A QUALITATIVE STUDY: WHAT THEMES ARE EVIDENT IN FOURTH AND SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS' DISCUSSIONS AND WRITTEN RESPONSES USING AN AUTHOR STUDY

By

NANCY HILL

Bachelor of Science
Southwestern Oklahoma State University
Weatherford, Oklahoma
1976

Bachelor of Science
University of Arts and Sciences
Chickasha, Oklahoma
1982

Master of Education
Oklahoma University
Norman, Oklahoma
1990

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
December, 2003

A QUALITATIVE STUDY: WHAT THEMES ARE EVIDENT IN FOURTH AND SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS' DISCUSSIONS AND WRITTEN RESPONSES USING AN AUTHOR STUDY

Dissertation Approved:

Barbara D. Walker

Dissertation Advisor

Sandra Gordy

Kathryn Castle

Katya M. Denny

Alfred Larkin

Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to my committee members, Dr. Sandee Goetze, Dr. Kathyrn Castle, and Dr. Katye Perry. This has been a journey that I could not have made without your assistance and constructive guidance.

I wish to especially thank the chairperson of my committee, Dr. Barbara Walker. Her encouragement, constructive guidance, wisdom, and continued support were invaluable to me. I am a better scholar for completing this journey; but mainly I am a better scholar because my path has crossed with such outstanding experts in the field of education. I am forever grateful to my committee.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the fourth and sixth grade teachers, principal, and administration of the participating school district for their support and cooperation. I sincerely thank the students who participated in the study for your enthusiasm and cooperation, and their parents for allowing them to participate.

Most of all I thank my husband and family for their support and encouragement. I am deeply indebted to my husband, Randall, for his encouragement and patience during this ordeal. Without him, this goal would not have been achieved. When I wanted to quit, he prodded me to keep working. It was his motivation and encouragement that provided the inspiration for me to complete this project. When I lost faith in my efforts, he never did and was always there during the difficult times. To Paige, Jodi, and Tim, I owe you the world too. You were always understanding for all the times we couldn't be together

because I was working on this project. Your understanding and love nourished me to complete this assignment. All of you are my inspiration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

Chapter Page

LIST OF PICTURES

PICTURE Page

CHAPTER I

Introduction

"Johnny, why did Little Pig's house fall down?"
"Because it was made of straw."
"Not quite. Look on this page and find the exact words that tell the answer."

And so, the reading instruction proceeds in many classrooms across the country. It appears that most of American children receiving reading instruction in the public schools are based on the gospel of the teacher's manual of the basal reader. It may be true that the basal reading program remains the most common mode of reading instruction; however, educators and researchers have been arguing for decades over the efficacy of skills-based versus whole-language. Since the 1970s, research in the areas of reader response, emergent literacy, literature-based programs, and whole-language instruction increasingly directed attention on the issue of comprehension (Harris, 1993). Theorists argue that children learn to read by reading, and reading literature helps students learn to like reading, and as they read more, they become better readers. This practice helps them to become better language users (Anderson, 1991).

Getting better at writing also requires practice. Journals provide students with the writing practice they need. As a classroom teacher for many years, I found free writing after reading and discussion groups gave students privacy, time to reflect on what they

read, discussed, and time to form their own ideas without peer influence. There is a relationship between reading, discussing, and writing. Students learn to read by writing because they are two sides of the same coin. We use writing for response to literature because writing is the link with reading (Hancock, 1992). Hancock speaks of the benefits of using literature response journals as a way for students to express their thoughts. Hancock found that students' responses increase in length over time. She found that students move beyond retelling stories because they are able to record their thoughts as they read. This leads to the use of spontaneous language. Specifically, Medway (1987) noted that students are often taught to write as if they are informing others because this helps them to make sense of the knowledge they have learned. Research, however, has shown that writing to inform others does not help students learn how to ask questions or make connections. Medway (1987) claims that making connections and asking questions of the text are important skills students need to learn to become critical readers. Discussion groups would be a vital role in helping students make connections to the written text that they may not have otherwise made.

Literature discussion circles replaced traditional reading groups in many classrooms, and "round robin reading" became a thing of the past. Critics, politicians, and the general public pointed their fingers at falling test scores and urged a return to "back to the basics" or skills-based instruction. The recent readopting of phonics-based instruction in place of whole-language and literature-based programs indicates the pendulum is swinging back to skills-based instruction. Guided reading and direct instruction are replacing literature discussion circles in school districts across the country. Publishers of basal series now include excerpts from authentic children's literature and teachers'

manuals place more emphasis on reading for "explicit information" than aesthetic purposes. Still, teachers ask questions that children attempt to answer with the understanding of the story measured by how closely their responses match that of the teacher's guide. This in turn, may send the message that students must "learn something" from each story in order to meet the teacher's, and the curriculum guide's expectations of a "good" reader. Nevertheless, the opposition continues firm in its belief that children learn to read and write by engaging in authentic reading and writing activities. And so, the reading war continues.

My Experience with Reading Instruction

As an advocate for literature-based literacy programs, my classroom library shelves were filled with award winning and reputable literature chosen to integrate and complement units in the content areas for my district's curriculum requirements. Independent reading was not only encouraged; it was built into the daily schedule. My fifth grade students had a voice in the selection of the books they read. There was not a hint of "round-robin reading" in my classroom. However, this was not true when I first began teaching.

I began my teaching career in a middle class community outside of Oklahoma City. Basal readers were the only style of reading instruction I had. I diligently taught the reading series adopted by the school district to my students as a whole-class instruction regardless of individual strengths and weaknesses. The lessons usually followed the same pattern; each day I assigned pages of text to be read silently while I assessed the students'

workbooks. After that, the students read the story aloud in a "round-robin" fashion; I interrupted frequently to ask a question or help a child decode a word. No matter how I tried to enliven instruction by playing games or varying instruction, the stories remained unpopular and the workbook pages were little more than rote skill drills. When the class finished the story in the basal and took the mastery test, we moved on to the next story.

Even at this stage of my teaching career, I understood the importance of authentic children's literature in the classroom curriculum. After lunch I read aloud: poetry, adventure, mystery, anything I thought would be enjoyable and stimulating to the students' minds. During those twenty minutes, the children often appeared spellbound, and lost in the imaginations of great writers.

The change from traditional skills-based instruction to a literature-based program did not occur easily or quickly; nor did I completely abandon skills instruction. Although the use of basals became less and less, skills drills and worksheets instruction was still fairly traditional. The students were grouped into three or four ability groups and read level appropriate books that I selected. Skill instruction was embedded in literature and language experience, and skills groups changed as students' needs changed. Reading and writing instruction were integrated. Teacher-directed literature discussions replaced reading groups and I led the questioning. Each day the students read an assigned number of pages and answered questions I wrote.

Over the years, I redefined and adjusted my literacy program; every year there were modifications. Literature choices were expanded to complement the content area units; reading and writing were integrated into all areas of the curriculum. The students enjoyed greater autonomy in choosing the literature they read and instead of three or four

reading groups, there were five or more. Multicultural literature was included; nonfiction was added because boys especially seemed to prefer it to fiction. I focused on comprehension skills and was rewarded when my Title I students made gains. As I became more committed to a literature-based classroom, I recognized that my students were active participants in constructing meaning rather than passive receivers. It appeared to me that it was no longer appropriate for students to demonstrate their understanding of text by answering questions at the end of each chapter. Instead, I introduced reader response journals and encouraged the students to write what they thought as they read, to ask questions, to elaborate on what they read, and to use their journals to organize their ideas. As they made personal responses, they constructed meaning that was relevant to their own experience and knowledge. At that time in my teaching career, I was not aware of Louise Rosenblatt's transactional approach and did not realize that I was using her theory. Because readers often discuss their reading with others when they have been affected by a text, reading becomes not only a transaction between reader and text, but between multiple readers and text (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Reader Response and the Transactional Approach

Louise Rosenblatt was the first of the reader response theorists. After *Literature as Exploration* (1938), Rosenblatt wrote *The Reader, the Text, and the Poem* in 1978; she continued to develop her transactional theory. Rosenblatt contended that the reader is the integral factor in the reading process (1978). It is the reader who brings meaning to words that the author has written. She calls this a transaction between the reader and text being

read. People are a part of their environment and are therefore shaped by it; they are not separate from it (Rosenblatt, 1978). Transaction means that a reader has both a past and present relationship with text. In order to uncover the meaning, both the author's text and what the reader brings to it are involved.

Rosenblatt (1985) stated that the word's transaction and interaction have often been blurred and interchanged. This should not be the case, as there is a basic distinction between the two. Interaction implies separate entities that get together while transaction may or may not imply a total, ongoing process. Transaction is what occurs between the reader and the text, and there is a blending of the two. The transactional theory not only deals with the initial reading process but also with higher level skills of interpretation and evaluation. The reader is more than a participant in the reading; the reader is a central part of the process. Rosenblatt's transactional model views the reader and text not as discrete entities, but as aspects of phases of a dynamic process in which both elements take on their character as part of the organically interrelated situation. Rosenblatt (1985) states that the sense of a word is the sum of all psychological events aroused in our consciousness by the word (p. 99). Furthermore, the transactional model of reading recognizes context as a contributing factor. The transactional model of reading will be addressed in more depth in Chapter II.

Reader Response and Engagement

Researchers recognize the close relationship between response and engagement; one does not exist without the other. Some, such as Wylie (1999), believe response is a form of engagement; the way in which the reader reflects the level of his/her involvement

with text. Engagement with literature implies, individually or collectively, interest, agreement, commitment to the text, and willingness to become involved with characters and/or plot (Wylie, 1999). Engaging with literature involves a constellation of subjective experiences, including emotional reactions and associations, empathy or identification with characters or text (Beach, 1993); recognizing one's own emotional experience with a text magnifies those feelings (Bleich, 1975). Ideally, examining his/her personal engagement with literature may lead the reader to an understanding of the way elements of the text interact with his/her values and experiences.

"The difference between the reader sitting down with a novel and the student reading a classmate's response paper or hearing the comments is surely not so great that we may consider one but not the other to be a source of knowledge" (Probst, 1988, p. 240). The listener must, after all, act on the words of his/her classmates just as the reader will act upon the words of the text. Probst (1988) says that the spoken word is inert and immobile and must be heard by an active, thinking listener to become anything more than vibrations in the room. If verbal exchanges within the classroom can yield knowledge, then surely the verbal exchanges between writer and reader might also yield knowledge.

The Reader and the Text

Although researchers in the empirical tradition often focus primarily on the reader or the reading context in their analysis of literary response, the text always remains a critical element. Not only does the text provide the occasion for whatever responses are developed (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1997), it shapes those responses at the most basic level as soon as it is identified as "literature." Rosenblatt distinguished between aesthetic

reading, which focuses on the lived-through nature of the literary experience, from efferent reading, which focuses on the information that, can be carried away from the reading. Langer (1994), although interested primarily in how readers develop an "envisionment" of a literary text, examined such development only after the text had been identified as literary. How readers read nonliterary texts, she argued, is quite different.

Reading for Literary Understanding

When readers seek to make sense of a literary work, they engage in an exploration and are open to many possibilities for meaning according to Langer (1997). At any given point a reader is developing ideas, or envisionments, of events, characters, and meaning while anticipating what might be ahead. Readers recognize that some future experience such as an interaction with friends or fellow students might change their thinking of the literature. Thus, Langer (1997) says their reading is guided by inquisitiveness. Readers explore relationships between characters, they understand not only the characters and their actions, but they also develop ideas about how the story might end. As the student's understanding of the characters change, so, too, do possibilities for the ending. When readers share their thinking with others, they consider more possibilities for meaning (Langer, 1997).

Reading for Information

When readers are primarily concerned with gaining information, they work to develop a sense of the topic by what Langer would call "maintaining a point of reference." Their envisionments are shaped by their questions and explorations that bring them closer to the information they seek and that help them to better understand the topic. As people read, they use the content to narrow the possibilities of meaning and sharpen their understanding of the information, according to Langer (1997). She says that using information gained along the way (combined with what they already know) to refine their understanding, they seek to get the author's point or understand more and more about the topic. Unlike literary thinking, their questioning is guided by their sense of the whole (e.g. the topic or the point of the argument and the ideas, issues, and arguments related to it). Although readers may revise their current understandings, Langer (1997) believes that rarely do they change their sense of the whole or what the entire piece is about.

Response Journals and Discussion

Response journals have been an effective means of moving students and the teacher beyond the printed pages of stories. Although there is little research on what responses reveal about students' understandings and knowledge of the construction of literature, it could be said that students' responses are the windows through which the teacher glimpses the child's understanding of how literary texts are perceived. Through

writing in response journals, students are often better able to understand their own thinking. Pantaleo (1995) states that in students' journals they are:

> able to engage and participate personally with the text, reflect on evoked emotions and ideas, and imagine the perspectives and experiences of others. Students can take ownership of their reading as they write about their personal interpretations and connect and associate their prior knowledge and experiences with text. They can express, reflect upon, and clarify their thoughts and understandings, gaining self-confidence and motivation as they realize different interpretations of text are acceptable (p. 89).

As children begin working with response journals, their entries are usually little more than a summarization or retelling of the story. As they gain experience, they often respond to elements of the character or story that are of personal significance to them. Sometimes students will begin to project their own personality onto the character. Research indicates that students move on to evaluate the character and measure his/her values and judgments against the standards of the character in the story.

Written responses become permanent fixtures where students can revisit, elaborate, and organize their ideas. It is believed that the written dialogues that occur between the student and the text, between student and student, and the student and the teacher results in a more complete understanding of the story.

Discussion

Research supports the notion that learning is a social process and language is used to arbitrate meaning through the interactions of students', teachers', and the author's purpose. Oral literature discussions are essential in literature instruction. Discussion helps to construct ideas and represent experiences for others and ourselves. Students use discussion to question, respond, reflect, and to propose outcomes and solutions. In short, discussions can help them think. Reading would seem to be at its best when balanced with in-depth discussion of books by groups of children. The ways in which students discuss literature with adults and peers may influence the way they think about the literature they have heard or read independently.

When a student's literary discussion is passive, and only required to provide short answers to questions posed by others, is it correct to assume that he/she will be equally passive in his/her own individual thinking about literature? If students are expected to elaborate on personal responses, will they be equally active in their own individual reading? Research supports that literate voices develop as readers respond, react, and interpret the world through their experiences and apply these interpretations and reactions to their reading (Hepler & Hickman, 1982). They found that features of children's responses are social rather than age relevant or personal. Discussing books encourages children to negotiate meaning, which is central to learning. "The struggle to explain literature is made easier by having listeners who share your context (Hepler & Hickman, 1982). Talking in groups enables children to work through meanings that otherwise might

not be articulated" (p. 281). A classroom community of readers provides both an audience and a resource for response that may extend beyond discussion groups.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if second semester fourth grade students and sixth grade students who had the opportunity to engage in class discussion after listening to a Patricia Polacco book wrote about common themes. I chose these two grades because I had been a former fifth grade teacher and wanted to avoid my biases. Also, in Oklahoma, the fifth grades are required to take state-mandated tests and I did not want to interfere in this preparation. I felt that having two grades fairly close in developmental stages of learning and socialization would be best for my purpose of detecting any common themes in this study. The books I chose were also age appropriate for these grades.

In order to present a unified picture of the students in relation to literature engagement and understand any change in responses and/or engagements to an author study over a four-week time, a qualitative study, based on an in-depth viewing of written responses, taped discussion groups, and teacher interviews was conducted. Written student responses were collected so that the researcher could study them and verify any assumptions. Through an analysis of the students' responses written and oral, the researcher will be able to search for and identify any categories and themes evident in this author study.

The data will be derived from the personal writings of the students in their response journals, observational notes, audiotaped classroom discussions, and teacher

interviews. In addition, the researcher will note any artifact the teacher may use to manipulate and/or stimulate the story's meaning.

Definition of Terms

Aesthetic reading - in transactional theory, a type of reading in which attention is focused on "what is being lived through, the idea and feelings being evoked during the transaction" (Rosenblatt, 1978) as cited in Harris & Hodges (1995, p. 5).

Authentic text - in student programs, text that has not been altered in form or content, as original publications of children's literature (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 15).

Basal reading program - a collection of student texts and workbooks, teacher's manuals and supplemental materials for developmental reading and sometimes writing instruction, used chiefly in the elementary and middle school grades (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 18).

Efferent reading - a type of reading in which "the attention is focused on abstracting out, analyzing, and structuring what is to be retained after the reading, as, e.g., information, logical argument, or instructions for action" (Rosenblatt, 1991) as cited in Harris & Hodges (1995, p. 69).

Engagement - the emotional involvement of the reader in the process of responding to the content of reading, as occurs in a total absorption in a story or play (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 73).

Journal - a collection of student writing in response to reading (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 126).

Literature-based curriculum - a curriculum in which literary works, usually trade books, are the dominant materials for instruction, especially in the language arts (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 145).

Member check - a strategy for ensuring validity in qualitative research, here you ask participants to comment on your interpretation of the data, that is, you take tentative findings back to some of the participants from whom raw data was derived (Meriam, 2002, p. 26).

Reader response - a written record of materials read and reader's personal reactions to them (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 206).

Recall - the act or process of bringing back from memory a representation of prior learning or experience by images or words (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 214).

Round-robin reading - the outmoded practice of calling on students to read orally one after the other (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 222).

Trade Book - commercial books, other than basal readers, that are used for reading instruction (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p.258).

Transactional theory - the view that meaning is constructed in communication through language by an active, fluid interchange of ideas within a given context, as between reader and text or between speaker and audience (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 259).

Triangulation - the use of multiple methods, data collection strategies, and or data sources, in order to get a more complete picture and to cross-check information (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 630).

Statement of the Research Questions

The major research questions for this study were:

1. During an author study, (or using a series of books written by the same author), what themes are evident in fourth grade students' discussion and written responses?
2. During an author study, (or using a series of books written by the same author), what themes are evident in sixth grade students' discussion and written responses?
3. What themes emerged in both grades?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this qualitative study is to describe fourth and sixth graders' themes to an author study. The themes from the study were used to understand the nature and value of practicing discussion taking the aesthetic stance. The study was grounded in Rosenblatt's theory that students who have a chance to express their feelings out loud with their peers may find it is easier to face anxieties or problems and to "seek the help of others without the embarrassment of explicit self-revelation" and taking the aesthetic stance is the "perfectly valid way of responding to literature–in some ways the most valid, since it means that the word has profound importance to the reader" (1995, p. 196).

The significance of this study relied on the need for students to take the aesthetic stance during discussion of the story. When the aesthetic stance was taken, students talked

to each other, gained an understanding from their peers, and built on interpretations that were stated. The study investigated the effectiveness of written responses followed by classroom discussion. The results determined how students engaged with and responded to a particular author study in light of their experiences by common themes found in both grades. This investigation could provide teachers valuable insight into improving fourth and sixth grade students' comprehension skills and oral and written development skills.

Assumptions

This study was based on three assumptions. First, students and teachers were not extensively trained in literature response techniques. Secondly, students were never involved in class discussions to the Patricia Polacco books selected for this study. And third, students had not written any responses to the Patricia Polacco books selected for this study.

Limitations of the Study

Participants in this study were students in two public school classrooms located in the Northwest section of Oklahoma. The study was limited to one fourth and one sixth grade class of students in one elementary school, providing a relatively small sample size. This study cannot be generalized to the overall population of students and school districts since it was limited to urban, predominately middle class European Americans and

mainly due to the type of study it is. This study had the limitation of utilizing only one author study.

Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I provided an overview of the study including background information, definitions of terms used in the study, a formal statement of the problem investigated, the purpose of the study, an explanation of the significance of the research, and the assumptions and limitations of the study.

Chapter II reviewed the literature and research in the areas of literature responses both oral and written, transactional approaches, and engagement of the reader with the written word. Chapter III presented the methodology used in the study including the research questions, relevant information describing the participants, the research design, and procedures of the study. Chapter IV presented an analysis of the data while Chapter V summarized the findings as well as discussed the conclusions and implications of this study.

Summary Statement

Reader response recognizes that the reader has a significant role in bringing meaning to the interpretation of text. Rosenblatt (1988) emphasized that the meaning does not reside "ready made" in the text or in the reader, but happens during the transaction between the reader and the text (p. 4). The purpose of this study was to

examine students' written responses and discussions to an author study in order to learn about the kinds of meaning constructed by fourth and sixth grade students as they listened and discussed Patricia Polacco books. As the students engaged with the stories, the study looked at ways the children's responses were similar to the text. The responses that were common and evident in both discussion and written responses became themes. The themes in the study were prevalent topics that the fourth and sixth grade students wrote and discussed throughout the eight Patricia Polacco books.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Research has shown that there are basic distinctions in the way that readers focus when they are trying to make sense of text. Students live through experiences while they are reading, and they are constantly interpreting text. According to Langer (1994), when students finish a piece, they then rethink their interpretations. Traditional teaching of reading did not take this into account. The product and not the process, the text and not the reader were important. Hence, educators began to use reader response as an alternative to traditional instruction. At the elementary level, more literature and more different kinds of literature have begun to appear in classrooms, where teachers are sometimes blending work in basal readers with literature trade books. Responding to literature may foster comprehension, discussion, and writing, and promote emotional involvement with and an appreciation of literature. Advocates of reader response theory stress the importance of the reader's experiences in developing meaning. By introducing children to a wide variety of response modes, teachers may be encouraging their students to explore an interactive engagement with a story.

This chapter examines the four factors introduced in Chapter I: (1) reader response and the transactional approach, (2) reader response and engagement, (3) the reader and the text, and (4) response journals and discussion. Each section presents a review of the literature, a discussion of research results, the implications of these prior studies, and address how the literature will support specific methodological procedures chosen for this study.

Reader Response and the Transactional Approach

As stated in Chapter I, transaction is what occurs between the reader and the text. The transactional theory has two major attributes, the ideas that the reader brings from background knowledge or schemata to the text and the idea that the reader chooses to read a text from an aesthetic perspective (Purves & Monson, 1984). The transactions that students have with literature involve their total beings and manifest themselves in all sorts of activities. Literature should form a major portion of any language arts program; Purves and Monson (1984) do not want to see it divorced from everything else that goes on in a person's school life. Literature presents experience to people, and people experience literature.

Transaction focuses on both the reader and text. Rosenblatt's transactional theory differed from other theories because she did not see an interaction of reader and text since that implied two entities. The reader and text are dependent on one another, they do exist alone. Responding is a natural part of the reading process. Students' transaction with the text results in the envisionment of their own personal meaning (Rosenblatt, 1991).

Rosenblatt (1995) calls the way in which the text and the reader come together "transactions." and explains,

> The reader approaches the text with a certain purpose, certain expectations or hypotheses that guide his choices from the residue of past experience. As the text unrolls before the reader's eyes, the meaning made of the early words influences what comes to mind (p. 26).

Because readers often discuss their reading with others when they have been affected by a story, reading becomes not only a transaction between reader and text but between multiple readers and text (Rosenblatt, 1978). Reader response has been a part of literature since Rosenblatt published *Literature as Exploration* in 1938, but only since the 1960s has the idea of readers "transacting" with the text by bringing to it their knowledge, experience, and values to develop their own personal ideas, has it come to be seen as an important part in understanding text.

It appears that reader response theories incorporate a broad range of beliefs and attitudes toward, as well as assumptions about, the role of the reader, the social and cultural contexts that influence the transaction between the reader and the text (Beach, 1993). Some theorists favor the role of the text, others the role of the reader, while still others suggest that cultural and social influences are most important to transaction (Beach, 1993). According to Rosenblatt (1991), there are two kinds of reading: literary [aesthetic] or nonliterary [efferent]. She defines efferent reading as more academic reading or an analytic reasoning strategy. The purpose of efferent reading is to acquire "...information that we wish to retain after the reading has ended" (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 444). Children who know the teacher will ask about the factual aspects of the text will

read from an efferent stance. The students will be considered successful if they remember how many ducks were on the pond.

Aesthetic reading is considered a more private reading that focuses on "...what we are experiencing, thinking and feeling" (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 444). Perhaps when teachers stress information about feelings and experiences, the child may read from an aesthetic stance. However, it is the individual reader's interpretation and response to the text that are the essence of any piece of literature.

Responding is a natural part of the reading process. When children listen to or read a story, they respond to it by using their prior knowledge to construct meaning. Often in the class, there is a commonly accepted response that is expected from students. There are also responses that differ from student to student for any specific piece of literature. Within the bounds of accepted responses, there can be a variety of interpretations. Students' personal responses can be expressed in a variety of ways in particular, oral discussion groups.

Reader Response and Engagement

Squire (1964) developed categories of response to evaluate adolescents' responses to literature and to understand how those responses develop over time. He studied the responses of 52 students in relation to intelligence, socioeconomic factors, ability level, and personal characteristics of the reader by examining the emotional and ideational responses of adolescents. Although he found patterns of response, his research clearly demonstrated the individual and experiential nature of response. He concluded that

emotional involvement, or engagement, was the most critical element of response; students who developed an emotional involvement were more aware of the elements of a story.

Rosenblatt believed that an aesthetic reader does not merely concentrate on verbal objects but rather on experience. The focus is what the reader is able to bring to mind and live through. She claimed that her "reader" was both a participant and a spectator.

Researchers recognize the close relationship between response and engagement; one does not exist without the other. Some such as Wylie (1999) believe response is a form of engagement; the way in which the reader responds reflects the level of his/her involvement with text. Engagement with literature implies, individually or collectively, interest, agreement, commitment to the text, and willingness to become involved (Wylie, 1999) with characters and/or plot. Engaging with literature involves a constellation of subjective experiences, including emotional reactions and associations, empathy or identification with characters or text (Beach, 1993); recognizing one's own emotional experience with a text magnifies those feelings (Bleich, 1975). Ideally, examining his/her personal engagement with literature leads the reader to an understanding of the way elements of the text interact with his/her values and experiences (Purves & Rippere, 1968).

Many theorists refer to engagement <u>with</u> literature. Wyle (1999) made a distinction between being engaged by/with literature and being engaged <u>in</u> literature. Engagement <u>with</u> literature, she says, is a more distant involvement in which the reader "temporarily" adopts another persona whereas a reader who is engaged <u>in</u> literature is immediately involved and committed. She also identifies three levels of engagement

which she believes are "a measure of response and depend entirely on the individual reader" (p.197) rather than the text. At fully engaged, the reader is "riveted" from the beginning to the end of the story; this level of involvement ranges on a continuum from "complete empathy" (p. 193) with the protagonist or narrator during which the reader understands he/she is a reader "outside the story as well as being a listener inside the story" (Wylie, 1999, p. 193) to such "fully absorbed" empathy that the reader forgets to be outside the story until called back to reality. A partially engaged reader is involved only some of the time. Wylie (1999) called these readers "fence sitters" because they drop in and out of the text. Non-engagement readers indicate a complete lack of interest; when a reader actively resists a book he/she is disengaged. These levels can be used to gauge response; when the reader considers his/her level of engagement with a text it adds another dimension to the discussion of his/her reading response.

The Reader and the Text

Since each reader comes to the text with past experiences and uses these experiences to make meaning from text, the reader will have some level of prior knowledge. The text triggers elements in a reader's past and causes the reader to select, reject, and reorder the new material that is being read. One must also take into consideration the reader's present state. Each individual reader makes different meaning from text (Rosenblatt, 1978) although a group can often reach a consensus because they have had similar experiences. The discussion among readers and listeners that occurs in response to shared text is an important part of the story-time experience. Using story-

based discussions helps children construct meaning and understand stories that are read to them. Recent research, (Many, 1990; Wylie, 1999; Kelly, 1990), indicates that it is important to provide children daily with positive experiences involving stories. Opportunities for such experiences include reading and retelling stories, discussing stories critically, responding to stories both orally and in writing, and sharing books with peers. Children support each other in their efforts to understand and reflect on stories (Purves and Monson, 1984). When children participate in read aloud events, Purves and Monson (1984) claim that the quality and complexity of their responses increase. Also, when children have repeated experiences with stories, their interpretive responses become more varied and more in depth.

Rosenblatt defined the reader's stance on a continuum from efferent to aesthetic, reading to remember or reading to enjoy the experience. She stated that narrative (or story) exists in any text, even scientific journals and nonfiction material (1991) and suggested that readers should not think of text as either efferent, to take away something, or aesthetic, to savor the experience. Any text could be read either way, and any reading event fall somewhere between efferent and aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt, 1982). Rosenblatt (1982) says readers switch stances while reading as they transact with text.

Purves and Monson (1984) believe the curriculum and the teacher must realize that there may indeed be many idiosyncratic responses to a text, many individual transactions, and they may appear to disparate as to be unmanageable from a pedagogical point of view. Flynn (1986) found that males and females differed in their characteristic responses, with males attempting to dominate the text or distance themselves from it, whereas women readers were able to maintain a more balanced approach. Hansen (1986)

found that male readers responded more to the formal elements of poems about violence, and females attended more to the poems' messages.

In a related study, Garrison and Hynds (1991) found that proficient readers integrated textual cues and prior knowledge in the process of reflecting about stories, whereas less proficient readers approached texts in a linear way. Earthman (1994) found that more experienced readers [in this case, graduate students], were more likely to attend to difficult gaps in literary texts (Iser, 1978) and that less experienced readers (college freshman) were more likely to retain their initial view of a work, whereas graduate students assumed varying perspectives. Many (1990) found that the use of the aesthetic stance was associated with higher levels of personal understanding. This parallels to Rosenblatt's (1978) view on aesthetic stance.

A study by Hynds (1989) looks further into connection between social and literary understanding. In this project Hynds was especially interested in how adolescent readers used their understandings of people as they read literary texts, and in the influence of other social and home experiences on attitudes toward reading. For a case study design, Hynds chose four students representing each of four prototypes. One tended to have high complexity rating on interpersonal constructs for peers, less complex for literary characters. One showed the opposite pattern: less complex interpersonal constructs for peers, and more complex for literary characters. The third had high complex ratings on constructs for both peers and literary characters and the fourth, lower rating for both peers and literary characters (p. 33).

Hynds observed that students do use their social understandings "to predict what will happen next in the story or to speculate beyond it; to understand people around them;

to reflect on their own personal lives; and to compare the world of the text with the everyday world in which they live" (p. 49). She pointed out, however, that how much they do so depends a great deal on such factors as the encouragement they find at home for reading, the strength of their motivation to perform in the classroom, and, of course, their competence.

The comments of the students offered Hynds some insight into their conception of the literature classroom. They reported to her the "constraining influence" (p. 57) of ceaseless evaluation and of having their interpretations rejected by teachers too strongly devoted to their own. They noted, too, the pleasure, rare though it was, of working with teachers "who were willing to act as 'co-learner' in the process of literary analysis" (p. 57). Their observations indicated to Hynds that they would see clearer connections between literature and their lives "when teachers model literature as a way of learning about and reflecting upon life, when they are willing to act as co-learner rather than expert in that process, and when they offer choices of response modes and assessment measures" (p. 58).

Ideas about reader response have changed over time. Bleich (1975) considered the response of the reader the most important element in analyzing text. He totally disagreed with traditional approaches to teaching reading; meaning, that the traditional reading instruction was typically provided through the use of basal readers in which all students read the same story, answered the same questions, were taught the same skills, and responded to the same essay assignments. Bleich (1975) felt that traditionalists were too impersonal, and he suggested various ways to get students to respond to literature. Bleich was less concerned with objectivity than with the interaction of readers. He, like

Rosenblatt, was an experiential theorist, but one difference between Bleich and Rosenblatt was that Bleich said that the reader had more personal control over the text than Rosenblatt. Rosenblatt asked students to return to the text to locate the section that led to an expressed meaning.

Stanley Fish, (1980) a reader response theorist of the 1980s, appears to feel that interpretation comes from the "interpretative communities" from which both the reader and the author come, and this is what influences interpretation. Most readers interpret texts using strategies that they have learned. The fact that different children interpret text differently is a result of the differences of the strategies used. Fish (1980) felt that these strategies were a result of socialization experienced by readers in their own communities and environments. Fish (1980) believes that response journals work well in the classroom because we all learn by sharing our beliefs with one another.

A reader response study conducted by Cullinan, Harwood, and Galda, (1983) viewed reading comprehension as a multi-layered activity. The researchers conducted a study of developmental factors in children's response to realistic and fantasy novels in a naturalistic mode; they used taped interviews and close observation for evidence. Eighteen participants in grades four, six and eight, (nine boys and nine girls), including Italian, Jewish, African-American, and Puerto Rican ethnic groups, participated in the study. Children were met individually and interviewed about their concept of story. They were asked about the kinds of stories they liked to read what they knew about a story, what they expect when they read a story, and what kinds of things usually happen in stories. The students were given one of two novels, *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Wizard of Earthsea.*

When children had completed reading one of the books, they were interviewed individually and later in a same sex-group of three to discuss the book. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The major question for eliciting response was to ask them to tell about the story. They were also asked what they liked about the story, what made it good or not so good, if the title or symbol had any special meanings, and whether this book reminded them of any other book they had ever read.

Three raters independently read the responses from the concept of story interviews and individual and group discussions. The concept of story protocols was labeled according to:

Life experiences (family structure, hobbies, leisure activities, and friends)

Types of stories liked (favorite books and authors, genre preferences)

Characterization of reader (purpose for reading, type of reader)

Preference (reading as compared with TV viewing and going to movies)

What is a story (definition, use of literary terms, purpose of stories)

Expectations of story (characteristics cited, personal traits)

Where do stories come from (sources cited, understanding of origins)

Do stories really happen (recognition of alternatives, suspension of disbelief)

These data were used to determine the child's *stated* concept of the story and later compared to the *revealed* concept of story observed in the book discussions (Cullinan, Harwood, Galda, 1983).

The book discussion protocols were labeled in the following way:

Story recall - Form: (retelling, synopsis, summary, analysis, and generalization)

Story recall - Content: (literal, interpretive, evaluative comprehension)

Character (plot, trait, and theme)

Important part and/or idea (plot, theme, character, style)

Literary universe (connections made between this book and others)

Evaluation (basis for liking or disliking)

Rewrite (probing evaluation for changes they would make)

Metaphor or symbol (recognition of possible meanings)

The book discussion data became the base for descriptive summaries of the developmental stages in children's responses to stories. The data confirmed the idea that there are clear developmental levels in children's comprehension of literature. The form of reader's story recall progressed from retelling and synopsis to summary and analysis. Fourth-grade students remained at the literal level; they ignored a significant event in one text and could not grasp the complexity of the plot in the other. Sixth-grade readers were able to make inferences beyond the information given and eighth-grade readers could make evaluative judgments with valid justification from the text. Fourth-grade students comprehended little meaning in the symbolic and metaphoric elements of the text, whereas sixth-grade students considered the possibility of symbol and metaphor. The eighth-grade students saw multiple meanings for the symbolic and metaphoric features of the texts.

Most studies have viewed comprehension and response as two separate items but Cullinan, Harwood, and Galda (1983) thought they must be viewed together. Studies by Galda (1983) have shown that children respond differently to different kinds of reading material. There are identifiable differences in performance between girls and boys as well. Many factors influence comprehension, and different people reading the same

materials respond differently. This, too, is consistent with the cultural, psychological, and experiential theories of reader response. Research in literary response is a discipline of examination into how and why readers respond to what they read (Galda, 1983). Children of different ages respond differently to the same text (Cullinan, Harwood, and Galda, 1983). Both the quantity and depth of understanding is a function of a reader's background experience. Children in the literal stage look at text more literally than older children. Peer pressure and public discussion affects the way students answer questions (Galda, 1982). Galda (1982) stated that response appears to be influenced by both age and developmental levels of understanding and children's knowledge develops with age. At first, when children begin to evaluate text, they consider texts discrete segments of literal truth before they evaluate them in terms of their own life experiences. The ability to evaluate analytically or symbolically comes later with the acquisition of formal operations (Galda, 1982).

Cullinan, Harwood, and Galda (1983) believe there is a direct relation between students' liking of a story and their comprehension of that story. Reader response provides a way to look at the multidimensional nature of comprehension rather than looking at a single aspect of the reader's interpretation of a text. It allows a glimpse into the interaction between reader and text. The researchers state that no longer can studies be on just the reader or just the text; it must be examined as an interaction between the two.

Response Journals and Discussion

Patricia Kelly, teacher and researcher, wanted to know how students would react to Bleich's (1978) prompts and how their responses to the literature would develop over the course of a year. She said that one crucial element of Bleich's ((1978) model is that it allows for different interpretations of text depending on what the reader brings to the reading. Her foundation for the reader response perspective that guided the study can be found in the works of Rosenblatt (1978) and Bleich ((1978). Rosenblatt's (1978) view of readers' transactions with text, i.e., that comprehension of the text involves both the author's text and what the reader brings to it, coincided with Kelly's view of reading.

All 28 students in Kelly's multiethnic third-grade class participated in activities that encouraged response to literature. The students' reading levels ranged from first to fourth grade. Due to the variance in reading abilities, Kelly (1990) decided to introduce responding to literature by reading a wide variety of literature aloud to the class rather than having students read silently.

Kelly used Bleich's (1978) prompts to encourage response, which included the following: (a) What did you notice in the story? (b) How did the story make you feel? What does this story remind you of in your life? These prompts were introduced as an oral language activity and then as a written activity.

Phase I in Kelly's (1990) study began in the fall of the school year. At least once a week prompts were used in whole-group activities where recording was done on sheets of butcher paper, in much the same way that students' words might be recorded in language experience activities. These response charts were displayed in the classroom so they

could be reread by the students. This structure Kelly claims permitted students to engage in responding to literature without requiring individual written responses. It also allowed students to hear each other's thoughts about the story, demonstrated that all responses were valid and valuable, and showed that there was not just one "right" answer.

Phase II began in January and continued until the end of the school year. Stories were read to the students and instead of students responding orally to the Bleich prompts, they had 5 minutes to respond in writing to what was read using the prompts as a guide. Kelly felt that this 5-minute limit was enough time for students to individually respond succinctly to each prompt, and that timed writing focused students' attention and bolstered fluency. She extended the response time as the year progressed. By the end of the year, students wrote for approximately 7 to 8 minutes. Following the writing, students were given an opportunity to share their responses with the class. Written responses were then collected so that Kelly could read them. Kelly did not grade the responses.

Kelly (1990) found that the transition from orally responding to literature to written response was an easy one, perhaps because students were accustomed to thinking about the prompts. She states that the third graders were easily able to respond in writing to the questions within the allotted time. When students were asked to write about their feelings regarding the book, responses were usually longer than those given in the oral response sessions, and most students elaborated on more than one feeling or single event. Written responses increased in length as students had more practice with the activity. Kelly states this may have reflected in an increase in fluency encouraged by the timed aspect of the work; it may have reflected growth over time due to practice with several writing activities. Other changes in response patterns were also apparent near the end of

the school year according to Kelly (1990). Students of all reading abilities were inclined to write more elaborate summaries to the question "What did you notice in the story?" Another change that occurred in written responses to this question was that some students went beyond the literal retelling and summarizing of story events in their observations.

Kelly (1990) believes that giving students the opportunity to respond to literature added a substantive element to her literature program. Regardless of reading ability all students were successful in responding to literature, guided by the prompts. She says that allowing students to respond in both oral and written formats fostered written and oral expression. Responding to literature promoted students' ability to connect their prior knowledge and experience with the text, and encouraged personal response to literature. Overall Kelly (1990) claims that responding to literature fostered comprehension, discussion, and writing skills, and promoted emotional involvement with and appreciation of literature.

Many et al. (1992) conducted a study that consisted of undergraduate elementary education majors enrolled in two intact sections of a children's literature course. One section was randomly designated the transactional criticism approach (N=25) and the other an aesthetic literary experience approach (N=31). Students in each section shared a common syllabus and were introduced to the concepts of aesthetic approaches to literature and transactional criticism. The only difference between the two sections was the manner in which eight works of multicultural literature by award-winning authors were approached as the books were shared across the course of the semester. In the aesthetic literary experience group, students were encouraged to reflect on how the emotions, associations, and images evoked added to the personal significance of their

story experience. For example, in response to the text, the aesthetic experience group discussed the following question: "How would you feel at different points in the story if you were this character"? In contrast, the transactive criticism approach group, they first experienced the works aesthetically and then critically analyzed the artistic or literary techniques which affected their own aesthetic experience. In responding to the same book, these students discussed a particular section of the book that caught their attention, and then went back and analyzed what the author or illustrator did to stimulate that reaction.

At the end of the semester, students read another story about racial prejudice. After reading the story, students completed a written free response. Responses or response portions were classified according to three categories: literary analysis, aesthetic, or unable to be determined. Two independent raters scored all responses. Interrater reliability was established with 98% agreement and consensus was reached on the coding of any responses upon which there was disagreement. Responses were then divided into thought units and the percentage of the response, which fell into each of the categories, was computed. Responses classified as literary analysis indicated the students had stepped back and objectified the story experience in order to contemplate the artistic or literary techniques involved in creating the text. The intent of responses coded as aesthetic was to focus on the students' engagement in the story world and reactions to the events within it. Aesthetic responses could have one or more of the following: visualizing scenes or characters, making associations between the story and literary or life experiences, relating emotion evoked, putting self in character's place, passing judgments on character's behavior, discussing preferences, citing metacognitive awareness of living

through the story, hypothesizing alternative outcomes, and discussing personal relevance of story experience (Many, et al. 1992).

The approach modeled with the eight multicultural works significantly affected the students' purpose in writing the free response to the subsequent work at the end of the semester. The students who experienced the transactional criticism focus included a higher percentage of statements focusing literary analysis (52%) than did students who experienced the aesthetic literary experience approach (29%). Students in the aesthetic literary experience approach group wrote responses with a higher percentage of statements focusing solely on their aesthetic literary experience (68%) than did the transactional criticism approach students (44%) (Many, et al. 1992). Both methods of Kelly and Many demonstrated an aesthetic literary experience.

In another study of children's responses to literature, Studier (1978) involved three fifth-grade classes in a rural Georgia school. The responses of the fifth-graders support the belief that these children are, indeed, capable literary critics.

The procedure for eliciting responses began with a class activity in which the teacher read a selected book aloud to the entire class. Immediately following the conclusion of the book, the teacher asked the students to write a free response to it. The following instructions were suggested:

> Write what you'd most like to write about the book, what you especially noticed, or what you thought about it. What you write about the book is more important than how you write it, but make sure it is readable. Write as much as you wish. If you have a question about spelling, punctuation, or character's name, raise your hand and I'll help you. Take as much time as you need. Write whatever you want

> to concerning the book. Before you start to write, spend some time thinking about the book (Studier, 1978, p. 42).

The fifth-graders in the study wrote for approximately fifteen minutes, most producing an essay which filled one-half to one full side of a sheet of paper.

Studier (1978) says that the use of free written responses is recommended for classroom teachers for two reasons. First, writing allows students some privacy for thought and expression. Peer influence is at a minimum, so children's responses are likely to be more individual, more personal than their oral responses might be. Second, written responses are permanent; the teacher may study them carefully and refer to them at any time.

Studies of the literary responses of students in grades four through six reveal that there are certain characteristics which typify the responses of these children (Cooper 1985; Harding 1962; Purves 1975; White 1973).

1. Their responses are primarily concerned with content, rather than style.
2. They are likely to concentrate on the literal aspects of literature, rather than making inferences.
3. They are capable of responding critically to literature.
4. They respond with certain openness and are willing to reveal personal responses with little regard for social expectations.

In a study of children's responses to literature, Applebee (1978) found those children's understanding of, response to, and evaluation of literature evolve in predictable developmental stages corresponding to those observed by Piaget. Applebee (1978) noted that in the preoperational early childhood stage, children retell stories with little

understanding of plot structure; their responses and evaluations are subjective ("It's a good story because I liked it"). It is not until children enter the concrete operational stage, at about age seven, that the ability to summarize and categorize responses; at this time, both objective and subjective responses are apparent, although subjective responses may still be dominant.

Discussion

Observations and self reflections reveal that teachers do most of the talking in their classrooms. Usually when students do respond, they typically provide only simple information to recall statements. This pattern of teacher/student interaction may not only limit a student's opportunity to create and manipulate language, but may also limit the student's ability to engage in more complex learning (Ramirez, 1991, p.8).

Applebee's (1978) work demonstrated that each stage of literacy understanding builds upon the previous stage; the reader matures into each subsequent response level. Six- year olds are unable to formulate abstract statements about the author's purpose; older children not only are able to generalize, but are able to activate all previous responses depending on their purpose. Applebee (1978) says this gradual development enables the reader to "articulate and explore" his/her view of the world, to clarify and reconsider literature within his/her personal experience. Teachers guide the child reader to expand, question, and cultivate his/her response.

Students' discussion in classrooms is important to their learning. Research shows that students' verbal exchanges about content improve learning and increase their level of

thinking. The social nature of learning implies that, because each context is different, students must always evaluate what to say, when and how, consider options, and make choices. Learning rests on taking these actions according to Hansen and Graves (1985). Traditionally, discussion in classrooms has not been common. As students advance through the grades, opportunities for discussion in the classroom appear to decrease.

Many theorists claim that using discussion to connect literature and other texts with a variety of experiences and the prior knowledge of the reader maximizes students' learning, given that they critically discuss topics worth talking about. With my experience as reading teacher, this interactive approach is based on the knowledge that simply acquiring information like names and dates may not amount to significant learning. On the other hand, I believe discussion among students, at any age, in which they hear different points of view and collaborate to solve problems, serves as an important foundation for the development of logical reasoning skills.

Beach (1993) makes an interesting statement in that readers often respond to literature because of a social need to share their views with others; they may use their responses to form social relationships or exclude others from the discussion. Although each reader has a unique approach to a text, they share common cultural, social, and interpretive experiences with his/her classmates (Beach & Hynds, 1984).

Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development provides a framework for understanding the role of social interaction in literacy. Vygotsky suggests that we learn as we move cognitively from one function to the next. Vygotsky (1986) believed that interaction enhanced learning through scaffolding and the zone of proximal development. As children relate new information to prior knowledge, he says, children are able to

organize and integrate information into their schemata. The zone of proximal development serves as the foundation for Vygotsky's argument that with peer interaction and teacher guidance students can do more than they can do alone (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 187). In collaborative efforts with adults or more capable peers, children are able to organize their thinking and to perform tasks that they are not able to do alone (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Peterson (1988), as students engage in dialogue, "they collaborate one-with-the-other to comprehend ideas, problems, events, and feelings..." (p.1). Through this genuine responding, the students work together to expand what they know of the world's meaning. "The literary transaction in itself may become a self-liberating process, and the sharing of our responses may be an even greater means of overcoming our limitations of personality and experience" (Rosenblatt, 1984).

Engagement

In a qualitative study MacGregor (2001) explored the nature of children's engagement with and response to multicultural and mainstream literature in relation to the literature itself and the child's development during reading. The participants were four students in the researcher's ethnically diverse and scholastically heterogeneous fifth grade class. The school was located in a low socioeconomic area of a Midwestern community. Data consisted of audiotapes of in-depth interviews with the participants, student response journals, audio- and videotapes of small literature group discussions, and audio- and videotapes of whole class literature discussions; data were collected over a six-week period from April to June. MacGregor (2001) found that what emerges from

an in depth analysis of the data, that while engagement looked different for each child, the common element across cases was true growth of self through deep engagement with the literature; was evident in the development of the children's responses to literature. The two children of color engaged at a maximum level with text reflecting their lived experiences. Maximum engagement seemed by MacGregor to be characterized by an intense emotional and intellectual connection during which the children felt they were "in" the story. An unexpected finding she says was the unsuspected deeper levels of inner moral/ethical feeling and knowledge. These levels apparently remain stable over long periods of time and play a large role in the child's behavior in various contexts; they are intertwined with the way the child relates to the characters in books he/she is reading and the child's use of these in understanding and structuring these perceptions of the world around him/her (MacGregor, 2001). MacGregor noted in her study that it is possible that the element of choice, even when that choice was guided by the literature made available to children, provided a stimulus for reading and engagement with literature. African-American literature had a definite impact not only the willingness to read but in engagement as well with African-American children. MacGregor said they "knew" the characters, they understood their ways of life, they spoke the same language, and they were inspired to read. She found that even those students with little interest in reading in the past became enthusiastic readers. The mainstreamed children also enjoyed the multicultural literature.

Her findings included that maximum engagement with literature seemed too characterized by an intense emotional and intellectual connection during which the children felt they were "in" the story; the people and situations seem real. She said that as

the students engagement evolved, the children's responses expanded, and they moved from making shallow surface comments to deeply penetrating insights about life, morality, and the world around them. MacGregor felt their response journals were a disappointment, but their responses to group discussions and individual in-depth interviews surpassed all her expectations.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of the study was to examine the written responses of children to an author study using authentic literature. The focus was on written responses, and to detect, if possible, any common themes over the course of the time of data collection. The researcher also compared the written responses of fourth grade students to sixth grade students' written responses to eight different books written by the same author.

This chapter will describe the study's research questions, instructional/research setting, research design, research subjects/ participants, research procedures, data collection analysis procedures, and trustworthiness of the study. The methodology was based on the nonparticipant's observation form of study in which the researcher/observer is not directly involved in the situation to be observed, and the observer does not intentionally interact with or affect the object of the observation. The written responses were assigned and collected solely by each grade's teacher. Any other artifacts were photographed and included in this study; for example, items that the teacher brought for supplemental support for the classroom discussion.

Statements of the Research Questions

As stated in Chapter II, more literature and more different kinds of literature have begun to appear in classrooms, where teachers are sometimes blending work in basal readers with literature trade books. It appears that responding to literature fosters comprehension, discussion, and writing, and promotes emotional involvement with and an appreciation of literature.

The major research questions used in this study were:

1. During an author study (or using a series of books written by the same author) what themes are evident in fourth grade students' discussion and written response?
2. During an author study (or using a series of books written by the same author) what themes are evident in sixth grade students' discussion written responses?
3. What themes emerge in both grades?

Instructional/Research Setting

The school in which the study was conducted is located in the Northwest region of Oklahoma. Most of the children were from families where both parents work. The written permission of the administration, teachers, parents, and students were collected before any observations and written responses were gathered (see Appendixes A, B, C and D). The school includes grades pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. The average class size for the school is 23 for the school year 2002-03. The school has a computer lab that

incorporates a commercial reading program to enhance the reading curriculum. This school also has a Title I reading and math teacher and a part-time Title IX teacher for those students who qualify for these services. The percentage of students at this school in the Title I program is 41%. The total number of students who attend the school is 430. The school district currently has a population of 47,045 (Rand McNally, 2003).

Research Participants

The participants were children from heterogeneous and culturally diverse fourth and sixth grade classes. The fourth grade class was comprised of 24 students: 13% African American, 62% European American, 8% Hispanic, 4% Pacific Islander, and 13% Native Americans. The sixth grade class was comprised of 21 students: 19% African American, 71% European American and 10% Hispanic. Although the classes were culturally diverse, the majority of the students were European American.

Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative research design with descriptive methodology. The study determined and described the way things are interpreted. By using the information from Gay and Airasin (2000), the researcher was guided by general characteristics that qualitative studies include and chose to incorporate this design. First, the sources of data for this qualitative research were real-world situations and the study occurred in the natural setting of the classroom. The researcher spent two days for four

weeks in the selected setting. Secondly, the qualitative research data was descriptive. Third, the qualitative research emphasized a holistic approach, focusing on the process as well as the final outcome. The researcher was immersed in the details and specifics of the setting that provided the basis for understanding the setting, participants, and their interactions in their real-world setting. Fourth, the qualitative data were analyzed inductively; a conclusion was reached from collecting and observing multiple instances. Fifth, the researcher often sought to describe the meaning of the findings from the perspective of the research participants, not the researcher herself.

Data Sources

Data included teacher interviews, student response journals, taped classroom discussions, and field notes taken at each observation. This was the basis for the analysis and interpretations.

Student Response Journals

The second set of data was the responses the students wrote at the end of each Patricia Polacco book their teacher read aloud. The student response journals were prompted by their teacher with three questions: 1) "What do you think Patricia Polacco was trying to tell you about this story"? 2) "What does Patricia Polacco want you to think about after hearing this story?" and 3) "Have you ever felt like one of the characters in this story?"

Taped Classroom Discussions

The third set of data came from taped classroom discussions. The researcher recorded the discussions without any participation or interference to the group. The teacher turned the recorder on and off. The recorded discussions were used as a procedure to increase the reliability of the filed notes.

Field Notes

The fourth set of data came from the researcher's field notes collected during classroom discussion activities and teacher interviews. Notes were taken at each book reading (two per week for four weeks) and at the weekly teacher interviews for a total of four and a fifth after the study was completed. The researcher recorded what she saw, heard, experienced, and thought about during the observational sessions.

Procedure

The researcher obtained administration permission through a formal written letter to the district's curriculum director explaining the study with a request of signature approval. The principal of the school, teachers, parents, and students also granted written permission (see Appendixes B, C and D). Data were taken from field notes during the observations as well as from in-depth analyses of written responses of the fourth and sixth grade students' and teacher interviews. The researcher investigated common themes

found in the artifacts. There were no identifiers on the written responses or field notes other than grade level and first names. Field notes were categorized according to male responses, female responses, and the grade level. The researcher did a practice session with a group of sixth grade students not included in the initial study. This enabled the researcher to check for question reliability and appropriate procedures and specific directions to ensure a study with possible fewer errors.

Before any data were collected, the researcher conversed with the fourth and sixth grade teachers explaining in detail what the research study involved and specific directions by supplying them with an outlined lesson plan (see Appendix B). The study lasted four weeks and required eight books read aloud by the teacher with students' written responses after class discussions. During the times of book engagements, the researcher collected field notes and taped discussions.

Non-participant observations were conducted by the researcher during regular class time and were conducted in a way that did not disturb the normal routine of the classroom. Two days of the school week were scheduled to obtain data. The days and times were left to the teachers' discretion. The teachers read the books aloud in order to control for reading abilities and not be a factor in the study. The researcher honored the naturalistic inquiry definition, "Studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally; nonmanipulative, unobtrusive, and noncontrolling; openness to whatever emerges–lack of predetermined constraints on outcomes" (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 205). In order for the researcher to pursue a naturalistic setting, the teacher used her pedagogical practices as she read the book. Stopping and discussing with a general question of "What are you thinking now?" throughout the story again was left to the teacher's pedagogy. In addition,

there were initial questions for the teacher to engage after reading the author book. It was speculated that these questions would induce more engagement of oral responses.

Teacher Interview Questions

Teacher interviews were conducted each week. The following questions were used to begin the interview but the interviews tended to flow with no structure or definite outline.

Week One: Overall, how did the two discussions go this week on *Some Birthday* and *Thank you, Mr. Falkner* stories you read aloud this week? Can you give me some examples of the students' discussions and ideas?

Week Two: You have now read four books by Patricia Polacco; how have the discussions been progressing? Can you give me some examples? Books for week two are, *Thunder Cake* and *Rechenka's Eggs.*

Week Three: In the third week of reading Patricia Polacco's books, have you noticed any thing in particular the students are bringing to the discussions? What are they talking about? Examples? Books for week three are *Chicken Sunday* and *Pink and Say.*

Week Four: Reading aloud eight books and engaging in classroom discussions for the last four weeks, have you observed any changes in the students? If so, can you give me some examples about how they have changed and if no change can you elaborate on why? Books for week four are *Just Plain Fancy* and *The Keeping Quilt.*

Rationale for Choosing This Author

The researcher chose a collection of Patricia Polacco's books. These books were chosen because they dealt with real life situations and family diversity. For example:

- family stories
- "passed-down stories" or elder stories
- stories that emphasize diverse communities
- stories that may help to raise social consciousness

Patricia Polacco is a distinguished author and illustrator of children's books. Her books show distinctness from other children books. They are not childlike stories created around children as the central character. Polacco's books artfully integrate story structure and visual images to present stories in which the reader or listener can involve him/herself as a member within the human community of the story, and identify with others differently from him/herself. This allowed meaning to take place in each child's developing sense of the world. Respect and embracing diversity is a hallmark of Patricia Polacco's books.

Books included in the study were:

- *Pink and Say* (1994) was chosen as an American Library Association Notable Children's Book for 1995. This story is based on a true incident from the American Civil War and has been passed down through the author's family. This story has a dramatic theme of the trials of war, the loyalty of friends, and the relevance of history in our lives today. Regardless of individual differences, brotherhood and sisterhood have no boundaries not only in a time of need but

always. It is a book about doing what is right and getting that "warm" feeling inside.

- *Some Birthday* (1991) is a story that everyone in the family seems to ignore Patricia's birthday. Instead, they follow dad to the swamp to have an adventure and perhaps to capture a monster. *Some Birthday* spotlights the family and the need to feel important and remembered. This story's family is like many students' families involving divorce. This book won the Child Study Association Children's Book of the Year, the International Reading Association Children's Choices Book Award, and was chosen as a Parents' Choice Awards Honor Book.
- *Thank you, Mr. Falker* (1998) is a story about a special student who cannot read. She is often made fun of by her classmates until the new teacher, Mr. Falker, sees the real talent that Trisha has. This is a personal story that gives thanks and praise to those teachers who quietly change the lives of the children they teach. It is a story that shows empathy and how we should look beyond the obvious to really know a person and to value them regardless of any disability they may have.
- *Thunder Cake* (1990) relates the fears of a young child who is frightened of a thunderstorm and her warm and wise Babushka (grandmother) who keeps her busy gathering ingredients for the Thunder Cake and helping to bake it. The real lesson learned in this book was not of confronting fear but of the precious time spent with Babushka (grandmother) and the memories being instilled upon Patricia and how these memories molded the person she became as a person.
- *Rechenka's Eggs* (1988) is one of the most praised books by Polacco. In this story, Babushka (grandmother), who makes lovely painted eggs, takes in a goose,

Rechenka, who has been injured. As Rechenka heals, she begins to explore every nook and cranny of the house. She jumps on the table and breaks the eggs meant for the Festival in Moskva. Babushka (grandmother) is heartbroken, but discovers a miracle the next morning. *Rechenka's Eggs* enables students to reminisce about someone who is special to them and/or something given to them that are cherished and why. This book was selected as IRA Children's Book Award Winner, a *Redbook* Top 10 Picture Book, and a "Reading Rainbow" feature book.

- *The Keeping Quilt* (1988) tells the story of Ms. Polacco's lineage. Great-great-grandma Anna came from Russia to New York City in heavy boots, a thick overcoat, and a bright scarf on her head. Anna's mother used scraps of that scarf and of the family's old clothes to create a quilt that was displayed at all the important events such as births, marriages, and deaths that marked the life of the family. The story is a sharing of heritage and how traditions have been changed or preserved through generations. Because the author shared her heritage and story, it is safe for children to share their own. A book that incorporates diversity and shows that we can all be proud of our heritage.
- *Just Plain Fancy* (1990) shows a community different from others. The readers are transported to Pennsylvania and into an Amish home. This story is based on research the author did while visiting the Amish. A story about fear of being shunned for possessing "fancy" qualities. Then learning and realizing you can't be shunned for having special unique qualities that you were blessed with at birth.
- *Chicken Sunday* (1992) is a story that examines the truth of strong friendships between generations, races, and religions. This story also explores the deep and

loyal friendship between neighbors. *Chicken Sunday* connects all of us to humanity no matter what, whether boy or girl, rich or poor, no matter where we come from or what culture or religion we are. Three children have been falsely accused of harassing old Mr. Kodinski, who is illustrated with a number tattooed on his arm from the Nazi's concentration camp. A story that enables others to view the world in a different lens other their own.

The researcher observed and took field notes during the discussion times. The researcher was seated and settled before the read aloud, discussions, and written responses began. The teachers were responsible for turning the tape recorder on and off as to not cause any distraction from the observer. Teachers followed a unit schedule as follows:

Unit Plan Schedule

Week One. The teacher read aloud two Patricia Polacco books and engaged students in classroom discussion.

Book one was *Some Birthday* (1991). The teacher read the book aloud. The teacher conducted classroom discussion. Students were asked to write their responses/reflections about the story. The students turned their papers in to the teacher. The teacher emphasized only first names to be placed on papers.

Question 1: "What do you think Patricia Polacco was trying to tell you about in this story?"

Question 2: "What does Patricia Polacco want you to think about after hearing this story?"

Question 3: "Have you ever felt like any of the characters in *Some Birthday*?"

Book two was *Thank you, Mr. Falker* (1998). The book was read aloud to students. The teacher conducted classroom discussions of the book and then requested the students to write in their response journals. The students turned them in to the teacher. The teacher emphasized only first names to be placed on papers.

Question 1: "What do you think Patricia Polacco was trying to tell you about in this story?"

Question 2: "What does Patricia Polacco want you to think about after hearing this story?"

Question 3: "Have you ever felt like one of the characters in *Thank you, Mr. Falker*?"

Noted: The researcher chose these two books as a beginning to the study because they are about the author Patricia Polacco, and allowed for personal identification for the students.

Week Two. The teacher read aloud two Patricia Polacco books and engaged students in classroom discussion.

Book three was *Thunder Cake* (1990). The teacher conducted classroom discussions about the book, then ask students to write their responses/reflections and turn them in. The teacher emphasized only first names on the papers.

Question 1: "What do you think Patricia Polacco was trying to tell you about in this story?"

Question 2: "What did Patricia Polacco want you to think about after hearing this story?"

Question 3: "Have you ever felt like one of the characters in *Thunder Cake?"*

Book four was *Rechenka's Eggs* (1988). The teacher read the book aloud. The teacher conducted a classroom discussion about the book, then asked the students to write their responses/reflections and turn them in. The teacher emphasized only first names on the papers.

Question 1: "What do you think Patricia Polacco was trying to tell you about in this story?"

Question 2: "What did Patricia Polacco want you to think about after hearing this story?"

Question 3: "Have you ever felt like one of the characters in *Rechenka's Eggs?"*

Week Three. The teacher read aloud two Patricia Polacco books and engaged students in classroom discussion.

Book five was *Chicken Sunday* (1992). The teacher read the book aloud. The teacher conducted a classroom discussion. Students were asked to write their responses/reflections without any conversing with their peers or teacher. The teacher emphasized only first names on the papers.

Question 1: "What do you think Patricia Polacco was trying to tell you about this story?"

Question 2: "What did Patricia Polacco want you to think about after hearing this story?"

Question 3: "Have you ever felt like one of the characters in *Chicken Sunday?"*

Book six was *Pink and Say* (1994). The teacher read the book aloud. The teacher conducted a classroom discussion. Students were asked to write their responses/reflections about the story. The students turned their papers in to the teacher. The teacher emphasized only first names on papers.

Question 1: "What do you think Patricia Polacco was trying to tell you about this story?"

Question 2: "What did Patricia Polacco want you to think about after hearing this story?"

Question 3: "Have you ever felt like one of the characters in *Pink and Say?"*

Week Four. The teacher read aloud two Patricia Polacco books and engaged students in classroom discussion.

Book seven was *Just Plain Fancy* (1990). The teacher read the book aloud. The teacher conducted a classroom discussion about the story, then asked students to write their responses/reflections and turn them in. The teacher emphasized only first names on the papers.

Question 1: "What do you think Patricia Polacco was trying to tell you about in this story?"

Question 2: "What did Patricia Polacco want you to think about after hearing this story?"

Question 3: "Have you ever felt like one of the characters in *Plain and Fancy?"*

Book eight was *The Keeping Quilt* (1988). The teacher conducted a classroom

discussion about the book, then asked students to write their responses/reflections and turn them in. The teacher emphasized only first names on the papers.

Question 1: "What do you think Patricia Polacco was trying to tell you about this story?"

Question 2: "What did Patricia Polacco want you to think about hearing this story?"

Question 3: "Have you ever felt like one of the characters in *Keeping Quilt?"*

Data Analysis Procedures

Before the researcher began any process of interpreting the teacher interviews, student response journals, taped discussions, and field notes, she coded and categorized and subcategorized the responses to facilitate analyses. The data collection was dated, organized, and sequenced with field notes, observer's comments, memos, and reflections. A continued review and reorganization of data were done until the researcher had distinctive categories or themes. By organizing a routine of viewing observer notes one day, written responses the next, and the third listening to the taped recordings of the discussions became a pattern used to analyze the abundant data. By allowing focused attention on one set or type of data, moving to the next, and so on permitted the observer to make connections and form categories that led to the themes.

The qualitative data analyses involved a process of reorganizing the data into smaller units and themes when possible, and determining the importance of these units by synthesizing or logically forming the units and themes together in an interpretable form.

Categories were used to organize similar concepts into separate groups in order for the researcher to examine and compare one another and make connections and form subcategories as needed.

The constant comparison method (Gay & Airasian, 2000) was used with the students' written responses since it involved the constant comparison of identified themes and categories. To determine their distinctive characteristics they were placed in appropriate categories and checked again and again with the tape recordings and observational notes. The researcher asked for feedback from the involved teachers of any similarities they felt were evident during the discussions. Throughout the study the researcher was involved in making constant comparisons. As each new topic or concept was identified, it was compared to existing categories. The categories were modified as needed to fit new data and further tested by additional new data.

The researcher verified and developed categories through numerous readings of the written responses as described below. Patterns and/or themes were identified in the same way sections of data were organized into categories by the researcher seeking and looking for connections among the categories. The teachers were asked to read the categories and give the researcher input for the categories established. This member check helped the researcher verify and develop the categories.

The researcher read through the data three times (field notes, students' written journals) and listened to the audio taped discussions three times for each story. She then read the categories established for that book three more times on different days. The researcher felt giving time between readings allowed for any incorrect misrepresentations of the categories to become evident. In order for the categories to become manageable,

the researcher developed a rubric to help in organization (see Appendix E). For each story, the searcher used a filing system with categories established for that book. After all books were read, each folder for each category from all eight books was reread on three different days. When categories were validated by the researcher, they became a common theme (or not) for the author study.

Trustworthiness

Triangulation was the approach used to establish the credibility of this qualitative research study. Triangulation was used to form a cross-validation of teacher interviews that sought regularities in the written responses by comparing multiple sources of data across participants, times, and sites, and by comparing the multiple methods of themes or categories. Credibility was attained by the researcher demonstrating that the concepts used to describe the study were congruent with data selected to gather information about the themes. Showing that this study's results might be similar to other similar studies attained credibility. A second criterion the researcher used was the transferability of this study. This study could be replicated if the resources, personnel, and timetable were the same.

After the researcher had time to view the students' written responses, field notes, and taped recordings, an additional interview was conducted with the teachers. This interview occurred approximately two weeks after the final reading of the author study. This interview was used as a device to check validity of themes identified by the researcher to common themes the teachers noted and discussed. During this interview, no set of questions were addressed, only a collection of reflections from the two teachers.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis of Data

This study examined children's written responses to an author study using authentic literature. Authentic literature as defined in Chapter II is text representative of the real world (Harris and Hodges, 1995). The study focused on written responses to detect common themes over the course of the time of data collection. The researcher compared the written responses of fourth grade students with sixth grade students' written responses to eight different books written by the same author for four weeks. Each week included two books read aloud by the teacher, classroom discussions, journal writing on each story and weekly interviews with the teachers. I kept observational notes throughout each session of the classroom visits and interviews as well as tape recordings. For two days of the school week, students were scheduled to listen, discuss, and respond to the stories in their journals.

The majority of the students in this study read and responded primarily aesthetically. As stated in Chapter I, Rosenblatt distinguishes between aesthetic reading, which focuses on the information through nature of the literary experience, from efferent reading, which focuses on the information that, can be carried away from the reading. With this in mind, I found this study revealed three main characteristics, which are often evident in aesthetic responses to literature. One was the students' tendencies to image and

picture the story in their minds. Fourth graders more often than sixth included a drawing with their responses. I made the conclusion that this may have happened perhaps to further the meaning of their written responses. A second was to extend the story or hypothesize about it while listening. A third was to relate associations and feelings evoked while listening and discussing. All the students wrote about personal feelings some applied story content while others did not. This coincided with the transactional view of reality (Bruner, 1986) and of the literary work of Rosenblatt (1978) suggesting an emotional and intellectual active role for children like these students' responses described in this study.

Providing students with authentic literature, allowing for discussion time, and ensuring time for written responses encouraged engagement; however, that may not have been enough to guarantee a subjective involvement with text. Literature discussion groups and journal writings gave students a greater measure of control over what the text did or did not supply for them as an individual. For example, this student in the fourth grade wrote about a personal story with little story recall, "I like to have a birthday with pop music, a cake, no balloons a lot of friends and ice cream, I would like to have everyone in the class. Even the teachers and principal." The opportunity to discuss the Patricia Polacco books in an informal atmosphere without imposed tasks or objectives added a different perspective to literature. With this in mind, we must still address the validity of this study and whether duplicate studies would reflect the same finds.

The research questions used in this study were:

1. Using an author study (or using a series of books written by the same author), what themes are evident in fourth grade students' discussion and written responses?
2. Using an author study (or using a series of books written by the same author), what themes are evident in sixth grade students' discussion and written responses?
3. What themes emerged in both grades?

The research question of whether there are any themes evident in fourth and sixth grade students' written responses to an author study is yes. Both grades had the same categories with the fourth graders having one extra, drawings. This supported the idea of Coles (1992) when after years of interviewing children and studying their drawings found that children often worked through feelings in drawings. The drawings represented their fundamental views of life. He suggested that children not only attempt to understand what is happening around them, but why it is happening; in doing this, they may also rely on spiritual or religious values (Coles, 1992). This was very apparent with the story of *Pink and Say* and *Just Plain Fancy*. I asked the teachers in one interview on what their perspective was on this. They commented, "I bet he/she couldn't think of any more to write" and "we've been talking about book illustrators" and "maybe the pictures in the Patricia Polacco books entices them". I asked them whether they thought these drawings helped them [their students] understand the story better; their answer was, "Yes, maybe, I am not sure and I didn't think of that being the case."

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analyses involved a process of reorganizing the data into smaller units and themes. The researcher determined the importance of these units by synthesizing the units and themes in an interpretable form. The categories were used to organize similar concepts into separate groups in order to examine and compare and make connections and form subcategories. The process was similar to webbing commonly used in classrooms to show connections of a topic (see Appendix E).

The constant comparison method was used since it involved the constant comparison of identified topics and themes that determined distinctive characteristics and placed in appropriate categories. As stated in Chapter III, I devoted one day to reading my field notes, one for student journals, and another to listening to the tape recordings. I did this process many times until I reached the common themes. This enabled me to make comparisons and form new categories that I may have overlooked and to validate current themes established previously. After all the books were read and categorized, I reread each category three more times. Since I used the written responses as my primary source of data, I read and reread them numerous times for several weeks in order to develop categories. Throughout reviewing field notes, replaying tape recordings of discussions and teacher interviews, and rereading written responses, I was involved in making constant comparisons with changing and placing those responses in subcategories. As each new topic or theme was identified, it was compared to existing categories. Each category was modified as a subcategory to fit new data that was not in an existing category. The teachers were asked to give feedback on themes and/or categories they felt

their students were consistently using. I used this information and checked the existing themes for repeated categories previously developed. The teachers' stated themes coincided to mine with one exception of a category that was not developed through the written responses and field notes. The teachers felt that students were engaged in some of the stories more than others. They commented on the attentiveness of each story. The teachers felt that when the interest level was higher the story meant more to their students and asked me if the written responses indicated this as well. The written responses did vary in length and detail with stories that the students discussed more. As I stated in Chapter I, when a students' literary discussion is passive, it is correct to assume that he/she will be equally passive in his/her own thinking individual thinking about literature (Hepler & Hickman, 1982). Relying on this assumption I replayed stories that had more written to those that the students did not write as much. I found that the popular stories had more personal connections and story recall. I narrowed down the categories to five themes for each grade. The fourth grade had one common theme I found evident only for them. The fourth graders included drawings or illustrations on most of the written responses. In an editorial in *The Reading Teacher* posed the question, "How well do students create their own mental images from text without a visual component?" (Griffith & Lynch-Brown, 2000, p.6). It has been an experience for many teachers that one fundamental path toward imagery and comprehension is the use of characterization. For students to interact with a text, they must identify with the characters they read or heard about. Cullinan and Galda (1998) stated that "Characters...reflect human beings we know; they are circumscribed by the natural powers and failing of a real person in a real world" (p. 233). Dionisio (1994) stated that identifying with a character leads to deeper

involvement with a text. Readers gain an intimate understanding of a character when they recognize that the character has the same personality traits as themselves and people in their own lives (p. 202)." The process of characterization begins as readers create an image to help describe a character. This enables readers to create a mental map to use as an intellectual resource" (Routman (1991, p. 18).

Because of the richness of their content, the primary sources of data I used to identify themes were the written responses. The journal responses provided support for my insights that could be verified by conversations with the teachers immediately following class discussions. Secondary sources were the teacher interviews and taped class discussions.

It is important to acknowledge a possible threat to the validity of my observations and interviews with the teachers. Although I remained a non-participant observer, my presence may have affected the students' discussions and possibly the teachers'. For example one student in the fourth grade wrote the following note to me:

> "Dear O.S.U. student, I just want to take some time before I forget to thank you. I think listening to books and writing really helps me. Most of the time I put something down and someone will say it is stupid. I learned to expres myself with secret writing, doing this has made me get over being afrade to talk with other kids. I learned to talk about Patrica Polaco books and think about the story. Thank You. E."

As researcher, I tried to remain both involved and aware of my view points as an experienced educator. I was challenged to be involved enough to gain the insights I was seeking while at the same time to be as unobtrusive or inconspicuous as possible. I sat in

the back of the classroom during all discussions and had the teachers to turn the tape recorder on and off. The fourth graders sat in the floor around their teacher while the sixth graders remained in their seats with the exception of a few who chose to sit on the floor closer to the teacher.

In reality, I know it is virtually impossible to obtain totally unbiased and perfectly valid data in a qualitative research study. My many years' experiences as a classroom teacher may have allowed me to "see" and "read" data that another researcher could or would not. Nonetheless, I believe attention to issues of bias and validity is important for maintaining the integrity of this study. I will address in more detail the validity of my study in Chapter V.

Written Response Journals

Response journals, like literature discussion groups, were staples of both classrooms. In the written responses of this study, students expressed their ideas of author purpose, feelings for the characters, personal experiences both related and unrelated to the story, and stating life's lessons or values. The students responded to the stories in various ways. Sixth graders wrote more about understanding a story through analyzing its plot, setting, characters, or narrative elements of the story. Fourth graders' responses most often reflected personal connection to the story without analyzing the narrative elements. Often the written responses of the fourth graders had nothing to do with the story theme. Both grades compared and contrasted the events in the story to their own lives, saying, "That happened [or didn't happen] to me."

After the teachers' interviews, I came to the conclusion that the teachers helped the students realize there is no one or "best" interpretation of Patricia Polacco's book. I made the assumption the students were open to listening to others' perspectives and came to appreciate why and how others may have different envisionments from their own. I believed this true because both teachers practice tolerance and respect in their classrooms. While writing was part of both fourth and sixth grade's curriculum, discussion groups with an author study were not. I found the students were able to view the story from varying critical and cultural perspectives and from the various perspectives of the characters within the stories. For example, with the story, *Pink and Say*, one fourth grade student wrote this, "I feel like Say and Pink. I have black cousins. Kids made in fun of me and my cousins" and a sixth grader who wrote, "This book was better than then the rest of the other books. I really like it and I feel like the little boy because he really likes Pink and he doesn't care what color Pink is...".

In order to gain a better assessment of the written responses, I used a general principle known as triangulation or the collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods (Denzin, 1970). By using this, I reduced the risk of my conclusions reflecting my biases or framework and of chance associations. I used four sources of data; the written response journals, audiotaped discussions and interviews of the teachers, and my own notes during observational times. I solicited feedback from the teachers to clarify my assumptions when categorizing the themes. I used this feedback as a member check. It was the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of any possible misinterpretation of the data.

Tape Recordings

The taped discussions were used as a secondary source of data in order for me to focus on the purpose of this study, viewing written responses to detect evident themes. The tape recordings allowed me in the role of researcher to review the interaction between the students and each other as well as with the teacher. Tape recordings were taken for each book reading; however, the tape recordings were not an important source of data. Their value was to provide an auditory record of the students' interactions with other students and their teacher to support themes or not and to support my view on categorization of the written responses. When the teachers read the stories to the students, they translated, as it were, the visual illustrations and the written language by their expressive spoken language. For example, teachers read dialogue by changing the tone and volume of their voices to interpret those of the characters in the story. In other words, the stories were interpretive performances by the reader of the story. I noted this in my field notes and as I listened to the tape recordings, I found this supported the my observational notes as well.

Interviews

I interviewed the teachers weekly for about 30 minutes; often the interviews lasted longer due to the teachers comparing thoughts and ideas when they read to the students. Our conversations were unstructured and touched topics of what stories the students seemed to be more or less engaged. While I had questions in mind, the

interviews were actually directed by the teachers' comments on their students and their own opinions about the discussions that they conducted. Often my note taking during these interviews was sporadic due to our elevated interests popping in from all aspects, similar to a brain storming session. I made notes as the teachers discussed what stories were popular with their students as well as those that did not hold the interest of the students as much. One teacher stated,

> "Students were engaged in the story of *Thank you, Mr. Falker*. There was very little squirming and looking around. A couple of 'big eyes' when I read the part about tears in the teacher's eyes. The boys who answered 'no' to if they had ever felt like one of the characters in the story did listen with little distraction" (see Appendix G).

Having this information gave me a deeper insight of the written responses and supported my categories. Some written responses were longer than others were. Even though this information was not part of the study, I found it interesting that students wrote more to the stories they enjoyed and engaged with in both fourth and sixth grades. Those same stories that the written responses were shorter were the same stories the teachers commented as being "less liked." For example, one teacher commented that, "My students were really listening to the story today", and "I noticed that they were really into writing, some didn't want to stop when I asked for their responses."

Students' written responses and discussions indicated they were involved in many levels of literacy: comprehension and learning, going beyond merely understanding the words being read, recognizing the importance of sharing ideas, relating to the characters, and responding in genuine ways to the stories. Cambourne (1988) defined reading as

comprehension. It is more than just figuring out the words or gaining a literal understanding of what is read (in this case, heard). He states that reading is what is read and making personal connections with the events and themes of a book or story. With this in mind, I found the following themes common in both fourth and sixth graders' written responses. The fourth graders had one additional theme evident only for them, drawings.

The following themes and quotes will support the themes established for this study. With each story the teacher had a set of questions that I had asked her to use for all eight stories:

1. What do you think Patricia Polacco was trying to tell you about in this story?
2. What does Patricia Polacco want you to think about after hearing this story?
3. Have you ever felt like any of the characters in this story?

Personal Experiences

In these written responses, students revealed fragments of their own lives that related to the experiences of the characters and the events of the books. These responses reflect "life-to-text interactions" (Cochran-Smith, 1984) in which the readers take direct or indirect experiences outside the text. I found this to be true as well with students that listened to story text. As the students listened and discussed the story, written responses indicated that their thought processes were mainly on personal experiences that were evoked during listening and discussing. Fourth graders did not connect the story content to their story experience as often as sixth graders. Most fourth graders wrote about "me" [themselves] and did not apply their personal reflection to the story; whereas the sixth

graders were more consistent in applying story content to their personal reflections. These fourth graders' written responses include personal experiences with some or no story recall:

> "Today I was looking out my window and I saw a baby bird stuck in the crack and I told my dad because I felt sorry for it..." (see Appendix I).
>
> "I always get blamed for stuff. Like when one of my brothers yelled my mom always thinks its me, but when I yell she knows it me. Sometimes my brothers are blamed too. And when I tell her what really happened she believes me, and some time I get blamed at schools. Like if somebody hits me and I hit them back and you catch me I get in trouble, and they don't" (see Appendix J).

The sixth graders' written responses always included story recall when they made connections to their personal experiences:

> "You can pass stuff down through generation after generation. I felt like that was a good book to tell to a family. I also felt like the girl because we pass down a quilt to. It has been through five generations and it is all orange and black" (see Appendix M).
>
> "...Pink was boy who also wanted to be Say's friend. What I don't like about the book is when they go and hang him. Pink and Say didn't care what other people think as long as they were friends" (see Appendix K).

There seemed to be a fine line between personal experiences and the idea of empathy with the students' written responses to themselves and to the story's characters. Both grades often included empathy when they wrote about an experience. This leads to my next theme, character empathy.

Character Empathy

Students became active participants in the discussions often telling stories about themselves. Both fourth and sixth grades indicated the need to share their personal contact with the character by expressing their own feelings about the character's plight during discussions and most evidently through written expression. Most fourth graders moved beyond the actual text and told stories of their own. Both grades constructed meaning through their transaction with text.

Rosenblatt describes this type of transaction as a relationship between the reader and the text which is "a reciprocal process in contrast to notions of the passive reader acted on by the text, or the passive text acted on by reader" (1985, p. 40). Bruner (1986) also emphasizes the importance of the active role of the reader in constructing meaning from text. He describes this as a process of constructing reality as a result of an interpersonal negotiation that takes place when readers read (p. 122). This theme was based on these theories as I read and reread the journals and listened repeatedly to the tape recordings.

Examples of written responses that indicate character empathy from fourth graders are:

> "Yes, I have felt like the story that I have listened to. Sometimes people jude [judge] me by my color. They think just because I am Mexian [Mexican] that I can't talk proper English. But there wrong because I have made straight As ever since I was in school" (see Appendix K).
>
> "This story makes me feel sad and happy. ...If I was black and people said bad

thing about me I would feel bad and left out. It makes me happy when black people and white people are freinds [friends] and they get along well" (see Appendix K).

Sixth graders had empathy that usually included excerpts from the story they had listened to and discussed.

"I felt mad because this guy was shot in the leg. Then this black guy came and save him and made him better. Then the other people came and Pink and Say had to hide in the celler. And the other side shot Pink's mom because she was black. It made me feel sad because she died in Pink's hands. After that they left and they were caught and Pink was killed and Say went on to live a good life" (see Appendix K).

"I felt sad because people made fun of her at her school. Her teacher did not really help her a lot. And she could not read as well everyone else. ...they started making fun of her. ...I think that is what my teacher does for me when I don't get something" (see Appendix G).

As the students related to the characters with empathy, they made a connection to the character and often addressed what the author was implying and some students wrote a question directed to the author inquiring about the story's elements. The third theme evident in my study is character and author interactions.

Character/Author Interaction

In these journal entries students offered advice and imposed criticisms on some of the actions of the characters. Especially with the fourth graders, students recalled similar situations and how they felt. Some students made a connection with the author in asking her a question and implying why she wrote the story. Weaver (1998) states that two strategies good readers use are predicting and monitoring comprehension. She said these behaviors of proficient readers are performed with automaticity. It appears that the students who identified with a character led to a deeper understanding of the story. I came to this conclusion because of the responses the students had with most of the Patricia Polacco books. The stories that the students could not or did not relate to were the same stories that their teacher commented on as their class being "restless", "distracted", and in some cases a few behavior problems. Character interaction enables the reader to create a mental map to use as an intellectual resource (Bluestein, 2002, p. 432). Bluestein (2002) says that students may find themselves identifying with the characters on many different levels. As stated in Chapter I, Probst (1988) stated that the spoken word is inert and immobile and must be heard by an active, thinking listener to become anything more than vibrations in the room. This theory is evident in my study with some of the stories having more character and author interaction than others. The *Keeping Quilt* and *Rechenka's Eggs* were the stories that most students could not interact with the character or author.

This fourth grader's response has character interaction but was strayed with personal stories that were unconnected to the story (*Thunder Cake*) other than having fear:

"I have fears. I am scared of heghest [heights] I'm scared of them because my big brother Johnny [psuedoymn] is always saying don't fall when I am by the egde [edge] ...I am just like the little girl in the book I scared of thunderd too. I'm also scared of the dark. I'm scared of tornados. I'm scared of thurnerd [thunder] storms" (see Appendix H).

The responses of these sixth graders used real-life experiences of being fearful of something in relation to the story's fear of thunderstorms. They also wrote about before and after being afraid and made a story connection to the grandmother character to her own grandmothers:

"How I feel is that sometime being afraid is ok. I used to like the little girl because I used to be afraid. But now when a storm comes, I would either play a game or go outside on the porch and watch it. ...My grandma would sometimes when she comes over, we would read books or watch a movie or do something else beside that. Sometimes we would sit outside together and watch." "This story was great. I can really relate to it. I used to be so scared of thunderstorms until I realized how calm they can be. I am still scared of storms like tornadoes. Maybe a thunder cake would calm me but I would call it a tornado cake. The May 3rd tornado made me scared most. My grandma is scared of storms too so I don't think she can relate to the grandma in the story. I was scared in the ice storm. My mom was like the grandma. She played games with me and we sang songs and played cards. ...And another think, my mom seems to always bake cookies or cake on rainy or stormy and cold days, but never thunder cake!" (see Appendix H).

Author interaction was often written about in the stories when students wrote about character interaction, for example:

> "...I think the author was trying to say don't act like someone you are not because the peacock was acting like a chickin... The other think [thing] the author was trying to say is take good care of your animals and your animals will be good to you" (see Appendix L).
>
> "I thought p.p. [Patricia Polacco] was trying to tell us that it was ok to be different and unusawal [unusual]. She wants to think abought [about] how it whould [would] fell [feel] to have to be same day in day out. I felt like the peacok [peacock] when I starded [started] school" (see Appendix L)
>
> "I think Patricia is trying to make us be thankful for what we have. It's working! She is trying to tell us that simple things are the most special" (see Appendix L).
>
> "I think the author was trying to say when someone passes something to you don't put it in a garage sale or give it away keep passing it down because its realy speacil [really special]" (see Appendix M).

In one particular story, *Thunder Cake*, there were many stories about Halloween. I believe this happened because of the discussion. The students got off the topic of storms and onto fearful events in their lives namely Halloween. One fourth grader started telling a frightful story only to lead numerous others to chime in and tell their "own" scary story. In this region of Oklahoma, ice storms, tornadoes, and thunderstorms are yearly events. I made the conclusion that storms are not as thrilling as spooks to these Oklahoma children. The students related to the story more in the sixth grade than in the fourth grade,

again I believe because of the discussion of Halloween within the fourth graders' discussion time.

Most fourth grade students' responses had drawings of tornadoes, ghosts, haunted houses, lightning flashes and trees broken from storms. There was not one drawing on the sixth grade responses.

The next theme life's lessons and values, became a theme that the teachers commented on "I am so happy that the students are talking about how people should act and treat others" and "I should read a book like these every week".

Life Lessons and Values

Here the students revealed their deepest convictions on the themes directly suggested by the Patricia Polacco books. Most sixth graders took the time to share more than character, plot, and setting in their responses. Some literature response journals became a mirror reflecting their values and convictions.

Students appeared to have a sense of trust to share some of these personal views in their written responses. When I compared this theme with the taped recordings, there were fewer students who talked about values than who wrote about them in their responses. This was true for both grades. This was an interesting finding to me even though it was not part of my study. Wood, Roser, & Martinez (2001) write that collaborative literacy is a multidimensional term to describe how engaging students in group activities to read, discuss, and analyze literature on the theme of working together can help them learn many of life's important lessons. They say this engagement

reinforces their ability to work collaboratively. In referring to Lev Vygotsky's theory of social learning in Chapter II, students can apply what is learned and heard in literature to their own lives, both inside and outside the classroom. Vygotsky (1978) maintained that intellectual ability develops through participation in joint activities. It is through interactions with others that children are able to expand their thinking, broaden their conceptual knowledge, and express themselves in language. I base my assumption that some students did not discuss values but wrote about them is due to their own self evaluations of what they felt as "right" or "wrong" behavior and were not willing to express it openly.

Typical examples of life's lessons and/or values I found were as follows:

"Never give up until you learn it. Like when I had trouble with Math, and now math is my favorite subject. People used to laugh cause I was reading slow, because if you rush you might get a bad grade" (see Appendix G).

"...I thought Patriccia Polloco [Patricia Polacco] was trying to tell us that it's good to tell the truth. Never always think people are liying [lying] and never always think people are telling the trugh eaiter [either]" (see Appendix J).

"I would think the big kids [in the story, *Chicken Sunday*] need to tell the truth" (see Appendix J).

"...you should always do many things for other and treat them as you would like to be treated" (see Appendix G).

"...you don't need to judge people by there [their] color, you judge them by there heart and kindness and niceness" (see Appendix K).

Less Engagement to Some Patricia Polacco Stories

The fourth theme the data led me to include is the engagement the fourth and sixth graders had with the Patricia Polacco stories. Listeners in this study responded without being engaged; for example when the story was read, some students were inattentive and distracted by other stimuli. I found that the students were less engaged in *Rechenka's Eggs* and *Just Plain Fancy.*

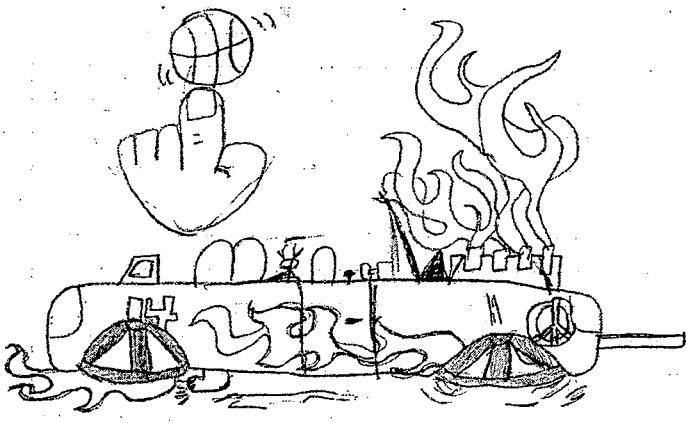
The responses of these two stories were basically shorter than other stories. Many included story recall but did not elaborate with personal stories nor did they engage with a personal connection to the characters. A fourth grader wrote these three sentences:

> "I felt relly [really] sad for the goose when the hunter shot it. I also felt good for the old lady when she wanted to goose. I didn't think the goose was going to lay panted [painted] eggs."

Even though this response writes about empathy, the goose was not a character in the story only an element.

Another fourth grader wrote a short response to *Rechenka's Eggs*. I located other written responses by this student to previous stories and found that they were somewhat longer and in more detail with personal stories and opinions. The shorter written response also included a drawing at the bottom of a car, again something that was foreign to the story. His drawing indicates that there was more engagement with it than with the written response to the story:

> "I fill [feel] that everone is diffrenin [different] your own whay. She whats you to think about you are different from everyone in the world."



Picture 1. *Rechenka's Eggs*

This same student, B., wrote this to a story (*Thank you, Mr. Falker*) that he was apparently more engaged. There was not a picture on this response:

> "It makes you fill bad because thay made fun of her because she could not read. Then it makes you happy because she over came her problems. Then some pepole lern [people learn] fast and other lern slower the faster pepole sometimes make fun of to slower pepole. You should never give up because there is someone how could help. I think it was a good book good and sad it was sad because she couldn't read very good and because she got mad [made] fun of like when she was hiding [hiding] thay cald [called] her mole and toad and [they] laughed at her it was good because she got help and got over her fears and she could read after a while."

There was a direct relationship between students liking the story and their written responses to the story. The stories that were not as well liked, were the same stories that both fourth and sixth graders wrote and discussed less. I discovered this by accident. As I listened again to the discussions, I found that my field notes were not as elaborate either. I found that I too had not written down as much. Basically there was not as much to observe during times students were not as engaged with the stories. My observational

notes only indicated shorter lengths of note taking but no record of why I thought students were not discussing as much. The students wrote less on *Rechenka's Eggs* than any of the other stories in the author study. As a member check, the teachers and I talked about this and came to the same conclusions that the children did not care for this story and perhaps some of them just did not understand its meaning. This conclusion was made after the study and all data was reviewed and categorized. The teachers also commented that they believed this was reviewed and categorized. The teachers also commented that they believed this was true due to this story being a fantasy. Yet for some reason the written responses were not as lengthy. I listened to the tape recordings again and found that the discussions were less fruitful well. During my interview with the teachers, I asked why they thought this was not as well liked. The only conclusion made was this story was about miracles and in a genre the students were not as familiar. Most of the fourth grade students' written responses included a drawing of a goose, duck, egg, bird in a nest, to just scribbles. Scribbling did not appear on any other previous stories' responses. As the study continued, it just so happened that this was the only story that the students did any scribbling.

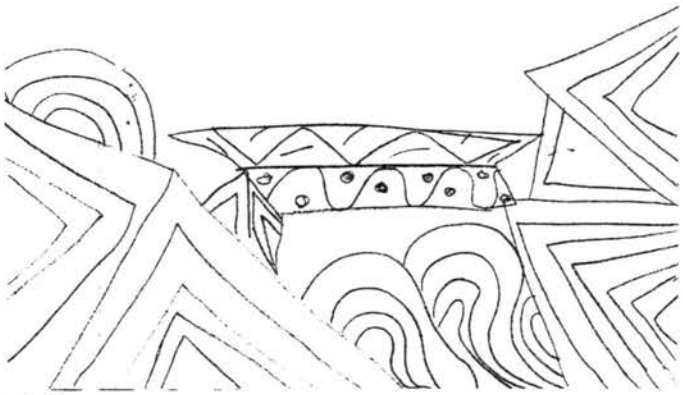
With the data telling me that drawings most often accompanied the written responses that were short, I have one more theme to include in this study. The final theme, drawings, was only evident with the fourth graders. The data showed and told me that these drawings were most prevalent on the same stories the students stated, as being less liked. During the interviews with the teachers, I showed some of the responses that were short that included pictures drawn on the bottom of the page. One teacher commented, "I remember "B" not paying attention that day in any thing, in fact he got in

trouble at recess." The other teacher stated, "I can't figure out why they drew that, I guess those stories were not as interesting to them."

Drawings

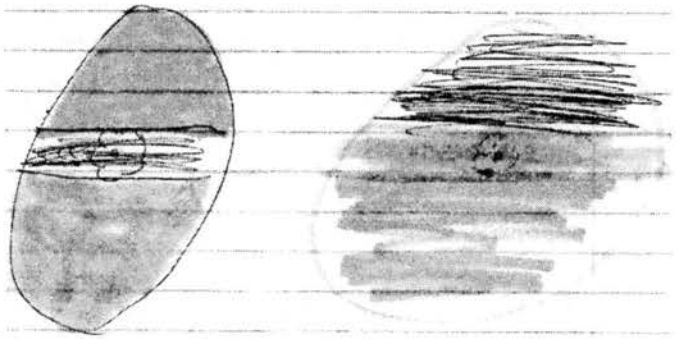
The students' drawings became an additional theme when it was evident only with the fourth graders' responses. Creating a mental image of what the students heard as their teacher read the Patricia Polacco book may have been a natural process for the more proficient readers. In contrast, the responses that appeared to be by low-ability readers based on their spelling and sentence structure were where I found the bulk of the drawings. Perhaps many of the students drew pictures simply because they could not relate to the story as well. The drawing below was drawn on a response that had no story connection or recall. A car showing fire exhaust, something totally foreign to the story (Picture 2) and another of doodling or scribbling (Picture 3). These drawings were drawn on the responses of *Rechenka's Eggs*. One of the stories that was less liked as a group according to their teacher.

Picture 2. *Rechenka's Eggs*

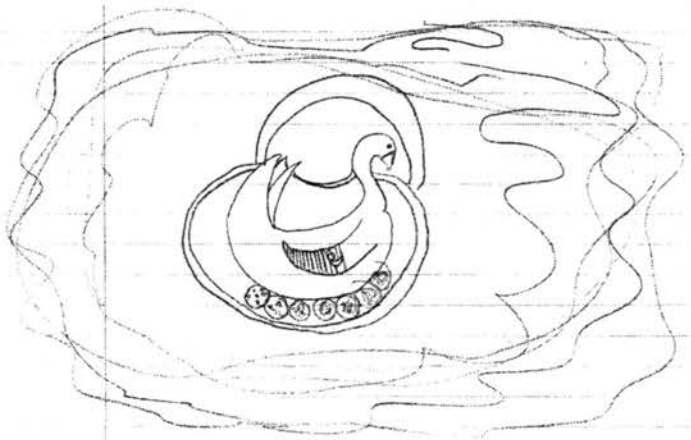


Picture 3. *Rechenka's Eggs*

The following drawing was also drawn to the story, *Rechenka's Eggs* but actually did apply to the story's content. Here, the student drew a picture of decorated eggs, something Patricia Polacco included in the text and illustrations of this story (Picture 4). Another of a goose with the written response writing about having empathy for the goose when it was hurt and could not fly (Picture 5).

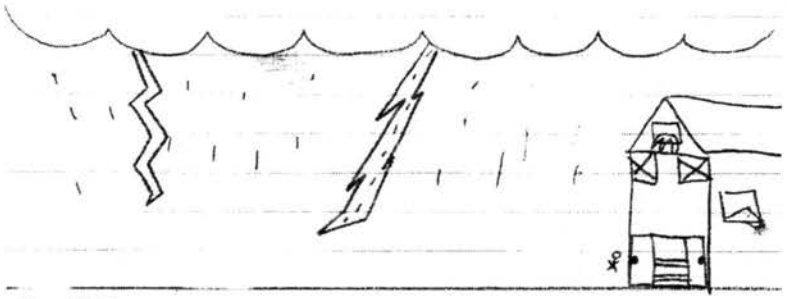


Picture 4. *Rechenka's Eggs*



Picture 5. *Rechenka's Eggs*

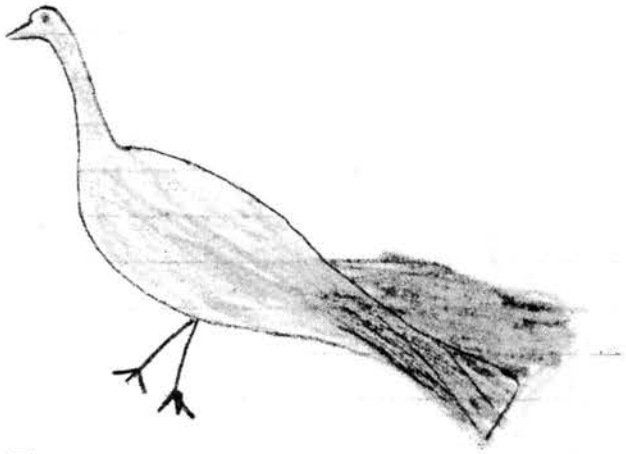
In the story *Thunder Cake*, some fourth graders included drawings of tornadoes and thunderstorms, something the fourth graders can truly relate due to this area of Oklahoma being threatened yearly with these types of storms (Pictures 6 & 7). There were very few drawings on the written responses to this book. I think the students did not choose to draw because they could apply their experiences of storms to the girl's in the story. They did not need to use drawings to extend their thoughts. The students' written responses were more detailed with their own experiences with storms than making a comparison to *Thunder Cake*.



Picture 6. *Thunder Cake*

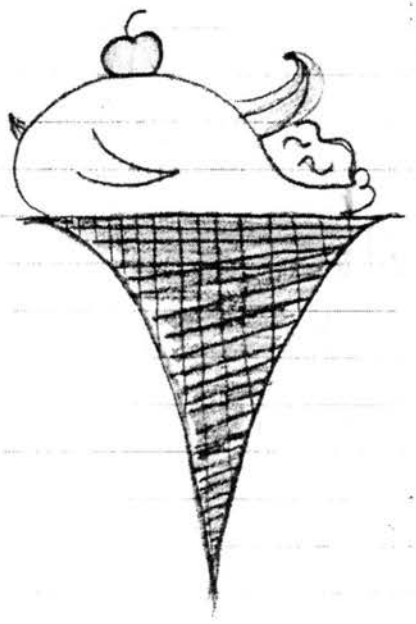
Picture 7. *Thunder Cake*

Just Plain Fancy had numerous drawings of peacocks; this particular drawing's written response has story recall of an egg hatching and relating it to a personal story of having a pet chicken (Picture 8).



Picture 8. *Just Plain Fancy*

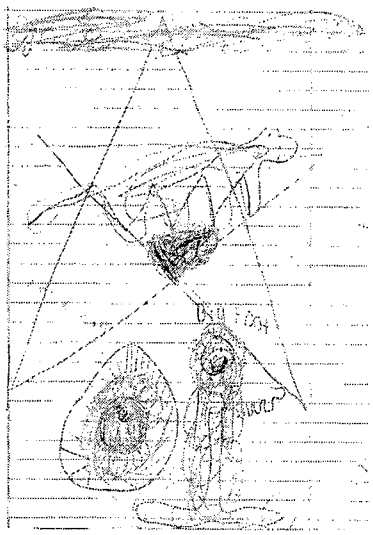
A written response to *Chicken Sunday* has this drawing along with her feelings of happiness "when the grown up believed them" (Picture 9).



Picture 9. *Chicken Sunday*

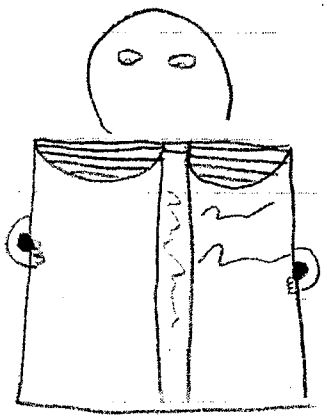
Some Birthday written responses had numerous drawings of "scary things" that probably was a consequence of the discussion straying off the story and to personal

stories of frightening times the students had experienced. An example of this is with Picture 10 of Big Foot.



Picture 10. *Some Birthday*

With the story *Thank you, Mr. Falker*, this student included a picture of someone reading a book. Most students made a connection to the main character. Their responses included personal stories and story recall. Many written responses were about Trisha [the character] and how she must have felt. Most written responses had similar stories they had during frustrations of learning something new. Few drawings were included on the responses of this book. The following picture was included with one response (Picture 11).



Picture 11. *Thank you, Mr. Falker*

I believe the drawings that accompanied the written responses often indicated the student's failure to comprehend the story and/or retention of the story. The students, whose drawings were not about the story, may be due to comprehension gaps or interest in the book. Whereas, when the drawings were accurate to story content, so were the written responses. The drawings often complemented the written responses but just as equally often they did not. Peeck (1987) says that often teachers will have students who spend a great deal of time drawing superfluous details to cover up their lack of understanding of the text. For example, in Pictures 2 & 3, the students' drawings had nothing to do with the story nor did it elaborate on their written responses.

Summary

This study led me to believe the students were engaged with the literature of this author study. No two students exhibited the same exact responses but there were themes that became evident in both fourth and sixth grades.

The research question of whether there are any themes evident in fourth grade student's written responses to an author study is yes. The research question of whether there are any themes evident in sixth grade students' responses to an author study is yes. This study led me to believe the fourth and sixth grade students were engaged with the literature of this author study. The themes that were evident with both fourth and sixth grade students include: Personal Experiences, Character Empathy, Character/Author Interaction, Life's Lessons, and Less Engagement to Some Patricia Polacco Stories. There was one theme evident with only the fourth grade, Drawings. No two students

exhibited the same exact responses but there were common themes in both fourth and sixth grades.

The themes are evident because of the consequence of engagement and are apparent in the student's written response journals. Because readers often discuss their reading with others when they have been affected by a text, reading becomes not only a transaction between reader and text but between multiple readers and text (Rosenblatt, 1978).

CHAPTER V

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine if fourth and sixth grade students would engage with literature through an author study using their written responses and to determine any themes that became evident for each grade. This study led me to believe the students were engaged with the literature of this author study. No two students exhibited the same exact responses but there were themes that became evident in both fourth and sixth grades. The Personal Experience, Character Empathy, Character/Author Interaction, Life Lessons and Values and Less Engagement with Some Patricia Polacco Stories indicate engagement through lived experiences. When the students listened to the story, and were engaged they were a part of the book and the book was a part of them. For example, when something was read that sparked their experiences and reflections it was discussed and later written about in the journals. This finding supports Probst (1988) that the spoken word is inert and immobile and must be heard by an active, thinking listener to become anything more than vibrations in the room. This study will support some such as Wylie (1999) in stating that response is a form of engagement; the way in which the reader responds reflects the level of his/her involvement with text. And the

foundation this study was built on of Rosenblatt and the belief that an aesthetic reader does not merely concentrate on verbal objects but rather on experience.

Both grades had the same categories with the four graders having one extra, drawings. This supported the idea of Coles (1992) when after years of interviewing children and studying their drawings found that children often worked through feelings in drawing which represented their fundamental views of life. He suggested that children not only attempt to understand what is happening around them, but why it is happening; in doing this, they may also rely on spiritual or religious values (Coles, 1992). This was very apparent with the story of *Pink and Say* and *Just Plain Fancy*. I asked the teachers during our interview on what their perspective was on this. They commented, "I bet he/she couldn't think of any more to write" and "we've been talking about illustrators in books" as well as "maybe the pictures in the Patricia Polacco books enticed them". I asked them whether they thought these drawings helped the students understand the story better. Their comments, "Yes, maybe, I am not sure" and "I didn't think of that being the case, yea maybe so." With the exception of a few responses, most drawings complemented the written responses and related to the story they were responding.

The written responses were essential to understanding the students' engagement and response to literature and led to an understanding of the development of common themes found in the classrooms. In the written responses over the course of the study, the students made frequent connections to their personal experiences. These connections often seemed to be stimulated by their discussions. For example, students, particularly the sixth graders, listened to one another's interpretations with an open mind and considered others' statements in order to form personal conclusions. The fourth graders more often

interrupted others to tell their "me" story. They tended to be manipulated by a few more vocal peers to either contributing to the engagement or not. Why and how these written responses develop and their role in constructing meaning merits investigation. Of particular interest is the connection; between illustrations by the students and the way they think about literature. There was one theme evident only with fourth graders, drawings. Yellin (2000) states that for many students drawing is the best way to get ready to write. He says that children often have a vague idea of what to say but do not know where to begin. Often they will draw doodles, scribble, cartoons, or illustrations from stories they have read (p. 304). The drawings showed ideas about the story sometimes and sometimes not, I could not analyze why the drawing was done on some responses. Perhaps this is what Yellin (2000) is describing as doodling and scribbling.

The students' written responses indicated evidence of maturity. The fourth graders most often did not use story recall when writing about themselves or the character. Most sixth graders included story elements and applied it to their own beliefs and experiences. This component of their written responses suggests intriguing possibilities for exploring the formative aspect of literature in the growing student.

Even though I intended for the taped discussions to be used as a secondary source, I believe they had an effect on the written responses and played an important role in the written engagement. For example, when the students started discussing family going to war and scary times, their written responses were mostly about these topics as well. This supports the aesthetic stance. As in Chapters I and II, it was noted that the aesthetic stance of reading is when the reader adopts an attitude of readiness to focus attention on what is being lived through the reading event (in this case the listening event). The

aesthetic reader pays attention to qualities of feelings, ideas, situations, personalities, and emotions. In the story, *Pink and Say*, students predominately remained in an aesthetic stance. My field notes from observations, taped recordings, and review of written responses all support that the students were engaged aesthetically in the story. The unstructured nature of the classroom discussions encouraged peer interaction around the author, Patricia Polacco, and almost certainly affected the way the students reconstructed meaning. When the students discussed their perceptions of the story with their peers, this opened new avenues to a different view and perception of why Patricia Polacco wrote this story and what she wanted the reader (in this study, listener) to think about, and whether they had ever felt like any of the characters in the book. Ideas and personal stories poured forth. That is evident in this study. The students reinforced the give and take of discussion and encouraged each other to share thoughts. "Hey, what do think?" and "How do you know?" As the students interacted in an informal, at times social manner with one another, they were introduced to other perspectives and often reconstructed their own perceptions as a result of group collaboration. For example, those students that were open to discuss feelings of being blamed for something they did not do, as with the characters in *Chicken Sunday*, were very vocal to explain what had happened to them and to validate their innocence.

The values that fourth and sixth graders had in their responses, are closely connected with the child's relationships with others and their family. In the case of the students in this study, they would also extend to the ways they related to the characters in the story they heard as well as the way they used them to understand and interpret their perceptions of the world around them. Maximum engagement with the Patricia Polacco

books seemed to be characterized by a strong emotional and intellectual connection during which the students felt they were "in" the story; the people and the situations seemed real. Character empathy was evident throughout the eight books in both grades. However, despite their strong emotional connection, the line between literature and lived experience was clear and the students never lost sight of their own reality or identity. With the locale of this study "tornado alley," one book in particular had an impact on distinguishing reality and fiction (*Thunder Cake*). Students wrote of personal experiences with going to the cellar and being scared of tornadoes, and what their families did during stormy weather to distract their attention from the weather. They had lived experiences and could relate to the story first hand.

The literature in this study appeared to encourage the growth and development of the individual student. Both teachers commented that students were "sad" that the Patricia Polacco book study, discussions about them, and journaling were over. As the students listened to the books, they actively explored their own feelings, values, and lived experiences through their written expression. In my last interview with the teachers they believed the journal response writing appeared to increase comprehension when the students were allowed to respond to literature by creating their similar versions and connecting personal experiences to the text. According to research, retelling stories is a strategy that can improve oral language fluency, sense of story, and overall comprehension.

Concluding, the teachers in this study said during an interview that they found that the response journals encouraged their students to listen aesthetically and often used their own personal experiences to construct meaning of the Patricia Polacco book. As

mentioned in Chapter IV, one teacher made the assumption that "her students gained an appreciation for literature and the discussions stimulated the written responses as well as the reactions of what other students had for the story". She believed that listening to the stories followed by group discussion lead to a more in- depth reflection in the student's written response. Another teacher claimed that her teaching of reading will always include discussion and writing activities, they [students] just seemed to "get it" much better. Through my analysis of the data I can confirm that both teachers are correct in their comments.

In concluding, I will say that the themes are evident because of the consequence of engagement they experienced with their written journals. While there are common features of engagement and common themes the students have written, it is difficult to say that this is what engagement and written responses will be for all students listening to an author study. And finally, because readers often discuss their reading with others when they have been affected by a text, reading becomes not only a transaction between reader and text but between multiple readers and text (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Implications

I believe the data confirms that there are developmental levels in children's responses to stories is an implication that further research should be done in this area. However, what I found interesting is there appeared to be different levels of engagement. The fourth grade students wrote of little meaning in the symbolic and metaphoric elements of the text, where as sixth graders attempted to include symbolic and

metaphoric features in their written responses. Both grades indicated an emotional connection to the characters in the stories. Fourth graders included "me" stories more often without any story recall or connection than sixth graders. The sixth graders more often used story content if writing about themselves as a personal reflection. This was also evident in my secondary source of data in the discussions of each book. Fourth graders tended to get off topic more easily and slip into their own personal stories. The sixth graders' discussions were more interacted amongst their peers; they seemed to build on the perception of others. One comment stimulated another, and they often used this as a clarification of any story misinterpretations especially dealing with character traits and author's purpose. For example this student's response, "At first I thought that the little kid was a boy expesselly [especially] when they went to look for a monster" and another, "I think they maby [maybe] they called capris pusher peddles because when you ride a bike you would have to roll up your jeans or your jeans would get cout [caught] in the bike when you push the peddals".

The story recall progressed from retelling and synopsis to summary and character analysis. Fourth grade students mostly remained at the literal level; they ignored a significant event in one story and could not understand the complexity of the plot in another. This was apparent with the book, *Just Plain Fancy*. For example this fourth grade student wrote, "I felt like the three kids in the story because I have got blamed for something I didn't do". Students in the sixth grade made inferences beyond the information read to them and some made evaluative judgment with valid justification from the story. As an example from this sixth grader's response journal, "I thought that was pretty neat that they passed down a blanket. I thought that the weddings were weird!

How the men and women celebrate differently. Men in one area and women in another area!" The fourth graders wrote of life's value (or morals) directly to the story text. An example of a fourth grader's life's value with no story recall is, "I don't think we pass down stuff for our family. I think? We probably do probably don't I don't know. If we do I have never ever hear of it. I don't even know all my cousins, and if we did have anything I wouldn't want to hear storys about it" and this sixth grader's, "I felt like the goose in the story because I've broke something that my mom really liked, but then I tried real hard to make it better. I think the author was trying to tell who was reading it that miracles can happen if you believe in them. She also was trying to say if you give to people you get back." Students in the sixth grade made inferences beyond the information read to them and some made evaluative judgment with valid justification from the story. The fourth graders wrote of life values (or morals) but the sixth graders applied life's values (or morals) directly to the story text.

There was a relationship between students liking the story and their written responses to the story. The stories that were not as well liked, were the same stories that both fourth and sixth graders wrote and discuss less. As I wrote in the literature review, researchers recognize the close relationship between response and engagement; one does not exist without the other. Some such as Wylie (1999) believe response is a form of engagement; the way in which the reader responds the level of his/her involvement with text. This data supports Bleich (1975) in examining personal engagement with literature leading the reader to an understanding of the way elements of the text interact with his/her values and experiences. Time after time students in this study made a personal engagement to the text. As in Chapter IV, I can not help but wonder if these students'

engagement with the stories were stronger and in more depth because they did not have to tend to reading the text themselves. By listening to the stories, they could relax and give full attention to hearing the text and not to decoding and comprehension. Did this really allow them the freedom to explore their reflections? I am drawn into believing this may necessitate a different perspective on reading instruction. I base this on the fact that even those students who show little interest in reading in the past (according to their teacher) were excited about hearing another Patricia Polacco book.

Recommendations

Providing students with authentic literature, allowing for discussion time, and ensuring time for written responses encouraged engagement; however, that may not be enough to guarantee a subjective involvement with text. Literature discussion groups and journal writing give students a greater measure of control over what the text did or did not supply for them as an individual. The opportunity to discuss the Patricia Polacco books in an informal atmosphere without imposed tasks or objectives added a different perspective to literature. With all this in mind, we still must address the validity of this study and whether duplicate studies would reflect the same findings.

Throughout the study, I was constantly battling my bias and reactivity. It is impossible for me as the researcher to eliminate my own theories, preconceptions, or values. By addressing my possible biases and explaining how I dealt with them has been a key issue in this study. As a former teacher in this school district, my participant observation was not a serious validity threat, as some may believe. In the natural setting

of the students' classrooms, I was not an influence on the participants' behavior.

During the long process of analyzing the data, it produced results I did not expect to find. For example, I did not consider the current war or the location of this research setting as being in a typical tornado/thunderstorm area when choosing two of the Patricia Polacco books, *Pink and Say* and *Thunder Cake*. The students' responses may have been different if children had not experienced family going to war and tornado destruction. This necessitates further analysis or data collection from other populations and locales.

Although many findings were noted in this study, there are still many areas within these parameters that would allow for further investigations. The following suggestions for future research related to this specific study or to this area of study are proposed:

1. Further research is needed to determine if these same results would be obtained in other populations and locations. Such studies would indicate if these results were confirmed.
2. Using authentic literature with an author study other than Patricia Polacco books are needed to check if common themes would emerge in that chosen author study as in this study.
3. The population of students be less/more heterogeneous than with this study as well as a more culturally diverse population to determine if the same results would be found and recognized.
4. Further research is needed to determine if these same results would be found and recognized when children read to themselves before engaging in discussions written responses.

5. Research and include fourth and sixth graders' developmental stages in comprehension and written responses.

REFERENCES

Anderson, P. M. (1991). *Enhancing aesthetic reading and response.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Applebee, A. N. (1978). *The child's concept of story.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Beach, R. (1993). *A teacher's introduction to reader-response theories.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Beach, R., & Hynds, S. (1984). Research on response to literature. In P. David Pearson (Ed.) *Handbook of reading research.* New York, Longman.

Bleich. D. (1975). *Readings and feelings.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Bluestein, N. A. (2002). Comprehension through characterization: enabling readers to make personal connections with literature. *Reading Teacher,* Feb2002, Vol. 55 Issue 5, p431-34.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cambourne, B. (1988). The whole story: Natural learning and the acquisition of literacy in the classroom. New York: Ashton Scholastic.

Cochran-Smith, M. (1984). *The making of a reader.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Coles, R. (1989). *The call of stories: Teaching and the moral imagination.* Boston: Houghton, Mifflin.

Coles, R. (1992). *Their eyes meeting the world: the drawings and paintings of children.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Cooper, C. R. (1985). *Researching response to literature and the teaching of literature.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Cullinan, B. E. & Galda, L. (1988). *Literature and the child.* 4th Edition. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Cullinan, B. E. & Harwood, K. T. (1983). The reader and the story: Comprehension and response. *Journal of Research and Development in Education, 16*(3), 29-46.

Cunningham, D. J., Snowman, J. (1975). A comparison of pictorial and written adjunct aids in learning from text. Journal of Educational Psychology, 67, 2 p. 307-11. Apr75.

Dionisio, M. (1994). Teaching reading strategies in a "remedial" reading class. In C. Weaver (Ed.), Practicing what we know: Informed reading instruction (p. 202). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Earthman, G. I. (1994). *School renovation handbook: inventing in education.* Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing Company.

Fish, (1980). *Is there a text in this class?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Flynn, E. A. (1984). *Contextual models in response theories and reading research.* Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Reading Association, Atlanta, GA.

Flynn, E. A. (1986). *Gender and reading: essays on readers, texts, and contexts.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Galda, L. (1982). Assuming the spectator stance: an examination of the responses of three young readers. *Research in the Teaching of English, 16*(1), 1-20.

Galda, L. (1983). Research in response to literature. *Journal of Research and Development in Education, 16*(3) 1-7.

Garrison, B. M & Hynds, S. (1991). Evocation and reflection in the reading transaction: a comparison of proficient and less proficient readers. *Journal of Reading Behavior 23*(3), 259-280.

Gay, L. R., & Airasian, P. (2000). *Educational research competencies for analysis and application.* 6th Ed., New Jersey: Merrill.

Griffith, P., & Lynch-Brown, C. (2000). Extending the vision. *The Reading Teacher*, 54. 6.

Hancock, M. R. (1992). Literature response journals: Insights beyond the printed page. *Language Arts, 69*(1), 36-42.

Hansen, J. (1998). *When learners read.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hansen, J. & Graves, D. (1985). *Breaking ground: teachers relate writing and writing in the elementary school.* Pourtsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Harding, D. W. (1962). Psychological process in the reading of fiction. *British Journal of Aesthetics,* 2, 133-147.

Harris, V. J. (1993). Literature-based approaches to reading instruction. In L. Darling-Hammond (Ed.) *Review of research in education* (pp. 269-297). Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association.

Harris, Theodore L., Hodges & Richard E. (1995). *The literacy dictionary, the vocabulary of reading and writing.* Newark: International Reading Association.

Hepler, S. I., & Hickman, J. (1982). The book was okay. I love you - Social aspects of response to literature. *Theory into Practice, 21*(4), 278-283.

Hynds, S. (1989). Reading as a social event: Comprehension and response in the text, classroom, and world. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Hynds, S., & Rubin, D. (1990). *Perspectives on talk and learning.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Iser, W. (1978). *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response.* Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Kelly, P. R. (1990). Guiding young students' response to literature. *The Reading Teacher, 43*(7), 464-470.

Langer, J. A. (1994). Focus on response-based approach to reading literature. *Language Arts,* 71, 203-211.

Langer, J. A. (1997). Literacy through literature. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy 40,*(3), 606-615.

MacGregor, N. A. (2001). Deeper engagement: a qualitative study of multicultural fifth graders' involvement with literature. Unpublished doctoral dissertation: University of IL.

Many, J. E. (1990). The effect of reader stance on students' personal understanding of literature. In J. Zutell & S. McCormick (Eds.), *Literacy theory and research: Analyses from multiple paradigms* (39th yearbook of the National Reading Conference, p.p. 51-63). Chicago, IL: National Reading Conference.

Many, J. E., & Wiseman, D. L. (1992). Analyzing versus experiencing: The effects of teaching approaches on students' responses. In J. Many & C. Cox. (Eds.), *Reader stance and literary understanding* (pp. 250-276). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Medway, P. (1987). *Learning and teaching genre.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publisher.

Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey - Bass.

Morrow, L. M. (1985). The impact of a literature-based program on literary achievement, use of literature, and attitudes of children from minority backgrounds. *Reading Research Quarterly,* 1992, 27, 250-275.

Pantaleo, S. (1995). What do response journals reveal about children's understandings of the workings of literacy texts? *Reading Horizons, 36*(1), 76-93.

Peeck, J. (1987). Delayed retention of orally presented text with pictorial support. British Journal of Educational Psychology, V57 pt3, p. 412-16. Nov87.

Probst, R. T. (1988). *Response and analysis: teaching literature in junior and senior high school.* Portsmouth NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Probst. R. E. (1992). Reader-response theory and the English curriculum. *English Journal* (3), 37-44.

Purves, A. C. (1975). Research in the teaching of literature of literature. *Elementary English, 52*(4), 463-466.

Purves, A. C. & Monson, D. L. (1984). *Experiencing children's literature.* Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman.

Purves, A. C., & Rippere, V. (1968). *Elements of writing about a literary work: A study of response to literature.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Rabinowitz, & Smith, (1997). *Authorizing readers: Resistance and respect in teaching of literature.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Raimirez, M. (1991). *Psycholtherapy and counseling with minorities: a cognitive approach to individual and cultural differences.* New York: Pergamon Press.

Rand McNally (2003). *The road atlas.* Rand McNally & Company.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1938). *Literature as exploration.* New York: Appleton Century.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1964). The poem as event. *College English,* 26, 123-128.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). *The reader, the text, and the poem.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1982). The literary transaction: Evocation and response. *Theory into Practice, 21*(4), 268-277.

Rosenblatt. L. M. (1985). The transactional theory of the literary work. In C. R. Cooper (Ed.), *Researching response to literature and the teaching of literature* (pp. 33-53). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1991). Literature - s.o.s.! *Language Arts,* (68), 444-448.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1995). *Literature as exploration.* New York: The Modern Language Association.

Routman, R. (1991). Invitations: Changing as teachers and learners K-12. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Squire, J. R. (1964). *The responses of adolescents while reading four short stories.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Studier, C. E. (1978). Children's responses to literature. *Language Arts, 58*(4), 425-430.

Tierney, R. J. (1990). Research on the reading-writing relationship: interactions, transactions, and outcomes. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research: Volume II* (pp.246-280). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Trousdale, A. M. (1989). Let the children tell us: The meanings of fairy tales for children. *The New Advocate. 2*(1), 37-47.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (Eds). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language.* (rev.ed.; A. Kozulin, Trans. & Ed.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Weaver, C. (1998). *Toward a balanced approach to reading in reconsidering a balanced approach to reading.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

White, V. L. (1973). An analysis of the responses of fifth-grade children to the characteristics of the heroes of four short stories. Doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 1973. *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 1973, 34, 1978A-1982A).

Wood, K. D.; Roser, N. L.; Martinez, M. (2001). Collaborative literacy: lessons learned from literature. *Reading Teacher,* Oct. 2001, Vol. 55 Issue 2, p. 102-112.

Wylie, A. S. (1999). Expanding the view of first-person narration. *Children's Literature in Education, 30*(3), 185-201.

Yellin, D., Blake, M. E., & DeVries, B. A. (2000). *Integrating the language arts.* Scottsdale, AR: Holcomb Hathaway, Publishers.

REFERENCES

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE BOOKS

Polacco, P. (1992). *Chicken sunday.* New York: The Putman & Grosset Group.

Polacco, P. (1994). *Just plain fancy.* New York: Random House Children's Books.

Polacco, P. (1994). *Pink and say.* New York: Penguin Putman Books for Young Readers.

Polacco, P. (1988). *Rechenka's eggs.* New York: The Putman & Grosset Group.

Polacco, P. (1991). *Some birthday.* New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division.

Polacco, P. (1998). *Thank you mr. falker.* New York: Philomel Books.

Polacco, P. (1988). *The keeping quilt.* New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Polacco, P. (1990). *Thunder cake.* New York: The Putman & Grosset Group.

Appendix A

Administrator Letter

(Date)

Dear Ms. Smith, Principal,

I would like to conduct a study in your elementary school. This project is in conjunction with research that I will be doing for my doctoral dissertation at Oklahoma State University.

I want to look at children's responses to an author study. I hope to gain insight into the factors that influence children's understanding of literature and use that knowledge to improve reading instruction. With your permission as administrator, this study will involve one fourth grade class and one sixth grade class for four weeks in late April and early May of this semester. Two books per week will be used for a total of eight by a specific author.

I will be asking the two teachers as part of regular classroom reading instruction, to read aloud Patricia Polacco's books specifically chosen for this study each week. As children hear the stories, they will engage in classroom discussion and then be asked to write their thoughts in a reading response journal. I would like to use those writings and audiotape discussions in my study. There will not be any change to the regular classroom routine. Literature discussions will be audiotape for my use only as well as written responses and destroyed after the study is complete. Scheduling for the read alouds will be arranged by the teacher to accommodate her schedule.

Attached is a letter of explanation and consent form that will be sent home with the students for parental and child permission before any data is collected.

I appreciate your consideration in this study and hope that I may have the privilege of working with your teachers and students. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 405/743-1954 or my Committee Chair, Dr. Barbara Walker at 405/744-7125.

Sincerely,

Nancy Hill

Administrator Signature _____

Date_____

Appendix B

Teacher Letter, Consent and Unit Plan

(Date)

Dear Teacher,

I am a doctoral student in the Literacy and Reading program at O.S.U. and I would like to conduct a study in your classroom. This project is in conjunction with research that I will be doing for my doctoral dissertation at Oklahoma State University.

I want to look at children's responses to an author study. I hope to gain insight into the factors that influence children's understanding of literature and use that knowledge to improve reading instruction. With permission, this study will involve your class two days for four weeks in late April and early May of this semester. Two books per week will be used for a total of eight by a specific author.

I will be asking as part of your regular classroom reading instruction, to read aloud Patricia Polacco's books specifically chosen for this study each week. As children hear the stories, they will engage in classroom discussion then be asked to write their thoughts in a reading response journal. I would like to use those writings and audio tape discussions in my study. There will not be any change to the regular classroom routine. Literature discussions will be audio taped for my use only as well as written responses and destroyed after the study is complete. Identifiers such as names will be removed from transcripts of taped conversations and from the text of the research report. Pseudonyms will represent the students' names as well as your own. Scheduling for the read alouds will be arranged by you to accommodate your schedule. I will be asking that you use the following questions for discussion sessions: 1. What do you think Patricia Polacco was trying to tell you about in this story? 2. What does Patricia Polacco want you to think about after hearing this story? 3. Have you ever felt like any of the characters in this story?

In addition to reading the books and initiating the discussions, I will ask you to have an interview with me each week and again after all data is collected. This will make a total of five interviews. I will be taking notes and audio taping our interviews.

Below this letter is a form for you to sign. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree to participate in this study. I want to stress that you may withdraw from this study at any time. Upon agreement, I will provide you with a copy of the consent as well as the parental/guardian letter and consent/assent form. I will also provide you with a written script that I will use to introduce myself and an explanation of this project to your students. A unit plan I have created for this study is also included for your keeping.

I appreciate your consideration in this study and hope that I may have the privilege of working with you and your students. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (405)743-1954 or my Committee Chair, Dr. Barbara Walker at (405)744-8001). **The Institutional Review Board: Sharon Bacher (405) 744-5700 at 415 Whitehurst, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK.**

Sincerely,

Nancy Hill
(Former Monroe Teacher)

Consent Form for Teacher Interview

I understand that there will be one interview each week after the Patricia Polacco books are read for four weeks for a total of four interviews. I will also have one interview approximately two weeks after the researcher has collected all data. The interview will be used for validating the data. The researcher will take notes and audio tape the interviews.

I agree _____do not agree _____ to participate in this study and in the interviewing sessions with the researcher about my students' responses.

Signature of Teacher_____Date_____

I may withdraw from this research study at any time. Questions can be addressed to Nancy Hill at (405) 743-1954 or her committee chair Dr. Barbara Walker at (405) 744-8001.

Unit Plan

(Teacher Copy)

The procedures will be done the same for the four week study. Each week the teacher will read aloud two Patricia Polacco books and engage students in classroom discussion with the three questions:

1. What do you think Patricia Polacco was trying to tell you about in this story?
2. What does Patricia Polacco want you to think about after hearing this story?
3. Have you ever felt like any of the characters in this story?

Afterwards, the teacher will then ask students to write in their response journals using the question, "Now that I have read this book to you and we have discussed it, I want you to write your responses or feelings in your journal."
The teacher will collect the responses and remind students to use only their first names on their papers.

Week One
Book One: *Some Birthday*
Book Two: *Thank you, Mr. Falker*

Note: The researcher chose these two books as a beginning because they are about the author Patricia Polacco, and allows for personal identification for the students to future stories in this study.

Week Two
Book Three: *Thunder Cake*
Book Four: *Rechenka's Eggs*

Note: The stories for week two are about Patricia Polacco's Babushka (grandmother).

Week Three
Book Five: *Chicken Sunday*
Book Six: *Pink and Say*

Note: The stories for week three were chosen because the storyline is about social issues and character empathy.

Week Four
Book Seven: *Just Plain Fancy*
Book Eight: *The Keeping Quilt*

Note: The researcher chose to end the study with these stories because of the common themes of cultural issues.

Appendix C

Parent Letter of Explanation

(Date)

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I would like to invite your child to participate in a project to study the ways in which children understand text. I want to look at the ways in which an author study encourages children's responses to and understanding of literature. As a result of this project, I hope to gain insight into the factors that influence children's understanding of literature and use that knowledge to improve reading instruction. This project is in conjunction with research I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation. The four-week study will be conducted during late April and early May of this year.

As part of regular classroom reading instruction, the students' teacher will be read aloud a Patricia Polacco book specifically chosen for this study. As children hear the stories, they will discuss the book and then be asked to write their thoughts in a reading response journal. With your permission and your child's agreement, I would like to use those journals in my study. There will not be any change to the regular classroom routine. Audiotape discussions and my field notes will be for my use only. The teacher will arrange scheduling for the read alouds.

This study is unrelated to your child's current school progress and participation is purely voluntary. Participation, or lack of participation, will not affect your child's grade. All materials and documents related to the study, i.e., children's response journals, taped discussions, and field notes will be kept confidential and away from school; identifiers such as names will be removed from transcripts of taped conversations and from the text of the research report. Pseudonyms will represent your child's real name. Withdrawal may be done any time during the study if desired.

Attached is a form for you and your child to sign. Please indicate whether you agree to allow your child to participate and have your child return the form to his/her teacher tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Nancy Hill
(Former Monroe Teacher)

Appendix D

Consent/Assent Form

I give _____, do not give _____, permission for my child _____

to participate in the study of children's responses to literature.

I understand the nature of the study and I may withdraw my child at any time during it.

_____
Parent/Guardian Signature

_____
Child's Signature

_____
Date

If you have any questions concerning this study, please feel free to contact me at 405/743-1954. You may also contact the Oklahoma State University Research Services at 405/744-5700.

Appendix E

Rubric

_____ GRADE RESPONSE

Category
(future theme)

RELATED to
P.P. BOOK

YES NO

HOW? WHAT/WHY?

Other/Miscellaneous

Appendix F

Book One: *Some Birthday*

"I like to have a birthday with pop music, a cake, no balloons a lot of friends and ice cream. The friends I would like to have are everybody in the class. Even the teachers and principal. With family and friends, would be a great party wouldn't it? Well I think it will be a good party. I love birthday party's don't you."

"I did not like monsters when I was five years old because my sister use to say Freddy Crouger was going to get me and she lock me in my room and I screamed that I saw something and my mom forgot but my grandma didn't and she took me out to Wal-mart and when I got there I had to go to the bathroom and my grandma called my mom and dad to by me a cake and ice cream when I got home we had a party and so my and dad did not forget it was my birthday when I was seven years old and I was not scream about monster."

"It makes me feel like my parets are going to forget my birthday but my parents are responseble. They probably forget about Valentine's Day, but not our birthdays."

"I think it would be fun to go hunt a monster and you wouldn't be mad if you didn't even get to see a monster. At first I thought there wasn't going to be a birthday party at all espesselly when it got dark. At first I thought that the little kid was a boy espesselly when they went to look for a monster. I thought it was a very good book. I have read some of her books before.

"I realy liked the story. It taught me to never think someone forgot your birthday. I thought it was funny when the girls dad came out as the monster. I wonder how he did that because the kids were standing by their dad and then I guess they got so scared they were not looking and did not see their dad take off and go in to the water to be the monster. I think maby they called capris pusher peddles because when you ride a bike you would have too roll up your jeans or your jeans would get cout in the bike when you push the peddles!"

"My parents have never divorced, but mine seems to be forgetful too. not on my birthday of course. It made me feel sad at first because I thought the dad really forgot about her. That would make me sad at anytime. That would be fun going on a camping trip with your family too. I would be scared too if a monster or what seemed like a monster walked out of a lake or swamp. It makes me think of a swamp man [a movie]. That would be scary too. Like on easter we always get presents and we were half way through the day and I was sad, and then at supper my mom passed out presents. I felt so much better just like the little girl was at the end when she got the present she wanted. I really related to this book. It was excellent."

"I liked the story a lot. I liked how they made the big deal about how everyone was really scared. At the very first of *Some Birthday,* I was a little sad for the little girl because I would be scared if my dad didn't say Happy Birthday to me when I woke up. Then, I got a little scared when they got there, I knew something funny or tricky was going to happen to the kids. Then, when they got home, and when they started telling their grandma, I

knew the dad did something. It made me feel good when the grandma said, 'There's your monster coming through the front door!' I liked the story."

Appendix G

Book Two: *Thank you, Mr. Falker*

"I felt that Patricia is trying to tell us is that it herts your fellings when people make fun of you and people shouldn't call other people names cause it herts your fellings being called a name. It happened to me when I tried reading. My brother said that I could do anything if I set my mind to it. A kid at school made fun of me in the first grade and made me cry. He said that I could never read and I never will. So I cryed and I cryed."

"Never give up until you learn it. Like when I had trouble with Math, and now math is my favorite subject. People used to laugh cause I was reading slow, because if you rush you might get a bad grade. I used to do that I always got a bad grade, because I never felt like reading, but now I love to read. That's why you never give up, and your parents might get mad too. I never gave up on Math, now I got better at math."

"Thank you Mr. Falker is a good book. Mr. Falker helps people with problems that they have. He is a good teacher he is nice and the story is a sad book. Her grandparents die and she can't read good. I would get really mad if some one made fun of me. The story was interesting when they put the honey on the book and she dipped her finger in it and she said it tasted sweet and they all said the saying that they said."

"I thought that the story was good. Poltricia Poloco was trying to say never give up and how she became a storywiter for children. I got a question do you think that Patricia Poloco wrote all of the patricia poloca books? I think patrica poloco was trying to say that teachers can help you make your carier [career]. They can help you do more stuff you think you can. Teachers can help you do lots of things like read books."

"I had no idea that people felt that way. I will admit that I have acted like the boy to people before and now I know how it feels. It really must hurt. I used to get mad at myself for not being a good artist. I never gave up and I keep getting better at it. I felt like almost all of the characters in the story because I help people like the teacher, I don't learn in easy ways sometimes like the little girl, and I have made fun of someone for being dumb like the boy. That was when I was younger though. I definetly know better now."

"I felt sad because people made fun of her at her school. Her teacher did not really help her a lot. And she could not read as well everyone else. Then she moved to a new place, and she went to a different school. Soon after that they started making fun of her. And a new teacher came to and he protected her, and taught her how to read. I think that is what my teacher does for me when I don't get something."

"I really enjoyed the book! It kinda in a way explained life! EXAMPLE: life is hard sometimes and you have got to get over these things even if it is with someone eles help! At 1st the book was sad and depressing. I thought that she was just never going to get any more sad, but then it did. Her grandpa died and also grandma! Mr. Falker was a big change in the story but, it was a really good change! Mr. Falker was really good with Tricia at least I thought! I really enjoyed the book!"

"This story is a good one. I think the author was trying to get people to think before they made fun of someone just because they learn slower than you do at some things, because people learn differently than you do. I felt like the little girl sometimes because my grandpa died and he was still helping with a lot of things. I also felt like the teacher

because I help my brothers with the things that they don't understand. The author wants you to think about peoples feelings before you talk about them. I think that it is trying to say people learn in different ways and paces."

Appendix H

Book Three: *Thunder Cake*

"I liked the story a lot. It was scary I felt like the little girl in the story because I youse to bed scared of lightening and my dad took me outside and played in the rain and now I go out their and play in the mud and ride my forwheeler and bycicle in the mud and I think that the cake was a distraction from the storm so the little girl wouldn't be scared. I don't think it takes a brave person to go out in the rain because I think it is fun."

"I think it was funny that her grandma kept her busy so she didn't notice the thunder. And it was funny to me that the chicken and the cow was mean to people. And it was good that she was able to over come her fear of thunder."

"I have fears. I am scared of heghest [heights] I'm scared of them because my big brother Johnny [psuedoymn] is always saying don't fall when I am by the egde [edge] It is realley scarer. He is mean. Sometimes I can't stand him. He gets on my nerves. I'm just like that little girl in the book I scared of thunderd too. I'm also scared of the dark. I'm scared of tornados. I'm scared of thurnerd storms. I'm scared of my big brother some times."

"I think that the story is fake because I think there is no such thing as a thunder cake because you can't bake cakes or else the oven's electricity will waste. Thunderstorms are real strong and loud, and I think that everybody have been scared once in a while. My sisters have got scared by a guy on Halloween and the guy was chasing them. I think that kind of ruins your mind a little bit too. Once I got scared when I was little because my big sister put ketchup on her hands, droped herself on the floor and screamed my name. I told

her that I didn't have time to go. Then she screamed and I went. I saw her thrown on the ground and she said got scared and I said yes.

"This story was great. I can really relate to it. I used to be so scared of thunderstorms until I realized how cam they can be. I am still scared of storms like tornadoes. Maybe a thunder cake would calm me but I would call it a tornado cake. The May 3rd tornado made me scared most. My grandma is scared of storms too so I don't think she can relate to the grandma in the story. I was also scared during the ice storm. My Mom was like the grandma. She played games with me and we sang song and played cards. We listened to the radio and we fell asleep to the sweet sound while our tree branches were falling and the fences too. And another thing, my mom seems to always bake cookies or cake on rainy or stormy and cold days, but never thunder cake!"

"How I feel is that sometimes being afraid is ok. I used to be like the little girl because I used to be afraid. But now when a storm comes, I would either play a game or go outside on the porch and watch it. Also was afraid to talk in front of a big crown but now I stick out my chin and go say what I need to say. My grandma would sometimes when she comes over, we would read books or watch a movie or do something else beside that. Sometimes we would sit outside together and watch. I thought it was a good book."

Appendix I

Book Four: *Rechenka's Eggs*

"Today I was looking out my window and I saw a baby bird stuck in the crack and I told my dad because I felt sorry for it because a blue jay was picking on it and so my dad put some gloves on and when we got out their the baby bird was gone. Mabe it was amiercal [a miracle] but I wonder where it went? "

"I have been like Patira Polcoon. I saw a turtle on the side of the road. My dad picked it up there was something on it. We took it to the vet and they helpted it. It was better. That's what gave us the idea to get two pet turtles."

"I think the auther was trying to say if you do something nice for someone they will do something nice for you! No I do not feel like anyone in the story but one time I was walking on a green belt behind my house and I saw a blue egg on the ground but I didn't touch it because I wanted the mother to come back and get the egg. One day the girl on the bus I walk home with asked me if I wanted to go to her house and see eggs in her boosh [bush] so I did and she said you have to wiggle the boosh so you can see the eggs because the mothers in there so I wiggled the boosh and the mother came zooming out and really scared me!!! Then she opened the boosh and I saw the blue eggs and went home."

"It makes me feel like painting eggs because they turn out so beautiful. I feel sad when the eggs feel [fell] off but I was so glad that the goose laid beautiful eggs to replace the broken ones and the goose left a baby goose for a surprise."

"I liked the story we read today. I felt like the goose in the story because I've broke something that my mom really liked, but then I tried real hard to make it better. I think the author was trying to tell who was reading it that miracles can happen if you believe in them. She also was trying to say if you give to people you will get back."

"This story reminds me of Easter. With all of the eggs. I also like painting eggs on Easter. I also love animals like the grandmother. But I am not so fond of geese. I have always wanted a little chick, too! I can relate to the goose because I give to others and also the grandma because of her love of animals. And I sort of believe in miracles. But don't be so sure. Anything can happen. I like to do crafts and find adventures. It is so fun. I like colorful things and rainbows. Just like the eggs. I like nature and everything you can search for. I liked the story."

"I thought that the story was really good. The story could kinda relate to real life as being a kid. You mess up and then you try to do better for whatever or whoever you messed up. The goose was almost like a small person. It messed up then made things better. The eggs were pretty cool. The eggs were extremely beautiful in the book. The book was kinda sad at 1st and the end was better. The lil' [little] goose was so lil' and cute!"

Appendix J

Book Five: *Chicken Sunday*

"I think the story was good and I thought Patriccia Polloco was trying to tell us that it's good to tell the truth. Never always think people are liying and never always think people are telling the truth eaiter [either]. Always belevie [believe] who you want to beleave unless you don't know the hole story because one time I was asleep on Saterday. My sister got into my crayons and colored on the t.v. and she blamed it on me and I got in trouble because they beleave the younger children but that's not why the young children didn't get in trouble. They didn't get in trouble because their gram belevies in them."

"It makes me feel mad, angry, blamed, happy. This story makes me feel mad because the grownups blamed it on them. If I was the kids I would say the big kids did it. I would think the big kids need to tell the truth. I would always tell the truth because it could come back to you. And if you don't you could pay for it when you get older. It makes me feel happy because the parent believes the little kid and they know that it was the bigger kids."

"I always get blamed for stuff. Like when one of my brothers yelled my mom always thinks its me, but when I yell she knows It's me. Sometimes my brothers are blamed too. And when I tell her what really happened she belives me, and some time I get blamed at schools. Like if somebody hits me and I hit them back and you catch me I get in trouble, and they don't."

"I tank tate itows sadit twow egg at the old men. [I think it was sad to throw egg at the old man]. They were nice to him he wus nice to thay by giving that hat to them. Yu sad

tret otrs how you wot to be tretid. [You said treat others how you want to be treated]. You sodit by arot sum wun win you no ther dowing sthing roge. [You shouldn't be around someone when you know they're doing something wrong]. I tenk pepol sod de nice to erdatnet gus oun prsing. [I think people should be nice to . . . own person.] I tek the old men codof der a litol niser to the yountgr wut. [I think the old man could have been a little nicer to the younger ones.]

"Yes, I did feel like someone in the story because I have got in trouble for something I didn't do before. I think the author was was trying to say 'if you do something nice for someone they will be really happy and do something nice for you'. The other thing I think she was trying to tell you is to never ever lie and to not blame others for something they didn't do and you don't really know who did it. You should wait and figure out who really did it then tell on them!"

"The story was pretty cool. I like singing, so I can relate to the grandma. I like hats too. I like to do things for nice people like the little children did in the story. I like painting eggs too like the last story. It makes me feel good inside when I hear the story because it was so nice about her getting a new hat. I can't even think of anything else to say. The main thing was that this story was great and you should always do many things for others and treat them as you would like to be treated."

"I liked the story that we heard our teacher read today. I think that the author was trying to tell you that if you try hard at something you will get what you are working for. The author trying to make us think about telling the truth because those kids didn't really

throw the eggs. I felt like the three kids in the story because I have got blamed for something I didn't do. I know how it feels to be blamed when you really didn't do it."

Appendix K

Book Six: *Pink and Say*

"I feel like Say and Pink. I have black cousins. Kids made in fun of me and my cousins. I do not think that people should jude [judge] people by there looks."

"I think that the story is ok and a nice story. Patriccia Poloco was trying to say that don't judge people by thier color of their skin don't people by thier friends. Like if someone had a friend that was black one person might not want to be your friend becauseyour friends with a differnt heritage. That thier not the same color. I have felt like someone in the story because people have judged me on the way I look and my skin color."

"Yes, I have felt like the story that I have listened to. Sometimes people jude [judge] me by my color. They think just because I am Mexian [Mexican] that I can't talk proper English. But there wrong because I have made straight As ever since I was in school. I know Math, English, Science, Health, Social Studies, Reading and of course I know spanish and art. There was this one person that when I was in the 3rd or 2nd grade they had called me four eyes just because I was wearing my glasses. People that jude other people by they way look or by the way the way there color is or anything they are pretty bad people for doing that. No one should be feeling bad if they haven't jude anyone by their color. But those have need to tell the person sorry and ask for forgiveness."

"This story makes me feel sad and happy. Because they killed pink because he was black and he believed different then them. If I was them I would say, you don't need to judge people by there color, you judge them by there heart and kindness and niceness. If I was

black and people said bad thing about me I would feel bad and left out. It makes me happy when black people and white people are freinds and they get along well."

"I have never ever felt like any of the characters in the story. I have never ever had a master expect [except] for my parents, and they are kind of my master. I will get in trouble if I didn't listen to them. I would never ever want to be a slave like they had to. I want to stay free."

"This book was better than then the rest of the other books. I really like it and I feel like the little boy because he really likes Pink and he doesn't care what color Pink is so he wanted to be his friend. Pink was a boy who also wanted to be Say's friend. What I don't like about the book is when they go and hang him. Pink and Say didn't care what other people think as long as they were friends. I really really liked the story."

"I felt mad because this guy was shot in the leg. Then this black guy came and save him and made him better. Then the other people came and Pink and Say had to hide in the celler. And the other side shot Pink's mom because she was black. It made me feel sad because she died in Pink's hands. After that they left and they were caught and Pink was killed and Say went on to live a good life."

"That story was cool. It was very fun to listen to. I wouldn't want to go back to the war. He must have been a nice man. That was sad. I had no idea that Pink's mother would die. It was a big surprise. There seemed to be a moral of the story but it was hard to figure out. I liked it anyway of course. I would cry and cry if something like that happened to my mother or father. Anyway Pinkus and Say were so nice to each other and made me

have more respect for the world and war. I would be sad if my family had to go to war like T's. Anyway the story was great!"

Appendix L

Book Seven: *Just Plain Fancy*

"Yes I felt like charechers [characters]. Cause I take good care of my three dogs and I also take good care of my fish. Also my cat got a disiese [disease] in his head and it went through his body and he went out prowling that night and he never came home. That happened five months ago. Everyone thinks black cats are scary but their not. Mickey was my cats name and he was black."

"This story makes me feel happy, couries [curious] and woried. It makes me couries because you don't know if the egg is going to hatch or live. If I was the girl I would help it to. If I had chicken I would take good care of them because they feed you, and they just would be good pets. It makes me feel worried because you don't know if the chicken is going to live."

"I liked the story but I don't think I have ever felt like anyone in the story. I think the author was trying to say don't act like someone you are not because the peacock was acting like a chickin then the peacock showed everybody that he/she was a peacock. The other think the author was trying to say is take good care of your animals and your animals will be good to you."

"No I haven't felt like any charters [characters] in the story, but sometimes when people ask me if I like hotdogs I say no but when they come over thier like hey I thought you didn't like hotdogs well sometimes I don't. and most of my friends ask me if I like salad I always tell them yes because I love salad!"

"I thought it was a good story. But I don't get how a hen could lay a peacock. and they were so worried about them not liking it, and they would think he was to fansie, but they fell in love with him and his beautieful feathers."

"I thought p.p. [Patricia Polacco] was trying to tell us that it was ok to be diffrent and or unusawal [unusual]. She wants us to think abought [about] how it whould [would] fell [feel] to have to be the same day in day out. I felt like the peacok when I starded [started] school."

"I think that the story was pretty good. The drawings were very beautiful and they looked so real. The girl I can kinda relate to because I have very simple things and then, I make them fancy. My favorite charicter [character] was probly the peacock or the little girl. The peacock I think we can relate to because sometimes we all are a little different. The little girl because like I told you above I take simple things and make them extrodonary [extraordinary]."

"I liked the book. Because you couldn't have anything fancy it must have boring not getting any t.v. or a car or something fancy and you get in troble [trouble] if you don't do what they said and follow the rules."

"How man times have you thought to yourself, Man my life is boring! Well, you should be very thankful. I think Patricia is trying to make use be thankful for what we have. It's working! She is trying to tell us that simple things are the most special. I feel like the amish people sometimes also the peacock. I like to be different. Different is fun, and different is different and different is good. Sometimes it is bad to be different but not

always. I protest against it every once and a while. Almost like the girl. The peacock was wonderful and I would act the same way as that one lady. I liked the story."

"I liked the story we read today. I think the author was trying to tell me that being different isn't that bad as long as that's the way you really are. I think the author wants me to think about being plain, or being different. In this story I felt like the bird, fancy, because I have felt different in a crowd of people that were all the same. I liked the story."

Appendix M

Book Eight: *The Keeping Quilt*

"No, I haven't felt like anybody in the story, but I do have something to pass down. My mom says to keep my American girl dolls so maybe I could pass my American girl dolls down to my kids. I guess the story was ok not quiet as good as the other books that we've read. My favorite one was pink and say and I also liked thunder cake actually that was my favorite and pink and say would half to be my second favorite. The story today I think needed a little more detail."

"I think the story was ok and short. I don't feel like anybody in the story but I do have something to pass down to my sisters kids. What I'm going to give to my sisters kids is a diamond that is about five inches tall. I guess thats the badest thing somebody ever gave to their children. If I don't give that diamond to my sisters children, I'll give them my goldfish, if it says alive until I grow up. That's all the things I can think that my mom has given me, exept [except] the goldfish part, I got the goldfish from the all american carnival."

"I have never felt like any of the charactors in this story. I kind of liked that story. I don't think we pass down stuff for our family. I think? We probably do probably don't I don't know. If we do I have never ever heard of it. I don't even know all of my cousins, and if we did have anything I wouldn't want to hear storys about it. Some story are cool."

"No, I don't think I have ever felt like anyone in the story. I think the author was trying to say when someone passes down something to you don't put it in a garage sale or give it away keep passing it down because its realy speacil [special]!!! I like the story but the

story just tell you about them getting married then someone else does the same thing then someone else and someone else. But the story was ok!!"

"You can pass stuff down through generation after generation. I felt like that was a good book to tell to a family I also felt like the girl because we pass down a quilt to. It has been through five generations and it is all orange and black."

"This story was good. I can relate to it because I have many traditions in my family. Not really traditions but things of the sort. Like opening presents and things like that. It is fun to see the new games and things that we can invent and pass out through the families. My grandma even makes quilts sometimes. Once, on my birthday she made me one with ladies and cool dresses with umbrellas on and stuff. She makes them all the time almost like a small tradition for her."

"I though it was cool because my family dosen't [doesn't] pass anything from genaration to genaration [generation] but thers dose. The quilt was used for everything from a table clouth [cloth] to a blanket."

"I think it is good to have a family tradisoin [tradition]. My family does not have a tradision that I know about. I thought we did but I was wrong. Maybe my family has a tradition of being wrong. I hope we have one. But really I do not care that much."

"The book was pretty good. I thought that was pretty neat that they passed down a blanket. I thought that the weddings were weird! How the men and the women celebrate differently. Men in one area and women in another area! I could just kinda relate to the story!"

Appendix N

Institutional Review Board Approval

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 4/16/2004

Date: Thursday, April 17, 2003 IRB Application No ED03105

Proposal Title: A QUALITATIVE STUDY: THEMES EVIDENT IN FOUTH AND SIXTH GRADE STUDETS' DISCUSION AND WRITTEN RESPONSES USING AN AUTHOR STUDY

Principal Investigator(s):

Nancy Hill
6209 Canterbury
Stillwater, OK 74074

Barbara J. Walker
256 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited (Spec Pop)

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson

Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA 

Nancy Hill

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: A QUALITATIVE STUDY: WHAT THEMES ARE EVIDENT IN FOURTH AND SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS' DISCUSSIONS AND WRITTEN RESPONSES USING AN AUTHOR STUDY

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Education: Bachelor of Science Degree: May 1976, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Weatherford, Oklahoma, Major: Office Administration, Minor: English. Bachelor of Science Degree: December 1982, University of Arts and Sciences, Chickasha, Oklahoma, Major: Elementary Education. Master of Education: December 1990, Oklahoma University, Norman, Oklahoma, Major: Adult Education, Emphasis: Reading. Completed the Requirements for the Ed D degree at Oklahoma State University, in December 2003, Emphasis: Reading Education.

Credentials: Standard Oklahoma Teaching License, Certificates: Elementary Education K-8, Reading Specialist K-12, Special Endorsement 7-8, Social Studies.

Professional Experience: Graduate Assistant to Dr. Sandee Goetze and University Student Teacher Supervisor for Active Student Teachers, assisting for Dr. Virginia Worley, January 2003- May 2003; Interview Committee for Teacher Education Admittance, Oklahoma State University, School of Curriculum and Educational Leadership, Graduate College of Education - Oklahoma State University Graduate Teaching Assistant, August 2001 - December 2002, School of Curriculum and Educational Leadership, Graduate College of Education - Oklahoma State University, CIED 3005 - Foundations of Literacy, CIED - 4005 Literacy Assessment and Instruction and Tutorial Laboratory. Guthrie Public Schools, Guthrie, Oklahoma, 2003 - Present, Title I; Enid Public Schools, Enid, Oklahoma, 1996 - 2001, Regular classroom teacher in grades fourth, fifth, and sixth, Blanchard Public Schools, 1984 - 1996; Kindergarten,

fifth and sixth grade teaching assignments; Committee Member/Star Schools Grant Project (2002) affiliated with Oklahoma State University Advisory; District Staff Development Member, 2000 - 2001; Science Fair/Invention Convention Chair, 1999 - 2000; Member of Advisory Committee for the Gifted and Talented Program 1988 - 1994; North Central Accreditation Steering Committee Chair 1992 - 1993; Committee Member/Star Schools Grant Project (2002) affiliated with Oklahoma State University; Resident Year Mentor Committee Member, 1988, 1990, 1992, and 1999 1986 - 1987; School Safety Committee Member

Presentations: Credited Co-Presenter: 2002 International Conference of Multilingual and Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Dyslexia, *Learning English from Print and from Speech: Its Effect on Spelling,* Washington, D.C.; Credited Co-Presenter: 2001 International Dyslexia Association 52nd Annual Conference, *Parallels Between Acquisition of Writing Skills by Children and the Evolution of Writing Systems: Implications for Instruction*, Albuquerque, NM; Credited Co-Presenter: 2001 National Reading Conference 51st Annual Meeting, *Parallels Between Acquisition of Writing Skills by Children and the Evolution of Writing Systems: Implications for Instruction*, San Antonio, TX; Presenter: Oklahoma Reading Association Conference, 2001: *Building Professional Development in Your School*; Inservice for Presenting Children's Literature, 1994

Professional Memberships: International Reading Association, Oklahoma Reading Association, International Dyslexia Association, International Honor Society in Education: Kappa Delta Pi, National Education Association, Oklahoma Education Association

Name: Nancy A. Hill Date of Degree: December, 2003

Institution: Oklahoma State University Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: A QUALITATIVE STUDY: WHAT THEMES ARE EVIDENT IN FOURTH AND SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS' DISCUSSIONS AND WRITTEN RESPONSES USING AN AUTHOR STUDY

Pages in Study: 136 Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the nature of students' engagement with and written response to an author study using Patricia Polacco books. The participants were two public school classrooms of one fourth grade and one-sixth grade. The school is located in Northwestern Oklahoma. Data included student response journals, interviews with the teachers, observational field notes, and audiotapes of classroom discussions. Data were collected over a four-week period from April to May 2003. The constant comparative method was used to detect themes. The students listened to, discussed, and wrote in their response journals two times per school week for four weeks to eight Patricia Polacco books.

Findings and Conclusions: What emerged from an extensive analysis of the data is, that while engagement looked different for each student, the themes were evident in the development of the students' responses to literature. The themes identified were personal experience, character empathy, character/author interaction, life's lessons/values, less engagement to some Patricia Polacco books, and drawings. The fourth grade students wrote of little meaning in the symbolic and metaphoric elements of the text, whereas six graders attempted to include symbolic and metaphoric features in their written responses. Both grades indicated an emotional connection to the characters in the stories. Fourth graders tended to get off topic more easily and slip into their own personal stories. The sixth graders' discussions were more interacted with peers; they seemed to build on the perceptions of others. An unexpected finding was the unsuspected deeper levels of engagement with some Patricia Polacco books. There was a relation between students liking the story and their written responses to the story. The stories that were not as well liked were the same stories that both fourth and sixth graders wrote and discussed less. Due to the students' engagement or not to the stories, results indicate the importance of individual choice in selecting literature as well as the importance of unstructured group discussions and written responses to text. There was a close relationship between response and engagement; one does not exist without the other.

ADVISOR'S APPROVAL: Barbara Walker