go table to table.

Mrs. M.: We have to sign up for the science lab and I didn't sign up this morning. We would have to wait. That would be something to consider.

Holly: Even if we did go down there, it would take up too much of our time.

Todd: You can say one and they would raise their hand and you could put their name by it and that's the one they do.

Mrs. M.: How many do we have? (Students shouted 10.) Is that enough for everybody?

(Students said no.) What else would we need for the other people that we don't have?

Todd: We could have more than one person working on one.

Mrs. M.: Oh, so you would get to choose which one you want to do and we put your name beside it. (She wrote choose on the board with the other options.) Let's take a vote on these three. (She read through the choices, table partners, trios, or choose. She reminded them to vote only one time. The vote was table partners 1, trio's 4, and choose 13.)

Brent: Someone voted twice.

Mrs. M.: Really? For what? (Students started suggesting certain people that may have voted twice. (She interrupted them.) Would it make a difference?

Brent: Yes.

Ashley: Yes, it would make a difference.

Mrs. M.: Okay, let's go back. Let's see...(She had students vote again. They came up with the same vote.) 13 and 4, how much would that make?

Ashley: 17

Mrs. M.: 17 and 1 more. How much?

Students: 18

Ashley: Haley isn't here. We only have 17 so that does mean someone voted twice.

Mrs. M.: Was that fair?

Todd noticed that it wouldn't make a difference. He took 1 away from 13 and recognized 12 would not make a difference. The class moved on to assigning people statements. In their groups, they had to figure out how they would go about completing their page.

When students finished their page they sat in a group on the floor to share. Mrs. M. explained the four stations she had set up for the friendship fair. She provided students with a variety of activities. (For examples from one station, See Appendix C)

Rather than create a set of classroom rules, Mrs. M. used the theme, friendship. She began a list of ways to treat a friend beginning the first day through their story. As time passed, students added their suggestions to the list. They even referred to them at times. Whenever a problem existed, Mrs. M. referred to the list with the class before solving the problem.

The friendship theme fit into the daily curriculum routine. Students' ideas were heard and accepted. Suggestions from students were carried out. Mrs. M. provided a variety of materials for students to use on art projects involving friends. They were able to create their projects in their own style. Several situations enabled them to make a decision on who they worked with and where they worked.

Several community decisions were made through the friendship activities. With almost every activity, they had some situation they had to decide as a group. Self-determination was evident during activities involving the friendship theme. Often times, students were the originators of ideas carried out. Projects and assignments were open ended to allow for their creativity and self-expression.

Limitations were necessary for many activities. During the beginning stages of planning, students had big ideas. As they advanced through the planning stages, certain ideas were

simplified or not accepted due to the difficulty of carrying them out. A limit was requested by Mrs. M. for the students to choose a day they would be ready. Students realized their limits because of their deadline. The friendship pocket chart provided the boundaries or limits to be implemented for the rest of the school year. Although gently stated, they were the procedures to live by which created community and friendships among the 19 members of the class.

PORTRAIT OF THE BLUE AREA

Georgia O'Keeffe was considered a modern art painter representing the natural world. Images abstracted from nature included large skies, rivers, animal skulls, rocks, and other natural forms. Her artistic style revealed "new edges of vision, new attitudes of direct experience, put down in rich color with energetic line in carefully ordered brushstrokes or markings" (Cowart and Hamilton, 1987). Ms. O'Keeffe's work represented her intense, personal investment. "She tested her physical and psychological independence by living beyond the fringe of civilization...seeking discoveries for her art" (Cowart and Hamilton, 1987). She reminisced about how she came to the realization her art was her own. Ms. O'Keeffe remarked,

In school I was taught to paint things as I saw them. But it seemed so stupid! If one could only reproduce nature and always with less beauty than the original, why paint at all...? I was constantly experimenting but it was not until sometime later that I made up my mind to forget all that I had been taught and to paint exactly as I felt (Bloemink, 1995).

The teacher in the blue area shares a similar vision as Georgia O'Keeffe. I have chosen to use the name Georgia when referring to the teacher in the blue area to insure anonymity.

THE SUBJECTS

Georgia's Story-

When asked to describe an experience of choice, either personally or professionally, Georgia wrote about a teaching experience she had several years ago in a school district different from the one she is working at present. She was a sixth grade teacher at the time. She was teaching world history and specifically made plans to study the Middle Ages. After a

thorough introduction, Georgia and the art teacher prepared a list of topics for further research from which the students could choose. She wrote:

They could research the music of the time and perform it. They could make costumes, models of early weapons, heraldry exhibits, models and maps of feudal estates. They could also write papers on topics of their choice. We expected the interest to be high, but we could never have predicted the extraordinary explosion of participation. Our classrooms were filled with industrious children taking care of business. They asked each other about what they were doing. They requested information and support of all kinds from each other. We found that most students knew, on the average, the details from the projects being done by at least half the members of the class. Each student managed his or her resources, although we made many resources available. We had absolutely no classroom management problems even though we spilled out into the halls and library. Children worked at home with delight and at the end, they loved presenting their projects to the class.

While she enjoyed the excitement of the students' involvement and innovations, she was still responsible for students mastering the factual information. The end of the unit test showed a high level of comprehension. She was pleased with the student's feel for the time period and their depth of detail for the era. She could not remember for what reason she tried the approach but reflecting back, she wrote, "What I remember vividly is the amount of focused energy, the bubbling excitement, the commitment, and the astounding results. From this time on, I began to build in choice on many different levels and in many different contexts."

Georgia later left the school district to move to a large metropolitan area. Before moving, her friend, the assistant superintendent, encouraged Georgia to apply for a teaching position at a new school in the area where she was moving. When Georgia recognized she shared a similar philosophical vision of how a school should be run, she actively pursued a teaching position and was hired to teach the oldest group of students ranging in ages between eight to twelve.

In our initial interview, she described her attraction to the school. We discussed many of the practices representing the schools mission. She stated, "...A lot of freedom of movement, a

lot of freedom of choice in terms of expression, a lot of ability for kids to talk...Honor for children to make their own decisions and being able to respect that and create something valuable out of what they choose." When asked to clarify what she meant by freedom in relation to the school, she explained:

Many people think freedom means no responsibility, but what we tell our kids is we start from the premise that you have enough responsibility to have freedom. And it is only if it is indicated that it is not so, that we take it away. Whereas most schools have you prove for six years that you really are responsible and then we'll give you a little freedom. We go the other way. ...I think that they need a structure in which to operate freely. ...There is a very strong structure but it is managed internally rather than externally.

She described operating freely within the structure as "internal management". She continued, "People always ask us what our discipline is and we hate that question. Our discipline policy is to create self-discipline; a system of self-discipline for every child that's appropriate for that child." Georgia added, "[Students] have a vocabulary from the time they are four years old to manage conflict, to manage space, to manage stuff, to manage their emotional lives."

Georgia referred to a brain-compatible classroom when discussing the climate of the school. She began, "First and foremost, you have absence of threat. You have the kids feel safe, emotionally, physically, in every way." She asks students what they want in order to have a perfect school. During a community circle, Georgia and her students establish agreements rather than rules to live by. They generate a list together such as mutual respect and trustworthiness. She indicated that year after year, students come up with the same basic suggestions. The agreements are then written on a poster board and a thumbprint of each student acts as a signature. To aid in creating a brain-compatible environment, Georgia explained,

We have lots and lots of structures in place to provide for safety; emotional safety...quiet voices, humor, greeting kids, asking them about what they did this weekend. Being in tune when somebody walks in off the bus clearly messed up, taking aside a minute to get them to oxygenate their brains, take a drink of water, what ever it takes to get a little detoxed.

Curriculum planning is approached by keeping in mind the state objectives, the CRT (Criterion Reference Test) and current research. One framework when planning curriculum is guided by Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligence. Georgia explained that on any given assignment, teachers give 3 or 4 ways to express what they have learned. The teachers document what methodology students use to express their intelligence. They expect students to focus on one or two ways to present their work. In order for students to work with each intelligence, they encourage students to explore each intelligence sometime during the school year.

Teachers also plan the curriculum in keeping with the state objectives by focusing on concepts. Before beginning an upcoming yearlong study, Georgia planned to focus on the concept of similar and different. Throughout the year, she would try to relate the concept to the topic they were studying. She gave an example of the previous school year when they researched the value of civic participation. They studied the importance of voting for president. They conducted a voter registration and students registered 34 new voters. The students learned about the constitution. Georgia wanted to heighten their understanding of how a democracy works.

Georgia does not use textbooks for information. She remarked, "They're stupid!" They're insulting to the intelligence of children." She explained:

First of all, you have to decide what's important to teach. Our theme this year is built around the rivers. We're going to visit [a local] river. We're going to test its pH and going to find micro-invertebrates in it. We're going to stock our indoor river with all that. We're going to know that river that we live on. We're going to know the rivers around the United States and around the world and how it relates and what's happening in those

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Georgia mentioned students have additional choices throughout their day. In order to take care of their own needs, students decide when they need to go to the restroom, get a drink, or if they need a tissue. She explained, "We're just not interested in those interactions." When eating lunch, they eat what they want. The cafeteria lunches are not a serve but an offer system. They choose whom to sit with. Students wear school uniforms and have a narrow choice of shirt colors. They may choose to decorate their lockers with anything that is appropriate and decorations that can be taken off later. Students have the right to pass in community circle situations as well as with academic situations. They may also decline to participate. During their physical education class, they often choose which game to play. During home base, which is a community building time at the end of the day, they either vote on a game or take turns deciding on games to play. They have a sharing time, where students can choose whether they want to share something with the class. For students who stay after school, either by choice or out of necessity, they can choose among a variety of volunteer jobs.

The teachers recognize that students sometimes need a break from their responsibilities. They provide students with two movement centers. Students may use a small exercise trampoline or jump rope with a three-minute time limit. Georgia explained, "When they are just going crazy and can't sit [there] one more minute, can't work with [a] group any longer, don't feel like they're being listened to or frustrated with whatever they're doing, they can go to the movement center and jump on the trampoline or jump rope." They may visit the centers during their independent practice periods or during a special project. They must wait to visit the centers during whole group lessons. Another center designed to "get away from it all" is Australia adapted from the book, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day! by Judith Viorst. Australia is tucked away under a loft with a small table and rocking

chair. The teachers provided a CD player with headphones and finger puzzles for students. The movement centers and Australia are limited to two visits a day for most students. Occasionally, a teacher might suggest to a student to visit a movement center. Georgia explained, "Kids we're trying to keep off medication for having a hard time sitting still. They may go seven or eight times but they can choose twice."

Georgia's students-

Georgia was responsible for sixty-four students. She taught in a multi-age, open design classroom area with the oldest group of students. She was considered the lead teacher and shared her teaching responsibilities with two other certified teachers and a paraprofessional. There were thirty-one boys and thirty-three girls, ranging in ages between eight and twelve.

THE LANDSCAPE

Georgia's school was set in a middle class urban neighborhood on the edge of a large metropolitan area. The school was originally built in 1973 as an open design but was closed in the 1980's. After renovations, the school reopened in 1992.

At the outside entrance of the building, a wall was transformed into a large mosaic ocean scene with tiles and shells created by a few parents and students. An outdoor classroom with gardens and a pond stocked with fish, toads, and plants were located behind the school. The remainder of the outside area was equipped with a large field for group games and two playgrounds, one for the younger students and one for the older students.

The inside of the school was primarily an open design with the exception of a main office, the gymnasium, and a teacher's lounge and workroom, which were enclosed. The cafeteria and library were open to the main areas of the building. Student work, agreements and life skills,

and information related to themes being studied were sparingly hung on the walls around the school. Agreements are similar to "school rules" yet they were positively stated and students agreed to them as a group. The life skills are a set of life long guidelines for students to follow and were discussed during the year. The agreements were loosely based on Jeanne Gibbs, TRIBES and Susan Kovalik's work concerning LIFESKILLS. A variety of animals were located throughout the school such as, a snake, gecko, tarantula, fish, and an iguana.

The multiage levels were broken into three main areas; the early childhood area, an area for students ranging in the ages of six to eight, and an area for the oldest group of students. The multiage areas were open to one another, yet they had their specific work area. Within each spacious work area, there was a large general meeting area, classroom tables and chairs, comfortable areas with couches, loungers, tables, and lamps, a loft, bunk beds, and computer stations.

The particular area under investigation was broken down into four distinct areas. The yellow area was where one certified teacher mainly worked and the red area was where another certified teacher primarily worked. The art area was mainly where the paraprofessional worked and Georgia worked primarily in the blue area. Within each of the areas, there were classroom tables and chairs and comfortable furniture for student use. All four areas shared the loft, bunk beds, and computer stations. The four teachers shared an enclosed office near the general meeting area, which was a carpeted stage.

The school was of modern design with several innovative practices in progress. The most impressive part of the atmosphere was the sense of community throughout the school. All personnel and students worked together to create an environment for all to feel accepted and cared for individually. Support for one another created a sense of safety in students so they

were more likely to take the initiative to make decisions, socially and academically, and carry out their responsibilities.

ELEMENTS OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE-THE ESSENCE OF CHOICE

After analyzing the data, themes emerged from the lived experience of observing the blue area and its surroundings. Once various phrases were highlighted from the data collected, four themes emerged, which were daily routine, community, self-determination, and necessary limits. The essential themes derived from both classrooms were the same; only some of the sub-themes were different. The themes represent the simplest form of the phenomenon and were essential to students lived school experience. How the school began, the school community, and the classroom climate laid the foundation for choice. The foundation is necessary to discuss in order to give shape to the themes, revealing the essence of choice in the blue area.

Foundation for Themes

During the data collection phase, it became apparent that the school and those involved with running the school played an integral part in supporting the idea of choice. From the inception of the idea to create a unique situation for a community of learners, the philosophy of continuously striving to create such an environment permeated throughout the school and was evident each day I observed. To begin, a brief discussion of how the school began is necessary.

History of the School

In 1992, the superintendent at the time and a principal decided to re-open a vacant school building as an open design demonstration school. They hired three lead teachers and several paraprofessionals. The paraprofessionals were non-certified staff, trained by lead teachers to take on part of the teaching responsibilities. The purpose of the demonstration school was to invite principals and teachers throughout the school district to observe an innovative school, modeling practices based on current research. The faculty's intentions were not to have guests emulate their practices but rather gain insight on ways to incorporate innovative ideas into their own style of teaching. At the time, the school was one of the first in the country to implement a four-year old program in the public school system, as well as, one of the first to require public school uniforms. Parents supported the idea of school uniforms and took on the responsibility of designing them. Together, the superintendent and principal had a vision to create a model school with a student body, which demographically represented the metropolitan area in which the school was located. Interested families were to complete an application. The first year, the school accepted four-year-olds through eight-year-olds. Four-year old students were given the Peabody test for assessment and previous test scores from the older students were obtained from their schools. They worked to create a student body representing a bell curve. Applications were then separated into piles representing the make-up of the city such as gender, race, socio-economic class, special needs and test scores. After applications were grouped, they selected twenty students per age level. They added a level each year ending with ages eleven or twelve.

The school provided an integrated curriculum focusing on science and technology. Their program was designed to adapt to the needs of the students rather than students adapt to the program. As stated in a brochure about the school, "The Integrated Core Curriculum

underscores that what children take from the classroom is more important than what they do in the classroom." They developed a non-graded system by offering parents a portfolio of student work and skills mastered related to the state outcomes. Students were grouped developmentally rather than by age or grade. As they progress academically, they are placed into a new group level.

There has been little change since they first opened. There has been an increase in the size of the student body. They have also reduced the number of paraprofessionals and increased their certified staff. A teacher from the youngest group of children became principal and was the only remaining original staff member. The school layout and general running of the school remained the same. New and updated practices were incorporated to continue supporting current research.

School Community

The school community atmosphere was a rich part of the environment. Elements supporting the notion of school community were the diversity of the student body, the environment, support members of the community, and school-wide activities.

During observation, I noticed the student body represented a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and students with special needs. It was apparent that within the school community, as well as, among students, everyone was accepted and considered equal.

The environment appeared open, warm, calm, and inviting. I attended the first day of school and arrived approximately fifteen minutes before school began. After entering the school, I followed the voices to the cafeteria area. I observed several parents, students of all ages, and several staff members laughing and visiting with one another. Background music

from the Beach Boys was playing softly on the speaker system. The cafeteria was decorated with a large sign stating "Welcome!" There were several helium balloons throughout the area and plants on each round table. I noticed a large whiteboard resting on an easel near an outside door entrance. Listed on the board were morning entrance procedures which stated:

1. Enter quietly and put your lunch box on shelf.
2. Sit at a table with no more than 7 other people. Leave the chairs where they are.
3. Stay at your table until breakfast is served.
4. If you eat breakfast, line up when food line opens.
5. Eat breakfast quietly. Clean your area. Put trash in its proper place.
6. Be in your ocean area by 8:00 a.m.

Have a Great Day!

On one wall was a bulletin board with posted notices. Students were checking the board to find out their ocean area and what members were listed in their families. An ocean area was a large general meeting place for families. Families were made up of fourteen different groups of students from all levels. At the beginning of the day, families played games and worked on special projects together. The conversations slowly faded as students and staff migrated to their areas and parents left.

Several other people were involved in the community support along with the students. Support came from the principal, teachers, other staff members, parents, and visitors. Since the principal was one of the founding members of the school, he had a clear vision of the mission they had developed. He was a very visible part of the community. He was constantly in and out of the areas acknowledging students. Students were obviously comfortable and at ease with his presence and often approached him with a hug. Georgia explained to me that he

developed relationships with parents and students. He took time to get to know the student's interests so he could engage them in a meaningful conversation. She described him as an appreciation machine. He acknowledged the teachers for their hard work, expected them to run the school as their community, constantly reminding them of why they were there. He believed that the staff that plays together stays together. His interest in all those involved in the school community was constantly visible. Georgia mentioned he enjoyed reading to the students. In particular, one of his favorite books was about a zany school and was loosely based on a similar philosophy as his own. The essence of the book entitled, Hooray for Diffendoofer Day! by Dr. Suess and Jack Perlutsky is captured by the following quote.

Referring to a test, a teacher named Miss Bonkers told students not to fret. She continued:

"You've learned the things you need
To pass that test and many more-
I'm certain you'll succeed.
We've taught you that the earth is round,
That red and white make pink,
And something else that matters more-
We've taught you how to think."

Each team of teachers worked together to develop the curriculum for their level. All teachers then collaborated on ways to relate information studied to other levels. Occasionally, they worked as a whole group to develop an in-depth study during families. From the support of the principal, they all participated in professional development programs.

Teachers and other staff members wore blue smocks over their clothing, signaling to students, a person they could go to for help. Several times, I observed the librarian, the part-time special needs teacher and her assistant helping students with a variety of needs such as getting something for them or helping them with an assignment. On several occasions, if a teacher needed to leave for any reason, other staff members lent their time to oversee their

class. I observed the special needs teacher, the art teacher, and the principal stand in for Georgia's class. Parents often volunteered their time. During my observations, a parent/artist painted a mural on a wall in the cafeteria depicting scenes of students practicing a life skill. On occasion, college students visited, observed, or taught a lesson.

To distinguish among the three multiage groups, the teachers decided rather than differentiate them by grade levels they would develop names for each group. Georgia explained that each group had a unique story behind their name. The youngest group received the name Einstein's. They were called Einstein's because the staff wanted students to think of themselves as smart. Throughout their school career, they would be thought of as smart, because they had all been an Einstein. Several years ago, Jane Goodall, the famous gorilla expert, came to the school and spoke to the children. The experience prompted the middle group to be given the name Goodall's. The oldest group in the school, researched fifty of the most influential leaders and voted Neil Armstrong, the astronaut, to be the most influential. Thus, the oldest group became the Armstrong's.

The community atmosphere was enhanced by creating multiage families. Families were formed in order for students to get to know one another and work together at different age levels. They also had school-wide gatherings to start their day at the beginning and the end of the week to celebrate as a community. "Rendezvous" was on the first day of the week to kick off the week as a school community. "Celebrations" was on the last day of the week to celebrate what happened during the week. During both gatherings, as students entered the gym, music was playing; balloons lined the front stage with teachers dancing in party hats. Songs such as *We Are Family* by Sisters Sledge and *Celebrate* by Kool and the Gang were played and staff and children danced and sang along. After the opening song, announcements

from the district or school office were made by a teacher or the principal. They sang the school song and recited The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. Each level shared news of their current curriculum studies. The music teacher led students during the sing-a-long songs. During the musical segment, students could be found, singing, clapping, swaying, dancing, or just observing others. The principal often played his guitar and sang with students. On one occasion, special services teacher taught a song in sign language.

During "Celebrations", a staff member announced, "You've Got Mail" and checked a mailbox located on the stage. He or she would then read a letter aloud from A.C. Nibbler, a rabbit that no one ever sees but lives in the air conditioning vents at school. In the letter, the rabbit wrote about stories concerning certain students and recognized them for life skills used during the week. One example mentioned was an older student helped a younger student with a project using the life skill of helping. Another life skill mentioned was "care", when a student helped a new student adjust to the school routine. Teachers were also recognized for their efforts. The gatherings ended with an uplifting community related song as teachers and students left clapping, singing, and dancing to return to their ocean areas.

The school, as well as the school district, endorsed a program to promote community. TRIBES, developed by Jeanne Gibbs is a program to assist in creating an environment which focuses on learning and human development.

It was obvious that the focus on school community was supported by all who worked at the school. They were committed to working together to create a family environment for students to feel safe and accepted. Students, in turn, worked to fulfill their expectations to practice life skills within their community and among their peers. The foundation for community was very prominent and enabled students to feel comfortable in actively taking part

in what happened each day at school. They appeared to have a sense that they belonged and took the initiative to take responsibility for themselves and help those around them.

Classroom Climate

The mission of the school and the school community were reflected in the climate found in the blue area. There was a strong sense of community, mutual respect, organization and structure, and expectations.

Mrs. G. worked to provide a strong sense of community in the blue area. She was an active member. She shared personal stories with her students, added humor, and engaged students in community building activities. Mrs. G. told stories about her husband, grandchildren, and animals she has had during her life. Stories were often told in casual conversation with the class and questions and comments from students were always excepted.

Georgia and her students laughed together. When a student asked her a question referring to her as grandma, he hit himself on the head and embarrassingly replied; "I don't know why I said that." She laughed and stated, "Well, I am one." On another occasion, while students were working on a plan to build a model of a local river, a student excited about the current project they were working on suggested they build another river after the first one is completed. Mrs. G., with her hands on her face, responded, "I see another research paper hatching!" Students belted out; "No way!" and they all laughed. She often sat with students either discussing their work with them or acknowledging them in a reassuring way. I observed moments when students carried on a conversation as if she were one of their peers. On one occasion, several students were sitting on the floor with Mrs. G. while they were drawing a map of the streets in a section of their city. A student initiated a conversation about what would they do if there

were no teachers? Mrs. G. assured her that they probably would be fine. The student then suggested that they would be running the school. Mrs. G. laughed.

Georgia wanted students to feel safe and accepted and believed it was necessary to take the time to give students an opportunity to share their thoughts, opinions, feelings, and work. Students engaged in "getting to know one another" activities. They played games together. In large groups, they shared how things were going at school for each other, whether there were problems or successes. Georgia called the student's attention to projects and work by other students or groups of students in order to stay connected during whole group projects.

Community was strong among students also. Often times, they worked in groups on assignments or projects. Students were willing to help and encourage one another and worked together to solve problems. I observed students getting materials for others or sharing their space with someone. Students became concerned when someone was having a difficult day and tried to cheer them up.

During observations, I focused on Georgia and the students she was working with at the time. I did not collect data on the other teachers in the Armstrong area even though they all worked closely together at times throughout the school day. The principal visited frequently and attended many student presentations. His presence gave him a place in their smaller community. The special services teacher and librarian were constantly in and out of the area and students approached them with a problem or a question. Parents took part in the whole community projects. The climate promoted such a community effort that even visitors felt very welcomed.

Mutual Respect

The sense of community was so prominent that it seemed natural for respect to be present in the community they had created. Georgia demonstrated a great deal of respect for her students. I observed students respecting the environment, each other, and their teacher.

Mrs. G. showed respect for students in a variety of ways. She acknowledged a concern for them. She showed respect for their ideas and their work, and expressed her appreciation for them. When a student was obviously not acting like his or her self, Mrs. G. would acknowledge them by quietly talking with them about how they were feeling. I noticed several situations when she might rub their back or put a hand on their shoulder when they did not seem to feel well. If a student was frustrated with their work, she would respond with statements such as, "It's okay, you can get it or not get it. It doesn't matter", "I just want you to play with it" or "Sit with it for a few minutes." When she was concerned a student was drifting from the group, she made comments such as, "Are you feeling part of this?" or "Stay with us, you're important to our discussion." If someone was over energetic during a quiet activity, she would gently put her hand on their shoulder and speak softly to them.

During my observations, Georgia asked students if she could share with the class an idea a student had privately shared with her when it related to their class discussion. In one situation when they were discussing the lyrics from a song about reaching a goal, Georgia asked a student if she could share the student's dream of becoming a doctor. She acknowledged student's questions with "I'm glad you asked" or "We'll get back to that question in just a minute." When a student started to ask a question and then forgot, Georgia responded, "Oh that's okay. You'll remember." She responded to their work and ideas with comments such as, wow, cool, or tell me about it.

Mrs. G. showed appreciation for her students. On several occasions she thanked them for waiting patiently, for bringing something to share with the class, or for taking the initiative to take care of things on their own. She acknowledged them for listening to each other in group discussions and commented often, "You guys are awesome."

When working with students, Georgia encouraged them to consider other perspectives in different situations. When a student mentioned in a whole class discussion that he was cold, Georgia explained why the Armstrong area was so cold. She stated, "The Goodall's are too hot in their area. We have to compromise with them. It's too hot for them and too cold for us. We can put a sweater on but they can't take their clothes off." Students laughed.

Students enjoyed having Mrs. G. as their teacher and their respect for her was apparent. After Mrs. G. told another teachers group that she would be working with them for a few days, students expressed their joy. One student then added, "I made a poem about you." Mrs. G. replied, "I can't wait to hear it." The student stated, "It's called, Mrs.G., You Rule!" On another occasion, a student mentioned during a class discussion, "I appreciate all the work teachers have done." Students also showed respect for others by moving to a different spot when they were too noisy. I observed several situations when a student worked to cheer someone up or help someone figure something out.

Students were respectful of their environment. They were careful with the variety of materials they used. They put them away in their proper places. Several times I noticed students picking up trash on the floor. They also were respectful toward the animals in their environment. When Georgia brought out a snake during a small group discussion, she reminded them of the need for quiet voices so they would not startle the snake. While discussing the snake, a student asked if they still had rats? Mrs. G. answered, "No, they died."

The students sighed. Mrs. G. explained that rats were short-lived animals and thanked them for asking.

The Environment

The environment in the blue area was warm and relaxed as it was in the entire Armstrong area and throughout the school. Unique to the blue area was Mrs. G.'s presence. She was very relaxed with her students. During my visits, I observed Georgia sitting on the steps of the stage while waiting for students to gather in the ocean area. She sat on the floor with her students during many of her lessons or while they were working. Often times, she had her shoes off and occasionally carried a water bottle with her. While students worked independently, she whispered to them with her hand on their back or gently placed her hand on someone's head when they were speaking too loudly. She also utilized subtle ways to get students attention. Georgia might pause for students to get quiet or put her hand up to signal stop talking. She snapped or clapped patterns for students to repeat. She played a chime softly. She might put her hand gently on a student's head and say, "Remember, four inch voices."

Some of Georgia's structural and organizational practices were school-wide. All areas had a "meet and greet" time, agendas, procedures, and other practices stemming from brain research.

Teachers furnished students with a set of procedures when they arrived at school. A small wipe-off board resting on an easel was located at the entrance of the Armstrong area each morning. Students visited the board to find out their responsibilities at the beginning of the day. A typical set of entry procedures is as follows:

Friendly Friday

1. Greet a teacher with a hug, high five or a handshake.
2. Put "stuff" away on the big brown table.
3. Sit at the stage quietly.

Expect a great day!

After students finished taking care of their responsibilities, they gathered at the stage for "meet and greet". During meet and greet, they reported any announcements. Teachers posted agendas on the walls throughout the Armstrong area on a sheet of paper for students to refer to during the day. Teachers listed their routine for the day and the time for each segment. While students were seated, a teacher introduced the agenda arranged on a large moveable bulletin board. Each activity of the day was represented by an icon made from construction paper. The icons were arranged in a clockwise fashion in the order they would occur. During my observations, I noticed Georgia also wrote procedures on her wipe-off board before a new group of students came to the blue area for a lesson. A typical set of procedures were as follows:

1. Stroll to your table.
2. Look at board
 - a) Person whose number is in the corner of the board gets the folders.
 - b) People at tables think silently about POD (Problem of the Day).

The teachers had generated several lists of procedures related to numerous events, activities, or occasions. The lists were made from previous years yet subject to change if a teacher or students thought they should be updated. A chart rack filled with written procedures involving the cafeteria, playground, field trips, and so on, were referred to as needed.

Arrangement of the areas and access to supplies contributed to the structure and organization of the blue area. Due to the open design, shelves and a loft served as dividers from others in the Armstrong area. The shelves were stocked with paper, pencils, books, and several crates with student's personal work folders. Each worktable was supplied with a place mat, a potted plant, and a coffee cup full of pencils. Students had their own lockers for personal belongings. As mentioned earlier, Georgia kept the noise level at a minimum and gained student's attention through a variety of tactics such as pausing or using a chime.

Teacher Expectations

Georgia had high expectations of her students. She expected them to take their academic work seriously and to regulate themselves. Georgia was knowledgeable on current educational literature involving brain-based research. She educated her students on their level as to what was happening in their own brain as they learn. She expected them to be aware and utilize what they knew to optimize their learning situations.

While working, Mrs. G. would often remind students to think like a mathematician, a scientist, or a writer. She would make such comments as, "Mathematicians always check their work" or "Remember to get into your writers mind." In order for students to think like a mathematician, scientist, or writer, she provided them with materials, activities, and a comfortable space to carry out their assignments seriously.

Students were expected to regulate themselves in a variety of ways. While a group of students were entering the blue area, Mrs. G. wrote on the white board, "I expect you to get control of your voices." On another occasion, two students were talking while the entire Armstrong group was in their ocean area, Mrs. G. interrupted the two students and remarked,

"That looks like fun but not a successful situation." The students moved away from one another. While Mrs. G. was talking with students in the blue area, she paused to get a student's attention as he was talking to another student. He stopped, looked at Mrs. G. and asked, "I should shut up, shouldn't I?" Mrs. G. nodded yes. She trusted students to take care of their needs and be responsible. Students were trusted to visit the library, the computer areas and on occasion to go to lunch on their own. I observed several situations when Mrs. G. would need to leave the blue area briefly while students were working. Due to the open design, other adults were nearby. Often times, students were busy doing their work and never noticed she was away.

Georgia felt a need to share information regarding brain research with her students. She would explain what was happening in their brain during the learning process. While working with a group on a problem solving activity, Mrs. G. suggested the activity would build dendrites in the frontal lobe. She explained the importance of staying in the frontal lobe. She asked students when they thought they had solved a problem in their head, not to put their hand up, rather she asked that they put their thumb up in front of their chest. She suggested that if others see hands up in the air and they are not finished working out the problem, thinking would stop and they would end up in the brain stem. On several occasions, she reminded students of ways to stay in their frontal lobe.

In conclusion of the foundation for choice, the visionaries responsible for opening the demonstration school had a dream to create a school where the students could feel safe and successful. The entire school community worked together to provide such a place. Each contributing member was respected and in turn showed respect for their environment and others. The climate in the blue area, which is the focus of this section of the study, also

revealed a strong sense of community and respect. The climate, though relaxed, was organized and structured. The teacher's expectations were a stabilizing factor for the structure. The presence of choice and its essence were captured by the following themes: daily routine, community, self-determination, necessary limits, and are illustrated through anecdotes and vignettes. The foundation of choice was established, in part, through the schools beginnings', school community, and the classroom climate. Many of the anecdotes that follow were made possible through the foundation for choice.

Theme I: Choice in Terms of Daily Routine

Georgia and her team of teachers had an active schedule each day with sixty-four students working independently, in groups, and as one large group. As an observer, it was a complex schedule to discern. Their daily routine included several variations for grouping students. To assist the reader, it is necessary to mention the variations in groupings to add clarity to the following anecdotes and vignettes.

The sixty-four students spent most of their day in one general area. The general area was referred to as the Armstrong area and occasionally referred to as their ocean area. At different times during the day, when they met as Armstrong's, they met at a stage located in the Armstrong area. Within the Armstrong space, the teachers arranged for smaller groups to work in either the blue, red, or yellow areas. In the designated areas, generally, students worked in groups related to math, reading, science, and social studies. Often times, they worked in the same areas for home base, TRIBES, and class meetings. Most of the time, Georgia worked in the blue area. When the whole school gathered in multi-age groups for families, I observed only Georgia's family and they met at the stage.

Georgia and the other teachers in the Armstrong area developed weekly lesson plans. (See Appendix C for examples of the yearly schedule and weekly schedule) Early dismissal on Wednesday afternoons provided teachers with a plan time to prepare their lessons for the following week. The daily routine began with "meet and greet". As students arrived, they checked the white board, at the entrance of the Armstrong area, in order to take care of their responsibilities. They met at the stage to greet one another and find out their agenda for the day. Following meet and greet; students attended "Rendezvous" or "Celebrations" in the gym or met with their family in designated areas for approximately 45 minutes. Students in the Armstrong area then meet for reading. They were randomly grouped for reading and given "famous river names" to distinguish each group. After reading, the schedule varied each day. A variety of activities were planned such as healthy lifestyles (physical education), library, art, music, math, word play (language arts activities), or working on projects involving the yearlong theme related to science. Groups rotated through the activities for part of their morning followed by lunch and a brain break (recess) then continued until mid afternoon. All students then participated in activities related to the yearlong theme. On Wednesdays, early dismissal, students concluded their day with a class meeting where they discussed various topics about their school experience and solved problems together. Other days concluded with home base in their tribes groups and a read-aloud related to the yearlong theme. The day ended with some students going home and others staying for extended day.

The purpose of my observation beginning the first day of school was to document the "setting up" of how the classroom was run. At the beginning, it was difficult to establish a routine in my note taking. There were four teachers and sixty-six students often times working together. Georgia had several different groups in her area throughout the day. Students rotated

from one teacher and his/her activity to the next, and student groupings differed as well. Following the same group of students in their daily activities was not possible since I planned on focusing on Georgia and the students she was working with. Due to the number of students and trying to figure out the routine, it was difficult to collect data specific to individual students. Rather, the vignettes and anecdotes that follow are told in general terms when referring to students. I followed only Georgia and the groups and subjects she taught. She was responsible for groups involving family, home base, reading, math, science, social studies, and healthy lifestyles. Lessons were often planned and carried out in order to establish a daily routine for the four teachers and their students. The purpose of the daily routine was for organization.

Within the daily routine, some options for students were offered school-wide. Additional choices related to daily routine were found throughout the Armstrong area while other choices were specifically found in the blue area. Choices were related to organization and structure, community time, and curriculum.

School-Wide Options

All students from the Einstein's to the Armstrong's were given opportunities throughout their day to make decisions. Breakfast was served before school for students who preferred to eat at school. If students elected to eat lunch at school, the cafeteria lunch line was considered an offer system. The system allowed students to decide what they wanted to eat rather than a serve system when they simply take what they are given. Students chose where and with whom they would sit as long as there were no more than seven people at a table. A special area in the cafeteria considered the "café" was designed for special occasions. For

instance, students might elect to sit in the café when their parents came to eat with them at lunch.

The school provided several special classes for students to pursue their interests such as dance, piano, and martial arts. While observing, I noticed a few students leave the Armstrong area when it was their time for music. Georgia explained to me that these students had a private piano teacher that came to the school to work with them. She said the reason for the pull out programs was to provide the services during the school day to help parents and students elevate a busy after school schedule and give them an opportunity for more family time. Most special programs were offered during extended day. Extended day was another option available to students. Special programs, special projects, and self-directed studies were reasons several students chose to stay for extended day. They also offered a segment of time called "fix and finish" where students were given the opportunity to correct and/or complete work from the school week. A teacher was available to provide assistance to students.

Often times throughout the day, students were able to "stroll" to the computers or visit the library to check out a book. After completing their work, students knew they had the option to visit the library, work on a computer, or read their self-selected book. With the many available options from where and what to eat in the cafeteria to the extracurricular choices, students made the decisions and utilized the choices available.

Organization and Structure

Georgia and the teachers in the Armstrong area planned for organization and structure by providing students with lists of procedures to follow and duplicated agendas located on the walls throughout the areas for students to refer to during their day. Agendas, known as "The

Flow of the Day", listed the times of various activities and where groups should meet at specific times. Within the scheduled daily routine, students often had several choices while working in their groups. In the blue area, students chose where to sit and work and had options while working. They made decisions when taking care of their own needs.

During an instructional time, Georgia may ask students to sit at a table. Students were able to sit next to whomever they choose and at the table they preferred. After the first few days of school, a new student asked, "Do we have to sit at a certain table?" Mrs. G. responded, "You can choose as long as you choose successfully." On occasion, I observed Mrs. G. asking a student to choose another place to work when she felt they were not being successful. I also noticed students move to another spot on their own when they were not getting their work done. At times, Mrs. G. requested students in the blue area gather on the floor in a circle during an instructional period. A couch, loveseat, and a lounge lined the space of the circle area. During "circle time", a few students might choose to sit in the lounge or on a couch. Mrs. G. never asked them to move and students joined in the discussion.

When students worked independently, more options were available as to where to sit and work. They continued to have table and chairs, floor space, and furniture if they chose. In addition, they were able to sit in the art area, on bunk beds, in a bathtub, under or in the loft area. On several occasions, I noticed students working with their shoes off, lying down, and working with someone or alone.

A typical example of places students utilized to work independently was during a reading period I observed. One student was reading in the loft with a pillow and blanket. Another student was reading with his shoes off on the couch lying down. Two girls were reading a book together at the table and chairs. One boy was sitting in the lounge reading alone. Two

girls were sitting in a bathtub propped up with pillows. Three students were sharing the bunk beds with two sitting on the bottom bunk and one lying on the top bunk. Several students were sitting on the floor or lying down in tucked away spaces. Two girls finished their reading assignment early and strolled to the library. To take a break from reading one student jumped on the mini-trampoline and another jumped rope. Another girl who finished early went to the "Australia" area. Students were engrossed in their reading assignment and noise was kept to a minimum.

Students were encouraged to take care of their personal needs on their own. Mrs. G. did not want to be bothered with questions such as going to the bathroom, getting a drink, or getting a tissue. She trusted them to be responsible. I never observed a problem involved with students taking care of their needs. Students appeared relaxed and comfortable after selecting where to complete their work and only when a problem arose did Georgia intervene asking them to find a more suitable place to work. Choosing where to work was one of the most consistent and frequent choices offered to students. Students appeared to make thoughtful decisions in order to complete their work.

Community Time

To support the schools mission, the teachers in the Armstrong area planned periods each day for community related activities. They created families to provide a connection as a school-wide community. At the end of the day, students met in home base or gathered for a class meeting. The community get-togethers often provided students choices within the activities.

As mentioned earlier, families came together after meet and greet. Each family consisted of students from each level. Mrs. G.'s family played games together, worked on cooperative projects, and visited with several of the animals in the school. Mrs. G. usually suggested a few games to play and students voted on the game they preferred. On one occasion, after playing a game together, Mrs. G. asked students how they thought things were going? Students passed an apple when it was their turn to comment. Some students mentioned how well the group worked and cooperated together. Others commented on the cooperation during the games played and others discussed cooperation with animals during their family circle. A few students chose to pass when it was their turn. At the closing of families, students often shared their thoughts and feelings.

During families, students were given an opportunity to choose a buddy to work with and escort when entering or leaving the Armstrong area. Georgia explained to me that from past experiences, she discovered certain students worked well with one another and that certain partner situations did not work. She wanted students to take into consideration who they might want to work with for a positive family experience. After the first few family meetings, a student asked, "When are we going to get our buddies?" Mrs. G. needed to know who they preferred to have for a buddy. She suggested, "Let's vote; unless you can think of another way to do it." She asked them to vote on whether they preferred to write a list of who they wanted to choose for a buddy or whisper to her a few choices. Students overwhelmingly voted to whisper to her. She assured them she would make every effort to honor their first or second choice when organizing the buddy list.

Families worked on projects together such as pumpkinology where they did activities and wrote information about their pumpkin with a buddy. "Buddies" chose a place somewhere in

the school to have their picture taken together. The pictures were posted on a wall in the Armstrong area. Mrs. G. asked students to make an individual buddy book. Buddies worked together yet made their own separate book. They were to write answers to questions related to working with their buddy such as what you have to give, what do you want, and how will it be together? Students shared their experience of making the book with their buddy. They commented that it was a big responsibility, they felt frustrated at times, and that one buddy did not want to write but wanted to draw instead and it was hard.

Students created the name "Silver Snakes" for their family name. Animal visits frequented their family gatherings. On one occasion, Mrs. G. brought out a snake. A few students opted to move away from the circle to the couch. Some students wanted to touch or hold the snake while others sat quietly on the floor. Several students were curious and asked questions such as the snake's name, age, weight, the type, and what it eats. Mrs. G. shared the nature of snakes as she did with many of the animals.

For the most part, the older students assisted the younger students during families. On several occasions, I noticed an older student helping a younger student get a tissue, an ice pack, or console someone in need. Several choices were involved with families such as game selection, partner selection, where to sit during a project, how to go about an assignment, and the option to participate or not.

Home base was a period at the end of the day when Mrs. G.'s group met in the blue area. During home base, students met for thirty-five minutes, four days a week. They do their chores (clean and straighten up their area), write in their journal and other writing activities, play games, share thoughts and opinions, and listen to a read-aloud based on the yearlong

theme. Due to the early dismissal on Wednesdays, students gathered for one hour in home base and a class meeting was added to the schedule.

During the first day of home base, Mrs. G. asked returning Armstrong students to share what they did during home base last year. Her purpose was to inform students new to the Armstrong area. Student responses included, "It's like a family", "a big team", "journal writing", "play games", and "junk food parties".

Journal writing was usually toward the end of home base. Students were encouraged to write on any topic. They were required to sit at a table during journal writing but could sit at any table as long as they were successful. She told them not to worry about their spelling. She remarked, "I'm a champion about figuring out what you mean." At the first home base meeting, Mrs. G. discussed with the students the following:

Mrs. G.: We'll start our journals today and I'll write back to you at least once a week. For those of you that don't know, I write in green. A green message is going to be me and I sign my name too.

Student: She writes a lot.

Mrs. G.: Do I write too much?

Students: No!

Mrs. G.: I usually take one tribes journals home everyday and read what you've written. You should know, I do read what you've written. Don't write anything in your journal that you wouldn't want me to see. We don't trade them around. They're your personal journals but I do read them.

Student: If you have something in your journal that you don't want to be read, you could just fold the page.

Mrs. G.: Yeah, fold the page. (She referred to a past student who folded her pages in her journal for privacy.) Okay, if you don't want me to read it, just fold the page and I will respect that. I think that's very important for you to be able to have privacy.

Students were not required to write a certain length. They closed their journal to signal they were finished.

Writing activities were subjective in nature, giving students the opportunity to express themselves. On one occasion, Mrs. G. gave students handouts on emotional intelligence (See Appendix C). The purpose of the writing assignment was for each student to reflect on self-awareness. The information was later used during a community circle to get to know one another. Students were given the option to pass when sharing their personal information with the class.

Response writing was another activity giving students the opportunity to express themselves. "Rivers" was considered the yearlong theme. Mrs. G. had all students of the Armstrong area listen to the song, *The River* by Garth Brooks (For Lyrics, See Appendix C). She played the song twice and had the lyrics projected on a white board while students found a comfortable place to listen. After the song, she asked students to move to their home base area and write about what the song meant to them. Students found a comfortable spot to write their response. Mrs. G. explained to them to just start writing, in order for them to get their thoughts down. She suggested silence would get the imagery flowing. While students were writing, I noticed two boys leave a table because they were fidgety and could see they were bothering a few other students. They moved to the floor. One student moved to the art area. Mrs. G. interrupted midway through and asked students to take the time to write a paragraph from what they had just written. Two students were quietly mouthing the words as the song played softly

in the background. One student visited the mini-trampoline twice during his writing. A student from another home base was jumping rope nearby. A student, who finished early, sat quietly in the Australia area. Students appeared to be engaged in their writing and not bothered by others.

Mrs. G. knelt down next to a student sitting alone at a table. A moment later, the student put her hands over her face and began sobbing. Mrs. G. had her arm around her and whispered something to her. She left the student for a moment and returned with a tissue. The student wiped her eyes and blew her nose. For the remainder of the writing session, the child cried.

A short while later, Mrs. G. asked everyone to gather in a circle. Students finished at different times and joined the circle when they completed their paragraph. Mrs. G. explained that they would be sharing their response but had a right to pass if they chose to do so. The student who was crying sat next to Mrs. G. Mrs. G., with her arm around the crying student, began:

Mrs. G.: A lot of you are wondering about [crying student's name]. This song reminded her of her grandmother's death. This song affects everyone in different ways. This happened to affect her in this way...a sad way. You don't need to worry about her. She's okay; it's just the song. (Looking at the crying student) Do you want to read?

Student: No, you read.

Mrs. G. reads her response. She cries throughout the reading and another student consoles her while listening. Several other students chose to share their response (See Appendix C for various written responses,).

Students usually played a game at the end of home base. Most of the time they chose a game or suggested one. Games usually promoted working together in some way. On one

occasion, they played charades. Mrs. G. listed the life skills on the white board. In their tribes, students were to choose four or five life skills to act out for the whole group. Once they were in their groups, they decided on life skills they would act out. They decided who would act each one out and what they would do for their action. One student who did not want to participate in the acting asked Mrs. G. if she had the right to pass. Mrs. G. said yes.

Students were given time to share their thoughts, ideas, or feeling during home base and class meetings. Mrs. G. always set aside some time for a community circle. At the first home base meeting, Mrs. G. introduced a little stuffed mouse she named Cromwell. She explained to students that during their community circle time when they were sharing opinions, Cromwell would be passed around and the person holding Cromwell was the only one who should be talking. If someone wanted to pass on his or her turn, Cromwell would be given to the next person.

The first day students shared how they felt about their first day of school. One student said, "I was looking forward to school starting." Another commented, "I appreciate all the work the teachers have done." One replied, "It was better than camp" and several said it was fun. Yawning, one remarked she was extremely tired. After two weeks of school, Mrs. G. asked in the community circle, how it was going for everyone? She gave them a moment to think and started by passing Cromwell. Some student's comments were as follows:

Student 1: Good home base tribe. I'm finishing most of my work.

Student 2: I feel accepted.

Student 3: Our tribe fights a little.

Student 4: (referring to her tribe) Not yelling so much as last year.

Student 5: (referring to his tribe) Better than last year. Some people used to call me words but not this year.

Student 6: My tribe doesn't talk to me much. It bugs me.

Student 7: I'm angry at one tribe member.

Student 8: I like my tribe. We don't always exactly get along.

Student 9: Basically, good.

Student 10: I like my tribe. They share.

Student 11: I like my tribe sometimes. We don't always get along, usually one or two people.

Student 12: Comfortable.

A few students passed and others I could not hear. Through observation, it appeared Mrs. G. placed importance on letting students voice their opinions on a variety of subjects and situations. Most students were willing to share.

Mrs. G. selected the book for the read aloud during home base. Students were asked to listen yet they were able to get comfortable while she read. Students generally sat or lay down on the floor or sat on a couch. Mrs. G. usually sat on the floor and occasionally on the couch while she read.

Class meetings were on Wednesdays. Mrs. G. set aside one hour in the afternoon before early dismissal for home base and a class meeting. On the first day of school, she explained to the students what to expect from the meeting. She began, "You'll have a class meeting where we'll have a chance to get closer, feel more comfortable with each other and to have celebrations." She went on to say, "This is a time where everybody needs to feel absolutely safe and feel taken care of and this is where we'll have tribes. You'll work with your tribe from time to time." She mentioned they would solve problems together. Groups were formed into

various tribes arranged by Mrs. G. She announced that she would be forming tribes of four or five groups of students and that they would work together for three weeks. At the end of each three-week period, she would rearrange the groups giving students an opportunity to work with different students. After various tribe members worked together, students later decided on who worked well together and formed permanent tribes for the remainder of the year. She added, "You're going to manage your relationship with those four or five people all year, just like a family. You have to work out some issues."

Class meetings also involved sharing. Mrs. G. explained to me that essentially it was "show and tell". She felt they enjoyed the opportunity to share something about themselves with the class. Each tribe was assigned a certain week to share. Students shared places they had been, items they collected, favorite music, instruments they played, artwork, a story, photographs and animals. They shared information and students were free to ask questions.

Although home base had a specific agenda, several of the activities were designed to give students an opportunity to make some decisions. Chores were not generally assigned. When students saw a need for something to be done, they usually took care of it. Group games were decided by, Mrs. G., a group vote, or a suggestion from one student and everyone agreed. Students chose what they wanted to write in their journal and had the option by turning down a page so Mrs. G. would not read it. They decided how much they wanted to write and closed their journal to signal when they were finished. Mrs. G. made the book selection for the read aloud and based her choice on its relation to the yearlong theme. Students decided where to sit or lie while listening. Writing activities were usually planned for students to have an opportunity to express themselves. Community circle and class meetings gave students time to discuss, share, or solve problems together. Sharing time gave students a chance to share a part

of themselves from home. Tribes were designed for students to engage in solving problems together, to consider others point of view, and to make decisions as a group.

Curriculum

Georgia and her team planned the curriculum, which included traditional areas such as reading, math, science, and social studies. Each day was planned with a specific time for reading and math. Science and social studies were woven into the schedule in a variety of ways. The teachers were responsible for teaching physical education which they renamed healthy lifestyles. Student's school day also included library, music, and art. I did not observe students in their special classes except healthy lifestyles. Georgia often would teach a group of students while others were in their special classes. The teachers planned an in-depth study of rivers and related several activities involving reading, math, science, and social studies. The river theme was planned as a yearlong study. Within the planned activities related to curriculum areas, students were given choices and engaged in making several decisions.

Students were responsible for making many decisions concerning reading. They were required to select two books; one for the instructional reading period and one for independent reading. I observed various activities during the instructional reading period. Students often sat where they wanted and with whomever they chose. Students read quietly to themselves. Often students were to choose a job they were responsible for during literary discussion groups. Most students sat or lay down on the floor in a circle during group discussions. They were responsible for reflecting and responding on their reading in journals or reading folders they designed.

Within the first few weeks of school, teachers and students met at the stage for a book sale. All four teachers were on stage. One teacher dressed as Goldilocks opened the book sale by telling the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears while sitting in a rocker. At the end of the story, the teacher explained that when Goldilocks ran away from the bear's home, she ran to the library. At the library, Goldilocks picked out a book and began to read. She missed too many words and decided it was too hard. She picked out another book, began reading and discovered it was too easy. Goldilocks found another book and began to read and found it was "just right". Together, the teachers discussed with students the importance of selecting a book that was "just right" for them. Each teacher, taking turns, held up four of their favorite books and described what they enjoyed about the books they selected. They mentioned how many pages, how many chapters, the size of the print, and read an excerpt from each book as a teaser to get students interested. Several students shared their opinion about books they had read that were being introduced. Some students shared their favorite part of a story with the class to assist in peaking student's interest.

After the teachers finished their book sale, Georgia explained to students that they would be selecting their own book to read for their instructional reading period. The teachers had collected several sets of books. They placed a book and a sign up sheet on different tables in the Armstrong area. Students were to stroll around browsing through each book. Students were then to decide on a first choice and second choice and sign their name on the sheet next to their selections. The teachers would then organize the reading groups according to their choices.

A week before the book sale, Georgia explained to the students that the teachers were preparing for the sale. She also stated, "If you'd like to form your own group with a book you

find, you'll have to be responsible for finding four copies on your own and interested group members. We have the final say of what we think is appropriate." During my observations, students did not choose to select a different book and form their own group.

After a reading assignment was given, students found a place to read. When they completed their reading and any written assignment given, they were to read their self-selected book. Students were given an opportunity to choose a book from the school library to read after they had completed their work. Whenever they finished their book, they were able to return their book to the library and select a new one. I noticed several students very engrossed in their book. It was difficult for them to put it down when it was time to move on to another activity.

Several options were available when students read silently. Throughout my observations, I noticed students utilizing several spaces. I observed students sitting alone or with others. Sometimes students read to each other. Mrs. G. recorded audiotapes of their assigned stories. Students had the option to listen to an audiotape and follow along in their book. Usually four to five students were sitting or lying down listening to a tape and following along in their book. Students sat at a table alone or with others. Students sat on the couch, loveseat or the recliner. Often times, they took their shoes off. Some students sat in a bathtub, under the loft, on the stairs of the loft, or at the top. Almost always, some students utilized the bunk beds. They occupied the top and bottom bunk. Sometimes they shared their space and other times laid down or sat alone on the bed. One time I noticed a student kneeling down on the side of the bed resting his book and upper body on the bed while reading. While lying on the floor, I observed one student in a sleeping bag and another using a blanket. During my many visits,

students eventually utilized every space available to them whether on the floor or in or on something. The independent reading atmosphere always appeared comfortable and relaxing.

Mrs. G. set aside time for literary discussions. Students were to read stories selected by the teacher. After reading silently, they broke into groups and chose jobs for the discussion. Students were able to choose discussion director, literary luminary, artist, or connector. The job descriptions included leading the discussion, highlighting passages, drawing a picture, or connecting the story to real life in some way. Mrs. G. spent four class periods getting students acquainted with each job.

On one particular day of observation, students were faced with several typical situations requiring them to make decisions during reading. After students gathered in the blue area and found a place, Mrs. G. remarked, "Thank you to the student who took the initiative to get the folders." No one responded. Students were then given fifteen minutes to get into groups and discuss passages in their book they chose to share with one another. They read their passage to the group and discussed what it meant to them. Others were welcome to add comments. Certain students in each group facilitated the group discussion. They asked questions and asked students if they were ready to read their passage.

Mrs. G. clapped a pattern signaling to students their fifteen minutes had passed. She asked students to comment on what they had learned. Several students commented on the story. In particular, two girls mentioned they figured out a new word. Another student suggested, "You could look it up in the dictionary." Mrs. G. asked, "Did you?" The girls explained they had figured it out on their own. Mrs. G. ended the discussion with, "That's the beauty of groups. With each other's knowledge, you were able to figure it out."

Mrs. G. asked students to read the next story and draw at least one picture for the artful artist job. Students found several different places to get comfortable. While reading, one student visited the mini-trampoline. Another student left and returned with the mid-morning snack, peanuts. Students not interested in the snack, responded with a "no, thank you" when offered. Two girls who finished reading early left to check out a new book in the library. Mrs. G. walked around listening to students read while holding her water bottle. When their time had ended, students shared their artwork, explaining what they drew and why. They briefly discussed their various jobs and opinions about each one.

When students chose their book for their instructional reading period, groups were formed by their reading selection. They often read with the teacher on the floor in a circle. Sometimes they read aloud and other times silently. On one occasion, the students had two chapters of a book left to read. Mrs. G. asked them to read the next chapter silently and then they would discuss what happened. I noticed when it was time to discuss the chapter in their group; one student lying on the floor turned completely away from the group and kept reading. Mrs. G. and the students carried on their conversation without his participation. Toward the end of the discussion, the student was completely unaware they were discussing the book. He closed his book, turned around looking at Mrs. G. and announced, "That was so good." Mrs. G. said smiling, "I know. It is a great story, isn't it?" He was so involved in the story, he finished reading it and Mrs. G. never interrupted him.

I observed Mrs. G. on several occasions ask students for their ideas and thoughts. During a reading group, she led a discussion on how students go about choosing a book. One student stated that a girl in their group had recommended the book he chose. Another student chose a book because she had read many others from the same series. A new student said he chose his

book because he had seen it at his old school. Mrs. G. then asked students to share strategies they use when they do not know a word.

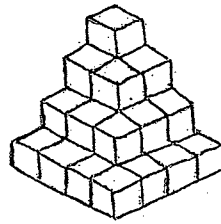
One student explained he skipped the word and would read to the end of the sentence and try to figure out what would make sense. Another student suggested looking at the pictures. Describing her strategy, a student stated, "If there is a word in it, try to find out by finding words inside the word to figure it out." They continued discussing a few other "helpful hints" before ending their conversation.

Students also had the opportunity to share their thoughts through written responses. They responded to literature through journals. Reading folders, illustrated by students, were used for chapter summaries and other assignments concerning reading.

The time set aside during the day for reading offered students several choices. They were able to select literature based on interest and utilize the library whenever needed. Students were able to choose where to read and with whom. They could read alone, be read to, or listen to an audiotope. They had an opportunity to choose from four different literary jobs. Students could choose to participate in group discussions or not and were encouraged to share their own thoughts and ideas. Another form of expression was through written responses. The river theme was related to reading through a read aloud at the end of each day during home base.

During math, students were given several opportunities to choose where they wanted to work. They were also able to choose whom they worked with whether they worked in pairs or in groups. Students shared their ideas and strategies for problems they solved. They were able to approach problems in their own ways and when in groups, they had to decide how to work together during certain activities.

At the beginning of each math period, students were given five minutes to work on the POD (Problem of the Day). Typical problems Mrs. G. gave students to solve were to finish a pattern or a story problem. Mrs. G. suggested that the POD was an intra-personal activity and asked them to solve the problem quietly. They were able to sit anywhere as long as they were not talking. Most students sat at a table but a few sat on the floor. One student suggested to Mrs. G. that they should turn their paper over when their work was complete so she would know when everyone was finished. Mrs. G. remarked, "Good suggestion." The problem was either written on the white board or projected on the board from the overhead projector. Usually several students wrote on the white board to share their strategy for figuring out the problem. On one occasion, Mrs. G. projected a block structure on the white board. (See Figure 3)



(Figure 3- block structure)

She wrote on the board, How many blocks? Students were given five minutes to figure out the problem. When time ran out, some of the students volunteered to share their strategy.

Their strategies were as follows:

Student 1: I drew mine out

Student 2: I counted 16 on the bottom stack.

Student 3: I multiplied the rows like $4 \times 4 = 16$ and so on.

Student 4: I counted each row.

During an unifix cube activity, students were asked to get into groups of four. They were to arrange the cubes so Mrs. G. could easily recognize there were one hundred cubes. At each table, students formed their groups and counted out one hundred cubes. I sat near one group to observe how they figured out how they were going to arrange their cubes. The conversation was as follows:

Student 1: Everybody get 20.

Student 2: Then it would be 80.

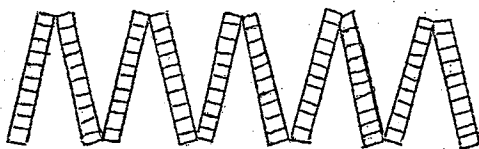
Student 3: Let's get 25.

Student 2: How should we arrange them?

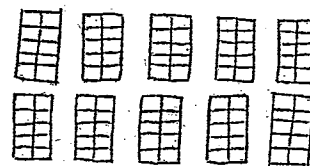
Student 4: Let's put them in groups of five. That's easy to count.

Student 2: (smiling) Good idea.

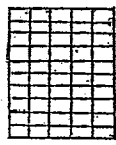
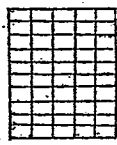
Student 1: (to student 3) Put them in 5's and then hook them together and make 10. (They finished connecting their cubes and student 1 quietly counted them) They are, yes! (See figure 4 for arrangements)



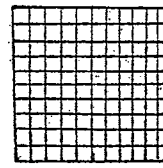
Group 1



Group 2



Group 3



Group 4

(Figure 4 - Unifix Cube Arrangements)

During a math lesson on graphing, Mrs. G. began by asking volunteers to count the total number of shirts students were wearing and separate them by color. Each student counting reported a total for each color. Mrs. G. graphed their count on the overhead projector. After a short discussion on the importance and purpose of graphing, she created a new graph. The students helped Mrs. G. graph letters from the first twenty words in a paragraph. They made predictions about what letters would appear most frequently and what letters would be represented the least. After predictions, they graphed the letters. When the graph was complete and had been interpreted, Mrs. G. explained to students that they would create a similar graph using the first twenty words of a paragraph for a homework assignment. An excited student asked if he could graph more than twenty letters. Mrs. G. laughed and said sure and would give him an extra graph sheet for his additional letters.

The next day they began to create a graph compiled from the student's homework. Not realizing the size and difficulty of the project, Mrs. G. asked, "What's impractical about this? What makes this hard to manage? A student remarked that it was taking forever. Another student suggested taking away a certain number from each letter. Mrs. G. asked, "Then will it keep up at the same proportion?" The student replied, "It will make it fatter rather than longer." Although suggestions were given, students would not stop long enough to solve the

problem. They were very busy sorting letters, gluing, cutting, taping, and helping others.

Although the graph grew to a size they could not easily interpret, they enjoyed the process.

A card game, Close to One Hundred, prompted several choices for students. They needed to decide on groups, where to work, and how to set up the game. Mrs. G. demonstrated how to play the game on the overhead projector. She began by picking a card, then another, then another. (See Figure 5).

0	3	9
0	3	6

(Figure 5 - Card Selection)

She asked students to figure out a strategy to combine the numbers to make one hundred. One student immediately spoke up while Mrs. G. moved the cards he suggested. He began, "I would start with using the numbers 9 and 6 then take the 0 and 3. Mrs. G. wrote on the white board the following:

$$\begin{array}{r} 96 \\ + 03 \\ \hline 99 \end{array}$$

Another student suggested, "Take the 6 and 9 and 3 and 0. Mrs. G. wrote:

$$\begin{array}{r} 69 \\ + 30 \\ \hline 99 \end{array}$$

Mrs. G. replied, "Yes, it's the same thing." Each deck included wild cards. She asked, "Why do two wild cards assure you exactly of 100?" One student replied, "You can choose any two numbers like 9 and 9." Another student added, "Because you can make them any number you need." After one more example, Mrs. G. explained, "There are only six sets of

cards and there would not be enough for pairs." Students formed groups somewhere in the blue area and figured out how all those in the group could participate in the game.

One student chose to work alone behind the white board. Three students used a pencil as a spinner to decide who would go first at their table. They planned to take turns. One student in their group unloaded all the pencils in the cup on their table and placed the cards inside for their draw pile. Some groups played as a whole group while others took turns playing.

Math offered students the opportunity to decide where to sit, who to work with, and how to work together. Students engaged in solving problems, and sharing strategies and ideas. They had occasions to invent and create. When relating math to the river theme, students engaged in activities related to measuring, graphing, and calculating figures for designing a river model. Students were responsible for initiating ideas, and working to figure things out. When asked to share their thoughts on the idea, "math makes me...", student's responded with excited, bored, think...

Georgia and her team planned their science and social studies curriculum around a major concept and a yearlong theme. They chose to focus on the concept similar and different and related the concept to their yearlong theme, rivers. For instance, they planned to study the local river in their area. They planned to observe the river and the surrounding environment. Students would study the plants and animals. The teachers planned for students to create a river model in the classroom, stocking the river with actual plants, river water, and soil for the river bottom. Throughout the year, students would be researching rivers around the world by comparing similarities and differences to the local river. They would be studying the geographic regions and similarities and differences in the environments. During my

observation period, students went on a field trip to the local river, a local stream, and began construction of their classroom river model.

On one occasion, teachers planned three activities involving the concept, similar and different. One teacher planned an activity with biosets. Another teacher planned to have students work with shells and weights. I only observed Georgia and her activity. She created a card game, similar to Go Fish, involving animal classification. Rather than having students move to each activity, teachers and their activity rotated every thirty minutes to the student's areas.

After Mrs. G. demonstrated how to play the game, she asked students to form their own groups. All students chose to sit at tables and chairs to play the game. Students were left to figure out how to organize themselves and who would begin the game. Students had to work out a few discrepancies while playing the game. Many groups debated certain classifications for animals. Some worked it out in their group while others asked Mrs. G. to settle their disagreement. On one occasion, a student asked her group for a particular classification when it was her turn. All players said they did not have the particular classification she needed. She then drew a card from the draw pile and drew the classification she had asked for from her group members. She suggested to the group that she should be able to have a turn again because she picked the classification she requested. After a lengthy debate, they decided a player would not go again even if they drew the classification they requested.

Some science lessons were more experiential. Each teacher planned a science lesson they would be responsible for with all groups. One teacher planned on working with students on a research paper while another teacher planned an erosion activity. Georgia planned on chemical testing. She wanted students to perform chemical and soil tests on the local river. To

familiarize students with the scientific process, she planned a testing activity using science materials and household products. After Mrs. G. demonstrated how to use the science materials, she discussed terms scientists use when testing, and how they document their findings. Students then chose a partner, science kit, and began their investigation.

All students appeared highly interested in the activity. As they experimented with different substances, they worked together to figure out each substance. They documented descriptive words to explain what happened when adding a liquid substance to a dry substance. They were to describe what each substance looked, felt, and sounded like. Partners also discussed, predicted, and documented their identification of each substance. After all partners completed their testing and cleaned their area, they gathered together to discuss their findings. Students described some of the substances as looking lumpy, frozen, soft, rocky, hard, like candy nerds, like crystals, powdery, and clumpy. Students referred to substances sounding like fizzing, falling with a thump, and maracas. Smells mentioned were diaper wipes, baby powder, and melting plaster.

On a different day, Mrs. G. wanted to assess students on general scientific practices which students had worked on previously. She wanted students to identify two specific powders. They would investigate through experimentation. Mrs. G. explained to students, "You'll run tests and document which ones give you the most information. I'm interested to see what choices you make. What happened? You can write what you think it is." She also explained what she was testing. Mrs. G. stated, "Did you understand scientific behavior? Did you keep accurate records in order to identify chemicals?" She mentioned to students that this one particular activity was intra-personal and that they would need to work alone. Before

beginning, she stated, "You can try anything. You can try standing on your head to figure it out."

While students worked, many were seated and a few were standing. Mrs. G. wrote on the white board the following:

On back of assessment

1. One good thing about each tribe member.
2. One different

Students were given a self-assessment form in addition to their chemical test record sheet. Besides assessing their experiences during the chemical test activities, Mrs. G. wanted to take the opportunity for them to provide feedback on how well their tribes were working together. (See Appendix C for Chemical Test Record Sheet and Student Self-Assessment forms)

I did not observe any particular activities which were specifically labeled social studies. Rather, social studies related activities, during my observation period, were included in other activities usually related to science or the river theme. Students were to copy a key point written on a white board. Key points were changed weekly and usually involved a social studies concept. They were often used as a starting point for a discussion and were related to the concept of same and different. An example of a key point was the following:

Geography is the study of places and people. Places have specific attributes just like people. Those attributes include, but are not limited to, climate, natural resources, plant, and animal populations.

Science and social studies related activities gave students opportunities to choose partners or their groups. They were able to figure out how they would organize an activity and solve

any problems together. They shared ideas with their classmates and expressed their thoughts through self-assessment.

Healthy lifestyles, traditionally known as physical education, was a period set aside for some form of exercise. The teachers were responsible for teaching at least one class a week. I observed Georgia and her students a few periods during healthy lifestyles. Each time they began with a few yoga-stretching exercises. They engaged in casual conversations while eating a healthy snack. After their snack, either Mrs. G. announced a cooperative game they would play or students voted on a game. On one occasion, three students chose not to participate and sat out of the game. After they played a game, they ended their time with a discussion about what worked and what did not work. Students shared their opinions.

On Friday afternoons during extended day, students needing additional time with work from the week had an opportunity to complete or correct their work in "fix and finish". Mrs. G. stated, "We [the teachers] get to say or you decide you need time with it. It's our choice or your choice."

The daily routine offered students numerous and varied choices throughout their day. As a school community, students were given the option to eat breakfast. They were able to choose what they ate for lunch and sit where and with whom they wanted. The café provided another option for special occasions. Some students chose to attend special classes such as dance or piano during the school day while others opted to attend classes during extended day. Extended day offered students additional classes, special projects, self-directed studies, and "fix and finish" for those needing additional time with their schoolwork.

In the blue area, students made personal decisions to take care of their needs such as when to go to the restroom, get a drink, or to get a tissue. They often chose where to sit or lay down.

During group work, they picked their own partner or formed their own groups. On several occasions, students had to figure out how to organize their time and how to go about an assignment. They had opportunities to engage in problem-solving activities and decided as a group how to solve the problem. Certain situations led to the need to solve some of their own problems within their group.

Students chose their own reading material. They had the option to read with someone or alone. They could read silently, read to someone, have someone read to them, or listen to a pre-recorded audiotope from the assigned story. Journal writing led to the choice of topics student's wanted to write about and the right to privacy if they preferred. Assignments could be completed with pencil and paper or students had the option to use the computer. They had four different writing programs on the computer to choose from. When finished with an assignment, students could read a self-selected book, go to the library, or visit a computer.

I observed Georgia always honoring student's request to pass when sharing or a request not to participate in an activity. After almost every activity I observed, students were encouraged to express ideas, share opinions, and offer suggestions. With students having so many opportunities to regulate their time, space, interactions, and basic needs, they appeared to feel cared for, accepted, and included. The atmosphere was very relaxed and Georgia worked hard to insure students learning experiences were positive and everyone felt part of the community. The next theme discussed involves choice as it relates to community. Small and whole group community decisions were part of the daily routine as well.

Theme II: Choice in Terms of Community

Promoting community was evident, from the involvement of personnel, parents, and volunteers to gatherings such as families, tribes, "Celebrations", and "Rendezvous". Students were encouraged to work together, spend time together, and express their opinions. Members of the school viewed themselves as one big family and the community influence played out in the blue area.

Georgia wanted students to feel safe and accepted by all. Students were encouraged to rely on one another and to help where help was needed. Occasionally, all students from the Armstrong area needed to decide as a community. Other decisions were made as a home base group or as a family. Partners and small groups, often were in situations requiring a decision. In most cases, situations requiring a decision were handled by the students themselves.

Students Helping Others

I never observed a situation when a student hesitated to help. It was understood, if someone appeared in need or requested help, a student had the unspoken "go ahead" and proceeded to assist others. The only exception was during an intra-personal activity such as POD or a testing situation, which was always addressed by Mrs. G.

On occasion, Mrs. G. requested that students help one another. While students were making individual record books for a field trip to the river, Mrs. G. simply stated, "Help your neighbor." When students were gathered in a community circle, a student was having a difficult time focusing on the discussion. Mrs. G. asked a student next time him to be a support for him during the discussion. To lend his support, he moved closer to the student and eventually the student joined in the conversation.

Georgia, on occasion, needed help from her students. During a family gathering, Mrs. G. brought out a snake to share with the students. When returning the snake back to its habitat, Mrs. G. asked a student to help her return the snake. The student helped her carry the snake and place him safely back in his home. After a snack, students were preparing to leave the blue area. As students were getting up to leave, Mrs. G. pointing to a wrapper on the floor stated, "Someone forgot their wrapper." A student reached down and picked it up. After he threw it in the trash, Mrs. G. commented, "I know that wasn't yours. Thank you." I noticed students willing to run an errand, locate something for Mrs. G., or volunteer to pass out papers.

In most cases, I observed students initiate helping others. While the class participated in writing, reading, or math activities, several students offered help to students struggling with their work. They helped with spelling or figuring out a word. After two girls finished making an entry for a book they had read for their reading log on the computer, they asked a student, new to the Armstrong area, if he needed help entering his book title on the computer. He accepted their help. After explaining an algebra concept to a small group of students, Mrs. G. worked with a student having difficulty understanding. Two students caught on quickly and finished their assignment early. Another student remarked, "I don't get number 4." One of the students that had finished early sat with her to explain how he worked the problem. As mentioned earlier, when students combined their homework assignment to make a huge letter graph, they eagerly helped one another. I was struck by one student who patiently held one end of the graph for an extended period of time in order for students to be able to glue their letters on the graph easily. Generally, he had difficulty focusing on an activity for any length of time. During a class meeting, a student wanted to share her cello. In order for her to

demonstrate, two students asked her if she needed help. She accepted their offer. They held her cello while she played.

Activities involving the river theme prompted situations when students helped one another. While students were on a field trip at the local river, some students were responsible for calculating the width of the river by measuring as they walked over the river on a bridge. I observed one group of students as they arrived at the river. The students eagerly walked to the bridge to start their measurement of the river width. I noticed one student hesitantly entering the ramp walkway leading to the bridge. With each step moving closer to the bridge, he appeared nervous. He began to panic and started to whimper. Noticing a parent volunteer nearby, he stated, "No one's helping me. Please hold my hand." The parent assisted the student to the bridge, walking at his pace. When they reached the bridge, the student held on to the parent's hand. A student already busy measuring the river, noticed his fear. She joined him to help. She told him that she would stay with him to help measure and suggested he hold on to the handrail. She waited patiently trying to calm him while he adjusted to the height. After a few moments, he assured her he was fine when holding onto the rail. They began to measure together, taking turns.

The next day at school, students worked in groups to map out the river they had visited on a grid sheet. While observing one group, I noticed students helping and assisting one another. One student helped another tape pieces of the grid together. A student noticing the need for straight lines on the grid found a yardstick and held it down on the grid for another student to draw. Students worked together to figure out how to draw the river, suggesting where to start and end on the grid sheet.

An Armstrong and an Einstein student were buddies and sitting together during a family circle meeting. The Einstein student was fidgety, lost her balance and fell back, hitting her head on a wheel attached to a large moveable white board. She held her head crying. Mrs. G. and her buddy tried to console her and at the same time check the area where she hit her head. Her buddy left for a moment and returned with a tissue to dry her eyes. Another student helped her up leading her to a couch. Mrs. G. located a bump on her head. The Armstrong buddy suggested he take her to get an ice pack. They both left for the office and returned shortly after with the ice pack. The two students sat together on the couch icing the child's bump for the remainder of the meeting.

Whole Group Decisions

Certain decisions required the entire Armstrong area to decide together. While on the bus after their field trip to the river, they were ahead of their time schedule. They brought their lunches along to eat at the river thinking they would not be back at school in enough time to eat lunch. Since they had time to do either, Mrs. G. asked the students to vote for the option they preferred. The majority voted to eat at the river and decided they would have enough time to play at the playground as well. On several occasions, Mrs. G. would ask the Armstrong group what they preferred on less significant choices. When a parent volunteer was about to leave, Mrs. G. announced to Armstrong students he was leaving and they needed to thank him. She asked, "How do you want to thank him?" Several students shouted, "Elvis!" She nodded okay. Students stood up, making a cranking sound and spinning their arm around several times. They all stopped at once. Impersonating Elvis, they all said, "Thank you. Thank you very much."

The Armstrong group also made decisions related to curriculum and content. Small groups were formed to decide together how to make the shape of the local river on a smaller scale for their classroom river model. After students discussed, worked together, and prepared their drawing, they were to give a presentation to the entire Armstrong group and share their final sketch. After each presentation, Mrs. G. discussed with students each group's calculations and the accuracy of their scale. By the end of the last presentation and discussion, students were able to decide which drawing would be used for a wood cutout of the river model.

Home base groups voted on a number of occasions. They frequently voted on a game to play. During a reading group, students voted on when to perform a play from a story they had read. Mrs. G. gave them the option to perform for the Armstrong area or at "Celebrations". The students voted "Celebrations". Students were to plan their play together. Mrs. G. explained, "You all decide together." Students started discussing characters in the story. During the conversation, I noted questions, comments and suggestions as follows:

Student: Who wants to be Robert?

Student: I'll be Robert's mom.

Students: We need a baby bunny.

Student: I have two of them.

Student: I'll hold them.

The student offering his bunnies stated, "I need to make sure my dad will bring them." Mrs. G. suggested, "You can call me tonight and let me know." The student replied, "I don't have your number." Mrs. G. said she would give it to him. Another student offered to bring her cat. Mrs. G. asked what she would do with the cat all day long at school and the student suggested a cage. Mrs. G. remarked, "That is kind of cruel. You can do that with a rabbit but not with a

cat." Another student agreed and said her friend might be off work and would be able to take the cat home. Switching the focus, Mrs. G. asked if they needed anything from her. Students responded no. Mrs. G. then asked, "You guys have thought of all these animals. What are you going to do?" Students began to discuss in different groups and Mrs. G. let them work it out. They only had a few minutes before students had to rotate to their next class. I do not know how the rest of the play situation ended. I was not present to observe any other preparation period or the play.

The purpose of TRIBES was for groups of students to solve problems and work together as a smaller community. On one occasion, Mrs. G. addressed her home base group during a class meeting. She began, "I have had some people who have said, 'I don't mean to be rude but someone in my group, I don't work well with'. I want you all to try. You're one year older. That was last year. If it still doesn't work, you may form a group of one." As mentioned earlier, students were in a group for three weeks and then Mrs. G. switched the students around. After several variations, students were then given the opportunity to decide their tribe members. They were to write down two boys and two girls to work with for the rest of the year. Mrs. G. arranged groups according to the student choices. She wanted to honor as many requests as she possibly could. Once tribes were formed, they had to decide on a name and create a poster signifying their tribe. Students had to carefully decide how they would plan their poster because at the end of the school year they were able to take it home. Three groups designed their poster so each member would be able to take their part home. One tribe decided they would let the only student in their group who would be going to junior high the next year take it home.

Mrs. G. did not have the traditional school rules rather she had agreements she established with the students. Mrs. G. held a community circle meeting with each group in the Armstrong area to discuss agreements. On the third day of school, one group of students gathered in a community circle to discuss their expectations of school. During lunch, Mrs. G. had been at a local high school giving a presentation to a large group of students. She began the community circle by telling her students about the experience. She said it was the most depressing thing she ever had to do. A woman that spoke before her spoke for three minutes and the students did not listen. Mrs. G. explained that students were throwing a football, hitting each other, and climbing over the seats. She was very discouraged by their lack of respect.

She opened each group's community circle with her story. At the first meeting, the conversation was as follows:

Mrs. G.: This brings us to what we're going to talk about. We're doing it very different than we've done in the past. Usually what we do is have a community circle. We ask you, what would you want and how do you want to be treated at school? How do you want school to be? It's interesting. We always get the same answers. Then the teachers got together and said, "what did your kids say?" They always said the same thing every year. So what you all want is just about what we want too. We are in agreement about what we want. Let's just brainstorm about what we want. Think about it. What do you want? How do you want to be treated? How do you want it to be at school? Any ideas?

Student: People to be nice.

Student: I don't want to be called bad words.

Student: I want to work hard and know how I'm doing.

Mrs. G.: So you want to work hard and know how you're doing? Very great.

Student: (spoke softly and could not hear response)

Mrs. G.: Oh, the golden rule. So you want to treat people how you want to be treated?

(Student nodded yes) What else?

Student: To be safe. People not to bother me.

Mrs. G.: Okay, so you want your body to be feel safe? You don't want to worry that somebody's going to hurt your body. (Student nodded yes)

Student: (spoke softly and could not hear response)

Mrs. G.: I'm repeating this for two reasons. One, so everybody can hear. Two, to make sure I understand what you mean. (Looking at the student who spoke softly) She wants to feel safe from someone talking behind her back saying ugly things about her. (Student nodded no.)

No? That's not what you're saying?

Student: (spoke too softly again to hear response.)

Mrs. G.: Oh, so you want people to be honest? Is that right? (Student nodded yes.) So you want people to say what they mean and mean what they say? (Student nodded yes again.) All right, what else?

Student: (spoke softly and could not hear response.)

Mrs. G.: I hear that over and over and over. (The student explained people made fun of her when she had her brain tumor.) So, [student's name] said she wasn't treated kindly when she had her brain tumor. They said hurtful things to you? (Student nodded yes.) We would not want that to happen. You want to feel safe from people saying hurtful things? (She nodded yes again.) As well as safe your body isn't hurt, as well as safe you can trust what they say, as well as safe that you want to treat people the way you want to be treated. What else?

Student: For people to be open-minded.

Mrs. G.: So you want to be able to exchange ideas.

Student: I got held back one year because I'm short. I want people to be nice to me and don't ask personal questions.

Mrs. G.: You don't want people to ask personal questions? (Student nodded yes.) Can I say something about that? I have two things I want to say about that, that are real close to my heart. One, there was another boy in a class that said almost exactly the same thing. People asking me questions I don't want to answer. There are things you get to keep private that you don't want to share. I think I'm hearing you say that. I don't want to share about that and it's okay. But you also don't want anybody to ask questions that they know are embarrassing. I want to say one other thing, about the term "held back". I want you to know, no one is ever "held back". Here at [school name] you can be where you exactly need to be. I want you to know there has never been a year that someone hasn't said to me, "I'm not ready for junior high". I want another year here at [school name]. That, in my opinion, is incredibly smart. Sometimes I bring it up and say, "now, are you sure you're ready to be in junior high? Would you rather have another year here?" Is that "held back" or is that being in the right place at the right time? (Students nodded heads in agreement)

They discussed a few more minutes about the negative feeling associated with the term "held back". She introduced a bulletin board displaying the agreements the teachers compiled. The agreements listed were trustworthiness, active listening, appreciation, mutual respect, high expectations, and truthfulness. Mrs. G. referred to the students' earlier statements and how they related to the agreements listed. They discussed several situations from the years past when agreements were not working. At the end of the discussion, she asked students to either affirm or reject each of the agreements. She explained they should put a thumb up if they

agree, a thumb down if they disagree, and a thumb sideways if they did not care or were indifferent. When they were deciding on high expectations, two girls put their thumb sideways. When asked why, one student stated, "It's hard to agree to everyday completing your work." Smiling, Mrs. G. responded, "Don't you always?" She did not want students to be unrealistic about the expectations but to strive to work toward them.

Due to time, the first meeting ended before students had the opportunity to complete the agreement process. I noticed a week later; the bulletin board listing the agreements also included each student's thumbprint as a symbol of their agreement.

Small Group Decisions

In smaller groups, students were regularly in situations involving partner selection, group selections, where to sit, and how to go about working on a project or begin a game. On several occasions I heard students asking such questions as, "Do you want to be my partner, Can I be in your group, where do you want to sit, or who wants to go first"? Several instances required small group decisions. In small groups, students chose five agreements to mime during charades. They decided where to begin when mapping out a drawing of the local river. Students decided in small groups their various jobs during a soil testing experiment. They decided where to have pictures taken and the rules of a card game. I rarely observed any situations involving a major dispute. Most differences were worked out peacefully among students themselves.

However, I did observe three girls sitting at a table dealing with a difficult situation during a graphing assignment. One of the girls yelled at the other two girls, "Stop! We aren't doing it that way." The two girls looked shocked. They picked up their things and moved to a different

table without her. The student who yelled, looked puzzled for a moment. She then walked to a different table with a group of boys and grabbed one of the boys' scissors. The boy responded, "Hey, those are mine." She remarked, "Well, I don't have any." She returned to her table with the scissors and began cutting out her pieces for the graph.

The two girls came back to her table to join her. She yelled at them, "Go away." One girl responded, "You go away." "Shut up!" remarked the student in anger. She repeatedly said shut up until Mrs. G. heard her. Mrs. G. led her to a secluded area, placed her hands on her shoulders and quietly spoke to her for a moment. The student returned to the table with her group and apologized, "I'm sorry", then added, "Sometimes you're so annoying." The girls ignored her comment and continued working. The angered student joined them. Together, they began to have a conversation about a current movie showing at a local movie theatre. As they discussed the movie and worked on the graph project, it appeared all was forgotten about the argument.

Community was a significant aspect of the student's daily lives at school. During a lesson in the blue area, Mrs. G. asked all students new to the school to join one of the teachers in her office. She explained to those students, that they were going to a meeting to discuss their school experience thus far with other new students and share their thoughts, concerns, and questions. On each day of observation, an event, activity, or occasion at school illustrated the importance placed on community.

Decision-making was viewed as part of the process of building a strong community. Working together as a community meant helping one another. The larger community was reflected in the decisions students made as a group in the Armstrong area. Community was displayed with groups found in the blue area. Students made decisions as a home base or

family. Decisions were also made in pairs or small groups of students. Mrs. G. summed up the community focus in a statement she wrote on the white board as one of the key points students were to copy. She wrote the following:

In a community, people agree to live by certain procedures and agreements that allow them to function in an orderly manner, promoting respect for all, individually and collectively. Within our [school name] community, there are sub-communities which create their own agreements. These agreements contribute to the success of each community.

Students were given several options within their communities and sub-communities associated with the curriculum and their routine each day. Mrs. G. emphasized to students the benefits of working as a group to solve problems together and to work out issues as a family.

Theme III: Choice in Terms of Self-determination

Through observation and data analysis, I discovered evidence in the blue area concerning the benefits of self-determination as Alfie Kohn described. He noted students feel a sense of self-determination when they have a sense of control over their lives. Students are given responsibility for their own behavior and are motivated, due to having some say about their learning. In turn, teachers are interested and collaborate with their students. As a result, the environment is respectful, consistent, and democratic (1998, p. 252-257). Self-determination was exhibited in situations involving students in whole groups, small groups, and individually.

Whole Group

When observing the group discussion on what kind of school students wanted, students revealed particular concerns they have had from past school experiences. Students were honest and shared painful or private stories. Students who shared their stories, such as the student who had had a brain tumor or the student who said he was "held back" were passionate about

being accepted and that others consider their point of view. During group discussions, many students appeared to want their stories told and their voice heard. As mentioned earlier, when given the option to perform a play at "Celebrations" or for the Armstrong group, students chose "Celebrations". After their decision, they were left to decide how to go about organizing their play. Decisions made in whole group situations usually prompted students to consider each other's point of view before finalizing any plans.

Small Group

As students worked in small groups, they regulated their time and projects. I observed numerous incidences when students took care of things on their own. For instance, after reading an assigned chapter, two girls left the blue area to work on a presentation on the computer. Similarly, one student often visited the mini-trampoline, when needed. Mrs. G. explained he had a difficult time focusing on any one activity for any length of time and was trying to stay off medication. She often introduced a concept or activity and left students in their groups to organize their activity. Students rarely asked Mrs. G. for help when they were able to take care of things on their own.

Occasionally, students focus changed from their present activity to an unexpected circumstance. While Mrs. G. was working with a reading group near the river model, a student called attention to the fish tank pumping water through the river model. She said she saw something in the tank. Students gathered around the tank to observe. Mrs. G. pointed out the plants and snails. After a short discussion, they figured out what the student thought she saw in the tank was actually a discolored leaf.

Another incident diverted a student's attention. While working in small groups near the stage, a student noticed the large turtle in a nearby aquarium appeared to be trying to climb out. Several students gathered around the aquarium to observe the turtle. The aquarium was in front of a window. Another student noticed it was raining outside, yet the sun was shining. They discovered a rainbow. They decided the turtle was trying to get out to see the rainbow.

Individually

Self-determination was most prominent individually. Students had numerous possibilities for expressing themselves. They expressed themselves through their physical appearance, verbally, assignments and projects, and assessment. Although they wore school uniforms, I notice one student's hair was always changing. On different occasions, his hair was green, red, or blue. He may grease it back or wear it spiked. Students were almost always able to express their opinion and encouraged to do so. Many assignments and projects resulted in an expression of each individual student. Self-assessment was almost always expected after a large project or an in-depth study.

Although time was regulated to stay on schedule, there were incidences where Mrs. G. ignored the time constraint when a student was consumed by an activity. As mentioned earlier, one student finished his book during a reading discussion and Mrs. G. did not interrupt him. Another student especially enjoyed reading her self-selected book. Mrs. G. noticed the student's involvement in her book and ignored her lack of participation in the activity. Certain projects motivated students to stay in class during their lunch break to eat and work on their project.

On one occasion, students were to write a thank-you letter to a parent who painted a mural on the cafeteria wall. Mrs. G. mentioned to students that they had a few minutes to finish and then should meet at the stage. Most students ended their letter and met Mrs. G. at the stage. Mrs. G. noticed three students who continued working. She asked them to finish quickly and clean up. One girl wrote a moment longer and put her materials away. Another student continued writing a few more minutes and then put his materials away. The only student remaining continued writing for eight more minutes. He was very focused on his letter. After signing his name, he joined the group shortly after. Mrs. G. did not mention his late arrival to the stage.

As previously mentioned, sharing ideas and opinions was always welcomed. Students "sharing time" at the Wednesday community meeting was always a favorite. On one occasion, a student had visited the local library and discovered free bookmarks with a listing of books related to rivers. She decided to gather enough bookmarks to give to the whole class. When she arrived at school, she shared with Mrs. G. that she had found the bookmarks and wanted to give them to the class. Later in the day, Mrs. G. excitedly announced that their classmate had brought them to share and noted the bookmark listed books related to their river theme. The student explained to the class how she acquired them and passed the bookmarks out to students.

While teaching a lesson or having a discussion, Mrs. G. recognized when a student's interest had veered in another direction. On certain instances, when a student asked Mrs. G. an unrelated question, she usually answered. As mentioned earlier, while observing, a student asked when they would be getting their buddies for families. She addressed the question by asking for a vote on how they would select buddies. During a reading group, a student asked

what new animals they had this year? Mrs. G. replied, "A gecko, iguana, and a tarantula" and then resumed her lesson.

After the first week of school, I noticed students new to the Armstrong area stopped asking Mrs. G. such questions as, "Can we sit anywhere, can we pick our group or partner, can I get a drink, or can I go to the bathroom?" After the first week of school, the new students began to realize they had to regulate themselves in many ways. In our interview, Mrs. G. referred to regulating themselves as internal management. Students began to utilize the right to pass or not participate. Mrs. G. expected students to regulate their time and actions, and be responsible through the process.

Self-determination was demonstrated by students through their experiences involved in their day. They shared ideas and concerns, solved problems together and individually, and regulated their time and actions. Georgia and the team of teachers worked to create a climate to provide students the opportunity to manage themselves. They called upon students to assist them in ensuring all members of their community felt cared for, safe and respected. As a result, students took the initiative to play an active role in what happened to them each day.

Barriers to self-determination for students, as mentioned by Alfie Kohn (1998), were primarily imposed by the district, state, and beyond. Due to the uniqueness of the demonstration school, teachers were constantly revising and updating their practices based on current research. During the time of this study, teachers realized the need for students to have some say about what happened to them each day. Therefore, teachers planned their agenda with the focus of students regulating their school experiences as much as possible. In order for structure and organization to exist with such a large group of students, naturally some barriers played out through their day and certain limitations were necessary.

Theme IV: Choice in Terms of Necessary Limitations

In order for the blue area to operate smoothly, Georgia provided for structure and organization. Within the structure and organization, she included choice yet limitations were necessary. Necessary limits were due to time, structure, procedures, curriculum mandates, school policy, teacher preferences, and student preferences.

Time

Time spent in the classroom was regulated by the agenda teachers planned. With sixty-six students, four teachers, and students rotating to different activities throughout their day, time was a factor. "The Flow of the Day", as teachers named their agenda, provided the structure and organization for the daily routine. Within each planned activity, certain activities required a time limit while others were less structured. On several occasions, Mrs. G. mentioned to students, they had a few more minutes on a project or an assignment. She wanted to alert them in order for them to have time to finish. When students were working on a poster during home base with their tribe, she explained to students that they must finish their poster that day. She reminded them that they had had two other class periods to work on their project and that it was time to wrap it up to work on a different project. On another occasion, during reading, she reminded students that she needed their four questions for discussion so she could take them home that night and look over them. One student spoke up and said, "I didn't do it." Mrs. G. replied, "Be sure and do it before the end of the day so I can take them home."

Running out of time caused activities or events to be delayed, postponed, or rushed. Students waited on getting a locker. When one student realized late in the day they had not been assigned yet, he asked when they would be getting their lockers? Mrs. G. said they

would not be able to do it that day because there was not enough time and they would get them the next day. When students met for home base, a student asked Mrs. G. if he could teach the group how to play the game “Sharks and Minnows.” Mrs. G. told him he could teach the students at the end of home base. Realizing time was running out near the end of home base, Mrs. G. remarked to the student that she did not think they would have enough time to play. She gave him the opportunity to explain to the students how the game was played yet, home base ended before they could play. During a chemical testing assessment, Mrs. G. realized students would not be able to finish testing all chemicals in the time she had planned. For lack of time, she gathered students around her and stated, “I’m going to do the last test. I’ll do a demonstration.” Students then documented the results.

Structure

Mrs. G. occasionally had to deal with disruption so that the situations would not become chaotic. She quickly brought organization to situations that were not running smoothly. On occasion, circumstances would occur when Mrs. G. needed to isolate a student from the group. When students were too fidgety, or talkative during an intra-personal activity, she might distance them from the group and speak quietly to them while others were working. Often times, students returned to the group on their own. During a home base meeting, Mrs. G. looked at two girls who were talking loudly while another student was talking and stated, “I feel yucky to have to ask you two not to talk. Will the two of you separate?” They moved away from one another. On another occasion, two girls during “meet and greet” were talking and Mrs. G. suggested, “Girls, that looks like fun but not a successful situation. Would the two

of you separate?" The girls assured Mrs. G. they would stop talking. Mrs. G. remarked, "I hope you two prove me wrong."

Mutual respect was an agreement, which was expected among peers and between students and Mrs. G. Respect was a high priority in the blue area. As mentioned earlier, when one student told two girls in her group to shut up, Mrs. G. heard the student. Looking upset, she replied, "Oh no, we never ever use that term." Another incident prompted Mrs. G.'s attention. As a student was offering a snack to the class, one student quickly grabbed a snack out of the bowl. Mrs. G. stopped him and said, "It's either, thank you or no thank you."

I observed Mrs. G., at times, recognize the potential for a situation to become chaotic and would step in to handle it. During a brief math lesson on mapping a river on a grid, one student who had been absent was not aware of what Mrs. G. was explaining. He became a bit anxious. Mrs. G. asked him to find another place if he was not going to be with them in the group. He moved away and sat quietly while she went over the lesson with the rest of the group. When students began to work on their grid, Mrs. G. sat with the student to update him on what they had been working on. Mrs. G. then asked the group to widen the circle in order to include him. The student became more engaged in the lesson.

While playing a card game, Mrs. G. asked a student to trade places with another to avoid a disruptive situation. Mrs. G. suggested two girls be partners during an activity to calm one of the girls who was having a difficult day. During a writing activity, a student wanted to sit at the top of the loft and Mrs. G. suggested he move to the art area. She felt he would be more successful there. On a few occasions, students would be sent back to the area from which they came, when they entered the blue area loudly. They could re-enter the blue area when they were able to come in more quietly. While observing, I only noticed, Mrs. G. limited their

bathroom visit once. They were going to practice an upcoming program in the gym and she wanted them to go to the restroom before they entered the gym. She wanted to avoid students leaving during practice.

Sometimes Mrs. G. decided how to handle situations to keep certain periods running smoothly. When students were to get their lockers, Mrs. G. explained that students going to junior high the next year would choose lockers first. During an algebra lesson, students were using manipulatives to aid in figuring out a concept. When a student asked Mrs. G. if she had to use the manipulatives, she replied, "Yes, I'd like you to because they didn't leave space on your paper to work out the problem. There are so many steps, it will help you keep track."

While students were working on a project during their lunch break, six students were working together in the art area. Mrs. G. came to the area to check on the students and noticed six students were working together. Mrs. G. stated, "There should only be five in your group. One needs to leave and you know who you are." One of the students replied, "We need [students name]. Mrs. G. left for a few minutes and returned. Looking at the student, she suggested, "You need to leave. It wouldn't be fair." She explained that she had planned for one member of each tribe to work in each of the groups. He agreed and left.

In order to provide structure in group discussions, she occasionally made requests. When sitting in their community circle, she suggested that if they wanted to talk, they must be holding Cromwell, her stuffed mouse. During a reading group, she was having difficulty getting students to take turns talking. Several students would talk at once. She asked their opinion about the story they had read and all students began to talk. She interrupted, "Wait! I want to hear everyone but not all at once." Students then raised their hand when they wanted to talk.

Procedures

I never observed a list of rules anywhere in the school. They established procedures for students to follow. I noticed written procedures posted in the cafeteria, gym, special classes areas, and in the Armstrong area. Mrs. G. or another teacher would discuss the procedures with the entire Armstrong group. On the first day of school, Mrs. G. took students to the cafeteria and read over the cafeteria procedures. After discussing the procedures and answering questions, students practiced the procedures.

After a few days of school, Mrs. G. went over the playground procedures with students. The list was as follows:

1. Check out equipment you want.
2. Follow playground safety rules.
3. Stay on the playground unless you have a pass.
4. Use equipment responsibly. Share and enjoy!
5. When whistle blows, stop and look for your color card.
6. Check equipment.
7. Line up behind your teacher. Stroll directly to your ocean area.

An incident a few days after going over the playground procedures prompted a discussion. A group of students had been playing football on the playground and a student was injured. When all students were back in their ocean area, Mrs. G. brought up the incident. She explained to students that she did not know how the football got into the equipment box. One of the teachers had taken it out last year due to a different injury. She said the football was not to be used on the playground because it could become a dangerous situation. She suggested to

the students that until they came up with some procedures for football that the teachers could agree with, the football would be off limits.

Some procedures were stated verbally to students and not written down. An example of a stated set of procedures was discussed the first day of school. Students were going on a field trip to the local river the second day of school. After their brain break (recess), students came to the ocean area to find the teachers had set up an arrangement similar to the inside of a school bus. They had students board their bus the same way they would need to board the next day. Students were assigned to different drop off points at the river and needed to board the bus in the order of their destination. They had also planned for snacks on the bus and reviewed some general procedures for eating and taking care of their trash responsibly. Examples of other typical procedures stated were strolling from area to area or use of the trampoline or jump rope.

Curriculum Mandates

Georgia explained to me that in the past, students were tested each quarter. The new superintendent was requiring teachers to test their students once a month. During one testing situation, teachers had to separate students by grade level for testing. Georgia was very relaxed about the test and suggested to the students to find a place they could be successful, take a deep breath, and not to worry. She explained to students that she would be reading word for word from her booklet and that her speech would not sound like her. Mrs. G. told them that they would take a break in the gym after each section to oxygenate their brains.

Before they began the test, a student walked up to Mrs. G. and asked if she could go to her locker. Mrs. G. said yes. The student opened her locker door and stood there for a moment. She returned to her seat with a stuffed animal. The animal was the Barney character from the

children's show on television. She held Barney close to her during each test. I observed other students when she brought her Barney to her table and no one noticed. Later, I asked Mrs. G. about the situation. Mrs. G. mentioned that she had to work with the students in the past on trying to accept and understand her point of view. She said it had been difficult for awhile but students were much more accepting. Mrs. G. was working with the student to try and wean her from Barney since she would be going to junior high the next year. She wasn't sure it would be as accepted by the older students. Mrs. G. said she rarely brought out Barney except during stressful situations, which cause insecurities in her.

The only other testing situation I observed was during science and students were being assessed on chemical testing. Before the test, Mrs. G. stated, "We always collaborate in science but we can't on this one." With a smile, she ended, "I know it's painful for many of you."

School Policy

Limits, I observed, concerning school policy were related to the dress code. School uniforms were suggested and created by parents from the inception of the school. Students were to sign a letter from the superintendent's office agreeing to follow the district dress code. On one occasion, I noticed Mrs. G. asked a student to tuck in his shirt. On the first day of school, the Armstrong area was discussing the field trip to the river the next day. A student asked if they could wear their regular clothes on the field trip. Mrs. G. said no because they would be representing the school while they were at the river.

Teacher Preference

Georgia set certain limits in the blue area. Although students were encouraged to discuss and work together on many of their assignments and projects, she required some intra-personal time. She asked that they work on their Problem of the Day in silence. When writing, she almost always asked students to work without talking. While writing in their journals, one student stopped to ask another how to spell a word. As the other student began to spell the word for her, Mrs. G. interrupted and replied, “We don’t talk during journal time.”

Occasionally, Mrs. G. asked students to sit in certain areas. When two girls sat in a recliner during reading, Mrs. G. reminded them, “Remember, I asked you to sit at the tables.” They moved to a table. While students were performing chemical tests for assessment purposes, two girls at a table noticed one girl alone at her table. They pointed out to Mrs. G. that she was alone and asked if she could sit at their table. Due to the testing situation, Mrs. G. declined.

On a few occasions, Mrs. G. asked students to keep their feet off the couch if they were wearing their shoes. She suggested they take their shoes off if they wanted to put their feet on the couch. During a math lesson, Mrs. G. noticed a student drawing on his math folder. She remarked, “We’ve asked you not to draw on folders.” She suggested that he get a piece of paper to draw.

Student Preferences

I noticed several situations when students moved away from other students due to noise or because they were being bothered. On one occasion, the class was working on the Problem of the Day. Two boys who were working separately to solve the problem were bothered by others talking. They both said, “Shhh” a few times each, to get those talking to quiet down.

Due to the numbers of students and the space available in the Armstrong area, in particular the blue area, several of the limitations were necessary. Limits were set to maintain structure and organization in the environment and Georgia relayed them respectfully to her students. In most cases, Georgia gave an explanation why certain limits existed and therefore were accepted by students. It was apparent; students believed even with certain limitations, they had some say about what happened at school each day. They knew they were valued and respected in their school community.

The data collected in the blue area was difficult to categorize into specific themes. Several incidences could have been categorized under more than one theme. The following vignettes related to the yearlong river theme, illustrate all themes discussed concerning the blue area.

Vignettes Illustrating All Themes

The following vignettes revolve around a yearlong study related to rivers. I observed only the beginning of the school year, yet captured several periods of activities related to the river theme. So much had been discovered concerning rivers in the short time I visited. I was only able to observe a small portion of the tremendous amount of time, work, and energy the teachers had prepared for their study. They had plans for the year, which might have enriched this section. The information may have given a more accurate account of what was involved in their river theme and the significance it played in the students school experience throughout the year, especially concerning choice. I offer the reader only a small portion of what they would accomplish for the year.

When Georgia and her team of teachers planned a yearlong theme, they worked together to decide on one they could relate in many ways to all areas of the curriculum. They also

planned a concept from the state curriculum guidelines to relate to the theme. They chose the theme rivers and related the concept "same and different" to their theme. The teachers prepared for their study by researching enough information about rivers to get students interested. They gathered information about the local river and rivers around the world. Information gathered related to many different rivers and was to be used in connection with the concept similar and different.

In order to provide for a school-wide connection, the Goodall area planned an in-depth study of the city in which they resided. They planned to make connections between the two studies, relating the city and its landscape to the river model the Armstrong students planned to build.

During my visits to the school, I observed students engaged in activities revolving around the river theme related to science, social studies, reading, math, and writing. Certain activities took place in the ocean area where they met as a whole group. Other activities took place in specified areas in smaller groups. I observed groups working in the blue area as well as the whole group in their ocean area. The study of rivers began the first day of school.

First Day of School

On the first day of school, students spent part of their morning in the ocean area, meeting new teachers and working on a "getting acquainted" activity. Mid-morning, they went outside for a brain break. As mentioned earlier, when students returned to their ocean area after their brain break, students found the teachers had recreated a seating arrangement similar to that of the inside of a school bus. They discussed the field trip procedures, practiced boarding the bus, and ate a snack.

While students enjoyed their snack, Mrs. G. brought out a potbelly toad to share with them. Students reacted differently to the toad. Some students were interested in touching or holding the toad and others stayed away as far as possible. Mrs. G. shared factual information about potbelly toads. Students finished their snacks, unloaded off the bus and gathered in their ocean area. Mrs. G. asked students to check their nametags for a certain sticker color. She explained to students that they would meet in groups according to their sticker color. The teachers had previously planned specific jobs for students to be responsible for at the river. All four areas within the Armstrong area were utilized for students to learn about their specific job. Mrs. G. described the job groups as the metric system, standard measurement, non-standard measurement, and compass reading. After students identified their sticker color, she pointed out which color would meet in each area to learn their jobs.

Students in measurement groups were to learn about their form of measurement and would plan to measure the width of the river from designated bridges. In the blue area, Mrs. G. explained to her group that they would be visiting the local river to gather information to build a replica of the same river in their classroom. She explained to the students that they would be using a compass and a camera to document different angles of the river from their vantagepoint. For instance, one student would find south on his/her compass and their partner would take a picture of the river where south is indicated on the compass. Another group was to stand on one of the bridges, extending over the river and a busy street. They were to observe human interventions. Mrs. G. wanted them to document things that were new to the environment. For example, they were to count the number of cars or joggers passing by during a certain amount of time.

Mrs. G. requested students divide into groups of three. She asked them to decide together what part each person would be responsible for doing and when. She suggested they might take turns doing each job if they preferred. Students worked together to plan how they would go about their job assignments at the river. After each group made their plan, they practiced using the compass to find each direction.

In the afternoon, Mrs. G. planned to work with her group on making a record book for their trip. Before beginning their prepared activity, Mrs. G. explained to students that she would be handing out plastic grocery sacks with handles for students to carry their water bottle and other items. A student spoke up and asked if he could use his backpack instead. Mrs. G. agreed to his request.

Mrs. G. began by demonstrating how to fold their papers into a book. As students followed each step, Mrs. G. suggested they help their neighbor. Students helped others needing assistance. After students finished folding their books together, Mrs. G. asked them to find a table while she gave each table crayons and colored pencils to use.

Mrs. G. demonstrated on the white board what they should write on each page in their book. They were to write on the cover the name of the bridge they would be working on at the river. On the second page, they were to title their sensory page to document what they saw, smelled, tasted, felt, and heard. On the third page they were to document the wild life they noticed. The fourth page was left blank for sketching the river. On the fifth page, they were to document their findings from the information they gathered from their job. The sixth page was left for a reflection. On the seventh page, they were to write, "questions I have..." and the last page, they were to write "what I saw from the bus".

Once students filled out their books in preparation for their field trip, they were to punch a hole in one end of the book and thread a piece of yarn through the hole to wear their book around their neck. One student discovered that if she punched the hole in her book on the bottom left corner, when she needed to document information in her book, she would simply hold her book in front of her to write. The book would hang around her neck upside down but when writing, it would be turned right side up. She shared her discovery with the class and several students followed her suggestion. Another student added three pieces of yarn to her book and braided her strands together. She demonstrated the braiding technique with a group who wanted to do the same. One student added an artistic flair to her writing by writing in block letters on every page. Several students commented on her creative work. Their group time ended and students moved on to find out where they were assigned for home base.

Choices within the daily routine were options available to students on their first day. Although students were assigned to a certain measurement group, when they had to form smaller groups, they were able to decide who they would work with in class and on the field trip. They had to decide how to go about practicing their measurement job and how each person would help. When making their river record books, students were to choose a place to sit. They were also given an option to use crayons or colored pencils when writing in their book.

In their small group, they decided together what each person was responsible for when measuring at the river. They worked together as a whole group community by assisting those needing help making their river record books and sharing their ideas and artistic talents with one another.

When making their river record books, students displayed self-determination in their work. The student who chose to braid her string shared her craft with others. The student who generated the idea to attach her book upside down around her neck offered the suggestion to others. One student preferred to spend extra time on her book writing in block letters.

Due to the energetic notion of preparing for a field trip on the first day of school for the following day with sixty-six students, teachers had to organize their plan in advance. They had to limit student's choice on their partners and groups in order to have time to prepare for their trip by assigning jobs and making booklets.

Down By the River

The school bus stopped at different bridges to unload Armstrong students, teachers, parents and the principal along the local river. I met students at the river and observed only Mrs. G.'s group at one of the bridges. After they unloaded the bus, Mrs. G. had student's gather around her to distribute grocery sacks and give instructions on how to begin their investigation of the river. Mrs. G. announced, "You as a group, decide where to start. Decide as a group where to start measuring the river width. Mathematicians always check their work." She then led them to the entrance ramp on the bridge. As they were walking, Mrs. G. reminded them to be aware of the wildlife around them to document in their book.

As mentioned earlier, I happened to be near the boy who appeared to have a fear of heights and observed the situation. After help from a parent and a student in his group, the boy appeared much more at ease. Once the students reached the bridge, Mrs. G. suggested the students measure the river to decide where to begin to measure. I focused mainly on the boy who was fearful of heights and the girl helping him. They decided where to start and began

measuring the bridge with a yardstick. At first, they marked the length of one yardstick with a rock and counted each yardstick measurement. One marked with the rock while the other handled the yardstick and they both counted. The student using the rock decided using her finger to mark the yardstick would be easier. They switched jobs occasionally. After measuring approximately half the river width, the boy began to measure by placing the yardstick down and lifting the stick end over end instead of marking with a finger. They both agreed his new method was much quicker. It also freed one of them to do something else. He suggested she measure while he sketched the river. They took turns measuring and sketching.

I noticed two other students documenting wildlife. They both were excited when they noticed a woman walking her two dogs across the bridge. They added dogs to their page. Another student noticed a few catfish in the river and called several others over to see. Another student pointed out a different kind of fish. They began to discuss what type of fish. The student having trouble with the height hesitantly peered over the bridge quickly to glance at the fish. He told others it was a drum. They recorded drum on their wildlife page.

After approximately an hour at the bridge, Mrs. G. announced it was time leave. They boarded the bus and headed downtown to visit a building. The teachers took students to the sixteenth floor and in a room surrounded by windows, they were able to view the river and its shape from above. Students were fascinated, pointing out and discussing what they saw from the windows. After leaving the building and boarding the bus, teachers realized they were ahead of schedule. As mentioned earlier, they conducted a vote to find out if students preferred to eat lunch at school or at the park near the river. They chose to eat at the river. Students arrived back at school after the school lunch period.

Although the field trip was far from what they experienced in their daily routine at school, they were expected, as they were at school, to manage themselves at the river. They were to take on the responsibility to decide how they were going to collect the information they needed. Students decided how to go about taking their measurements and organize their time to fill out the pages in their booklet.

A sense of community was evident when the one student who was nervous about the height of the bridge and another student took the initiative to help him through it. In many situations at the river, students decided together on how to begin collecting their information, what information they were going to collect, and ways they collected the information. Community was also evident when the whole group voted on where to eat lunch.

The student nervous about heights exhibited self-determination in a few situations. He worked through his fear with the assistance of his partner. He also chose to take a risk by peering over the side of the bridge to identify a fish for others. All students were given the opportunity to express themselves through their work in their booklet. They were able to interpret the river in their own way by sketching a picture. They were also given a page for reflection and for asking questions.

Necessary limits were stated before students ever left the school. The teachers went over the procedures for the bus and snacks the day before the trip.

Preparations for the River Model

Several activities were planned to prepare for building the river model. Although I was not present for all activities and discussions, I was able to observe a few periods leading up to the construction of the river model. Discussions began immediately following their field trip.

Mrs. G.'s group met in the blue area after their field trip. She mentioned to the students that they were going to begin discussing the Yangtze River in Asia. She compared the size of the local river they had just visited with the Yangtze River. She stated the Yangtze was approximately ten times wider than the local river. A student then asked, "When are we going to start building the river?" She explained to students, all that was involved in preparing for the day they would begin construction and tried to describe what the actual model may look like in order to give them a visual image. Students asked several questions about including plants and animals and how the water would pump through the river. The discussion ended when time ran out and students were to rotate to another activity.

The next day, after POD, students were to begin figuring out how to scale down their measurements of the local river in order to replicate it on a smaller scale for the classroom model. Mrs. G. explained they would replicate approximately six miles of the river's distance. She asked students, "How can we shrink that river down?" As a whole group they shared their ideas and solved their problem together as Mrs. G. helped guide the discussion. One student suggested they design the scale in miles. Mrs. G. asked, "Can we put miles on that table?" as she pointed to the table where they would be building the model. The students answered no. Another student spoke up, "We could measure the table." Mrs. G. agreed. Another student added, "We have to know what size we have to work with." Mrs. G. remarked, "Exactly!" Mrs. G. drew on the white board the distance they needed to calculate. Each group of students worked together on their section of the river they measured in order to calculate it in inches. Three forms of measurement were used at the river. Mrs. G. asked if the measurements would all work out the same. A student remarked, "It depends on how long your measuring unit is." "Brilliant!" remarked Mrs. G., "the river width stays the same." She wanted students to

understand that their numbers may be different when calculating, yet their answers would end up same. A teacher from another area interrupted to say that it was past time for their rotations. The students were very involved in their calculations and verbally shared their disappointment that their time had ended.

On another day, students were given a grid sheet to map out their calculations of the river. They were to denote directional signs, and decide how to map the river to scale from the calculations they had figured. Each group worked together, sharing their ideas and completing their drawing. One group decided to eat their lunches while working on their project.

After figuring the river to scale and mapping their drawing on a grid, in groups, students were to work on a presentation giving their interpretation of the river. I did not observe any of the group meetings when students planned their presentations. However, I was observing during the presentations. (See Appendix C for Examples of Grid Sheet)

Students gathered in the ocean area for presentations. Mrs. G. announced to the group, "I want you to be thinking about their presentations. Listen respectfully. Our goal for this is that [parent name] has generously donated all the wood and we have to have a plan about what we are doing. We have ten minutes."

The first presentation was the Yangtze group. They held up their grid sheet and explained. One student stated that the river should be eight inches wide. Another student added that it should be 2 1/2 inches deep and every 1/2 inch equals one foot. One teacher suggested that their drawing showed that a 1/2 mile equals one foot as well. Another student pointed out the street locations on their drawing. They shared their ideas on how the river should be built.

The second presentation was from the Amazon group. They had music playing in the background softly and read their information to the group. The third presentation was from the

Congo group. They held up a drawing, approximately 6 feet high and 9 feet wide and reported their calculations. The last presentation, the Thames group, presented their information on the overhead.

When presentations were finished, Mrs. G. asked, "How is it that everybody is about the same? A student answered, "Because we have to make the model on the table." They made predictions on how deep they thought the local river actually was. On the overhead, Mrs. G. calculated, with students, the actual depth of the local river. They voted that a 1/2 inch would not be exciting enough for the water depth on their river model. They waited until a later date to decide on the river water depth for their model. Discussion ended and students moved to their rotations.

Activities involved in the preparation for the river model were weaved into the daily routine schedule. Most choices for students during the activities were decisions they would make on any given day. In most situations, students were able to choose where to sit or where to work. They were given opportunities to pick their partner or choose their group. They were able to participate or not and always had the right to pass when they did not want to respond. They often shared their ideas with the class and gave their input when figuring the scale for the river model and deciding on how to map out the grid.

In small and whole groups, students solved problems as a community to figure out the scale and the grid sheet. In small groups, they decided together how to plan their presentation for constructing the river model. As a whole group, they had a vote on considering the water depth for their river. They also decided as a group from their presentations, how to go about figuring the measurements for their river model.

Students displayed self-determination when working on the grid sheet project during their lunch period. Signs of self-determination were also apparent during their presentation when they decided in what form they would express their work and what information they would share.

With each activity, the time frame set the limit. Even when they were very involved with calculations for their river scale, their time had ended and they had to move on to their next rotation. Mrs. G. had to set a time limit on their presentations in order for them to have enough time to get through each one.

Building the River

The day had finally arrived to begin construction of the river model and students were excited. Several fathers came with tools to volunteer. After "Rendezvous" students met in their ocean area to get started. Mrs. G. led a discussion on what they needed for their river. Student suggested plants. She asked questions referring to a project they worked on the past year concerning a marsh. Students suggested they needed water and sunlight for the marsh. Mrs. G. explained that they would be including an aquarium for their plants and would also need to attach a grow light. She mentioned that they would need to build a support for the grow light to fit over their marsh.

Mrs. G. described jobs that would be needed during the construction phase. One area would measure wood for cutting in order to build the river base and a support for the marsh. Another area would be working outside, with the fathers, cutting the wood that had been measured and bring the pieces indoors where needed. One area would be setting up a

workspace in the blue area and build the support for the marsh. Another area would construct the base for the river.

After Mrs. G.'s explanation, students decided where they wanted to help. Students went to work immediately. Every workstation was filled with students busy assisting the adults. A few students opted not to participate at the start of the project. I noticed four boys sat out of the way from others in a group and appeared to be just talking. One girl sat on a couch in the blue area waiting for her father. One boy laid down on the bottom bunk of the bed. Several students worked with Mrs. G. on the support. She demonstrated with the pre-cut boards how the structure would fit together. One student suggested she would get a drill and Mrs. G. add, "and an extension cord." When she returned with the drill, another student joined her and they worked together to figure out what drill bit they would need. Mrs. G. explained the difference between a flat head and Phillips screwdriver. Students were assisting, getting needed tools and holding the wood while Mrs. G. was drilling them together. Students worked in other designated areas. I mainly focused on Mrs. G. 's group in the blue area. Occasionally, I walked through other areas and noticed students busy assisting where needed.

Midway through the project, one student passed out a snack. Several students sat on the furniture in the blue area with the girl waiting for her father. At various times throughout the project, I noticed students sitting together visiting when they were uninvolved in the building. Only the student in bed and the girl waiting for her father were never involved. Her father never came.

Toward the end of the support construction, a student noticed a 2 x 4 piece of wood resting on two tables. The wood was positioned similar to a limbo stick with a space between the two tables. She pretended she was holding a microphone and started interviewing two of

the parents on how to play limbo. The parents began laughing. Another student nearby, who was listening, began to play limbo with the piece of wood. Other students joined him. Mrs. G. was enjoying watching the students when a student asked her to try. She attempted to play. The parents joined her in their attempts. After a few tries, Mrs. G. resumed her construction work, inviting students to help. When the construction was complete, students helped Mrs. G. clean up. With a few minutes before lunch, she took her group to the other areas to check out their work and discussed how the entire project would be assembled.

Students engaged in additional activities related to the river theme. As mentioned earlier, students listened to a Garth Brooke's song, *The River*, and wrote their responses to the song. They also listened to a read aloud at the end of each day related to the river theme. They also visited a nearby stream to collect plants for their marsh. At the end of my observation period, they were beginning to prepare for soil testing experiments to study different types of soil. They planned to create the same soil in their classroom model as found at the local river.

In relation to students and the river building project, students were faced with several choices they normally experienced in their daily routine. Students chose where to work and whether to participate or not. They regulated their time moving from one area to another to offer assistance or to simply take a break. Students took the initiative to help by getting necessary tools, lending a hand while assembling the support structure, and offering solutions when minor problems surfaced during the support construction.

Students, teachers, and parents worked together as a community to get the job done. I observed several incidences when students offered their help to each other or to an adult. They ran errands, supported wood pieces while a parent or teacher screwed them together, and cleaned up as they worked.

Self-determination was evident, in that, students had the opportunity to move about freely while parents and teachers remained in the work areas. Students decided on their own, how they wanted to help and where they wanted to work. Some students worked during the entire project, some took breaks occasionally to relax, and two students declined to participate. The one student initiating the limbo game created a diversion from their project and added laughter to the situation.

Necessary limits were set by the teachers with "unspoken" expectations. Due to the enormity of the project and that teachers and parents would be busy in their areas, students were trusted to manage themselves. Students proved to take seriously the responsibility to regulate themselves.

A BLENDING OF THE TWO PORTRAITS

What is art? Marilyn Stokstad (1999), from the University of Kansas, suggests art should be described as having two components, form and content. Form refers to the visual aspect of art wherein, content is less specific with respect to subject matter and ideas.

Form, when referring to room 11 and the blue area, can be described as two teachers committed to their students and their profession. One portrayed as a facilitator and the other as a co-learner. Spatially, their environments were different yet, their composition similar. Mary worked within a self-contained, multi-age classroom. Georgia's area was a multi-age, open design setting. Both were seeking to accomplish what was best for children. Georgia teamed with other teachers to plan a curriculum working within a framework of an integrated yearlong theme. Mary planned the curriculum herself, utilizing centers and thematic units.

The two portraits were textured, highlighting choice through daily routine, community, self-determination, and revealing necessary limits. The themes were the same across the two settings, giving shape to the shapeless. Themes were formulated as a simplification of the phenomenon of choice in a classroom and were considered essential in revealing the essence of choice. The foundation for themes was the groundwork and provided meaning and purpose for choice. The theme, daily routine, revealed students had some sense of control over their own lives at school. Community, as a theme, was essential in an effort to bring students together to decide what kind of place they most wanted school to be. Self-determination surfaced as an essential theme with students feeling that their thoughts, ideas, and opinions were respected and accepted by their community. Limits were essential to give structure and organization to the community they shared. The students were painted amid a landscape colored by interactions, involving choices of either personal preferences or centered on community.

Content, regarding subject matter and ideas, is subjective, in nature. I merely represented through anecdotes and vignettes, what surfaced during my visits and discovered choice as it played out in the classroom. Style was represented through choices of a procedural, spontaneous, community, and academic nature. Many procedural choices were established at the beginning of the school year in order for them to become part of the classroom routine. Spontaneous choices originated from the students and teachers as they interacted in their environment. Students participated in situations of choice, deciding together as a community. Opportunities for choice concerning academic matters were present in most activities and projects. Each vignette portrayed how choice unfolded. The vignettes were purposively selected to illustrate how all themes were present in choice situations. As illustrated, each

theme is interrelated, creating the lived experience of choice in the classroom and its' significance in students moving toward self-regulating their thoughts and actions.

In summary, each portrait calls attention to students from all elementary levels, with two teachers in two different settings. Choice and its presence blended the portraits together. The content of choice in the classroom was "the intent of the artist [yet, interpretation lies with] the reception of the beholder" (Stokstad, 1999).

CHAPTER FIVE

REFLECTIONS

Man ultimately decides for himself! And in the end, education must be education toward the ability to decide. Viktor Frankl

Introduction

The artist studied the masters and experimented with color, space, tools, and technique to illustrate the essence of choice through lived experience. The subjects and landscapes provided rich visual images. In the end, the artist recognizes imperfection in the work. Imperfection is not due to the subjects, for they are what brought depth and meaning to the portraits and inspired the artist. The imperfection lies within the artist's secret desire and passion to fully paint the experiences and beauty of its subjects. Painting the mental images was not fully possible with words.

This chapter presents a reflection on the essence of choice in two multiage classrooms. The essence was captured from students at all elementary age levels and their teachers, in different settings. The data revealed similarities and differences between the two portraits; yet they were not painted for comparative purposes. The purpose was to reveal and interpret choice in two settings. The themes were choice in terms of daily routine, community, self-determination, and necessary limits. Surprisingly, the themes across the two settings were similar, only the situations were unique. The themes that emerged from the data are my interpretation of the two lifeworlds studied. I proposed to capture the essence of choice in the

form van Manen (1984) suggests. He stated, "The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language when the description reawakens or shows us the lived meaning or significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner" (p. 38). The context of this study may or may not apply to other situations. Therefore, this study may not be generalizable in other contexts. However, I can draw inferences from the context in which I studied. My purpose to study choice was an attempt to deepen my understanding of its essence. The following chapter is an interpretation of my understanding, within the context I observed. It is my hope; the reader will experience a deeper sense of the essence of choice...as I have.

In order to summarize information obtained from my research, this chapter is organized with a discussion of themes present in each classroom. I will then blend the choices from each classroom together to respond to questions addressed at the beginning of the study. I will bring closure to the research by discussing implications, recommendations, and concluding thoughts.

Discussion of Themes Representing the Essence of Choice

By studying two different settings, I found that choice could be imbedded in the context of a school-wide community or in a self-contained classroom community. In both settings, choice surfaced as procedural or spontaneous, as community or individually, and related to the social and moral life or academic in nature. Statements, anecdotes, and vignettes were categorized and fell under four main themes of choice which were daily routine, community, self-determination, and necessary limits. It was not until after an analysis of the data collected that I realized each teacher and her students had established a foundation for choice. I recall watching in awe, the students and teacher work through a process of making a community

decision. During reflective moments, I kept returning to the question "what is influencing each of these situations that makes them exist"? Individual decisions were influenced in much the same way. After sorting through the data, a category surfaced that did not quite fit as a theme yet, without this "influence", many of the situations may not have occurred. Thus, all those highlighted phrases formed their own category and I refer to them as the foundation. The foundation played a significant role in the themes that emerged.

Foundation for Themes

When children enter a classroom setting on the first day of school, they often do not know what to expect. With their bag of supplies in hand, they sense they will be busy working with their new pencils, crayons and scissors. They will come in with questions about what will my teacher be like, will she be nice, will she like me, will the others like me, what will I learn and will it be fun? At the beginning, their expectations of life in the classroom is unsure until the life takes shape through their interactions with their teacher and other members of the classroom. It takes time to evolve into what it will become. What it will become begins with the foundation, which creates the setting and in the case of this study, followed by themes of choice.

I was able to watch the foundation unfold from the beginning in two classrooms. The children in the classrooms I studied were no different than most. They were excited, curious, and nervous about their future experiences beginning the first day of school. What made the two classrooms unique were the multiage influences. For example, returning students were not nervous and were aware of the nature of their upcoming school experience. In a sense, they

too, were the teachers and led the new students in figuring out what role they played in their new classroom.

The foundation consisted of several components often working together simultaneously. At the beginning, in either the school community or the classroom community, the teachers worked to develop student's trust and respect. The foundation evolved as students recognized that their ideas were respected and that they were valued members of their community. Returning students aided and modeled in the process. The foundation developed over time as students grew in comfort with one another, including the teacher, as a member of their community. The teacher relinquished control when questions from students were redirected back to the students in an effort for them to take the initiative to regulate themselves or to rely on others in the classroom rather than the teacher.

The situations of choice, especially spontaneous choices in the daily routine, community, and self-determination would not have happened with such impact without the foundation. From my observations, the foundation was based on trust, respect, and centered on students becoming self-regulated learners. The foundation set the stage for possibilities. I am suggesting that the foundation created situations for meaningful choice to be possible. Perhaps the foundation is what DeVries, Zan, Hildebrandt, Edmiaston, & Sales (2002) refer to as sociomoral atmosphere. They describe sociomoral atmosphere as "the entire network of interpersonal relations in the classroom" wherein, mutual respect is continually practiced in cooperation with others (p. 36). Are they the same or would the foundation need to be in place in order for a sociomoral atmosphere to develop? Could they be united in such a way that a teacher builds a foundation with her students in the beginning, in an effort to create a sociomoral atmosphere? Does the sociomoral atmosphere exist when students arrive on their

first day of school or is it developed over time? In this study, the foundation for themes is what was necessary for meaningful choice to exist. The foundation possesses the components of a sociomoral atmosphere and therefore could be considered one and the same. The foundation encompasses all themes. The themes are categories of choice. Within each theme, choice is present. The presence of choice did not reside in the foundation but foundation was considered a necessary component for choice to exist in a meaningful, purposeful, authentic, moral, and intellectually valuable context. Therefore, foundation is the groundwork for all themes.

In illustrating the importance of the foundation for choice, the reader may recall in Portrait of Room 11, a situation, which occurred within the first few weeks of school. Claire, who was new to the classroom, the school, and the city, mentioned to her teacher that she was thinking about the "lining up" procedure and made a suggestion for change. The teacher redirected her suggestion to the class and the class at first said no, then proceeded with additional suggestions. After a lengthy process, they voted and decided to keep the procedure the same. At the conclusion of solving the problem Claire had proposed, the teacher followed with saying that it was always good to think up new ideas.

The foundation for choice played an important role in providing Claire the confidence to bring to light her idea to change a procedure in the classroom. Without the respect from the teacher and students, she may never have taken the initiative to exercise her option and opinion. She knew her idea was taken seriously and even though her suggestion did not change the line up procedure, the process was dealt with democratically and with grace. The experience provided a valuable lesson in preparation for adult life as a contributing member of society. She accepted the vote and appeared fine with the outcome. Claire's initiative

illustrates; not whether her suggestion is a good one or a bad one, but that the foundation is crucial in letting an experience of choice play out. Students in the class were gaining confidence and felt a sense of citizenship as valued members of their democratic community.

The foundation is necessary if considering autonomy as the aim of education. By considering relevant factors between truth and untruth or considering all points of view between right and wrong, the student must feel trusted and respected in cooperation with his or her teacher and other members of the community. Without the foundation of trust to make a decision and the respect for the decision, the student may make a decision based on expectations of others. Making a decision based on expectations of others may lead to a heteronomous decision. Choice is a necessity in order to make a decision autonomously. Therefore, a foundation based on trust and respect must be present in order for meaningful choice to exist when promoting autonomy.

Choice in Terms of Daily Routine

Mary's room was self-contained and provided a simple routine for her eighteen students. Georgia's area was open design and provided a routine for sixty-four students. The daily routine, like most classrooms, offered students a curriculum with traditional subject areas such as reading, writing, math, science and social studies. A traditional classroom may offer some choices such as a lunch choice, when to go to the restroom, or choosing among a variety of activities during free time. What sets apart the classrooms I observed from the traditional classroom was the strong presence of choice for students in the daily routine. Choice was embedded in the organization and structure of the classroom and within the curriculum areas. In addition, Georgia's students engaged in many choices, which were offered school-wide.

Most of Georgia's students had been attending the school since the four-year-old program, which meant they were growing up with choice.

The classrooms I observed were student-centered. Students had some say about what they did all day. Choice provided students with multiple opportunities. They became responsible for their thoughts and actions. They had the confidence to take the initiative to regulate themselves intellectually through their academic work and morally through their interactions with others. This was due to the foundation that had been built on trust and respect from the teacher and other members of the community. The foundation was the support for students in their endeavors. Providing choice for student's meant the teacher did not have to "manage" what students were capable of taking care of themselves. Interestingly, there were no classroom rules. There were "ways of being together" established with students' input involving friendship or agreements and procedures. With choice, there was not a need for rewards or punishment. I saw no evidence of star charts, stickers to be handed out or incentive programs. They operated solely on their own motivation to investigate, solve, figure out and explore. Disruptions were minimized because of the many options available to students. From my observations, it appeared students preferred to take the responsibility as opposed to the teacher directing them. Students accepted the responsibility and did not find a need to be disruptive in regards to something they already had some control over. Students were energized and motivated by carrying their ideas to completion. They had opportunities to practice choosing in a safe environment to see the outcome of their decisions. Choice led student's to become aware of what it meant to make a decision and consider the effects on their own personal understanding and the effects on others and their point of view. The outcome of

a decision helped to guide their future choices involving academic strategies and moral obligations.

Mary and Georgia demonstrated their trust by providing opportunities for choices and respecting their students' decisions in the daily routine. Students took their responsibilities seriously and regulated their thoughts and actions. When they needed to go to the restroom, they did. When they were supposed to form a group, they did. When they were to solve a problem together, they did. When they needed to complete an assignment, whether at a table, on the floor, in a rocker, on a bunk bed, or in a bathtub, they did. Simply stated, students demonstrated the capacity to share the process of managing the daily routine. They did so with initiative, care, and responsibility. Students regulated themselves and freed the teacher to become a part of the community they had created together rather than managing student's thoughts and actions.

Choice in Terms of Community

What does choice have to do with community? Choice was at the very core, defining what it meant to be a community. As a community, students considered others' points of view, debated, negotiated, and many times voted to reach a decision. The members had some say in what happened to them each day as a group. For the students and their teachers, participating in the process of community possessed many of the same tenants of democracy.

For Mary and her students, friendship became the essence of their classroom community. Beginning the first day of school, students pulled together to help one another, listened to one another's ideas and suggestions, and proposed changes in how things were done. As a result, they grew to care for one another, respect one another and their points of view, and

believed their own opinions were valued in making decisions concerning their classroom. They grew confident and stood up for what they believed in unless someone else presented a more appropriate point of view. As a community, they practiced and proved they could solve problems democratically. Over time, their community strengthened.

Community for Georgia's students was felt the moment they entered the school building. They were members of a school community and several sub-communities. Most students had attended the school since the four-year-old program and knew most everyone at the school. They were comfortable with the principal, other staff members, and students at other levels. The school promoted several school-wide community activities. Students took part in the organization and the flow of their interactions with one another. They sensed it was their school and their responsibility contributed to its' success. They shaped what kind of place they wanted school to be by suggesting school should feel safe, challenging, respectful, and trusting and worked to establish such a community.

As students genuinely believed they were trusted and respected by all in their community, they began to manage themselves in their smaller groups. They resolved their conflicts autonomously utilizing strategies employed during the whole group decision-making process. As the community strengthened, students relied on each other and less on the teacher. At times, I observed both teachers step back and marvel with a smile on their faces at what their students were capable of doing. They were genuinely excited and committed to letting students figure things out. They laughed with their students and appeared to enjoy and be interested in their work.

I never observed a competitive moment in either classroom. Students genuinely worked cooperatively to accomplish a task, make decisions, help one another, console one

another, and were respectful toward others when sharing their ideas and thoughts. In both classrooms, it appeared students had an attitude of "we're all in this together" and embraced the experience of cooperating democratically.

Choice in Terms of Self-determination

The foundation established in both classrooms invited students to participate as contributing members of their community. The invitation to share played out in the classrooms with students originating ideas and taking part in seeing them through. Self-determination, as Alfie Kohn (1996) refers to, permeated every aspect of the student's day in some way. Students expressed themselves physically, verbally, through their work and assessment. It meant students could be creative and inventive and they could inquire and discover. They shared and made suggestions. Their ideas were discussed and opinions were given. Teacher planned activities, at times, gave way to student initiated ideas leading the class in a new direction for an hour, a day, or a week. Activities were not teacher directed; rather they were designed as a way for students to approach their work using strategies that worked best for them. They had access to most everything in their classroom and were often provided the time needed to complete their work. As a result, choice generated student's self-expression, risk taking, and the means to go about their business responsibly doing what needed to be done. Essentially, the teacher's believed in their students, and through choice, students began to believe in themselves. Self-determination appeared to be a natural outgrowth from situations involving choice.

Choice in Terms of Necessary Limits

Without any limits in a classroom with large groups of students, it might be considered complete freedom. Absolute freedom for students would not seem appropriate nor would it be practical. Teachers have to limit time in order to maintain some structure and organization in the flow of the day and for a school-wide schedule. Teacher limits were justified for reasons of safety, hygiene, to be considerate of others, and to optimize students learning experiences. Students set limits out of necessity due to noise levels, fairness, and to define a procedure.

A limit I observed could be viewed as an “unnecessary” limit depending on which side of the debate one is on concerning testing. Mandatory testing was imposed at the local and state level. I observed a testing situation in each classroom. Usually, students were comfortable working together with the teacher as one of the members. During the testing situations, one teacher had to talk with two students about helping each other. She tried to explain that it was one of those times they needed to do their own work; that it was thoughtful but not an appropriate time. Another student may have been seeking comfort by walking to her locker to get “Barney”, her stuffed animal and holding him closely during the test. Some students appeared stiff and stressed. The teacher was reading from her manual as if she had no relationship with her students. She apologized for it. It was the only moment I observed that seemed unnatural. It was disheartening to watch their community dissolve momentarily during the testing situation.

Another limit, which could be considered “unnecessary”, was due to the curriculum mandates. Accountability can be stifling for teachers and their students concerning the curriculum. Teachers are leery of whether what needs to be covered will be covered because of the accountability issue. As I observed, students can naturally progress in a developmentally appropriate curriculum designed at their level when they are initiating the

possibilities. Georgia's school was considered a demonstration site for other teachers from around the state to observe a model, designed for school improvement. A few of the practices appeared to take the "flow" out of what was already naturally developing in Georgia's classroom area with her students. This seems to be a problem with many practices designed to create a contrived situation such as a step by step approach to developing community. Teachers and practicing teachers need to be encouraged to rethink and modify information in order to weave the usable elements of programs and practices into what already exists in their classroom.

While choice was prominent in both settings, limits were considered necessary and provided for student's safety, organization, structure, and in consideration for others. Absolute freedom was not possible, nor educational when working together as a classroom community.

And so, what is the essence of choice in the classroom? In the context of this study, in order for choice to be present, a classroom establishes a foundation for choice. The foundation provides students with the confidence to make decisions, trusting they are genuine choices and that their decisions will be respected and accepted. Choice played out in many aspects of the daily routine and as a classroom community. Choices provided the opportunity for students to make decisions regarding their academic work, routine decisions, and solving problems individually and cooperatively in a group setting. Choices contributed to student's sense of self-determination and providing opportunities to express themselves. They actively engaged in choice situations giving them the initiative to take responsibility and regulate themselves in their classroom environment. Certain limitations were necessary both individually and collectively, to maintain some structure in their classroom community. The anecdotes and

vignettes portrayed situations related to procedural choices, spontaneous choices, community choices, and choices concerning academic matters.

Choice has three aspects concerning the context of this study. To begin, choice is open and full of possibilities. Choice is decisive and eliminates the possibilities. The third aspect involves choice, which is narrowing the possibilities and is a process of disequilibrium. The disequilibrium process occurs between the possibilities and the elimination of possibilities through deliberation and consideration. One is involved in choosing or deciding. The process can also be viewed as choice making or decision-making. Choice presents itself as possibilities, a process of disequilibrium involving deliberation or consideration, and ending in the elimination of possibilities. Student autonomy was reflected in the ability to make decisions or choices morally and intellectually with opportunities of choice in the school setting. Choice was not incidental. Choice was present with purpose. Choice and its essence are complex and through this study have only been slightly uncovered. The essence of choice in a classroom obtained from the context I studied could be described as:

A teacher and students working together to establish a foundation based on trust, respect, and cooperation, creating situations of procedural or spontaneous choice events either individually, or collectively, regarding the social and moral life of the classroom or academic matters, which results in students progressing toward self-regulated thoughts and actions, both morally and intellectually.

The themes were developed to “give shape to the shapeless” (van Manen, 1990 p. 88). Although the data were organized into themes, the themes are interrelated. It was difficult during analysis to separate themes when they often relied upon each other. In other words, all themes were present, in some way, in many of the vignettes and anecdotes.

Response to Some Tough Questions

The following section addresses questions taken from Alfie Kohn's book, What to Look for in a Classroom...and Other Essays. In chapter one, I referred to four questions pertaining to Kohn's (1998) call to examine the notions concerning choice in the classroom. The following response is my attempt to answer the questions based on my own lived experience of my exploration to seek the essence of choice. After observing two classrooms and their environments valuing student choice and decision-making, a response seems imperative in an effort to continue the dialogue of such research.

Alfie Kohn (1998) urges educators to consider "Why it is so important that children have a chance to make decisions about their learning" (p. 250)? The rationale for why students should be given opportunities in learning situations, were abundant considering the context of this study. Intellectually, students felt a sense of empowerment as they took control over their own learning situations and regulated the path of direction their inquiries led them. A need or desire to know guided their quest. They were inquisitive and experimented with their own ideas. They were interested and genuinely engaged in their work. They continued to develop their passion for certain interests and grew as they discovered ideas of new interests. The feelings of a safe environment stimulated taking risks, providing students the confidence and initiative as they experimented with ideas to invent new ways of knowing. Their decision-making experiences inspired them and provided them with a sense of self-esteem in their accomplishments. Intellectually, through choice and decision-making students were moving toward self-regulating their thoughts and actions.

Morally, the notion of community enhanced student's decisions concerning their learning. As they became actively involved in their community, opportunities for peer interactions and

developing their values were created through situations related to choice. Students gained a sense of confidence in themselves when they shared their ideas, thoughts and opinions, and believed their opinions were genuinely accepted and respected. Interacting in problem-solving situations with others led to new strategies and can be considered the building blocks to solve more complex problems in the future. As students developed additional problem-solving strategies, they were able to use them in subsequent situations. In other words, addressing a problem with a peer and working through the problem peacefully provides them with an alternative rather than "taking action" as students occasionally do. Establishing an environment which promotes values of respect, fairness, cooperation, care, concern, trust, and responsibility offers students opportunities to experience those values in their lived community life, and the ability to relate them to their own experiences. Often, decisions were made consistent with the values promoted in their classroom. Morally, through choice and decision-making, students were moving toward self-regulating their thoughts and actions.

The benefits were numerous. I observed the benefits of choice in learning moments such as when students gained in their own personal understanding while listening to another think aloud and explain how they solved a particular problem. Opportunities for sharing work, thoughts and inventions gave students the contingency to play with others ideas. New students gradually came to understand their role of responsibility in the classroom. They began trusting their ideas and recognized their input mattered to the class. Decisions they made eventually nudged them toward self-regulation. They began to take more risks. The multiage influence greatly enhanced choice. In a sense, the older students paved the way of possibilities for the younger students. They observed their elders involved in creating multiple alternatives

from situations. Thus, the younger students, in time, began to take the initiative to bring their own ideas to light.

Additional benefits include, students choosing with whom and where to work, and appearing genuinely engaged in their work with a sense of purpose. Choice of materials enhanced their work on projects. Deciding on their own when to "take care of their needs" never disrupted the flow of the day for others. I never observed a situation where students abused the option; they took care of their needs matter-of-factly.

As Kohn asks, why is it important for students to make decisions about their learning? Once a routine was established in each setting, opportunities of choice in learning situations led students to be responsible for taking care of their business, organizing their time individually and with others, respecting others' ideas and having the feeling that their own ideas were accepted. Students took the responsibility seriously to make decisions about what happened to them each day. As a result, their sense of empowerment was evidenced in their work, their motivation, and their respect for others in their community.

Discovering why it is so important for students to have a chance to make decisions about their learning leads to the question, but how? Kohn (1998), advises educators to consider, "How might this opportunity [to make decisions] be provided with regard to academic matters as well as other aspects of school life" (p. 250)? Choices can be imbedded in student's daily life at school, both academically and through other aspects of school life. As mentioned earlier, choice can be provided through the daily routine with regards to procedural choices such as where to sit and whom to work with. They can decide or help to decide what to study and how to study the information. Spontaneous choice situations can be carried out by students taking the initiative to explore, experiment or discover something of interest on their

own. Students then can determine how to present the information they learned with others as well as assess what they learned through self- evaluation. The possibilities are endless.

Choice concerning other "aspects of school life" aside from academics can be established through building a classroom community. Students can participate in a classroom democracy by posing problems and suggesting resolutions. They can work together to determine what kind of place they want their school or classroom to be and share in the process of debate, exchanging points of view, negotiation, voting, and consensus. They can share in the process of how the classroom is run.

Additionally, one can combine academics and "the other aspects of school life" for students to live in the context of a "real life" situation. Life is integrated. Life inside the classroom can reflect life outside. Academics should be presented as part of the learning community, where students are working toward the same common goal. A common goal as a community is to share discoveries, play with others ideas, and invent new ways of knowing by sharing strategies and perspectives, in an effort to seek meaning and interpret the complexities of the world around them in search of understanding.

There is much discussion concerning developmentally appropriate practices and in my opinion, one suggestion should be added. Let the students decide. What could be more developmentally appropriate than that? Give students an opportunity to share a good book with others. Let them peak other student's interest to read a book. Let a group of students organize and perform a play and then discuss their successes and failures of their experiences with the class. Give students opportunities to experiment with "authentic" tools to arrive at their answers and debate their findings with their community members. Let students write on topics of their choice and receive input from their peers when revising their work. There are

endless opportunities for letting students decide. With active engagement in their work, stimulated from their interest, need or desire to know, they learn to work as a group, helping, sharing, accepting, and respecting others in their community. They take responsibility for their learning and in this effort they may carry with them the tools to self regulate their learning in life beyond the classroom.

The third question Kohn (1998) suggested examining was "What limits on students' rights to choose are necessary, and what restrictions compromise the idea too deeply" (p. 250)? In my study, most limits I observed in both classrooms were necessary. To prevent disruptions or chaos, students were isolated momentarily, asked to separate, or asked to find a place to be successful. Limits due to time involved running out of time or not enough time. It is worth mentioning that pseudochoices as Kohn refers to were not present in either classroom with the exception of one occasion. When students were running late for lunch, the teacher tried to get them to quiet down before leaving the classroom. She suggested that if they did not get quiet quickly that they might miss their lunch period. Students quieted down and left the classroom for lunch. In order to provide structure and organization, limits were established. The teachers addressed students in a considerate way during situations involving disruptions or displaying a lack of respect. One class assigned seating during instructional periods to allow for multiage interactions. Students were limited on their book selection in order to find books at their instructional level. Procedures were created to guide students as to what was expected in the lunchroom and playground. Students were to wash hands before lunch. They were given an explanation when materials were not treated properly. Teachers had their personal preferences when setting some limits. Occasionally, intra-personal activities required silence. One teacher wanted students' shoes off while on the couch and the other teacher preferred students to keep

their shoes on. Students had personal preferences as well. They requested quiet voices during activities requiring individual thought. In one class, students requested a limit on the computers due to one student continuously choosing the computer center. They wanted to establish a limit based on fairness involving the computers as a center choice.

Curriculum mandates limited certain aspects of the curriculum. Mandatory testing and assessment were imposed. School policy related to limits such as school uniforms and hallway procedures. As a result, the "unnecessary" limits were few. As mentioned under the discussion of necessary limits, mandates related to curriculum and testing were stifling to teachers and students due to the accountability issue. Both teachers mentioned in their interview the need for covering the state objectives. Georgia appeared more tied to making sure she covered all state objectives and passing the state test. She spent an immense amount of time planning her curriculum in order to cover the objectives and to plan a student-centered curriculum offering several choices for her students. Mary mentioned the state objectives in our interview but did not emphasize she was worried about implementing them. During my observations, she tended to veer from the routine based on objectives when a student initiated idea transpired.

In Kohn's (1998) last question to consider concerning choice, he stated, "What barriers might account for the fact that students so rarely feel a sense of self-determination today (p. 250)? Individual choice was not always possible. In order to work together as a community, students had to consider other points of view, debate, and negotiate and decide certain situations as a community. Other barriers, as mentioned earlier, related to the school and district policy, and beyond.

I captured several moments illustrating a sense of self-determination in students. I observed students interrupting the routine to read an excerpt of their journal to the class. One student called attention to the others in class to join him in observing a turtle climbing out of its tank. They suddenly requested a change in procedures and it was discussed at that moment. They originated an idea and carried it through. Students took the time to finish projects during a different activity. They passed or declined to participate in certain activities. One student jumped on the mini-trampoline to deal with his energy rather than resort to medication. Students left their area, alone or with a friend, to find a book in the library and were not required to inform the teacher. For portfolio assessment, they chose their work. They shared their private or painful stories in order for their voices to be heard. Students stood up for themselves. They took responsibility for their work. They consistently helped others. Above all, as the procedural choices became routine, self-regulation was underway.

In my personal lived experience as the researcher, I observed two different classrooms which added to my perception and understanding of the essence of choice. Whether cognizant of Kohn's recommendations on choice or not, these teachers were aware of the benefits in students exercising their opportunities for choice in order to regulate themselves.

Implications

The purpose of this research was not to observe whether choice works or not, rather I went in search of what choice is-its essence. I sought classrooms with a strong presence of choice in hopes to observe what types of choices exist. What I found was not only what types of choice exist but what it means for students in a school setting, what they do with their opportunities of choice, and what effects, positive or adverse, choice may have in an

educational setting. Would students having choices benefit from them personally or within their classroom community? I found, indeed, overwhelmingly, that there are benefits of choice for students. I observed evidence that choice promotes democratic principles, initiative, confidence, respect for others, motivation, interest, resourcefulness, and self-regulation. It appears opportunities for choice foster a progression toward more autonomous thoughts and actions. The teachers in the classrooms I observed worked toward discouraging student heteronomy.

One implication from this study is that it seems imperative for the teacher and students to establish a foundation together. The foundation should be based on mutual trust and respect. Students must feel their opinions, thoughts, and suggestions are valued among their peers and the teacher. Students must gain the confidence to become active participants in the community, relying less on the teacher and more on one another. The foundation helps to establish that options available to students are genuine and the decisions they make are respected. The foundation also includes what van Manen (1991) refers to as teaching as a "tactful understanding of when to hold back" (p. 151). He suggests a teacher needs to be patient, enabling a child the time to grow and learn something. From the child's point of view, adults are always in a hurry. Too often, the teacher is tempted to help a child when the child needs the time or wants the time to do things on his or her own. Rather than a teacher viewing the child as dawdling or wasting time, the teacher is attentive to the need for the child to take the time to figure something out on his or her own leading to the child's personal development (van Manen, 1991). In both classrooms, the teachers were aware of students' need for time to explore, invent, pose, and solve problems. Rather than always helping, in an effort to hurry the learning process, teachers encouraged their students to rely on themselves and other students to

discover for themselves. This study suggests the foundation is crucial for choice in the constructive process.

Another implication from this study indicates that the influence of multiage classrooms lead to increased opportunities for choices initiated by returning students. Second year students can assist the teacher with the first year students in encouraging their self-regulation. As the younger students observed the older students, they were exposed to multiple ways of handling the responsibilities in the classroom. They observed how the older students took the initiative to take risks and make decisions on their own. They observed how older students created spontaneous choice situations such as playing limbo during the making of the river model or deciding there was a need to limit the amount of visits each week in a certain center. Younger students observed their elders, sharing thoughts and ideas when trying to solve a problem as a group. The younger students observed the older students as they engaged in choice situations concerning academic matters. After a few weeks of observing older students engaging in the "family news" process, younger students began to write their news on the chart to share with the class. The younger students watched as the older students solved math problems using their own strategies, reaching for a dictionary to check the spelling of a word, or suggesting to someone the noise level was bothering them. As a result, the younger students caught on to the routine, in part, by observing their elders and began to show signs of self-regulation early on.

Several implications may be drawn involving the idea that through choice, students can benefit by engaging in situations of problem solving. Through a democratic process, they made decisions as a community on what type of place they wanted school to be, established procedures and addressed problems and concerns. They discussed, debated, negotiated, and arrived at decisions together. In

most cases, they decided together democratically. Students actively participated in their community and as members were caring, responsible, and above all, respectful. This study suggests the process of problem solving in whole group situations can assist student's in future small group problem-solving situations. In an attempt to solve their problems in small groups, students engaged in a variety of strategies previously experienced when solving problems as a class such as negotiation and voting. In small groups, I noticed they rarely enlisted the teacher's help to solve their problem. Tattling was obsolete. When students are involved in problem solving in spontaneous situations of choice, they begin to gain independence and deal with problems on their own. Students move toward self-regulating their thoughts and actions. As students engage in the problem-solving process, by developing and utilizing strategies, they quite possibly may be building a repertoire of experiences for transference in solving more complex problems in the future, both inside and outside the classroom.

Choice appeared to create situations of what Fosnot (1996) refers to as perturbances, moments of disequilibrium, such as groups trying to figure out a scale for their river model, trying to organize a play, or realizing feelings have been hurt when someone was excluded and trying to rectify the situation. Many situations of choice involved some degree of disequilibrium by way of need or desire to figure something out. Students were genuinely interested and invested in situations involving their own decisions to be made; if only for a moment or an extended period of time. DeVries and Kohlberg mention that Piaget viewed interest as the fuel of the constructive process (1987, p. 24). This study suggests choice can peak an interest in students based on their own ideas, engaging them in the constructive process. Choice situations create authentic problems to solve. Students were more invested in their work when engaged in activities of their choosing. They were motivated to give up their socializing during their lunch period and free time at recess to work on a project. Students

were aroused in their activities in a constructive effort to try to make sense of their experiences. Choice in a student-centered classroom may result in students having more time for engagement, invested interest, and motivation to explore the depth of curriculum areas rather than students memorizing and obtaining bits of information in a passive manner in a teacher directed classroom with little to no choice.

This study may imply mandates and testing can be stifling to the teacher and students in relation to choice. I observed a strong presence emphasizing mandates and testing. Georgia worked long hours to include goals for mandates, testing, and her personal beliefs on what she thought was important for her students. She worked to integrate all subject areas providing a curriculum which emphasized a year long theme designed for students interest, decision-making, making connections relevant to students lives, and included requirements to work toward high scores on testing for accountability purposes. In addition, she was responsible for implementing several practices from her school districts model for school improvement. It was exhausting to watch the energy level Georgia and her team of teachers maintained. Doubtfully, would the majority of teachers expend that much time planning such a dynamic curriculum for their students in order to fulfill their obligations and their own goals.

Mary spent a considerable amount of time planning her own curriculum yet, not at exhausting levels. Rather, her planning was more in line with the amount of time a majority of dedicated teachers would be willing or could even consider with respect to their own personal lives outside of the classroom. She was able to include choice and even spontaneous choice from child-initiated ideas and still reach her goals for the mandates and testing as well as her personal goals of what is best for children. An example of a spontaneous choice and reaching her own goals and obligations were observed through a student initiated idea to perform a play

at the beginning of a reading group session. Having an idea and students never asking the teacher if it would be all right, were related to the foundation established. The students took the initiative and the teacher supported their idea by suggesting she would be there if they needed anything.

Comparatively speaking, many of the goals in a traditional reading group were met in the reading of the story with the student-initiated idea. What makes it more compelling is that it was done so with more breadth and depth. Students through their own choosing were interested and motivated about a story. They were able to practice working cooperatively on their own to establish their goal; to put on a play. They figured out ways to solve their problems peacefully and autonomously. In the end, they were able to take risks and the initiative to relate their experience to other contexts they would engage in later.

There was no doubt the student's comprehended the assigned reading, just as they would have in a traditional reading group. The actors organized the information, identified main characters, the setting, they interpreted (or reinvented) the story all on their own. Also, the entire class experienced an invaluable lesson in self-assessment. They were able to self assess along with peer assessment to learn from their experience for future experiences. Student initiated ideas involving curriculum have several implications for education. It implies that rather than planning for curriculum based on mandates and testing, being attentive to student's interests and ideas can provide the teacher with the means of a student-generated curriculum. The natural progression of objectives can arise as student's work through bringing their own ideas to light. Students engage in practicing necessary skills when in situations of choice. It also implies that without the foundation, choice could be present yet, with the foundation it gave choice meaning, purpose, authenticity, and moral and intellectual value.

In the context of this study, choice can eliminate the need for reward and punishment found in many classrooms. This study implies that the absence of rewards or punishment and an emphasis on student choice can assist in minimizing disruptions. In both classrooms, I had the opportunity to observe from the first day of school. With the foundation established by the teacher and with her students and choice present as discussed in each theme, students felt a sense that they were genuinely part of what made the classroom their own. They did not feel a need to be disruptive with situations they already had some control over. Rather than rewards to optimize student's thoughts and actions in the classroom, students were intrinsically motivated by their own desire to make decisions concerning the running of the classroom and their academic learning situations. I never observed a competitive moment in either classroom. Students instead, worked together to achieve their goals. They established positive "ways of being together" rather than being assigned rules in an effort to head off inappropriate behavior. The few disruptions were dealt with privately with the student and teacher. Students were momentarily isolated in order to get control of themselves and could re-join the group when they felt they were ready.

Although the negative aspects of choice in the contexts I observed were few, I found choice can create situations of exclusion and withdrawing from participation for a few students. Most students took the initiative to regulate themselves through choice while a few less outspoken or less confident students experienced feelings of isolation in their community. Overall, there were few incidences of isolation yet, it is necessary to draw attention to them to paint an accurate picture of the essence of choice and what can happen.

I shall turn to these students to focus on how choice may have played a role with an adverse effect. With opportunities to form their own groups, students experienced exclusion

on occasion. I observed a few situations when a student in a group became argumentative and difficult to work with on an activity after feeling excluded during the formation of groups. The teacher pulled her from the group work and spoke with her quietly. On another occasion, students moved away from her to work on their project because she was not willing to peacefully work on a solution for their project. Another student often withdrew from group situations either when she had the choice not to participate or when she was expected to participate but did not actively take part in a group project. She usually refrained from participation by not talking or sitting by herself on a couch. When presented with situations to choose a partner or group, she appeared to just drift to whomever was available. Only on a few occasions did I notice her ever enthusiastic about something and both the experiences revolved around her sharing a personal experience of interest with the class.

During independent activities, I observed several occasions when one boy "pestered" a group of three boys that always appeared to be together. When the teacher announced to the class to make a partner or group selection for an activity, the one boy always sought the group of three boys to form a group. On some occasions, the boys told him to go away and on other occasions they included him. These situations imply teachers need to be aware of situations of isolation or exclusion in order to present the different points of view in play when working in groups. This may suggest that students who can be difficult can gain insight from their own thoughts and actions while working with others. They may be experiencing consequences derived from their own actions.

A more poignant story of exclusion was also my most memorable experience during my observation and emotional as well. Mrs. M. asked students to form groups to play card games. A group of girls were forming a group to play a game and were one member short.

One of the girls noticed a student who was not part of a group. No one had asked him to be in a group. He was a student in the class who frequently needed help because he had a mild form of cerebral palsy. When he began to move in her direction as if to join them, she rejected him. His feelings were hurt. He stomped to his table, put his head down and began to cry. What impressed me about the situation, was her sensitivity to the boy. Although she did not include him immediately, she observed what it was doing to him, how it made him feel to be rejected. After a few moments passed, she asked him to join their group. Although he refused at the beginning, he eventually joined in the game. The situation illustrates that choice can provide students opportunities to decide what kind of person they most want to be. She based her decision by considering the boy's point of view. Students can work in the context of the classroom to develop relationships based on community and take into account the multitude of personalities with vast perspectives that reside in their environment. When incorporating choice in the classroom, teachers must be aware and address situations when a less outspoken or a less confident child experiences a sense of exclusion in their community.

After the dilemma, Mrs. M. was aware through her observations and gracefully brought to light what had happened. Through questions addressed to the class and their responses, she was able to nudge students to de-center leading them to consider others points of view in their classroom. This situation implies the foundation builds as the teacher and students call attention to situations involving choice and as in the case of this story, can assist the moral development of students.

I expected to find some evidence of choice in the two classrooms I observed. When visiting the settings of each classroom prior to beginning the study, evidence of choice was apparent and influenced my decision to select them for this study. What I found was much

more than I had expected. My eyes were opened to new ways of perceiving choice and its complexity. Initially, I thought of choice as options a teacher offers students and students acted on those options. I found that choices are not neatly organized as if a teacher were to plan her agenda by making a list of choices he/she would incorporate into the routine. Although procedural choices in the daily routine were present, many choices evolved with respect to influential factors from the foundation established, students sense of self-determination, and the presence of community. The foundation established between the teacher and students enhanced opportunities for choice situations. The sense of self-determination in students led to even more possibilities by gaining the confidence to take risks and generating their own ideas to bring about additional situations involving choice and decision-making. Community and sub-communities broadened the realm of possibilities even further. I wondered what elements, if any would hamper their decision-making? I only found limitations that were necessary and confounded by purpose to create structure and assemblance to the community they shared. Choice and its essence are multi-faceted.

Recommendations

This study reflects the need to reconsider the implications of choice and the benefits it may have on students in the classroom. Much has been mentioned in the educational literature concerning the importance of choice yet, there has been little research related to choice in the classroom.

My experience from this study has led me to ask new questions. I believe there is a need to research the moral aspect of choice in the classroom. I observed a few occasions when a student was excluded or isolated from a group of boys on more than one occasion. On one

occasion, one of the teachers and her students were involved in a class meeting. They were discussing hurtful feelings. The teacher referred to a story from the past year when a student in the cafeteria was "voted off" the table. The idea of being "voted off" originated from the current popular television series, *Survivor*. What can we learn about choice and moral development from these situations? Shall we address the problem as Vivian Paley (1992) suggests, "You can't say you can't play"? Should those being bothered have to deal with it? Are these students being rightfully excluded? Are they bothersome to the point that others do not want them around? Is it a matter of natural consequence? Should teachers step into the situation and address the conflict? Probably so, but further research may be needed as to why these incidences happen, even with such a strong "community" influence. Also, addressing the question of how to properly resolve these types of situations in order to promote student's moral development should continue to be examined.

I believe there is a need for closer examination of the foundation of choice. What elements are involved in creating a genuine choice situation? I only observed two classrooms and found similar elements in both; yet, there were differences. What are other elements involved in the foundation?

I would recommend this study be replicated, only, in a self-contained classroom. In this study, the foundation and what to expect already existed for many students. What differences might one find when all students are experiencing situations of choice in a new classroom and with a new teacher? How might the study differ in a looping situation where students are looped together into the same classroom with the same teacher for at least two years? Would their experiences be even more poignant in relation to the essence of choice?

During this study, out of curiosity, I asked my daughter in high school if at school, she had to ask to go the restroom or if she just left when needed? She responded with a resounding "Are you kidding? We have to ask!" That leads me to wonder what choices are available for students at older ages? Do choice situations increase as students mature and become capable of handling more complex decisions? If not, why not? Going to the restroom hardly seems complex yet, are there other issues with older students?

What can be uncovered by asking student opinions? What are their attitudes about choice? What are their opinions on what they think they are capable of deciding? Do they think they are given enough choice and why? If not, what would they recommend? What choices do they perceive they have?

I would recommend further research on students reasoning concerning choice. While in one classroom, I recognized that by listening to students at the center choice sheet, much could be learned. As they contemplated where to work for the day, many conversations ensued. Some student's were swayed by their friends to choose a certain center, others, chose due to interest. It appears much could be gained by eaves dropping near the center sign-up sheet. Similar situations such as the center sign-up sheet can offer rich conversations to study students' reasons for choice. Can the study of choice in any way lead to a deeper understanding of how moral and intellectual development is constructed? Can the analysis of children's choices in school situations further develop an understanding of children's moral and intellectual reasoning?

I believe there is a need for more vignettes pertaining to choice and choice situations. Research on choice can be documented and analyzed to provide practicing teachers and veteran teachers an interpretation of how choice can enhance the classroom experience for students.

Videotaping classroom experiences of students engaging in choice situations would also aid educators in recognizing the importance and benefits for students.

Lastly, this has been a study of student choice. What about choices for teachers? What opportunities are available for teachers to make decisions about their profession? How do their opportunities for choice effect them in their daily teaching experiences? What are their perceptions concerning choice and decision-making?

I encourage others interested in autonomy to consider the essence of choice and it's role in self-regulation. The subject of choice should be considered in studies involving autonomy. To date, Alfie Kohn has been the most resourceful author concerning the topic of choice. He has referred to related studies from psychology and the medical field. More from the field of education is essential in order for choice to be given much consideration by those who do not understand the benefits of its presence; those who make the educational decisions concerning our schools.

Conclusion

I must also address the situations of choice I was exposed to through this research. I realize I was fortunate enough to find two very special classrooms with teachers dedicated to student autonomy. In my opinion, much of their passion for their students rests on their abilities to live their own lives as autonomous teachers. Georgia sought a teaching environment that welcomed her and others like her, to provide choice and a stimulating environment for students and teachers alike. Georgia devoted an incredible amount of her time to her profession and students. Mary worked in a “semi-traditional” environment and established her own climate for fostering autonomy in her students. Other teachers in her

building frequently visited her room for advice or suggestions related to teaching. The principal commented on one occasion that, when she “needed a break from it all”, she escaped to Mary’s classroom to marvel at the relationship developed between Mary and her students. I thank them for sharing with me.

If, as I believe, the aim of education is to work with students in such a way to enable them to become autonomous adults, then providing them with an environment promoting constructive thought is an educator's responsibility. As mentioned at the beginning of this study, if autonomy is the ability to make decisions for oneself, intellectually and morally, then choice must play a significant part in the development of autonomy. During this study, I observed students making decisions both morally and intellectually, each day at school. Over time, the foundation for choice unfolded and students were eventually moving toward more self-regulated thoughts and actions. The two teachers in this study appeared to discourage heteronomy and facilitate the development of autonomy in their students. The opportunities for choice in their classrooms played a significant role in that development. Reflecting back on my experience, my understanding of choice has been heightened by two classrooms full of students and two very tactful teachers.

When the artist considers Dewey's interpretation of choice as mentioned in the opening of her work, she ends by concluding with the deliberation of her own choices in painting the essence of choice. The artists' passion for choice is expressed in Robert Frost's poem, The Road Not Taken.

TWO roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just and fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

...And so the artist inspired by her piece recognizes, she too, took the road less traveled and it has made all the difference. Future forks in the road will be met to consider other subjects and landscapes of choice to be painted, knowing how way leads on to way.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE OF PROTOCOL WRITING QUESTION

SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

MARY CASSATT'S PROTOCOL RESPONSE

MARY CASSATT'S TRANSCRIBED INITIAL INTERVIEW

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE'S PROTOCOL RESPONSE

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE'S TRANSCRIBED INITIAL INTERVIEW

Sample of Written Protocol Question

Please write about an experience either personally or professionally, which significantly impacted your views on choice as you lived through it. Try to reconstruct the experience from the inside and focus on a particular example or incident.

Sample Interview Questions

Initial Interview

1. How does your experience of choice as you have written in your response affect you as a teacher? Can you give examples?
2. What choices do children have in your classroom?

Exit Interview

1. After reading the first draft of this study, do you have any comments or questions?
2. Did you read anything you would like to have deleted?
3. Did you have anything you would like added?

(Sample of Mary's Written Protocol Response)

It has taken me many years to discover a very basic truth about teaching. That is that children learn when THEY WANT to learn. When they feel ownership and control of their learning, not only will they enjoy that learning, but also they will challenge themselves to ever higher learning. I have always worked to have a child-centered curriculum but changing from being the director of what happens in my classroom to allowing children to take responsibility and ownership for their learning has been a long trip. I've learned that as hard as I may try, I can't make them learn. Instead I lead them to discover, on their own, that learning is fun! I believe allowing children to make many decisions and take responsibility for their learning is key to my philosophy of teaching.

I think this truth became evident as my own children grew. I taught five years in the public schools before my husband and I started our family. When our first child came along I was able to stay home with him. Two more children followed and I was out of the classroom for 17 years. I think I learned a lot by being a mom about how children learn best. Every time I tried to force my boys to accomplish a task it was met with a strong willed rebellion that put us at odds with one another. A power struggle would follow. I learned over the years that if I gave them choices they would respond much more positively. I still had control over the choices many times but at least they had the final say. It was always much more fun if it was their idea. After seeing how effectively this worked when the boys were young I continued to allow them to make as many decisions as possible on their own. This doesn't mean that I left them without any guidance but by being allowed to make decisions time after time they became experts at making wise decisions. That was my goal! By the time they were in high school I didn't have to tell them where they could go or what time they needed to be in very often. They had experienced making

decisions enough that I trusted them. They knew they had the responsibility of making wise decisions because along with choice comes responsibility.

When I went back to school to update my degree to go back into the classroom this philosophy is what they were teaching. I was delighted that I had been able to experience this at home and now relate it to the classroom.

Although it is easy to fall into the trap of wanting to tell them everything they learn so much more by making those decisions on their own and making their knowledge their own from experience.

Mary's Transcribed Initial Interview

Since I have not had an opportunity to read your response, can you re-describe your experience of choice either professionally or personally?

After graduating from college, I spent five years in the classroom in the public school. After five years, we started our family. And I was fortunate enough to be able to stay home with the children and so I was out of the classroom for seventeen years. And during that seventeen years I think I probably learned more about being a better teacher than my other years in the classroom because I found out what works with children on an individual basis and then was able to carry that over into the classroom. One of the main things that I learned, being home with the children, is that things always went a lot better if it was their idea. And there would be times when I would try to coerce them into doing some or laying down the rules that this is what you have to do; this is what I need you to do right now and that didn't go over very well because they wanted to do what they wanted to do. I found out that if I worked it to where it was their idea and gave them the choices, it was something that they chose, then it worked a lot better and so we worked on having lots of choices for them to make which were all acceptable with me. The final decision of actually how we did it would be their decision. Right. And that worked a whole lot better as far as cleaning up their room and bath time and bed time and all those kind of decision things, you know, things that have to be done but yet they had some say in it. And it was a whole lot easier; and things went a whole lot smoother around the house. MMM hmmm. As they got older, because they had been experienced decision-makers, they could make better and wiser decisions. And so as they got older, I didn't have to set up all these rules like a lot of my friends did with their kiddos when they got into high school; and I have three boys. They are 31, 29 and 20. Wow. So, I have had lots of experience in seeing them all the way through and seeing how it worked out. And it has worked out well in all three cases. Right! I am very proud of all three of them! Um, but I think that that decision that my husband and I made early on to allow them to make as many decisions as they possibly can throughout their life would equip them to be able to make life decisions when they got older and out on their own. And I just saw the value of them having a say in the way things were. Right. And so that convinced me definitely. A lot of my friends who have had set rules that they had to be in by this time and they had to do this and they had to do that, the children just have rebelled to all kinds of things. And I think a lot of it is because they were not given any say about their lives. Right, right. And it was not their life, it was whatever the parents said that they had to do. And so we've always tried to leave things open-ended. If the boys were interested in a particular topic or a particular sport, we gave them every kind of support that we possibly could in that area. Went to the library, bought books, we did all these kinds of things to support their interests; and to put them out in the leadership role of what was happening in their lives. Right. Rather than us telling them what to do. And it just worked so well! I am just so pleased with how the boys have turned out and on into college, I didn't worry about them. And, I knew that they were experienced decision-makers and that they could make good decisions. And I didn't have to worry about them.

Can you think of like a, a, of an example of an experience that really impacted you to see? I can think of a, Yeah! Laugh. One particular incident my middle son who was probably the most headstrong of all them, had gotten a lot of money for his birthday. He was going to spend his money and I said "would you like for me to carry your money for you so that you don't lose it, because that's quite a bit of money." "Nope, nope, I'll carry it. I'll take care of it." I told him O.K., fine. He was looking around and of course had it in his little wallet and was looking at things and he laid his wallet down and walked off and left it. He went back to find it and it was gone. I didn't replace it. I thought it was very tempting, to say, "Oh, well." I just think that was a very important lesson for him to say, "Well, maybe that was not such a good decision." That has always stuck in my mind. I felt so horrible for him and he cried and cried but boy, I didn't come to the rescue. He learned a valuable lesson to be careful, to be responsible because along with choice comes responsibility. Exactly. Big responsibility. And I think that works so well hand in hand. My boys have all turned out to be very responsible boys. And I think that is because they have seen that along with that choice is responsibility. Yeah, I can see exactly what you are saying. I think, often times, people tend to rescue kids and so their learning opportunity is at least squelched some, you know, by not letting them live through it. And then when I went back to school before I came back to teaching, I've been back now, um this will be my eleventh year back. And when I went back to school, Constructive Philosophy, I was really excited about that! Because I had seen how it really works in my home and could see how it could definitely work in the classroom as well. You were able to kind of match intuition with theory? Right! Exactly! That's how I came to understand it as well. Because it made sense. It does! It makes wonderful sense! MMmm hum. Exactly. So, that was one of the questions, how this has influenced your teaching. It has just made a wonderful match and it really clicked in my mind all that Constructivism is a type of Philosophy. I went back and took 24 hours to update my degree before I went back into the classroom and that is what I studied. And I taught three years half day kindergarten in a private school and then I've been back in the public school for ten. Ok, Ok.

What do you do as a teacher to support your beliefs when working with children? We've looked at your home life and how that has affected your teaching, so what is it that you are doing in the classroom? Well, I think I have to say, my philosophy remains the same. That if it is their idea, they are going to engage in the learning process a lot better than if I stand up and say Ok let's do this worksheet, or let's do this type of thing. I try to get the kids as much choice as possible about what we're going to study. I definitely have a certain curriculum that I have to follow but within those boundaries of curriculum that I have to cover there is wealth of information that they can have a choice on and which direction we go and where their interests are. If they come up with something that is not necessarily on the agenda that I have down, I'll send them off to the library and they go home and they get on the Internet and with Mom and Dad and they research and they bring it back and I love them doing that! Because they are the ones who are excited about that particular topic and they are the ones who are going to delve into it so much deeper on a higher level than what I could ever do. Mm hum. MM hum. Because it's something that is important to them. Right. Right. And so therefore, they go much

further along. Any kind of research? Do they bring it back to the group? Yes, they do. They bring it back to the group and they share with the group. We usually have them go up on the carpet and they read their little report. Sometimes they do drawings or sometimes they build little things to go along with it. And I really encourage that as much as I possibly can. Right. As well as just the general running of the classroom. When we make up our rules, you'll see that I ask the kids, "now what do you think we can do to make the room run right?" I have them help make up the rules for the classroom. And those rules are open to change at any time. If we need to change them or if something else comes up or that rule isn't working very well, then let's reword it, let's fix it so that we can make it better fit our needs. The children are free to come to me and say, "you know, I'm having a hard time concentrating. It's too noisy in here." Then I will say, I've had a complaint. Someone said it is too noisy. What can we do about that?" Letting them feel that control. I don't have to have control. I don't have to be the stepper. My job is the facilitator. I'm just here to help everybody stay together! Build a community. Right! Build a community and be a family. My newsletter that I send home is called the [name of teacher] Family News. And it is kind of two things because we are a family and we are sharing what our, this family here is doing with your family at home. Ok. Ok. So is that a monthly? Weekly. Weekly. Ok. And just kind of report things in the class that are going on. Right. Keep the family informed. And are you the one that writes it all up? Yes. It would be good to put some of their things in there. I have thought about that. But boy, time is of the essence and later on in the year, I think it would be good. To put some of their reports in. But usually what I do is tell them what we are doing in math, and doing here in science and other topics and my other column is things that are coming up that they need to be aware of. Right. And different things like that. Oh, that's great because it does make the school home connection a little richer. I like to have the parents come in and help out in the classroom. I try to have a parent here for centers every day. The parent is just somebody they can go to if they have a problem. That way they don't have to come and... My rule is that you go to two other people first before you ever come to the adult worker because if they learn to rely on each other and help each other.

Ok. Uh, Let's see, you've answered a lot of my questions. You know, one thing I would like to know, from what you were saying with your own children, you know you felt that intuitively? What, what do you think brought that intuition on? Was there an experience or how did you intuitively know that you wanted to offer responsibility? My parents treated us that way. I never did have a time, because my parents always built a trust within me and I didn't want to disappoint them. And so that kind of was my background that I wanted to always trust the kids and bring them up so I could have that same kind of trust as with my parents had had with me. And also in my church we have a lot of education in child rearing. So you talked about the trust with your own parents and trust with your children at home. And how does that trust develop in the classroom or does it? Yes, I think that it very definitely does. I can trust the kids. If I send them down to the library, I'm trusting that they're going to be all right. That they are going to be doing what they need to be doing and I can trust them to go places. If they need to go to another classroom I think that, I trust them that what they are doing is constructively done. And they know that, I think. Early on. That I don't expect them to be playing

around or doing goofy stuff. I expect them to be on target and I trust them that they will do that. Ok. So, with you're, you're trusting them but how are they trusting --- How do they trust you? Do you know what I'm saying? At the beginning? Because it develops. Yes, it is very much so. I think there is that process that you go through. I think that at the beginning they follow me because I am just the adult person. As I begin to loosen up and let them take more and more of the responsibility in the choice of how things are done in the classroom, I think they begin to see that they can trust me because I trust them. So I think it is a reciprocal type of thing. Right. Mutual. Right. That slow gain. MM hum. It gains, builds their confidence. Knowing that you're not going to revoke it no matter - you know because they didn't do it your way. Right. And I think it does take a long time to really develop it to the point I really like it. Because by the end of the year, wow, we can do some really neat, neat stuff. They're awesome. Going in different directions and do all kinds of things where at the beginning you may see a little change in what we were doing as last spring than where we are now because it is a gradual thing that develops in that relationship I think it is a choice and important to let students have some say in the way this is done. You're in a unique situation with the multi-age, because you've had children - so how does that play out? Very well! Ok, but we're talking about developing trust and choices and, um so you have one group that's accustomed to who you are and you've got that trust and you have a new group that's come in and how does that all play out? I think they see the others and they catch on so much faster than if I had an all new group. Those elders just kind of take that responsibility in showing this is the way we do things. And I'm here to help you if you need help. I'm going to be here for you. They work together so much better because the older students kind of take that mother instinct and pull the younger students underneath their wings and kind of teach them how we do things in here. They have a lot of freedom that they might not have experienced somewhere else. So, so for instance they are almost your co-facilitators? Yes! yes! I do think that. Ok. I can see where that would be a big help too! Laugh Oh it is. We just get on track so much faster because we don't have to go back. They know the routine, they know you, we don't have to spend as much time getting acquainted and for part, the kids observe the kids and how they do it. They have a little marvel. So they quickly want to be like the elders and they fall right into that little family plan. Unique situation. I know that more and more multi-age classrooms are coming about but the advantages seem to outweigh ... I really do like it a lot. We kind of struggled with it here a little bit because people thought we dropped the Transitional at the same time we started multi-age and people kind of looked at multi-age as a transitional thing. And we are just like any normal classroom, some highs, some average, some lows. All right, let's see, any other things. Well, you kind of answered earlier, but one of my questions was how you would decide on your curriculum that you use in the classroom. You said that most of that is mandated. Yeah, and I have a plan of what we will probably cover based on what those [state objectives] are. And I take my science and social study blocks and that's how I come up with a theme. But within those themes there are lots of ways that you could go. I mean it is very broad. And as long as we cover what it impacts then we can go any direction we want to. Laugh. So within that structure. MM hum, mm hum. But if they come up with something that is very related to it, we'll go for it.

I'm going to throw a real strange question out there. If they said, you know, you're the expert, you know, the sky's the limit. Educate these children. How would you deal with that? The nice thing is you have some experience at levels that kids are working. What would you do in that situation? Well, I teach everything theme wise. I take a theme in our language block, our reading, what we read our literature, our science, our everything is around that block, that unit. And I would still continue to do that. But I would brainstorm at the very beginning of the year what the kids would like, what they would like to study. What they would like to find out about. And then from that I would probably say, ok, which of these would be most important? Which, how many people would like to study this, how many people would like to do this? And more than likely they would probably come up with the same things that are on the [state objectives] anyway. But those are things that the kids are interested in. Right, right. I mean and they may have something, you know, way out there but lead them in a whole different direction even. Right, right, yeah. But developmentally you feel like the [state objectives] are somewhat in relation to where these kids are? Yes, I mean animal, insects, plants, those are probably what kids are wondering about anyway. MM hum. It would be interesting just throw it open and say, ok, what would you like to, what would you like to study this year? And see what they have for answers. Yeah. We might do that! Laugh Laugh Just to see how close we came. It would be very interesting. Uh huh.

Well, we've discussed curriculum. Can you tell me anything else that you work on in your class? Non-academic?

Well, Character has always been an important thing to me. We learn how to get along with each other. We can get along. Besides, we could get along if we didn't know how to read. As long as we know how to treat each other. And it, I think that is a really important thing that they know how to treat each other with kindness and not, just try to get along. Teamwork. This thing that I went to gave a Fortune 500 company the things that they are looking for and the number one thing is teamwork. And that's what I want my kids to be able to learn. Right. You know. Kind of work with each other because I think more and more society is teamwork. And mutual respect. But your ideas are ok. It may be way out there but it's ok because it's your idea. Right. Right. And we're all different. We all have different ways of thinking about things. I think I'll make that the first thing we are going to talk about. Laugh. Laugh. Oh, that will be interesting. Well good, I can't wait. See what their ideas are.

Alright. What are the opportunities available to them as far as choice? When I came in to just observe that first time, you had a sheet, , do you have areas that they go to centers? Are there any regulations to these or are you pretty open ended? I'm pretty open ended. They can work with who they want to work with? Right. They can plan the day before and decide where they want to go but they can't sign up until that morning. When they come in they sign up and make their decision what center they want to go to. Ok. But that's, I mean, that's just a part of their choices. When they come in, they have certain things that they have to do. They have to mark the lunch board. They have to make a center choice. They have to do this and this and this. Those are just housekeeping things. They go over and write on the news, our [name of teacher] Family News, they can write whatever they want to write there. That's a choice. They can write or not write. It

is not a required thing they have to do. They write in their journals in the morning. That's a choice. They can write about anything they want to write there. At times, we do a lot of charts and brainstorming type of things. They are just their ideas. Presenting their ideas or answers to questions or what do we want to know about this topic. I would really like to get to the point where they would make a choice sitting where they want to sit. I would like to give them that choice. They have a choice when they go to the rug. They can sit any place they want to on the rug. They can sit with their best friend or whoever. Ok, well I guess I'm confused. Uh, now the centers are the tables that you have out here. The centers are basically, that's the math center, and they can work on the floor or work on the table or wherever they want to. Uh, they can work at science at that center over there. This is computers. This is poetry. And they are just little corners or areas and some of them tables and some of them desks. That is basically our morning. We do our group time, our family time. We do a family time and that's where we will read our news and we have an opening, maybe a song and then we come back and we have our writing time. And that's about a 30 minute bout. And we'll do some kind of writing activity.

Ok. But that's in, kind of, seats, that you've asked them to sit in? Yes, Right. Um, it's a large block of our time in the morning doing centers. And then in the afternoon, we'll have different games and math and a little bit of group activity and kind of an explanation of what we are going to be working on that day and then we do math.

(Sample of Georgia's Written Protocol Response)

Please write about an experience either personally or professionally, which significantly impacted your views on choice as you lived through it. Try to reconstruct the experience from the inside and focus on a particular example or incident.

Several years ago, I was teaching sixth grade. The social studies content was world history. We explored the history of mankind from pre-history to the Second World War. In the early spring we spent a significant amount of time on the Middle Ages. After a fairly thorough introduction, the art teacher and I decided to make a menu from which the students could choose how they would further research the time period and express what they learned. They could research the music of the time and perform it. They could make costumes, models of early weapons, heraldry exhibits, models and maps of feudal estates. They also could write papers on topics of their choice.

We expected the interest to be high, but we could never have predicted the extraordinary explosion of participation. Our classrooms were filled with industrious children taking care of business. They asked each other about what they were doing. They requested information and support of all kinds from each other. We found that most students knew, on the average, the details of projects being done by at least half the members of the class.

Each student managed his or her own time and resources, although we made many resources available. We had absolutely no classroom management problems even though we spilled out into the halls and library. Children worked at home with delight and at the end they loved presenting their projects to the class.

While the enjoyment was wonderful to watch, we were, of course, accountable for the students actually mastering the factual material. The end-of-unit test showed a startlingly high level of comprehension. Not only did they internalize the feel of the time, they had an amazing grasp of the details of the era.

I can no longer remember the reason we tried this approach. It was before I knew much about multiple intelligences. What I remember vividly is the amount of focused energy, the bubbling excitement, the commitment, and the astounding results. From this time on, I began to build in choice on many different levels and in many different contexts.

Georgia's Transcribes Initial Interview

As I read over your responses to my questions, um, and it sounds like you had a teaching experience that relates to choice, giving kids choices, and that kind of made an impression on you. That's right. Can you take that a little farther and give me some insight into how that moved you in the approach that you now use? I would like to hear about any experiences past or present in your career or personal life that relates to choice. Um, Without just going on and on and, I mean I could go on and on and on and on about it. I'm trying to think of something succinct.

You were at a different school? Yes, I was at [name of previous school]. And so then you're obviously in a different environment here. From experiences such as those, what led you to try ... Well, the assistant superintendent in [previous school district] was a close friend of mine and she was also close friends with [name of close friend] who was the visionary who started this school. And [superintendent's name] said, you know you need to move to [city where she presently resides] and teach at [present school]. She would tell me about what they were doing here and I would think, that is just exactly what I want to do. That is how things should go. And choice isn't the only thing, but it is a huge thing here. A lot of freedom of movement, a lot of freedom of choice in terms of expression. A lot of ability for kids to talk and so then when I moved here, I applied. There happened to be an opening. And so I actively pursued working here because of what I had heard. I wouldn't have used the word choice but it was essentially freedom. Honor for children to make their own decisions and being able to respect that and create something valuable out of what they choose. Are you familiar with the term autonomy and being autonomous and self-regulation. Yes How would you look at those two, uh, freedom versus kind of autonomy. Would you see those as coinciding or separate or? Many people think freedom means no responsibility, but what we tell our kids is we start from the premise that you have enough responsibility to have freedom. And it is only if it is indicated that it is not so, that we take it away. Whereas most schools, have you prove for six years that you really are responsible and then we'll give you a little freedom. We go the other way. Ok I do not think these kids are autonomous at this school. Or, nor do I think it's terribly appropriate for seven and eight and nine year olds to be autonomous. I think that they need a structure in which to operate freely within the structure that's there. Now, people come in here and think there's no structure. That the kids are just doing whatever they want and what I say is, there is a very strong structure but it is managed internally rather than externally. Now if that's, you know, it all depends on what we consider autonomy. If that's autonomy, they're very autonomy. I'm looking at it as far kind of governing yourself. That's what I mean by internal management. Ok, I wanted to kind of make sure we were on the same page here. And, you know, that's a very difficult thing to master for adults. Laugh. And for children and we work on it constantly.

In what ways are you focusing on internal management? People always ask us what our discipline policy is and we hate that question. Our discipline policy is to create self-discipline; a system of self-discipline for every child that's appropriate for that child.

And we teach life skills. We have a group of 18 life skills that we teach. We teach lifelong guidelines. We have agreements such as respecting other people. And doing what you need to do at the same time respecting other people in the community. So we teach that from the time they're four years old. They have a vocabulary from the time they are four years old to manage conflict, to manage space, to manage stuff, to manage their emotional lives, that kind of thing. Ok, so you're trying to give them that responsibility of self-management so to speak. Right

Ok. Alright. Well one thing I thought was interesting in the paper that you wrote or your answer was that you are interested in multiple intelligences. Can you tell me a little bit about that? Well, in this project I kind of stumbled into it. I had heard of Howard Gardner. I've always been blessed with great principals who do a lot of professional reading and pass it on so I'd heard of him. I'd go to workshops and people would say that I should really teach the multiple intelligence. It's great! (Laugh). I had a great art teacher who was willing to try stuff with me and a wonderful principal who would let us do what we wanted to do and so I just threw it open to whatever the kids wanted to do as long as it was about the Middle Ages. I had a child who was severely learning disabled who'd never done anything in class and he built a catapult. A working catapult. It was unbelievable! I had no idea that he had this capacity because there had been no option for it at school. He could tell you about battles with the catapult and why it was important and why castles were sometimes immune to it and sometimes not. He really understood, deeply some of the social structure of the Middle Ages. He would never have understood had he not had that experience. That was, that's really one of the most amazing ones.

MM hum. So, I thought, you know, I am a verbal person as most people are if you teach school because we tend to be successful at school therefore we go into it later. This kid is never going to go into teaching. Right I thought, if we could offer that and many other things, then what could they learn? Kids would come over and ask him and they learned all about Medieval Warfare. While they were doing that he was asking them about harlotry and diets and all kinds of other things. So the other thing about that is they taught each other. And of course what we know, what you most learn is what you teach.

Mm hum. We had a Medieval Choir. A group of seven kids who learned Medieval chants and songs and did a performance. They found out who was participating in that and why women went into convents and all of that. Hum The learning was so much deeper ;so much more personal when it had to do with their expressions of their learning. Right. Their form that they were able to use to express what they know. Right Exactly

Is that something that has carried over, spilled over as far as the idea of multiple intelligence and Howard Gardner and is that kind of your framework that you work within? It's one. We see learning through the Multiple Intelligences much more these days. Back then, it was like an experiment. Let's just let them do whatever. See what happens. Laugh! It's much more formalized now. Right See what happens! It was great! But now we usually give an assignment we give three or four ways to express it. Mm hum We keep a chart of how everyone is expressing themselves; what methodology people use to express their intelligence. We hope, we really push to have them use at least one assignment with each one of the intelligence, and then they kind of focus on one or two which we did expect. They don't leave out all the others.

Right Right And there are things that they just get lit up by when we build worm bins and compost heaps. Everybody loved hammering and nailing and sawing and all that, even if that is not what they would choose on their own like this one child. But when it was a big class project, everybody wanted to do that so we try to provide whole class projects that are an expression in one or two or three intelligences. MM hum. Ok. Alright, so that is kind of how you formed your theory on how children learn, it is kind of your... I don't know about how, if it, but it's how they express what they've learned.: Ok. What are your beliefs is what I'm trying to kind of get at here, you mentioned Howard Gardner and that seems to kind of... It's not about how they learn. It's about how they express what they know. Right now how they learn is a whole other issue. Ok. Mm hum So that's different. In that format then I think you have to, my philosophy would be you have to have a brain compatible classroom. First and foremost you have absence of threat. You have to have kids feel safe, emotionally, physically, in every way. So that's the absolute first thing. If they don't do, if you don't provide that, you might as well go home, call a babysitter, turn on the video or whatever. Now how do you develop that? Well, the environment, first of all. It's all, you know, common colors and we, uh, are real committed to teaching to not have any rules but rather having agreements that really come from what they want in a perfect school so the agreements are like mutual respect, trustworthiness. Nobody wants their stuff stolen. So we all agree. We are in contract. Now, does that always happen? No, but we teach the life skills. We do community circle, we have tribes, we have lots and lots of structures in place to provide for safety; emotional safety. So, consistency, quiet voices, humor, greeting kids, asking them about what they did this weekend. Being in tune to when somebody walks in off the bus clearly messed up, taking them aside a minute to get them to oxygenate their brains, take a drink of water, whatever it takes to get a little detoxed. Right. Ok.

Ok, you said something about writing a contract. Is that something physically you guys sign a contract or is this posted or how do you generate that? We usually have a meeting and ask kids what they want. We take all of their ideas and write up the agreements. "This is what it sounds like you are saying. Is that right?" And they say, "Yeah, it's exactly what I want." So, we say "Ok, we all sign on to this." And then we don't sign it although this year we are talking about making a big poster and have everybody thumbprint it. 'Cause we have little ones that can't sign. Thumbprint it; but it isn't an issue. It's like, "remember our agreement." Ok. Now I need to back up here. You're saying little ones that can't sign. I have in my mind, older kids. But this is school wide. This is a school wide agreement. Ok. And the agreements are written across the board? We get together and they always seem to say the same thing. MM hum. They want to be treated with respect, they don't want to worry about whether their pencil is going to be taken, they don't want to be hit on the playground. They don't want to be put down. Right. So, always it's the same thing every year. Same thing you and I would say. Right! (Laugh). Yeah. Isn't that funny how that is!. Yeah! So, you know, in choices, one of the elements is to choose to some degree what you're doing.

Ok. What are some choices? Well for instances when we were studying recycling you could study whatever you want. You could study debris, you could study um, aluminum, any of those things and then you could present it. That's the learning part. Then in terms

of choice and presentation, you could do a PowerPoint, you could do a speech, you could do a what, you know, a lot of different things. But I think there also has to be a choice in terms of what you're learning. When we did Native American Tribes, they kids could choose what tribe they wanted to study. They could choose what aspect of the culture they wanted to study. Then they added together the one who chose dress and the one who chose religion, and the one who chose geography. They all went together and saw how they all fit together. They gave each other the whole picture. So, I would rather they learn a very narrow subject in great depth and share that with other kids rather than learn very little about seventeen Native American Tribes and know a name and a state. MM hum. Ok. Alright. Um, let's see. I've written some questions down. Good! They are kind of guiding questions; one is, your goals for the students. You're talking about, the Native American Tribes and that study and by goals, I mean are they handed down from the state objectives or No. Ok. I am responsible for teaching the [state] objectives, and I take that responsibility very seriously and that's not my goal. Now, I have an objective that every kid pass the CRT. And we just got our results yesterday, five of the CRT's. Every single kid passed. On two of them one kid in each didn't pass. That's by far the highest in the city.

MM hum. But I don't teach the objectives. I teach concepts. What I want this year; I want the kids to really get what it is to be the same and what it is to be different. If they can make those distinctions, they'll be fine. So that's our concept for the year; and everything's going to be related to that concept. Now, in that we'll talk about the similarities and differences of the sides in the Revolutionary War. But what I want them to get is similarities and difference. But I use the content [state] objectives to teach what I want to teach. What I think is so important. Last year we taught Civic Participation; how important is it to vote in the Presidential election? We had a voter registration card and they registered 34 new voters which was astounding! In that we learned about the Constitution and who gets to vote. What I wanted them to learn was how democracy works. Right I don't really care if they know the pieces of the Constitution. But they had to know it for the [state] objectives. I take that seriously. But to teach it out of the context of any real world application, is idiocy. (Laugh) So, what I teach is how to manage in the real world with other people and the concepts that are going to make a difference now and when they are 47 and when they are 97. The [state] objectives are the grit for that mill, if that makes any sense. MMM hum. MMM hum. And I do not use textbooks. OK They're stupid. (Laugh) Laugh They're insulting. They're insulting to the intelligence of children. Right. MM Hum. So what do you use? Are you just pulling from resources from everywhere?

First of all you have decide what's important to teach. Our theme this year is built around the rivers. We're going to visit the [local river]. And we're going to test its ph and going to find micro-invertebrates in it. We're going to stock our indoor river with all that. We're going to know that river that we live on. We're going to know the rivers around the United States and around the world and how that relates and what's happening in those places. So I have to do a lot of research about rivers. MM hum I have to keep reading and I have to have at least enough access to open some doors for them. I don't have to know it all. Right But I have to know enough to make it interesting for them; so I have to keep learning all the time. I have to keep reading and keep learning and that is where I get the content for social studies. For science, the same thing, but I have a bigger crutch

with the FOSS and STC programs which are hands on. Um, but again, if they're not applicable to something else, like we're doing a chemical test which is an STC kit but we're going to do it based on the stuff in the [local river]. And we're going to do the soil kit which is, not that, well let's see, I think, one of them is FOSS and one of them is STC. It doesn't matter, but, but it's going to be for the purpose of deciding what we're going to put in the bottom of the river. What kind of soil are we going to use? Clay, sand, silt, gravel...what do we use and why? What are their characteristics? So unless it has something to do, I mean that makes it important, and it's important to know what's in our rivers. And why that bottom is so important. And why if you kill off the bottom of your river you're over. Your river's dead. What is it in the bottom of the river that makes it work or not work? We need some rain though! Have you seen the [local river]? Laugh. Laugh. They say you're going to go see the [local river] sandbar, ugh. Laugh! I've been watching it daily and it, it is incredible. I mean where, where has the water gone? It is amazing So we have to go see it full after it rains. And compare it to now, but I have to know a lot that is fascinating and wonderful. MM hum

And in there I've done a bunch, a bunch of professional development with people like Marilyn Burns, now I myself am a mathematician kind of person so I love math anyway and have a sense of it; that's where I get that stuff. Right. Right. Ok. That makes, yeah, sounds great! Well, ok, the only other thing I can think of that we haven't really talked about and yet we have in some ways is what decisions that the students make? How are you doing your lunch and, the bathroom and uh, where they go to do whatever, you know what I'm saying? I mean how does all that... They go to the bathroom when they want to. They just get a drink when they want to. They eat what they want to. It's not a serve. It's an offer system. Ok They choose who they sit with to a great degree. Now once they choose a group, we often keep them there for awhile. They choose the book they want to read in reading. If they can get a group together to read it they can read that book. OK They can choose what program they want to use on the keyboarding, I think we have four keyboarding programs. They decorate their own lockers, you know, they can decorate their lockers with anything they can get off later! Laugh. And that's appropriate. Right They do wear uniforms. They don't get to choose their clothes. I mean they have a very narrow choice. Just shirt colors. They vote often on what games they are going to do in PE. So voting They choose their own when we do games in home base. They either choose their own games or every group voted where they would go around and everybody gets a chance to choose it. Ok We do essentially show and tell but we don't call it that because they think its -- but they love it just as much as four year olds do! So we call it sharing. Laugh, Laugh Laugh And, you know, they get to choose that. And they get to choose among their extended day activities. They have an offering of about ten things, they get to choose what they're going to do in extended day. If they want to volunteer, they get to choose a volunteer job. They get to work out with their own tribe who does what every day. And on and on I mean, they make decisions. We do very little making decisions in terms, we don't want to mess with where are you going to sit, when are you going to get a drink and can you go to the bathroom? We're just not interested in those kinds of interactions. Take care of your needs as you need to..., Ok. And they, we have two movement centers. When they are just going crazy and can't sit here one more minute, can't work with that group any longer, don't feel like they're being listened to or

frustrated with whatever they're doing, they can go to the movement center and jump on the trampoline or jump rope. The movement center? We have two places. We have a little exercise trampoline and a place where they can jump rope and we have a timer. They turn it over. They can jump rope or jump on the trampoline for three minutes and then come back to class. OK They cannot do that during directives, if a teacher is delivering lessons. But if it's during independent practice or working on a project or anything like that they can go to the movement center. They can do that twice a day. Now we have kids that we tell to go to the movement center. I mean these real kinesthetic kids. Kids we're trying to keep off medication for having a hard time sitting still. They may go seven or eight times but they can choose twice. They, the same thing with Australia. We have a little place we call Australia, you know, Alexander the no good terrible, I think I'll go to Australia. Well, this is Australia. MM hum And there are little finger puzzles and there's a CD player with earphones and they can go in there twice a day, just to be alone. Be quiet. Get their brain. Get their head together. Kind of withdraw. I can't do this anymore. Ok

So, and that's all self-directed, managed; however you need it. Ok We have the right to pass any time we're talking in the community circle or something like that. You can always say something else if it gets too close to the bone or you just don't feel comfortable, you always have the right to pass. And that's with academic things too. If I should ask something that you, you can say "I pass." Mm hum. No questions asked. No questions asked.

What about.... one other thing? I keep thinking of little things. Um, the make-up of the school as far as how these kids came to be here. You know, is there.... There's an application process and then they, we take kids that fit, to match the demographics of [name of school district]. Ok So, we test them all. Now we test, granted that the test is one-side, it's the Peabody, and I know that's only one intelligence, but it's the best we've got for three and a half year olds. And we take a bell curve. We take 25 percent in the bottom, 25 percent in the second, 25 percent in the third, 25 percent in the fourth. So we should score right at the 50 percentile and we do. On one test we're at 53 percentile. We need to match [school district name] in terms of gender, percentage in terms of racial, percentages in terms of learning disabled, you know, any special needs, orthopedic, all of that. It needs to be represented. And sometimes we have to recruit for that. And um, also socio-economic, our goal is to have an equal number of kids from all feeder schools. So if you're a white male from [local school], you don't have much of a chance. But if you're an Asian from [local school], you'll have a much better chance. Right, right. So you're saying it's demographically set up for ... Exactly, we're supposed to match up to percent. Ok. Ok. So this is kind of reality. It should be reality. 80 so everybody can get there if you do a brain compatible environment. What's the resistance to that? It's hard. Time consuming? Lots of time. Lots and lots of time. And you can't just say I'm going to do page 130 to 135 and answer the question. And principals, you know, what most people say is, "Well if I had the kids like you do," Now what we can't correct for is we do have parents who are very involved and supportive and that is a huge, huge issue. Yeah. It is. So, but we can't correct for that one. Other than that we match, [name of city]. We have 400 applicants for 20 slots. Is there a need! Hello! Should other people be doing this? But, it is also true that [local university] did a longitudinal study and said,

given the rate of change in education, it is going at break neck speed. Now we look and say, "You've got to be kidding!" Mm hum But you know, a lot of what we're doing has been adopted, but nothing like what we wish for. Hm. So is, [name of school] just a one of a kind in [local town] with the exception of [middle school demonstration school]. It's supposed to be a demonstration that teachers come and watch. And then take practices that fit their style. We don't want, you know, everybody has their own style. It's not like it's a cookie cutter thing. But there are some basic things that we feel people need to incorporate in their classrooms. Most importantly is the safety, emotional and physical. MM hum. Ok. And TRIBES is, is really spreading through out the district. MM hum.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORMS

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

“I, _____, hereby authorize or direct
_____, to perform the following research
procedure.”

This is a study involving research conducted through Oklahoma State University. My name is Patty Eaton and as a student of Oklahoma State University, this study is an attempt to fulfill part of the requirements to earn a doctorate degree in Education. As a former teacher with a teaching certificate in elementary education, I am excited about the prospect of conducting this research in order to assist in refining the teaching and learning process by adding to education research.

The procedure is to participate in a study involving a written response, classroom observations, and conversational interviews for the purpose of obtaining information about the lived experiences of those involved in situations related to choice in the elementary classroom setting. Observations and interviews will be recorded through the use of field notes and audio tapes. The researcher plans to spend one month in the classroom, observing three full days a week. At the onset of the study, the participant will be requested to engage in a written response concerning an experience either personally or professionally, which significantly impacted his/her views on choice as he/she lived through it. It is anticipated that the written response will take no more than thirty minutes to complete. The written response will serve as a guide for the initial conversational interview, which should take approximately one hour to complete. Once data has been collected from classroom observations, preliminary drafts will be written.

The participant will be given a copy of the text that concerns information from their written response and vignettes related to situations obtained from the classroom observations. They will be requested to read, reflect, and comment on the text. During the final interview, a discussion from the reflections and comments will take place between the researcher and participant in the form of a follow-up conversation. Through such a conversation, consideration for comments and/or deleted comments will be negotiated. It is estimated that the final interview will take one hour.

The duration of the subject's participation will be determined by the length of time it takes to gather the data. It is projected by the researcher that it should take no longer than six weeks once the initial interview begins. The researcher plans to be in the classroom to observe from _____ to _____.

The code of ethics outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA) will guide the confidentiality of this study. This code of ethics instructs researchers to protect their subjects from mental and physical harm and that the best interests of the subjects must be kept foremost in the researcher's mind. The true identity of participants will not be written in the text of the study. The 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 and all papers related to participants in the study will be shredded.

Possible benefits as a result of participating in this research procedure are the benefits that come from reflection and insight of choice as it relates to the daily practices in an elementary classroom setting. It is hoped through reflection and insight, the participants will gain a greater understanding of choice and its relationship to the

classroom experience. The subjects will also aid society through their participation, by adding to the educational research that it relies upon for progress.

“This is done as part of an investigation entitled, What is the Essence of Choice in the Classroom?”

“The purpose of the procedure is to gain a deeper understanding of choice and its essence as it relates to the elementary classroom experience.”

“I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty after notifying the project director.”

If I have any questions, I may contact Patty Eaton at (918) 747-3894 or Dr. Kathryn Castle at (405) 744-7125. I may also contact: Sharon Bacher, Institutional Review Board Executive Secretary, Oklahoma State University, 203 Whitehurst, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 74078; Telephone: (405) 744-5700.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.”

“Date: _____ Time: _____ (a.m./p.m.)”

“Name: _____ Signed: _____”

“Witness: _____”

“I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the participant before requesting the participant to sign it.”

“Signed: _____”

PARENT OR GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

"I _____, hereby authorize or direct _____, to perform the following research procedure in the presence of my child _____."

This is a study involving research conducted through Oklahoma State University. My name is Patty Eaton and as a student of Oklahoma State University, this study is an attempt to fulfill part of the requirements to earn a doctorate degree in Education. As a former classroom teacher with a certificate in elementary education, I am excited about the prospect of conducting this research in order to assist in refining the teaching learning process by adding to education research.

I plan to observe in your child's classroom three days a week for one month. I plan to be in your child's classroom from _____ to _____. The daily classroom routine will remain the same while I am observing. Through observation, I plan to document the choices available to students as well as other choices they may encounter in the classroom. I will be noting dialogue, interactions, and behavior. The researcher will act as an observer during observations. Observations will be recorded through the use of field notes and audio tapes. I will audio tape routine classroom activities. Information gathered from observations will be written in the form of vignettes or anecdotes. To ensure confidentiality, the student's true identity will not be revealed.

It is estimated by the researcher that it should take no longer than one month to complete the observation process. It is not anticipated that any risk or discomfort will be

involved during the research project. The best interest of the students involved in the observations will be kept foremost in the researcher's mind. After the study has been approved by the Oklahoma State University research committee, all audio tapes will be erased and field notes will be shredded for confidentiality purposes.

A possible benefit as a result of participating in this research procedure is through aiding society by adding to the educational research that it relies upon for progress.

"This is done as part of an investigation entitled, What is the Essence of Choice in a classroom?"

"I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and I am free to withdraw my consent for _____ to participate in this project at any time without penalty after notifying the project director."

If I have any questions, I may contact Patty Eaton at (918) 747-3894 or Dr. Kathryn Castle at (405) 744-7125. I may also contact: Sharon Bacher, Institutional Review Board Executive Secretary, Oklahoma State University, 203 Whitehurst, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 74078: Telephone: (405) 744-5700.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me."

"Date: _____ Time: _____ (a.m./p.m.)"

"Signed: _____"

OUTLINE OF ASSENT FORM

This information will be provided to the students involved in the study prior to soliciting their voluntary participation in the study and after consent has been granted by the district, school, and teacher.

Purpose of the study

- to look at what is happening in your classroom
- to use audio tapes 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 down what is being seen

How participants were chosen

- because of the special way things are done in their classroom

Duration of the study

- one month

Confidentiality

- at the end of the study, all audio tapes will be erased and notes taken will be shredded

- all names will be changed in the final paper

Subjects rights

- free to choose to participate
- free to choose to withdraw by telling the researcher
- all participants will be treated fairly

APPENDIX C

CHILDREN'S ARTIFACTS

DOCUMENTS

Primary Lesson Plans
Date Wed. Aug. 1

Morning Business 8:40-9:05
Attendance/ lunch count/ math graph/ journal/ writing, choose "Just Right Books," estimation

Team Time (9:05-9:55)
Calendar-(measurement) Morning News-(Phonics, Grammar/Usage and Mechanics)
Shared Big Book
Naisy Nara Skill Rhyming Words
Shared Poem
Skill

Guided Writing (9:55-10:00)
Feelings- draw a picture showing how
they can make a friend feel happy today
Skill: Write sentences telling about it

Guided Reading/Literacy Centers (10:00-11:00)
Big Book-Print Awareness, Phonics Poetry-Phonemic Awareness
Listening-Vocab & Comprehension Read the Walls -Phonics, Print Awareness
Creation Station-Writing, Grammar/Usage
Language/Drama-Comprehension, Responding to Text
Overhead Projector-Phonics, Phonemic Awareness, Vocab., Grammar
Writing Center-Writing, Grammar Usage, Information and Research
Library-Information and Research, Literary Response
Sci/Math Center-Data Analysis, Number Sense, Operations and Computation

Book: Big Little Friends
Skill: Write response to story

Book: <u>Water is My Friend</u> Skill: <u>Read @ partner</u> Review: <u>bowel sounds</u> <u>drip, sip, tip, rip, slip, hip, dip</u>	Book: <u>Ice Creams</u> Skill: <u>Review T</u> <u>like ice.</u>
--	---

Word Study (11:00-11:40)
Word Wall Words had with are she the (review)
Skill: associate sounds @ pics on word wall
Activity: Tongue Twisters
Billie baby brother hopped Betty
1. log @ first letter
2. Read fast slow
3. Make up for own sounds

Guided Math Centers 12:30 - 1:15

Skill making 10 @ 2 or more addends
Activity Choice Time Center
10's Go Fish Turn Over 10

Specialties (1:20-2:10)
Music (Art) P.E.

Self-selected Reading (2:15- 2:35)
(Vocab., Comprehension, Fluency, Effective Reading Habits)

Conf. With: (Students Names)

Share and Advertise (2:35 - 2:45)
(Effective Reading Habits)
Draw pic of favorite part of story
they read
Teacher Read Aloud (2:45-3:10)
(responding to text, listening)
Stephanies Ponytail

Get Ready for dismissal (3:15-3:25)

Dismissal (3:25)

Daily Reminders

(Example of Mary's daily lesson plan)

Choice Time Centers

Big Book

Computers

Overhead Projector

Read the Walls

Math

Listening

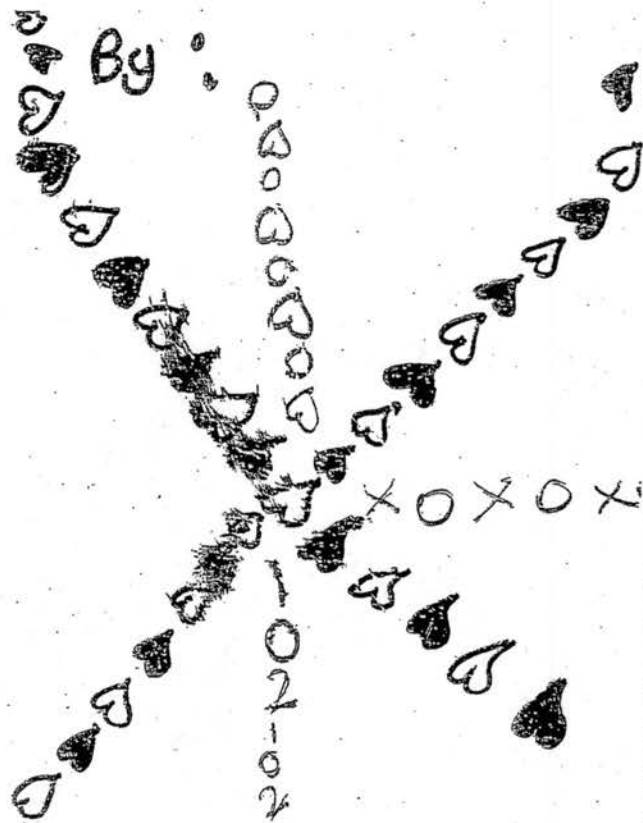
Language

Poetry

Writing

Science

(Example of Mary's sign-in sheet for center choice)



(Example from Mary's class, student's work on the overhead projector - originals were on transparencies)

friends, friends, friends,
friends help each other
yes, they really do how do you do,

friends

(tune Ro Ro Ro your Boat)

friends, oh friends
~~the~~ happy
makes you friends!

friends Help friends
friends Help friends
friend Help each
other every day.

friends help each
other and they play
together and take turns.

(Examples from Mary's class, one station during the friendship fair -
students wrote lyrics and performed songs in groups)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00-8:30	No School for Anyone Opening	Professional Development for all staff/No children Opening	Dedication of mural - breakfast with school and parents	Opening- Teach Instructional time procedure - Practice it	Opening - Key Point #3
8:30 - 9:05/ 9:15	Rendezvous	Family	Opening - Write a letter to mural name with response to the mural No family	Family	Celebrations
9:15-10:15	Build	Each will be doing something different - We should probably check where everyone is	Reading - Book sale - Each of us do four books at stage then have the sign up sheets for those books at a table	Reading - start books and each child have a different role - Let's help each group decide which role everyone has and how many pages to choose	Reading
10:15 - 11:00	Build	Library Red - Blue - Yellow -	Graphing lesson in home base	Red - Lifeskill posters (Friday) Blue (Red) - Procedure books - illustrate on the computer - learn clipart and folder access Yellow - (Teacher) - review several procedures then write about a procedure - choose one (two? three?) procedure(s) and give at least three reasons (in complete sentences) why it is (they are) necessary - Also a sentence about what the alternative is (Like if we didn't have this procedure what would we have instead)	HL-Red - Teacher Music - Yellow - Art - Blue
11:00- 11:45	Build on Reading	Library Blue - Yellow - Art - Red	Beginning, middle and a point of view writing - continue river story in home base groups	Rotation again Red - computer Blue - writing Yellow - posters	HL/Yellow teacher Music - Blue Art - Red
11:50-12:20	Lunch/Brain Break	Lunch/Brain Break	Lunch/Brain Break	Lunch/Brain Break	Lunch/Brain Break
Lunch Duty	Teacher/Parent	Teacher	This week lunch is Blue 11:45, Yellow 11:50, Red 11:55 (Back on duty)	Teacher	

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
2:25-1:25	Math/Music Congo Thames	Math/Music Amazon	Math/Music - Amazon	Math/Music Yangtze	Math
1:30-2:15	Math/Music Amazon and Yangtze - Healthy Lifestyles (Teacher and Teacher) Congo and Thames Math Teacher	Library Yellow Music Red - Art - Blue	Share time Read River journal chores Class meeting till 2:30 - complete 23rd Art	Rotation Red - writing Blue posters Yellow - computers	HL - Red Music - Yellow Art - Blue
2:15-3:00	Switch	Collect a Class - make the decks of cards, do research for answer keys		River water	Find new home bases - I have, who has? Do that in our old home bases, then come to the stage Go to new homebases then Barney babble for tribes?
3:00-3:35	Homebase and Read Aloud	as and Read		Homebase and Read Aloud	Homebase and Read Aloud
3:35-4:30	Extended Day	Extended Day		Extended Day	Extended Day

(Example of Georgia's weekly lesson plan)

The End of the Week Thursday August 30, 2001

8:00 - Meet and Greet

8:30 - Family

9:15 - Reading

10:15 - Volume of Water - meet in home base

11:00 - Red - Venn Diagrams (red area)
Blue - Scientific Observations (science area)
Yellow - Writing (yellow area)

11:45 - Red - lunch

11:50 - Blue - lunch

11:55 - Yellow - lunch

12:25 - Math
Music - Yangtze

1:30 - Red - Scientific Observations (science area)
Blue - Writing (blue area)
Yellow - Venn Diagrams (yellow area)

2:15 - Red - Writing (red area)
Blue - Venn Diagrams (yellow area)
Yellow - Scientific Observations (science area)

3:00 - Home base

3:40 - Extended Day

Armstrong Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00-8:30	Opening	Opening	Opening	Opening	Opening
8:30 - 9:05/9:15	Rendezvous	Family	Family	Family	Celebrations
9:15-10:15	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
10:15 - 11:00	HL/Red Word Play/Yellow Math/Blue	Library-Red Music-Blue Art - Yellow	Year-Long Theme	Year-Long Theme	HL-Red Music - Yellow Art - Blue/alternate with Word Play
11:00 - 11:45	HL/Yellow Word Play/Blue Math/Red	Library-Blue Music-Yellow Art - Red	Year-Long Theme	Year-Long Theme	HL/Yellow Music-Blue Art - Red/alternate with Word Play
11:50-12:20	Lunch/Brain Break	Lunch/Brain Break	Lunch/Brain Break	Lunch/Brain Break	Lunch/Brain Break
Lunch Duty					
12:25-1:25	Math/Music Congos	Math/Music Themes	Math/music Yangtze	Math/music Amazon	Math
1:30-2:15	HL/Blue Word Play/Red Math/Yellow	Library-Yellow Music-Red Art - Blue	Class meeting till 2:30	Year-Long Theme	HL-Blue Music-Red Art - Yellow/alternate with Word Play
2:15-3:00	Year-Long Theme	Year-Long Theme		Year-Long Theme	Year-Long Theme
3:00-3:35	Homebase and Read Aloud	Homebase and Read Aloud		Homebase and Read Aloud	Homebase and Read Aloud
3:35-4:30	Extended Day	Extended Day		Extended Day	Extended Day

(Example of Georgia's yearlong plans)

(Example of Georgia's posted "Flow of the Day" agenda)

Who Am I? Experience Sheet



An important element of successful living is knowing who you are. In order to have life goals that are meaningful, realistic, and achievable, you need an accurate sense of self-understanding. You need to know your strengths and limitations, likes and dislikes, wants and needs, beliefs and values. The following questions will help you clarify these things.

Think back to some of the things you've learned to do in life. The following questions will get you started:

- What are some things you've learned quickly and easily? (List at least five. These do not have to be school subjects.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

- What is something that you learned because you kept working at it, even though it was hard?

- What are some things you've been able to show other people how to do?

- What are your major talents (strengths, abilities)?

- What are some of your major accomplishments?

Self-Awareness

- In what school subject or activity are you most successful?

What about weaknesses? First of all, everybody's got 'em. You aren't alone. Here are some things that other kids have trouble with. If any of these items apply to you, put a ✓ beside them.

1. Using my time well
2. Standing up for myself when I know I am right
3. Overcoming shyness
4. Building self-confidence
5. Giving myself credit for achievements
6. Giving myself credit for strengths
7. Learning from my mistakes
8. Acknowledging my present weaknesses
9. Starting a conversation with a member of the opposite sex

Examine yourself closely, and complete as many of the following items as you can:

My personal strengths (talents, accomplishments, favorite activities, etc.):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

My personal weaknesses (handicaps, difficulties, limitations, things I don't know how to do yet, etc.):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Self-Awareness

Now, complete the following half-sentences. Don't worry about being scrupulously honest or making perfect sense. Just have a good time looking at you.

I am a person who _____

One thing I wish others could know about me is _____

One of the things I feel proud of is _____

It's hard for me to admit that _____

One of the nicest things I could say about myself right now is _____

A thing I accept in myself is _____

A thing I can't accept in others is _____

One thing that makes me angry is _____

The best thing about being a child was _____

The way I most need to improve is _____

I am happy when _____

Self-Awareness

I am sad when _____

I am fearful when _____

I feel lonely when _____

I become frustrated when _____

I hate it when _____

I get excited when _____

Admirable Qualities

List the ten qualities (such as honesty, bravery, helpfulness) you most admire in people.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

How many of the qualities you listed do your friends have? How many do you have? What does that mean to you?

The next time you express an opinion, choose a movie or TV program, or buy something, stop and think about the values you are expressing.

(Example of Georgia's hand out on emotional intelligence)

THE RIVER

You know a dream is like a river
Ever changin' as it flows
And a dreamer's just a vessel
That must follow where it goes
Trying to learn from what's behind you
And never knowing what's in store
Makes each day a constant battle
Just to stay between the shores...and

(Chorus)

I will sail my vessel
'Til the river runs dry
Like a bird upon the wind
These waters are my sky
I'll never reach my destination
If I never try
So I will sail my vessel
'Till the river runs dry

Too many times we stand aside
And let the waters slip away
'Til what we put off 'til tomorrow
Has now become today
So don't you sit upon the shoreline
And say you're satisfied
Choose to chance rapids
And dare to dance the tide...yes
(Chorus)

And there's bound to be rough waters
And I know I'll take some falls
But with the good Lord as my captain
I can make it through them all.....yes
(Repeat Chorus)

(Lyrics from Garth Brooks song, *The River*)

The River

In the Armstrong area we have been listening to a song called The River. Garth Brooks wrote the song. The song helps people to not give up on what their dream is in the future. Like the rocks in the river are bumping you and saying give up. But you need to stick with your dream and don't give up. And if you say your going to make your dream possible today and then later you say all make my dream possible tomorrow instead of today. That will just make your dream seem more harder to accomplish. And also the sound of the river passing by sounds like someones calling you and saying don't give up.

8-23-01

'The River' is a song that talks to people about their dreams. It tells you to do whatever it takes to make your dream come true. And to never give up on your dream or forget it. To cling on to it and work hard and use every last ounce of strength to reach the goal, and endure any rough times, hardships, or problems that you might possibly encounter. And that it won't be easy, and that even if you feel at times it's impossible, if you try your hardest, it will become reality.

My dream is to be a performance artist (an actor, singer, dancer). I'll do anything it takes to make it come true. I realize it'll be extremely hard, and sometimes I won't get the role I want, but I'll keep trying anyway. It's what I like, and it's what my dream is. And hopefully, I'll reach the goal.

It makes me think of my parents and my Grandma and how she made me treats. How the house smelled. How she would always say what's my baby doing? When she was in the hospital how I would run to her room. She was so fun to be with. She always understood me. She was my favorite Grandma. I don't know what it was but I now that she made me feel some good. There was something about her that made me feel some good.

(Example from Georgia's class, students written responses to Garth Brook's song, The River)

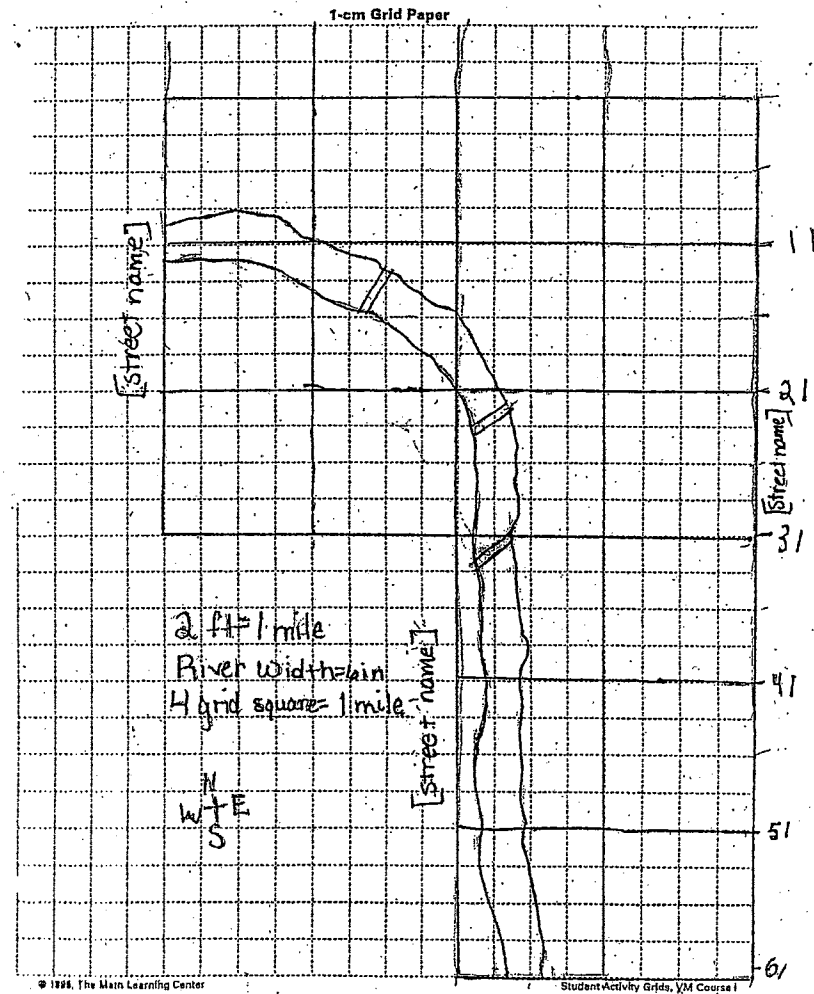
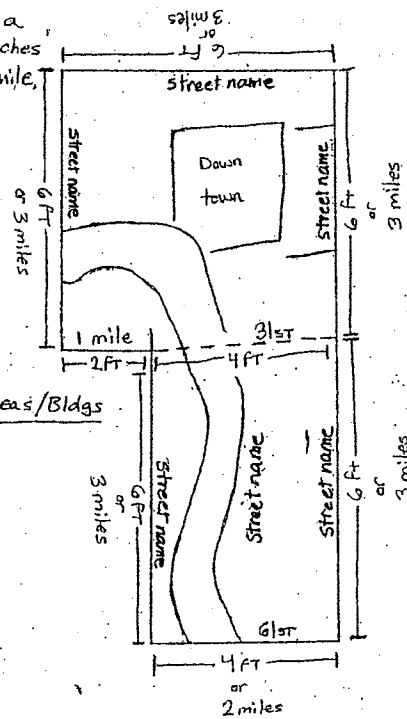
Amazon River Model

[Name of city] is built in square miles.

With the area that we chose to model our scale is:

$$1 \text{ square mile} = 2 \text{ Feet}$$

This gives our river a width of about six inches which is about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile.



(Example from Georgia's class, student interpretations of scale for river model)

Record Sheet A-1

Name: _____

Date: _____

The unknown mixture is labeled _____

Unknown Mixtures Test Results Table

What Did I Do?	What Happened?
What I Think It Is	Why I Think So (Give two or more reasons)

STC / Chemical Tests

Chemical Tests:
Student Self-Assessment

Name: _____

Date: _____

- Write down two or three important things you have learned from doing the *Chemical Tests* unit.
- How did you feel about working with the chemical testing materials in the unit? Did your feelings about the materials change as you worked through the unit? If so, give some examples.
- Write down some activities in the unit you enjoyed. Explain why you liked them.
- Were there any activities in the unit that you didn't understand or that confused you? Which ones? Why were they confusing?
- Take another look at your record sheets and your science notebooks. Describe how well you think you recorded your observations and ideas.
- How well do you think you and your partners worked together? Give some examples.
- How do you feel about science now? Circle the words that apply to you.
a) Interested b) Nervous c) Excited d) Bored
e) Confused f) Successful
g) Write down one word of your own: _____

STC / Chemical Tests

(Example of Georgia's assessment sheet for chemical testing)

(Example from Georgia's class on student
assessment for chemical testing)

APPENDIX D

IRB FORM

**Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board**

Protocol Expires: 3/26/03

Date : Wednesday, March 27, 2002

IRB Application No ED01123

Proposal Title: THE ESSENCE OF CHOICE IN A CLASSROOM

Principal
Investigator(s) :

Patricia Sue Eaton
1406 East 19th
Tulsa, OK 74120

Kathryn Castle
235 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

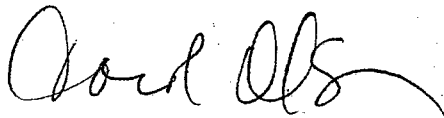
Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) : Approved

Continuation

Comments:

- 1) The approximate number of participants in each classroom is what should have been required. The IRB approves number of subjects: Please provide approximate total number you observed.
- 2) This approval for continuation will be for the current number. If you decide you need additional subjects from an additional classroom, please submit a modification form.

Signature :



Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

Wednesday, March 27, 2002

Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

VITA²

Patricia S. Eaton

Candidate for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: THE ESSENCE OF CHOICE IN A CLASSROOM

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, April 15, 1961.

Education: Graduated from Bishop Kelley in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1979; received Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from Fort Lewis College in May, 1985; received a Master of Science degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Oklahoma State University in May, 1994. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree from Oklahoma State University in May, 2003.

Experience: Employed as teaching instructor in Department of Teacher Education at Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in 1998; Graduate Teaching Assistant in Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Oklahoma State University from 1994 to 1997; Public school elementary teacher in Ignacio, Colorado from 1988 to 1993; Montessori school teacher in Durango, Colorado from 1987 to 1988; Private school teacher in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1986 to 1987.

Professional Memberships: Association of Constructivist Teaching and Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development