VOICES OF WITNESS, MESSAGES OF HOPE:
MORAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND TRANSACTIONAL RESPONSE IN A LITERATURE-BASED HOLOCAUST STUDIES CURRICULUM

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The professional literature of the Holocaust is replete with research, references, and recommendations that a study of the Holocaust, particularly for middle and high school students, is most effective when combined with an extensive use of Holocaust literature. Scholars and educators alike advocate the use of first-person testimony whenever and wherever possible in order to personalize the Holocaust lessons for the student. This study explore students’ responses to first-person Holocaust narratives through the lens of reader response theory in order to determine if prolonged engagement with the literature enhances affective learning.

This study also explores the students’ sense of personal ethics and their perceptions on moral decision-making. By examining their responses during prolonged engagement with first-person narratives, herein referred to as witness narratives, and evaluating these responses based on moral development theories developed by Kohlberg and Gilligan, the study also seeks to determine whether there are significant differences in the nature of response that can be attributed to gender.

Lastly, the study explores students’ views on racism, and how or if an extended lesson on the Holocaust causes affective change in students’ perceptions of racism and their role in combating it within our society.
DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of my father, Alexander E. Hernandez, M.D.
I made it, Papi!

To my loving and supportive wife, Mary Kate, you are my soul.

To my children, you are my inspiration:

Katherine Marianne, the joy of my life who has given me an additional joy, my granddaughter, Mackenzie.

Alexander Anthony III, my personal hero U.S. Army veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom. This world needs more like you!

Patrick Michael, aka “George Gibbs,” “Oscar Madison” and “Conrad Birdie” I’ve never known anyone who loves life and enjoys life quite like you!

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CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the Beginning

My family emigrated from Cuba when I was five years old. As a result, I grew up in a very patriarchal household, and was raised with very conservative, very Catholic values. These values were reinforced through my elementary and secondary schooling, under the auspices of the School Sisters of Notre Dame and the Xaverian Brothers. It is a fair statement therefore that I carried these values with me when at the “young” age of forty-four I decided to leave the business world, which had been my home for twenty years, and plunge head-first into the world of the public school teacher. By this point, I had four children of my own, all of whom attended the public schools in the District where I was hired. Much to the chagrin of my two older sons, I was hired to teach Reading/Language Arts at the middle school they attended.

Coming from the business world, I was convinced that I had all the answers to the problems of public education – after all, I knew what it took to survive in the real world, and I knew what the business world demanded of those seeking admission. I was not some young twenty-something fresh out of college; I had experience!
And just like those “twenty-somethings” I had so easily dismissed, I was awakened by the reality of what awaited me in the classroom. I found that unlike the children I had gone to school with, the “privileged” children who attended private schools — although we never thought of ourselves as being privileged — many of the children who sat in my classroom brought with them baggage I had never had to carry, much less unpack. Perhaps most unsettling to me as an educator was what I perceived to be a lack of awareness of what constituted ethical behavior and what I thought of as “common sense” values. These were students who had no qualms of conscience when it came to cheating on tests or plagiarizing assignments, and became aggressively belligerent when consequences for these violations of academic rules were imposed; who lied openly and shamelessly, if they believed they would escape the consequences of their actions; who openly challenged teachers’ authority. They thought nothing of calling one another the most vile epithets I had ever heard, and were equally at ease in resorting to violence to establish their position within the school pecking order. Even more surprising was the fact that quite frequently, the parents’ behavior was actually worse than the child’s. I decided that if I was going to have an impact on the lives of my students, as an educator but also as a male role model, I had to do something that would cause them to pause and reflect — I had to do something that would make a difference. Many have argued over the years that moral education — teaching children to make ethical decisions — is not the purview of public education. Moral education, they would argue, falls under “family and church.” But when these institutions do not play a significant role in the life of a child, who picks up the slack? I had often heard that being an educator is a “calling”; if this were true, then I would have to become a missionary of sorts.
During the 1999-2000 school year, after participating in an extensive summer seminar program for Holocaust educators in Poland and Israel, I conducted a brief study in which I examined my students’ responses to Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (1982) in terms of affective learning through engagement with this very moving first-person narrative. The results of that study were published in the *English Journal* (Hernandez, 2001). The implications that resulted became the impetus for a more in-depth study, which is presented herein.

**Prelude – In the Halls of a Middle School**

It was third period, my prep and conference time. I was sitting at my desk, deep in concentration, looking for ways to engage my second section. This was my most challenging group: good kids, but reluctant learners who fought my every attempt to get them to pass the eighth grade. My train of thought was suddenly derailed by familiar voices passing in the hallway outside my door. As a first-year teacher, this planning time was critical for me as I struggled to stay one page ahead of my students, and this interruption was very distracting. Not only were these students late for class, they were disturbing the peace and quiet of my early-morning ritual.

“Man, we got another one of those fuckin’ Somalis in homeroom this mornin’.”

“Shit! I hope they don’t put ‘im next to me. Those motherfuckin’ niggas be stinkin’ somethin’ awful.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. I heard it’s ‘cause they eat goats!”

“Oh my God! That is *sooo gross!*”
Two of my students, and late for class as usual. Danielle is one of the “in-crowd,” that select group of kids at every school that seems to rule the social scene. She is dressed in a denim skirt that pushes the boundaries of the dress code with regard to tightness and length (or lack thereof). Her low-cut blouse shows just enough cleavage and hints of bare midriff to catch the boys’ attention, but again stops just short of the dress code violation that would earn her a trip to the principal’s office and the dreaded “call home.” Her hair, long, straight, and blonde, sways as she shakes her head as if to accentuate her words. Her partner in this causal saunter through the halls is Keisha, another of the “eighth grade queens,” as they are referred to by several of the faculty. Ever the model of fashion, she wears the mandatory skin-tight hip-hugger jeans and a semi-translucent blouse, low-cut and tight across the torso with sleeves that billow and flare from elbow to wrist, clothes that my generation was so fond of during the ‘60s (a long-ago era that my students refer to as “back in the day”). Keisha’s hair, tightly braided in rows and hanging to her shoulders, also reflects the latest style.

I was struck by this conversation, more upset by the content than by the language. Were they, I asked myself, aware of the blatantly racist nature of their comments? Their parents have been my neighbors and friends for many years; these are two girls that I watched grow up since they were toddlers. I knew that this behavior had not been learned, nor would it have been tolerated, at home. I spent the remainder of that day, and several that followed, actually listening to how the students talked, and what they talked about, as they strolled to class. I soon discovered just how invisible a man the size of an NFL linebacker could be in a throng of middle school kids crowded into the hallway for the three minutes between class periods, oblivious to the adults in their midst. What I
“discovered” was that Danielle and Keisha’s attitudes were not an aberration; they were, sadly enough, the norm.

This disturbed me deeply, for I realized that I had, for months, been oblivious to the openly expressed prejudice and racism of our students. Over the next few weeks, I spoke to colleagues at other middle and high schools, only to find that the problem at their schools was just as bad, if not worse. My next thought was even more troubling, for how many of my colleagues, myself included, were also guilty of this behavior? While the comments made in the teachers’ lounge were devoid of the racial overtones and four-letter expletives used by our students, I soon found that the many types of negative stereotyping were often present. So my next question, directed to myself, was “What are you going to do about it?”

**Introduction**

Racism. The path that leads here begins innocently enough. Small children often call each other names, and their elders smile and remark, “Isn’t that cute,” and life goes on. Several years later, “booger” and “poopy-pants,” the naïve names of childhood are replaced by more ominous names, names whose sole purpose is to wound, to provoke confrontation, to dehumanize. Words such as “nigger,” “spic,” “faggot,” or “moron,” often preceded by obscene expletives, quickly become sharply barbed weapons aimed at the human heart. Suddenly, name-calling is no longer “cute,” but in many quarters of our society, it is not only condoned, it is openly encouraged.

Once we accept these derogatory labels, it becomes easier to believe that those whom we label are somehow inferior to ourselves, less deserving of the same rights and
freedoms that we enjoy. We start to apply negative generalizations, based on our limited observations of one or two individuals, to an entire group. Stereotypes now become part of our thought processes, and the more they are spoken and reinforced, the more ingrained and absolute they become, for if our parents, friends, and peers are saying these things, they must be true. And if they are true, there must be a reason for us not to like these people whom we have classed as being somehow different from ourselves. Before we realize it, we begin to apply these generalizations, whether deserved or not, to everyone in the entire racial, social, or cultural group. If it applies to one, we tell ourselves, it applies to all.

They are different, we tell ourselves over and again. They are of a different color, nationality, or culture; they call their Creator by a different name and worship in a way that is different from ours; they are a different gender, or have a different sexual orientation; they are older, or younger, or not as able as we, mentally or physically. Different is not a good thing, we tell ourselves. Therefore, if different is not good, there has to be something inferior about “those people,” and we start looking for reasons not to like them. We begin to make judgments about people we don’t even know. Prejudice has now found its way into our way of thinking, and once established, it becomes difficult to dislodge. It feeds on our fears, our mistrust, and our misconceptions of other people. We begin looking at ourselves as somehow better than those at whom our prejudice is directed. The epithets become more virulent; there is no logical reason for our dislike, but we aren’t concerned with logic; our concern is to bolster our feelings of superiority, if only to ourselves.
We begin to find reasons to justify our prejudices. Our peers and the media provide ample examples that we use to reinforce them. Now every Muslim, regardless of national origin, is perceived as a crazed suicide bomber bent on destruction; every Jew a money-grubber; every black male a gun-toting, drug-dealing thug. Dislike feeds on these fears and prejudices until they grows into an irrational hatred. Again, there is no logical rhyme or reason, it’s just there, and it becomes the dominant force in the thinking that guides our behavior. We begin to associate more and more with like-thinking people, and the hatred continues to grow. We may even join organizations that promote such irrational hatred, and before we know it, racism has become a way of life. Racism, taken to the extreme, the question becomes one of who deserves to live.

Hatred is a weapon, a sharp spear aimed directly at the heart of humanity. Like a spear point, the development of hatred can be defined as a pyramid, each level supporting those above it, with each subsequent level narrowing the focus of the hate (see Fig. 1.1).

![Pyramid of Hate](Hernandez, 1995)
Based on Figure 1.1, for the purpose of this study the working definitions of these terms, as used in our classroom are:

- **Name calling** – referring to anyone by any name other than their given name, in a manner that is in any way insulting, demeaning, or belittling.

- **Stereotyping** – a generalization about a person, who is regarded not as an individual, but rather as a member of a targeted group, to whom all the negative misconceptions of the group are attached.

- **Prejudice** – an irrational dislike of any individual, group or race based on their supposed characteristics. Prejudice is a learned attitude, usually acquired during the earliest years of a person’s life, and is often modeled closely on the attitudes observed in parents, friends, relatives, and the community.

- **Racism** – the irrational hatred of all members of a particular race, ethnic group, or religion very often based on the belief that one’s own group is superior to all others, because of stereotyped characteristics associated with that race, ethnic group, or religion. It is an extreme, often violent form of prejudice that disregards the individual qualities of the members of the hated group.

- **Genocide** – the systematic killing or attempted killing of an entire group of people.

Human history is replete with examples of what happens when a society condones, whether overtly or covertly, racist behavior. More frightening still are those examples wherein the society *embraces* racism to the point that the fifth and final stage of the pyramid, the tip of the spear, genocide, becomes a reality.
I was convinced that neither Danielle, Keisha, nor my colleagues perceived themselves as being racist. “Keisha is my best friend in the whole world, Mr. Hernandez,” Danielle told me, “and she’s black, so how can I be racist?” Keisha’s self-defense was also based on skin color: “Waddaya mean, Mr. H? How can I be racist? I’m black!” It became very clear to me that like many, if not most, Americans, Danielle and Keisha viewed “racism” as being determined solely by skin color. They failed to realize that racism is but one of the many “isms” that hide under the much wider umbrella of discrimination, that hate is an equal opportunity destroyer that knows neither race, religion, age, gender, nor social class. But given that in America, racism is defined first and foremost as an issue of race, be it white, black, yellow, red, or brown, how could I get a different message across to my students who were the products of generations raised to accept this narrow definition?

The Problem

If one accepts the premise that a basic purpose of education is to help young people become effective adults, one must also agree that education must include honest and even painful examinations of human behavior in order to assist students in developing their own sense of personal and societal ethics. Today’s students live in a world where racism, “ethnic cleansing,” and never-ending battles of hate abound. They see a world where major political figures commit adultery and business leaders embezzle millions of dollars, seemingly without consequence; where racism, sexism, and prejudice abound; where violence, murder, and drugs are everyday occurrences. They live in a society where “me and mine” have become the driving force behind human motivation;
and where what kind of car we drive, and whose name our clothing advertises, says more about us than our character or our actions. Television, recordings, and videotape bring these issues home to our children on a daily basis. The problem, as I perceived it, was how to make my students more aware of the potential for hatred that lies just beneath our thin veneer of civility.

Writing in 1990, Troyna and Carrington stated that racism, in one form or another is inherent in all of society’s structures and institutions. Schools, the very places where we attempt to mold the leaders of the future, are no exception. Having spent the better part of twenty years in the business world prior to embarking on a second career as an educator, I had had ample opportunity to observe how we as Americans view issues of racism. Literally hundreds of examples of the many “isms” that we can more broadly label as discrimination abound, yet as my conversations with Danielle, Keisha, and my colleagues made clear, Americans by and large view racism as a black/white issue. In order to help my students understand the fallacy of this mind-set, I believed that I needed to find a way to get the message across that took “race” – skin color – out of the equation.

Identifying the Message

As a teenager growing up in Baltimore, Maryland, many of my friends lived in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. I paid scant attention to the fact that I never saw many of their parents wearing short sleeves, even during Baltimore’s infamous “Triple-H” (hot, hazy, humid) summers, until that day in 1964 when Mr. Lowy came in from mowing the lawn. It was so hot that he had removed his long-sleeved shirt and I saw, for the first time, the pale-blue numbers tattooed on his left forearm. As often happens with
teenagers, curiosity overrode etiquette and I asked him about his strange tattoo. It was then I heard, for the first time, a story so shocking that I just knew it could not be true: Millions of people, including children, murdered in huge gas chambers? Camps where men, women, and children were starved, beaten, and worked to death? Specially built ovens that reduced human beings to ashes? With stories like this, I thought to myself, Mr. Lowy should write for the “Twilight Zone” or “The Outer Limits”! If this had happened just twenty years ago during World War II, how come I had never heard about it in history class? After all, high schoolers are supposed to know everything! There, in the air-conditioned comfort of the Lowy’s living room, I had my first encounter with the Holocaust. Thinking back to the days of my childhood, I realized that I had found my message. Now the problem of how to deliver it had to be dealt with.

I was convinced that the stories of the Holocaust’s victims and survivors, combined with a subtle dose of ethics education, would provide the vehicle for the message I was trying to get across to my students: that racism, in any of many guises, has no place in our society. Yet while much had been written about the role of Holocaust education, I could find little in the way of curriculum. I knew what I wanted to teach, where I wanted to go with my students. Several conferences, including the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Belfer Conference for Educators, literally thousands of pages of journal articles and various state mandated or recommended curricula later, the first generation of a nine-week literature-based unit of instruction was ready. The final test would be how the students responded to the vehicle I had chosen to deliver my message.
The Purpose of the Study

The Holocaust, wrote Franklin Bialystok in 1995, is the only documented event in history whereby a people, regardless of age, religious observance, political views, nationality, or economic status were condemned to death as a direct result of official government policy, with the tacit approval of a significant portion of the population (Bialystok, 1995, p. 137). Since the mid-1980s, much has been written regarding the pedagogy of the Holocaust – what to teach, what not to teach, how and when to teach it. Little has been written however, in follow-up to that pedagogy; specifically, what affective impact does a study of the Holocaust have on the student, particularly with regard to the student’s perceptions of discrimination, racism, and personal ethics. This study was conceived to investigate the written (including artistic renditions) and oral responses of eighth grade students to what I refer to as the witness narratives of Holocaust literature through the lens of moral development and reader response theories. Its purpose is to examine how middle school students respond to witness narratives when used within the context of a literature-based course of Holocaust study. More specifically, I wanted to determine how or if these responses demonstrate empathy and a code of personal ethics based on a personal response to the moral lessons of the Holocaust utilizing theories and study techniques developed by Lawrence Kohlberg (1981, 1984). Secondarily, I wanted to explore the possibility that, based on the work of Carol Gilligan (1982), there are noticeable differences in care/compassion between the responses of male and female students that can be attributed to gender. Lastly, but not of less importance, I wanted to determine how, or if, the students can apply the lessons gleaned
from the Holocaust in a call for social action, namely the reduction of discrimination and racism within their society.

**The Research Questions**

Delving into issues of personal ethics and racism is not a simple matter, particularly if the participants do not believe themselves, nor their words, ideas, or actions to be in any way of a racist nature. The issue of whether or not one thinks of oneself as “racist” becomes moot if the participants in the study do not have full trust in the researcher. I firmly believe that my students and I have that trust in one another. For this reason, I decided to draw the participants for this study from one of my own 8th grade classes in order to seek to answer the following questions:

1. How do students’ responses to the witness narratives reflect engagement through an aesthetic stance?

2. How do the students’ literary responses demonstrate empathy and personal ethics, based on the theories of Kohlberg, Gilligan, and others?

3. Given theoretical findings that emerge from studies conducted by Kohlberg and Gilligan, are there significant differences in the nature of the students’ responses that can be attributed to gender?

4. Do student writings demonstrate an application of these theories with regard to the roles of victim, perpetrator, bystander, and rescuer, as demonstrated in the witness narrative, in their own lives?

5. Do student responses, written or other, demonstrate how (or if) they can apply the lessons of the Holocaust to reduce racism within their society?
Witness Narrative – What Are They?

For the purposes of this study, the term *witness narratives* is defined as any first-person account written by a victim of Nazi persecution during the Holocaust, or by a survivor. These first-person accounts include, but are not limited to, diaries, memoirs, letters, works of arts, and autobiographies. Given the magnitude of the number of victims and the difficulty that eighth graders – or for that matter, adults - face in coming to terms with the number six million, the need exists to personalize the events as much as possible. For this reason, witness narratives also include, and rightly so, video- and audio taped testimonies of survivors, as well as face-to-face conversations with survivors.

Significance of the Study

There is much in contemporary research that indicates that literature can be used for stimulating and developing students’ moral thinking (Hoskisson & Biskin, 1979; Ellenwood & McLaren, 1994; Reid & Stringer, 1997). To many of today’s students, the genocidal events in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq, are isolated events, far removed from the warmth and safety of their American existence.

The issues of “teaching ethics” or “teaching moral behavior” in the public school can often be problematic. Many experts have posited the opinion that teaching morality and moral behavior are the purview of family and/or religious institutions. Public schools, it has been argued, are bound by the separation of church and state to refrain from teaching “morality.” Kohlberg however, believed that *moral education*, when viewed from the point of view of civil liberties, was completely separate from *religious education* (Kohlberg, 1981). He went on to state that:
“…the public school’s effort to communicate an understanding of, and an intelligent respect for, the law of the land and the underlying conceptions of human rights on which it is based does not constitute the establishment of a religion…” (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 295).

Schools, he stated, like the government, are institutions whose basic function is the maintaining and transmitting of some, but not necessarily all, of the consensual values of the society, the most fundamental of which, according to Kohlberg, are those values which the society terms “moral values,” the major moral values being those of justice (Kohlberg, 1981). My students cry daily about what is “fair” and “not fair,” about how as children, they do not believe they are treated “justly” by the adults who govern their school. The concept of “justice” is not one that is unknown to them.

Yet the world of the Holocaust was a world turned upside down in which there existed an order of reality which the human mind had never confronted before (Langer, 1975). The Nazis created parallel societies within Germany as well as within the camps and ghettos in which the traditional culture, and thereby the traditional moral and ethical values, had been either destroyed or grotesquely altered. Within Nazi-dominated societies, racism and murder became acceptable forms of behavior. Within the camps and ghettos, to simply survive very often became an end onto itself that superceded moral or cultural values. The desire, the need, to live one day longer, blurred the lines of cultural morality as the need to survive became an end in itself, because as Des Pres points out: “Survivors act as they do because they must – the issue is always life or death” (Des Pres, 1976, p. 156).
Few bodies of literature offer teachers such a wide array of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and drama that is as replete with problematic ethical issues as the literature of the Holocaust. Within these four genres can be found countless accounts of love and compassion, of risks taken and sacrifices made in order to save another human being, even in a world where ethical and cultural values had all but disintegrated. Farnham (1983) makes the statement that: “…dealing with the ethical dimensions of the literature of the Holocaust is a strong invitation to students to confront the values of life in general,” and that it is “…the teacher’s job – indeed, obligation – to help sensitize students to the presence of ethical issues in books” (Farnham, 1983, p. 67).

Louise Rosenblatt (1995) argues that because the reader “lives” the experiences encountered through literature, the exchange of ideas brought about by the reading experience can cause the reader to question present knowledge about human relations. If we are serious about guiding our students to reevaluate their perceptions of racism and prejudice, direct engagement with Holocaust literature affords us with literally hundreds of opportunities to get our students thinking critically about issues that are as vital today as they were in 1933: the effects of propaganda, blind obedience to authority, the rampant abuse of power through the perversion of the law and of democratic institutions in order to make racism a matter of national policy, the bastardization of language to disguise ulterior motives, and the use and development of technology as a means for genocide. Helping them acquire the knowledge that would allow them to make the transference from simply talking about social action, and actually evaluating their ideas and behaviors, as well as those of their parents and peers and doing something about it was, in my mind, worth the risk of broaching the “taboo” subject of moral education.
Limitations

“Social action.” “Reduce discrimination and racism within their society.” These are indeed lofty goals. The nine weeks that my students would spend reading about and studying the Holocaust is long compared to the instruction that the average middle school student receives. In order to truly ascertain whether or not this block of instruction will produce any long-term affective change in their perceptions of prejudice and racism, a more longitudinal study would be required. While a post-study survey, conducted during the first semester of my now-former-students’ freshman year of high school, would attempt to identify any areas of affective change, only time will measure whether or not the lessons learned during these nine weeks truly made a difference. We can only hope….

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the rationale for the study that follows, as well as outlining the five key questions that the study will attempt to begin to answer. I have also presented the purpose of this study, given reasons to support its significance as affective pedagogy, and discussed some of its limitations. In the sections that follow, Chapter Two will present a review of the literature that encompasses the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter Three will discuss in detail the design and methodology used to conduct the study. Chapter Four will present an analysis and interpretation of the data as it relates to the research questions, and Chapter Five will discuss the results and suggest issues for future consideration and study.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

If one accepts the premise that a basic purpose of education is to help young people become effective adults, one must also agree that education must include honest and even painful examinations of human behavior in order to assist students in developing their own sense of personal and societal ethics. Today’s students live in a world where racism, “ethnic cleansing,” and never-ending battles of hate abound. They see a world where major political figures commit adultery and business leaders embezzle millions of dollars, seemingly without consequence; where racism, sexism, and prejudice abound; where violence, murder, and drugs are everyday occurrences. They live in a society where “me and mine” have become the driving force behind human motivation; and where what kind of car you drive, and whose name our clothing advertises, says more about us than our character and our actions. Television, recordings, and video bring these issues home to our children on a daily basis.

While much has been written about the pedagogical theories that drive this study, more needs to be done with regard to an examination of classroom research by practicing educators in the area of adolescent responses to literature as they pertain to guiding them
to a sense of moral and ethical development. The six pedagogical areas that form the theoretical framework for this study to be reviewed and discussed herein are:

1. moral development theory;
2. reader response theory and research;
3. anti-racist pedagogical theory;
4. research on literature as catalyst for ethical and moral development; current theory on Holocaust education through literature;
5. research on teacher-as-researcher.

Moral Development Theory

Lawrence Kohlberg

Lawrence Kohlberg was not the first theorist to examine moral development. Between 1928 and 1930, Hartshorne and May conducted three studies in this area (Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975). During this period, moral education was looked upon as an explanation of the conventional moral code, as an exhortation to follow the code, and the planning of activities, be they group or individual, which would display “virtue” or the performance of “good works” in terms of the societal code. Beginning in 1966, Kohlberg initiated an approach to moral development and education centered on cross-cultural and longitudinal findings that led him to conclude that moral judgment develops through a culturally universal and invariant sequence of stages.

Kohlberg based his theory on the research of Piaget, who theorized that development occurs in stages and at specific ages (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969):
**Sensimotor Stage** (birth to age 2 years): The child develops the concept of object permanence and the ability to form mental representations of people and objects even when not plainly visible.

**Preoperational Stage** (ages 2 to 7 years): The child’s thoughts are egocentric. Child lacks the concept of conversion and the ability to decenter.

**Concrete Operations Stage** (ages 7 to 11 years): The child begins to decenter. Acquires the concept of conversion, but cannot reason abstractly nor test hypotheses in a systematic manner.

**Formal Operations Stage** (ages 11 or 12 years): The child begins to reason abstractly. Rather than simply accepting the then-current view that moral development was the result of socialization, Kohlberg noted that people impose a structure of meaning on life’s moral dilemmas. His premise was that morality is constructed rather than acquired; that moral understanding develops, is structured, is stage-like, and is based on the principals of justice. He argued that human beings actively give meaning to their social interactions, thereby constructing their own perceptions of the social world:

“…Along with Piaget and others, Kohlberg noted that people impose a structure of meaning upon the moral dilemmas: They interpret actions and actors, draw inferences not given in the stimulus material, and judge some social relationships and practices as fair and others as not fair.”

(Rest, 1988, p. 158)

Coming in the era that gave rise to the civil rights movement, the protests against the war in Vietnam, and the women’s movement, Kohlberg’s focus on justice and
autonomous decision-making, combined with his defense of principled civil disobedience, struck a responsive chord with American society.

It was Kohlberg’s belief that in order to understand moral stages, one had to first locate them within a sequence of personality development (Kohlberg, 1984). This notion was based in part on Piaget’s theories of cognitive development and the stages of logical reasoning. A central concept of this aspect of Piagetian theory, according to Reed (1996), is that behavior and thought function as parts of a regulatory system, which facilitates the individual’s adaptation to their environment. Viewed from this perspective, the term values stands for the diverse pattern of regulation entered into by all human beings. These regulations, or values, are then incorporated into their thoughts and actions. It is these values then which mediate between the self and the world, including the social world in which the individual, or groups of individuals, live. In Kohlberg’s view, “the most fundamental values of a society are termed moral values, and the major moral values, at least in our society, are the values of justice.” (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 295).

His definition of morality, therefore, is rooted in the way people treat one another (Lickona, 1988b).

Basing his theory of the stages of moral development on the work of Piaget, Kohlberg postulated that moral understanding begins in childhood. To this end, he developed six moral stages, grouped into three major levels:

Level 1: **Preconventional Level** (Birth to age 9 years):

*Stage 1. Punishment and Obedience:* What is right is to avoid breaking rules backed by punishment, to obey for obedience’ sake, and to avoid doing physical damage to people and property. The reason for this is quite simple –
the avoidance of punishment and the superior power of those in positions of authority. Viewed from a social perspective, this stage takes an egocentric point of view. Individuals at this stage do not consider the interests of others, and do not relate to other points of view. Actions are judged solely in terms of physical consequences, and there is a confusion of authority’s perspective with one’s own.

Stage 2. Individual Instrumental Purpose and Exchange: What is right is following rules only when it is to one’s immediate interests. One acts to meet one’s own needs and lets others do the same. Right is also what is fair, what’s an equal exchange, a deal, or an agreement. The reason for doing right is to serve one’s own needs in a world where one has to recognize that others have interests of their own. This is a concrete individualistic perspective; a person at this stage is aware that everyone has his or her own interests to pursue. This causes conflict, therefore in the concrete individualistic sense, right is relative.

Level 2: Conventional Level (Ages 9 to 20 years):

Stage 3. Mutual Interpretations, Expectations, Relationships, and Interpersonal Conformity: Right is playing a good role, being concerned about other people and their feelings, keeping loyalty and trust with partners, and being motivated to follow rules and expectations. There is a perceived need to be good in one’s own eyes and those of others, a desire to maintain the rules and authority which support what is perceived by society as “good” behavior. This stage takes on the
perspective of the individual in relationship to other individuals. There is an awareness of shared feelings, agreements, and expectations which now begin to take precedence over individual interests.

Stage 4. Social System and Conscience. Right is seen as doing one’s duty to society, upholding the social order, and maintaining the welfare of the society or group. Keeping the institution going as a whole and the imperative of conscience to meet one’s defined obligations are reasons given for doing what is right at this stage. Viewed from the perspective, this stage differentiates the societal point of view from interpersonal agreements or motives. At this stage, the individual takes the viewpoint of the system, which in turn defines roles and rules, and individual relations are considered in terms of their place within the system.

Level 3. Postconventional (Principled) Level (Ages 20+ and perhaps never):

Stage 5. Prior Rights and Social Contracts: At this stage, right is upholding the basic rights, values, and legal contracts of the society, even when they conflict with the concrete rules and laws of the group. There is a feeling of obligation to obey the law because one has made a social contract to do so for the good of all. There exists a feeling of commitment. The social perspective is that of prior-to-society in that the rational individual is aware of values and rights prior to social attachments and contracts. The individual considers the moral and legal
points of view, recognizes that they conflict, and finds them difficult to integrate.

*Stage 6. Universal Ethical Principles:* At this stage, the individual follows self-chosen ethical principles. Laws and social agreements are viewed as valid because they rest on such principles, and when a law violates these principles, the individual acts in accordance with the universal principles of justice – the equality of human rights and the respect for the dignity of human beings as individuals. This is based on the belief that a rational person recognizes the validity of principles and is committed to them. This stage takes the perspective of a moral point of view that states that any rational individual will recognize the nature of morality or the basic premise of respect for others is not a means, but an end. (Kohlberg, 1981, pp. 409-412; 1984, pp. 174-176).

The similarity between Piaget’s theory of cognitive development and Kohlberg’s moral stages is clear. Kohlberg aligns his three levels with Piaget’s intuitive (ages 2-7), concrete operational (ages 7-10), and formal operational (ages 11-15) stages of operational reasoning, although the postconventional level is reached by a minority of adults, and even then not until after the age of twenty (Kohlberg, 1984). He believed that since moral reasoning clearly is reasoning, “advanced moral reasoning depends upon advanced logical reasoning…logical development is a necessary condition for moral development” (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 171).

Kohlberg went on to further delineate the levels of his stage theory in terms of social perspectives. Level 1 is a preconditional person, for whom the rules and
expectations of society are external to the self. Level 2 defines a conventional person, one who has identified with or internalized the rules and expectations (the conventions) of others within the society; it is at this point, states Kohlberg, that moral development stops for the majority of individuals. Level 3 identifies postconventional individuals who have differentiated themselves from the rules and expectations of others and define their own values in terms of self-chosen principles (Kohlberg, 1984).

**Carol Gilligan**

A critique often leveled at Kohlberg is that his studies were limited to white male subjects; there are those who would further argue that this limitation extended to only privileged white males. Carol Gilligan, a colleague of Kohlberg at Harvard University, leveled further criticism by stating that his studies and findings (Gilligan, 1982):

a) caused a biased opinion against women, and

b) in his stages of moral development, the male view of individual rights and rules was considered a higher stage than women’s perspective on moral development in terms of its caring effect on human relationships.

Published in 1982, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* asserts that women think in terms of caring and relationships. It is this difference in developmental perspective that produces moral and psychological tendencies that are radically different from those of men, who tend to think in terms of rules and justice.

Gilligan illustrated this key assertion by proposing Kohlberg’s dilemma “Mr. Heinz and the Druggist” to a pair of eleven-year-olds she calls Jake and Amy. The gist of
the dilemma is that Heinz’s wife suffers from a painful and often-fatal disease. The druggist in their small town is the only source of a treatment that could cure the disease. Although the medication only costs $1,000 to produce, the druggist sells it for $10,000, a sum Heinz cannot afford, even if he sold all of his possessions. He offers the druggist $5,000, but the druggist refuses to sell for less than “fair market value.” The moral and ethical question that arises is: “Should Heinz steal the drug?” (Kohlberg, 1981).

The dilemma is thus posed as a conflict between what is legally “correct” (the rights of property and the societal prohibition against stealing) and what is morally “correct” (saving his wife’s life). From the very outset, Jake’s position is that Heinz should steal the drug, using logic to justify his choice. He reasons that the druggist will continue to live even if he does not make a profit; others, “rich people with cancer” will still buy the drug. On the other hand, without the drug, Heinz’s wife will die. He even rationalizes that if caught, Heinz will be treated with leniency, because “…the judge would probably think it was the right thing to do”. Thus Jake sees this dilemma as “sort of like a math problem with humans,” and that “there can only be right and wrong in judgement,” not in moral problems (Gilligan, 1982, p. 26).

Amy, on the other hand, considers neither property nor law in formulating her solution; instead, she focuses on the effect that the theft could have on the relationship between Heinz and his wife. Amy sees the dilemma not as a math problem with human variables, but rather as a narrative of relationships that extend over time. Her response indicates that she considers both the wife’s need of her husband’s support and his continued concern for her as ongoing:

“If he stole the drug, he might save his wife then, but if he did, he might have
to go to jail, and then his wife might get sicker again, and he couldn’t get more of the drug, and it might not be good. So, they should really just talk it out and find some other way to make the money.” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 27)

Rather than seeing the world where law and order determine “right” or “wrong,” Amy sees a world held together through human connections; to her, the dilemma lies not in whether or not to steal, but rather in the failure of the druggist to respond to the needs of a fellow human being in need.

In Heinz’s dilemma, these two children exemplify what Gilligan sees as the rudimentary difference between male and female moral development. Whereas Jake sees a conflict between the value of life versus the value of property that can be solved by logical deduction, Amy sees a potential breakdown in a meaningful human relationship that requires seeking out an alternative solution.

When evaluated according to Kohlberg’s stages theory, Jake’s judgments are scored as conventional, somewhere between stages three and four. His ability to deduce logically on the solution of moral dilemmas, to distinguish “morality” from “law,” and to see how the law can often be fallible indicates the principled conception of justice that Kohlberg equates with the moral maturity of stages five and six (Gilligan, 1982, p. 27). Amy’s response to the dilemma presents a dilemma of its own. When evaluated according to Kohlberg’s scale, her moral judgments appear to be a full stage lower than Jake’s. Scored between stages two and three, her responses, circuitous and repetitive, seem to indicate a feeling of her own powerlessness in the world, an inability to think systematically about concepts of law or morality, a reluctance to challenge authority, and
a failure to even conceive of taking direct action in order to save a life or to consider that such action, if taken, could have an effect (Gilligan, 1982, p. 30).

Based on her research, Gilligan posited a continuum of three stages with two transitional stages (Gilligan, 1977, pp. 494-505):

*Pre-Conventional Stage:* The primary orientation is toward individual survival. The self, the sole object of concern, is constrained by a lack of power. Decisions are based on individual survival and protection from hurt.

*Transition Stage:* Selfishness to Responsibility. One views the self as attached or connected to others. The need to “do the right thing” emerges, and one sees potential for social acceptance.

*Conventional Stage:* Goodness as Self-Sacrifice. The self is viewed by the ability to care for and protect others. There is an acceptance of others and a need for approval.

*Transition Stage:* Goodness to Truth. The question: Is it selfish or responsible, moral or immoral, to include my needs with the care and concern for others? This transition is seen as a quest for honesty and fairness, and there is a concern for intentions and consequences of one’s actions as well as not hurting others.

*Post-Conventional Stage:* Moral of Non-Violence. Care is perceived as a universal obligation. There develops a willingness to take responsibility for one’s choices.

It is important to note that Gilligan does not argue that her morality construct is neither better than nor opposed to Kohlberg’s. Rather, they are, as Kazemek (1986) states, complementary. Gilligan’s stages of ethical development progress from concern for individual survival (“I am The World”) to equating goodness with self-sacrifice (“I
am worth less than The World”) to a final caring for both self and others (“We are the World”).

If one accepts the concept of a complementary parallel systems of stages, the following comparison of how men’s and women’s ethics are perceived can be drawn:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice vs Caring</td>
<td>Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights vs Responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treating all the same vs Caring about one’s suffering</td>
<td>Preserving emotional connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying rules impartially vs Caring about one’s suffering</td>
<td>Responsible to actual individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible to impersonal codes of conduct vs Responsible to actual individuals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By the same token, a similar comparison can be drawn regarding male/female self-image:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy vs Relatedness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom vs Interdependence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separateness vs Emotional Connectedness</td>
<td>Part of a web of relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of a hierarchy vs Part of a web of relationships</td>
<td>Empathy and connectedness guide interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules guide interactions vs Rules are secondary to connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles establish one’s place in the hierarchy vs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Gilligan began her research from the position that historically, women have been taught to care for and about others while at the same time expecting others to care for and about them. She set out to explore a psychology for women by giving credibility to the difference in women’s voice. By getting women to rethink their perceptions of self and selfishness by asking four questions about women’s voices: who is speaking, in what body, telling what story, and in what cultural framework is the story presented, Gilligan went against the mainstream feminist paradigm of the times that asserted that there are
differences between men and women by asserting that women have differing moral and psychological tendencies than men, and by asking Western society to value both equally.

Much of the criticism of Gilligan has come from Christina Hoff Sommers (2001) who states that Gilligan has failed to produce the data for her research, that she used anecdotal evidence, that samples were too small to provide conclusive conclusions, and that other researchers have not been able to reproduce her findings. She furthermore argues that Gilligan’s findings promote an “anti-male agenda” that is harmful to both men and women, that girls and women need not be told that they are voiceless or diminished, and that gender studies should be contained within the purview of disciplines other than education.

Thus, it can be concluded that, according to Gilligan, the male approach to morality is based on the perception that individuals have certain basic rights, that the rights of others must be respected, and that morality imposes restrictions on what an individual can do, what Gillian refers to as a justice orientation. Thus, when boys have a dispute during play, they actively resolve it based on a set of pre-agreed-upon rules. The female approach is based upon a responsibility orientation; because morality dictates that people have responsibilities toward others, morality is therefore an imperative to care for others. Conversely, when girls have a dispute, they quit play in order to protect the relationship. Responsibility thus connotes an act of caring rather than a restraint of aggression (Gilligan, 1982, p. 38).
Moral Development Theory and Moral Education

The moral education of children was a burning issue long before Kohlberg began his research in the mid-1960s, and has continued to be a major issue in education. In order to better understand the concept of moral education, one needs to explore such areas as: the nature of direct versus indirect moral education, values clarification, what is meant by cognitive moral education, and what Kohlberg referred to as “the hidden curriculum.”

Direct moral education involves either emphasizing values or character traits during specified time slots or integrating those values throughout the curriculum. Diversely, indirect moral education involves encouraging children to define their own and others’ values and helping them define the moral perspectives that support those values (Benniga, 1988). In Kohlberg’s view as a cognitive developmentalist, the direct approach was tantamount to indoctrination:

“…indoctrination is neither a way to teach morality nor a moral way of teaching…true morality involves making thoughtful decisions about values which may be in conflict…”

Power and Kohlberg, (1986, p.16, emphasis added)

It is this very conflict that results in values clarification, wherein students are asked questions or present dilemmas, and are expected to respond, the intent being to help the students define their own values and become aware of the values of others. By its very nature, values clarification is controversial. Kohlberg insisted however, that it was a vital component of moral education. For while morality consists of rationally
constructed principles which apply to all cultures, these very principles “make it possible and sometimes obligatory for people to question and even criticize the values of their particular society” (Power and Kohlberg, 1986, p. 16). In other words, are the values, which the members of the society hold at a particular point in time the values it *ought* to hold?

Cognitive moral education, therefore, can be defined as an indirect moral education approach that emphasizes that children adopt such values as democracy and justice as their moral reasoning is developed. The student’s moral standards are allowed to develop through their attention to their environment and through classroom practices that encourage higher-level moral thinking. The imposition of moral standards through direct instruction argues Kohlberg, does not allow children to completely integrate nor understand moral principles. It is only through participation and discussion that children learn to apply the rules and principles of cooperation, trust, community, and above all, justice.

A key factor in cognitive moral education and development is that of role-taking. Citing G. H. Mead (1934, in Kohlberg, 1984, p. 199), Kohlberg defined role-taking as taking the attitude of others, becoming aware of their thoughts and feelings, putting oneself in their place. He saw role-taking as the bridge between logical or cognitive level and moral level – what he termed one’s level of social cognition. This is critical, stated Kohlberg, because role-taking

1. emphasizes the cognitive as well as the affective side;

2. involves an organized structural relationship between self and others;

3. emphasizes that the process involves understanding and relating to all the roles
in the society of which one is a part;

4. emphasizes that role-taking goes on in all social interactions and communication situations, not only those that arouse feelings of sympathy or empathy.

(Kohlberg, 1984).

Lastly, moral education must address the issue of what Kohlberg called the “hidden curriculum”. Very early in their academic lives, most students learn that there are two sets of values: those that make up their ideals and those they practice in the real world. School and classroom rules and relations with the peer group transmit attitudes about lying, cheating, stealing, consideration of others, sexism, and racism. Teachers, whether knowingly or unknowingly, serve as models of ethical or unethical behavior. This then is what Kohlberg referred to as the “hidden curriculum”: the pervasive moral atmosphere that characterizes the school. This atmosphere includes school and classroom rules, the moral orientation of teachers and school administration, and text materials (Power and Kohlberg, 1986). Quite often, particularly when the school emphasis is on discipline, students are forced into an “us versus them” mentality that regards inappropriate behavior as a form of rebellion against authority. Kohlberg saw this indifference and even hostility toward authority as growing out of a lack of meaningful participation in the rule-making process. He observed that while leaving social control with the adults frees adolescents of the psychological discomfort of having to confront the actions of their peers, it also encourages a lack of social responsibility. Not only do students accept improper behavior as a “fact of life,” some even condone it as a fitting response to carelessness on the part of the adult and the probability of escaping detection, and hence any attached consequences (Power and Kohlberg, 1986).
In their work *Moral Development: Transforming the Hidden Curriculum*, Power and Kohlberg (1986) laid the foundation for educators to begin building classrooms based on moral education, what Kohlberg called “school as a just community”:

First, have a clear conception of what morality is, and distinguish between moral principles and cultural values.

Second, focus on the group – the school, the classroom, and the homeroom. Do not focus on the individual student as the target.

Third, involve all students in participatory democratic structures for making rules and enforcing them when they are broken, thus making democracy a way of life, not just part of the social studies curriculum.

Fourth, be willing to speak up strongly as advocates of justice and community in democratic meetings. Educators need to share their leadership and wisdom, while giving students the right to express their own ideas and to ask questions

(Power and Kohlberg, 1986, p. 17)

Expanding on Kohlberg’s concept of the “just community”, Thomas Lickona (1988a) defined three “reasonable” (p. 420) goals for moral education:

- to promote development a way from egocentrism and excessive individualism and toward cooperative relationships and mutual respect;
• to foster growth of moral agency – the capacity to think, feel, and act morally; and

• to develop in the classroom and in the school a moral community based on fairness, caring, and participation.

To accomplish these goals, Lickona suggested that four processes should be on-going in the classroom:

Building self-esteem: This builds a sense of competence and master at the core of the child’s self-concept. It also teaches children to value themselves as persons, to have the kind of respect for themselves that enables them to stand up for their rights and command the respect of others.

Learning to cooperate and help others requires that students work together as well as just talk together. This cooperation is made easier when children learn to trust and support each other.

Moral reflection aims directly at developing the cognitive and rational aspects of moral behavior. This process also helps children realize that, while it is often easy to know the right thing, it is usually much harder to do it.

Participatory decision-making. It is easy to get students to agree about moral rules, but much harder to develop moral norms that students feel obligated to follow in their behavior. By requiring children to participate in making rules or solving classroom conflicts, they are then held accountable for these group decisions. Participatory decision-making provides the motivational push from judgement to action. (Lickona, 1988a, pp.421-423)
Reader Response Theory

Response to literature is a personal event; we all respond to a specific piece of literature differently, based on our experiential background. Hearing or reading a synopsis of a book or story is not the same as reading it, as one does not actually experience the text.

Reader response theory is based on the premise that each of us, as readers, comes to a particular piece of literature with a personal background that has developed over time based on our knowledge and experiences. Because this knowledge and experience base is different for every individual, each reader’s insight will be unique. We then need to share these insights with other readers, and afterward reflect on our insights in combination with those of other. It is through this sharing and reflecting process that we are eventually able to make meaning of a piece of literature (Beach, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1978).

Louise Rosenblatt and the Transactional Theory of Literature:

Texts are written by authors. They deal with something called “the world,” and are then read by a variety of readers (Purves, Rogers, & Soter, 1990). Prior to the latter part of the 20th Century, the reader was perceived as “invisible…cast as a passive recipient, whether for good or ill, of the impact of the work” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 4). The reader was consigned to a massive group, not to be treated as an individual, while the major focus remained on the author and the text. Beginning in 1938, Louise Rosenblatt
set out to examine the role of the reader, and how a particular reader, at a particular moment in time, interacts with a particular text.

Rosenblatt began by examining the position of the reader in relation to the text, what she termed the literary experience. The literary work, like the language in which it is constructed, is a social product; it gains its significance from the way in which the mind and emotions of a specific reader respond to the images conveyed by the symbols on the page (1995, p. 28). The logical conclusion that Rosenblatt draws is that this process of meaning-making is in fact a constructive and selective process which occurs over time in a particular context (1978, p. 16; 1995, p. 26). Because language is socially evolved, changing over time as human experiences and needs dictate, readers draw on past experiences from their own lives and language in order to extract meaning from the text. These prior experiences with life and language are what Rosenblatt called the “raw materials” (1995, p. 25) from which the reader shapes the new experiences encountered in and as a result of the reading. The teaching of literature thus becomes, for Rosenblatt, a matter of improving the readers’ capacity to evoke meaning from the text by leading them to reflect critically on this process.

Rosenblatt began her examination of the relationship between reader, text, and response by making the heretofore “invisible” reader the focus of her work. She observed that the reader draws meaning from the printed text by drawing on past life experiences and language to construct new understandings. Thus, she concluded that these meanings and associations of life and language to the text are significant in determining what the work communicates to the individual reader. It was this highly personalized experience that led Rosenblatt to theorize that reading is therefore neither a
“reaction to” nor an “interaction between” the text and the reader. Rather, it is a *transaction*, an ongoing process in which the elements of the reading experience are both conditioned by and condition the other (1978, p. 17). The reader, she went on to say, “…brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition” (1995, p. 30). Thus, the relationship between the reader and the text is not linear (1978, p.16) but rather *situational*, an event occurring at a particular time and place in which the reader and the text condition one another.

In light of this position, Rosenblatt saw the reading experience as a continuum encompassing the reader, the text, and the poem. “Text,” used in this connotation, refers to a set or series of signs interpretable as linguistic symbols, the words on the page. “Poem” refers to the whole category of aesthetic transactions between readers and texts (1978, p. 12), and it is to this transaction that readers brings their past experiences and present personalities. Therefore, each transaction becomes a truly personal event during which the reader selects out and synthesizes his responses to the author’s words, an activity which Rosenblatt stated requires the reader “…to carry on a continuing, constructive, ’shaping’ activity” (1978, p. 53).

The prior notion of the “invisible reader” assumed that difference between a literary work of art and other types of writings lay entirely in the text itself: the content of the text, its sentence structure and syntax, and the absence or presence of figurative language. Rosenblatt (1978) argued that text was simply symbols on paper until a reader responded to them. For her, the key question became what does the reader *do with the text*. To answer this question, Rosenblatt identified two primary types of reading
experiences – the *aesthetic*, in which the reader’s attention is “…centered on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (1978, p. 25), and the non-aesthetic, or *efferent*, wherein the reader’s attention is focused primarily on what will remain after the reading, the information to be acquired and retained, the solution to a problem, or the actions to be carried out (1978, p. 23).

The usual tendency, she stated, had been to think of the efferent or non-aesthetic as the basic form of reading – reading for information to be learned and filed away for future use. The aesthetic stance, whereby language was seen as a basically impersonal medium, with the affective or “feeling” elements merely added on to the literal meaning, was perceived as secondary (1978, p. 37). Viewed in this manner, reading was seen as progressing in a linear fashion from the efferent to the aesthetic; this view eliminated the reader as a key variable. Rosenblatt believed that the reader comes to the book from life, with all of its particular experiences, past and present. During the reading experience, the reader turns, momentarily, from his direct concern with the various problems and satisfactions of his own life to enter the world of the book, resuming his concerns when the book is closed (1995, p. 34).

Within the classroom environment, if the reading experience is examined superficially, it might be assumed that these stances occur, either consciously or unconsciously, based on the text that is presented to the reader. In reality, the issue is not that simple, because each encounter between reader and text is a unique event predicated by a wide variety of situational circumstances (1995, p.35). According to Rosenblatt, there are no “hard-and-fast lines between the efferent and aesthetic stances; they are not mutually exclusive, but rather exist as a series of gradations between the two extremes.
along a continuum (1978, p. 35). Rosenblatt suggested that most reading experiences should be viewed as actually occurring toward the middle of this continuum. Citing the work of John Dewey, wherein he stated that an aesthetic experience was simply ordinary day-to-day experiences “defined, heightened, complete” (1978, p. 37), Rosenblatt stated that the reader must learn to handle the multiplicity of responses to text. This was accomplished by the reader shifting the center of attention toward either the efferent or aesthetic ends of the continuum as the situation dictated. It was in the center of the continuum therefore where the process of transaction occurred. The process of transaction, what the reader *brings to* and *takes from* the text is therefore seen as an ongoing process.

Because the literary response is a unique, individual event, stemming from the reader’s life at a given point in time, literature enables the adolescent reader to live through – and reflect on – much that in abstract terms would be meaningless to him. (1995, p. 173) He learns to imaginatively “put himself into the place of the other fellow,” thus becoming better able to see the possible repercussions of his own actions in the life of others (1995, p. 176). It is through literature that the adolescent reader begins to *question*. The reader, regardless of age, is already functioning within a given society (1995, p. 169), with all the society’s biases, blatant or covert. Rosenblatt argued that since literature is a “lived through” (1995, p. 228) experience, the interchange of ideas brought about through the literary experience can lead the student to dissatisfaction with his present knowledge about human relations (1995, p. 229). It is this disequilibrium, this questioning, that can often lead the reader to formulate new ideas and personal value systems regarding his relationship with others. “Hence,” she goes on to say, “literature
provides an educational medium through which the students’ habits of thought may be influenced” (1995, p. 227).

Frequently literature is the means by which the youth discovers that his inner life reflects a common experience of others in his society (1995, p. 194). New social insights can grow out of response to literature as the reader compares and contrasts the present literary transaction with the whole body of remembered readings (1995, p. 235). In most cases these personal experiences, both personal and literary, will elicit a definite response, leading to some kind of reflection (1995, p. 67). The adolescent reader should be encouraged to bring to the text whatever in his past experience is relevant (1995, p. 270), and feel free to let his response take the form dictated by what he has lived through in reading the book (1995, p. 64). This process of reflection leads the student to seek additional information concerning the author, the work, and their social setting as a basis for understanding of himself and of literature (1995, p. 214). New situations, attitudes, personalities, and conflicts in values – a disequilibrium of the reader’s status quo - can be rejected, revised, or assimilated into the resources with which the reader engages his world (1978, p. 173) through the transactional response to literature.

Deanne Bogdan and the Re-Educated Imagination:

Bogdan’s work on literary engagement, *Re-educating the Imagination* (1992), examines the role of the imagination in the post-structuralist era. For Bogdan, literature “…is neither a body of knowledge to be regurgitated on examinations, nor a stubborn structure to be dissected, but a powerful means of furthering psychic growth and communicating values” (1992, p. 104). Therefore, she argues, today’s teachers of literature are faced with “…the paradoxical task of conditioning the minds and feelings of
the young in two directions at once – that of enculturation into a collective ethos or worldview, on the one hand, and personal growth and development, on the other” (1992, xxii).

The key issue Bogdan explores is what she saw as a three-faceted, interrelated “meta-problem:”

a) the Justification Problem – the place and function of literature in the language arts curriculum and the relationship between literature and life;

b) the Censorship Problem – what texts are taught (or not taught) as a result of school and/or community pressures, or the whether and what literature “says;” and

c) the Response Problem – the “response model” in the pedagogy of literature; how readers respond to these texts, which explore the possibility of an autonomous reader (1992, p. 19).

Bogdan begins by examining the work of Northrop Frye (1963), which posited that the literary text is an order of words to which the reader responds with an “educated imagination;” a detached, objective, and critical attention that brings into play the verbal structure of the text as well as the world outside the text (1992, p. 47). This anagogic perspective framed Frye’s approach to the relationship between literature and life.

Bogdan’s concept of the re-educated imagination is based on the following premises:

a) literary experience is a form of real experience

b) literary response is an embodied form of knowledge, in which the capacity for aesthetic experience is shaped by the reader’s situation in the world.
c) the ethical import of literature education is associated with the transforming function of poetic power. (1992, p. xxxiii)

Bogdan argues that the reader’s imagination is being re-educated through the reading process itself; the re-educated imagination therefore can be seen as one that blends the direct and embodied response and the objective critical response, joining the political with the literary as well as the real-life imaginative experiences.

Key to Bogdan’s definition of the Response Problem was the notion of the existence of what she termed the “autonomous reader.” Citing Frye, Bogdan defines the concept of the autonomous reader as one who is not unduly influenced by literary experience (1992, p. 111). The clearer the outline of the literary work to the respondent, states Bogdan, the more likely it is to cause a transformation of consciousness, or *stasis* (1992, pp. 112, 114). Yet while the reader should “identify” with the characters, place, and situation, there must also be a sense of separation from the reader’s own world in order for the text to be perceived as an aesthetic experience. True transformation, she goes on to say, occurs only when the reader transforms the structures by which they are formed. At times, this will involve the critical reading of existing texts; at other times, it will involve calling a text out of existence, temporarily, in order to allow for new growth (1992, p. 153).

As stated earlier, Bogdan holds that the task of the literature teacher is one of enculturation and transformation. She saw these tasks are directly related to certain presupposed aspects of the literature curriculum, specifically sympathetic identification, vicarious experiences, and social relevance. These “givens,” as she calls them, hold that
literature is supposed to lead into and out of the individual self by way of a positive engagement with the text on the one hand, while on the other it is supposed to result in the self accommodating and assimilating the values of the society in which the individual lives (1992, p. 155). This presents a potentially diametrically opposing scenario with much of today’s adolescent literature, and raises the issue that has been argued since the time of Plato; namely the role of literature in affecting social change. Literary reading cannot of and by itself, declares Bogdan, change the world, even when it is constructive and transformative of the self. It must be aided by literacy (1992, p. 190). In order to bridge the gap between self and “Other,” Bogdan states, literary experience needs literary literacy so that the “…literary/aesthetic recognition scene isn’t just a misrecognition of the discrepancy between sign and meaning…If it is to be re-educated, the imagination must take on the burden of finding out what we want by working, through literary literacy, to predispose itself to listen better to the voices and stories of the Other” (1992, p. 191).

**Anti-Racist Pedagogical Theory**

What is racism? To the typical American middle school student, it inevitably has something to do with blacks and whites not liking each other. In pedagogical terms, we must look much deeper than this simplistic definition. Racism, Thompson states, is “a system of privilege and oppression, a network of traditions, legitimating standards, material and institutional arrangements, and ideological apparatuses that together, serve to perpetuate hierarchical social relations based in race” (Thompson, 1997, p. 9). As educators, what can we do to combat this issue in our pedagogy?
For many years, society has looked to education, used words such as *confront*, *expose*, *argue out* or *stamp out* when dealing with racist ideas. Over the past several decades, education’s response has been to mediate issues of racism through multicultural education. If we made our students aware of their biases, it was argued, we could overcome racism. If we demonstrated that “different” was not synonymous with “bad,” we could change the way our students thought and felt about one another. The question we must ask ourselves now, after several decades of multicultural education is: have we been successful? And if we are truly honest with ourselves, the response must be a resounding “NO!” Historically, the methods implicit with the language of confrontation do not persuade people to change; when challenged in this fashion, people tend to withdraw themselves further from situations where their thinking is challenged (Wells & Wingate, 1986, p. 205). While multicultural education has played an important role, it must be coupled with anti-racist education (Thompson, 1997), which views racism as inherent in society’s structures and institutions, including education (Troyna & Carrington, 1990). If education is to prepare the students of today to be the active, global citizens of tomorrow, they must be able to reflect upon the strategies needed to combat institutionalized racism (Carrington & Short, 1997).

**Moral Development, Ethics, and Young Adult Literature**

Moral development is not changing one’s point of view on a particular issue, but transforming one’s way of reasoning by expanding perspectives to include criteria for judging that were not previously considered (Pillar, 1979, p. 149). Mikhail Bakhtin believed that some novels occupy a special place in ethical education, for they are
“powerful tool for enriching our moral sense of a particular situation” (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p. 27). Dealing with the ethical situations presented in literature is a strong invitation for students to confront the values of life in general; teaching social concepts is often of little value unless the ethical implications of the concepts are raised and discussed dialogically. What Bakhtin called a *prosaic view* of ethics grounds morality in the choice of actions by individuals in relationships with others at specific moments in time and space (Edmiston, 1998, p. 59).

Young adult literature can be used as the basis for developing students’ moral thinking. As discussed previously, Kohlberg’s theory states that moral development is dependent on cognitive structures and is the result of interaction between these cognitive structures and the student’s environment. Hoskisson and Biskin’s (1979) research indicates that children’s literature can structure the environment and provide the required interaction by means of planned discussions of the moral judgments made by story characters. Louise Rosenblatt (1995) stated that the teaching of literature involves the conscious or unconscious reinforcement of ethical attitudes. As students engage literature, they will be forced to “…consider questions of right and wrong, admirable or antisocial qualities, or justifiable or unjustifiable actions. The average student spontaneously tends to pass judgment on the actions of characters encountered in fiction” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p.16). Merely discussing moral dilemmas and ethical situations in isolation leads to moral abstractions and principles. By relating to characters in children’s literature, moral and ethical problems take on a name and a personality to which the student can, in most cases, relate. Thus, children’s literature, and in the
particular context of this work young adult literature, becomes an excellent vehicle to discuss, question, and foster moral development in children.

In Kohlbergian terms, ethical behavior can therefore be seen as not being necessarily obedient in the sense of conforming to an external set of values; it is a way of acting which, according to one’s best perception at the time, contributes to the freedom and/or well being of others. Often, acting in an ethical manner involves risk-taking by flying in the face of conventional rules or the behaviors expected by the peer group – in the words of today’s youth “doing the right thing.” Yet as the world becomes increasingly complex, the problems associated with adolescence become more severe. Anyone who has worked with adolescents will certainly find truth in the findings of Joan Kaywell (1997) which state:

“…Until the basic emotional needs of these troubled students are addressed, these teenagers are prime candidates for dropping out of school…many are destined to become prisoners of either our welfare or penal systems.” (Kaywell, 1997, p. 91)

In generations past, family, church, and neighborhood were the institutions, which traditionally passed down information that led to moral and ethical development. As these institutions begin to erode, we begin to see a reactionary influence from parents, teachers, and even students urging schools to fill the gap. Reid and Stringer, (1997) conducting an informal survey, found that respondents indicate that schools have a responsibility to address issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, sexuality, homosexuality, ethics, gangs, self-reliance, hope, prejudice, self-esteem, and AIDS with students between the ages of eleven and fourteen. These are controversial topics in current society which
many teachers surveyed readily admitted they were not comfortable discussing with adolescents. Educators should be concerned that the constant exposure to violence, substance abuse, and other affronts to human dignity through the media (television, films, video games, music video, etc.) may convince students that this kind of behavior is acceptable or even normal. If we accept Kohlberg’s belief that indoctrination – or direct instruction - is neither a way to teach morality nor a moral way of teaching (Power and Kolhberg, 1986), young adult literature offers an excellent vehicle for indirect instruction.

Based on Kohlberg’s (1981) moral stages theory, adolescents can be found, developmentally, in stages 3 or 4; they tend to be self-absorbed, and many may even feel isolated from both society and their peers. Many young adult novels are written effectively enough to elicit strong emotional reactions, either to the text itself or to the memories triggered by the closeness of the story to the reader’s own experiences (Reid and Stringer, 1997). This echoes Rosenblatt’s theory that “…without linkage with the past experiences and present interests of the reader, the work will not come alive for him, or, rather, he will not be prepared to bring it to life” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p.77). Young adult literature that deals honestly with adolescents’ problems allows the reader to become personally involved in the story, to care about the characters and their fates. Vicarious literary experiences, according to Ellenwood and McLaren (1994), thus enable the adolescent reader to enter subsequent real-life situations as an experienced person. They no longer find themselves with their perception that the confusion and uncertainty they feel is uniquely theirs. The impact of young adult novels, according to Reid and Stringer (1997, p.18) is strong because they tend to deal with issues that are immediately
relevant to adolescents and to use a style that is so accessible that it bypasses the need for translation by the intellect into emotional imagery.

Young adult literature provides a rich source of examples of moral decisions for adolescent readers to discuss in a relatively safe and non-threatening environment (Hoskisson and Blatt, 1979). By examining these decisions through a combination of discussion and teacher questioning, adolescents become more aware of moral thinking and can be encouraged to progress to higher stages. Adolescents need to understand the complexity of our modern moral dilemmas, and that often there is no clear cut right or wrong. Using young adult literature as the basis for developing moral thinking can help adolescent readers analyze moral dilemmas while encouraging them to think about alternate decisions they can make in their own lives when confronted with an issue that requires a moral judgment. A broad perspective of moral development including justice, caring, and responsibility coupled with discussion of characters and situations encountered in young adult literature can therefore provide an effective framework for promoting ethical thought and behavior in the students who will become tomorrow’s adults.

Children’s literature holds great potential for fostering moral growth when it is used by educators who know how moral judgment develops. According to Pillar (1979), a crucial dilemma faced by many educators who wish to implement a classroom curriculum to foster personal ethics is whether the development of moral judgment is within the jurisdiction of teachers of literature or even tax-supported schools. In Chapter 8 of *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice* (1981),
Kohlberg discusses at length the issue of moral versus religious education in public schools. He cites an essay by William Bell (1967) as follows:

“…it is possible to interpret the (Supreme) Court’s Schempp decision as ruling out any form of moral or ethical, as well as religious, instruction in the school. He points out that the recent Court decisions define religion as embracing any articulated credos or value systems, including Ethical Culture or Secular Humanism, credos that essentially consist of the moral principles of Western culture. He concludes that the Court is in effect prohibiting the public school from engaging in moral education because such education is equivalent to the state propagating the religions of Ethical Culture or Humanism….as a psychologist, I have attempted to formulate a conception of moral education in the public schools based on research findings, a conception in which a complete separation of moral and religious education is implicit…moral education is completely separatable from religion from the point of view of civil liberties…Accordingly, the public school’s effort to communicate an understanding of, and intelligent respect for, the law of the land and the underlying conceptions of human rights on which it is based does not constitute the establishment of a religion.” (Kohlberg, 1981, pp. 294-295)

The moral conflicts found in young adult literature are genuine; they present problems involving justice and human welfare and concern conscience, truth, authority,
and the sanctity of life. In questioning any issue presented in literature, the emphasis should be to find out the reasons why a child thinks a particular action is right or wrong. Educators should try to expand the students’ perspectives and allow them to take other viewpoints (Pillar, 1979).

### Literature-Based Holocaust Education

Many people, but especially adolescents, have a difficult time visualizing a million of *anything*. Harder still to comprehend is the systematic murder of *six million* men, women, and children by Nazi Germany during the years 1933 through 1945, a period which to many of today’s middle school students is as far removed from their personal reality as ancient Rome. Given the very limited amount of space and time devoted to a study of the Holocaust in the typical middle school social studies curriculum, teaching this complex history becomes an almost-Herculean task. “How do you teach events that defy knowledge, experiences that go beyond the imagination?”, asks Elie Wiesel, “How do you tell children, big and small, that society could lose its mind and start murdering its own soul and its own future?” (Wiesel, 1978, p. 270).

Samuel Totten, writing in 1996, stated that if the generations living in the aftermath of the Holocaust are going to even begin to attempt to understand the cataclysmic nature of this watershed event in human history, then the *literature* of and about that event must play a large part in their coming to such an understanding (Totten, 1996). Citing Milton Teichman, Totten went on to say that Holocaust literature “…is a literature which shows how precarious our being human is, how easily humans can forfeit
their humanity...in short, it is a literature with a massive human weight and generates intense self-questioning and self-searching” (Totten, 1996, p. 18).

In developing a curriculum for adolescents around Holocaust literature, the educator must first pay considerable attention to how the literature guides the students’ learning of the Holocaust as a historical event. Of equal importance is how the students respond to a particular story or memoir, and how it affects their thinking, not only about their own lives and attitudes, but those of the society we live in. Students need to be encouraged, urged, and sometimes cajoled to examine the literature from their own unique perspective without having to come up with the overrated “single correct answer” for questions for which there are no single, correct answers.

Holocaust Education in the United States: A Brief Overview

For nearly three decades following the liberation of the camps, the study of the Holocaust was virtually absent from the secondary school curricula (Bialystok, 1995; Cooper, 1994). Beginning in the late 1970s however, there was what appeared to be a resurgence in Holocaust education at all levels of education. As of 1999, Holocaust education is mandated in four states, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, and Florida; of these, only New Jersey legislates Holocaust studies comprehensively across all grade levels K-12 (Feinberg, 2000; Brabham, 1997, Shawn, 1995). Eleven other states, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Massachusetts, North Carolina, South Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington have recommended guidelines (state-approved curricular units) for teaching Holocaust and genocide studies (Shawn, 1995). This presented a precarious situation for scholars of Holocaust education who
expressed a grave concern over the “sudden proliferation of courses of study and curricula about the Holocaust” (Totten & Feinberg, 1995, p. 323). Although the need for Holocaust education was being voiced by state governments and departments of education, there were no mandates or requirements for teachers to enroll in accredited course in Holocaust history, literature, or pedagogy. “Thus,” argued Karen Shawn (1995), “the vast majority of educators, through no fault of their own, currently lack the basic skills necessary to implement state mandates with professional integrity” (p. 16). Her words echoed those of Holocaust survivor and scholar Henry Friedlander (1979), who expressed his own concern over this “sudden proliferation” of what he perceived to be random Holocaust curricula. Friedlander stated that “…it is not enough for well-meaning teachers to feel a commitment to teach about genocide; they also must know the subject” (p. 521, emphasis added).

In an attempt to provide much needed direction, Holocaust scholars began to grapple with the issue of Holocaust pedagogy for classroom teachers. Writing in 1994, Samuel Totten stated, “…there is a moral imperative to teach young students about certain aspects of that watershed event” (1994a, p. 5). Concerned by what he perceived as the tendency to overwhelm young students and adolescents with only the horrors of the Holocaust, Totten went on to say that “…children need to know about this event but they need not, and indeed should not be barraged with one horrifying story or image after another” (p. 5). Working in collaboration with William Parsons, then Director of Education for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Totten developed the first comprehensive set of guidelines for identifying the most significant lessons students can learn about the Holocaust, as well as how a particular reading, image, document, or film
is an appropriate medium for conveying the selected Holocaust lesson. In 1995, Franklin Bialystok presented what he considered to be the six key pedagogical considerations that should be of utmost importance to any educator who teaches the Holocaust. Foremost among these, he stated, is balancing the affective and cognitive domains, balancing historical information and emotional impact. Any comprehensive study of the Holocaust, by its very nature, deals with human suffering; before they are confronted with the enormity of the event, students need more knowledge of the topic. Thus, Bialystok (1995) concluded, “the primary pedagogical consideration is providing information” (p. 137).

Writing in *Canadian Social Studies*, Bialystok’s (1995) pedagogical considerations were targeted primarily toward history/social studies teachers, for it was in their classrooms that the study of the Holocaust was relegated. Unfortunately, most history/social studies textbooks at the middle-and-high school level contain little information on the Holocaust, a condition still true today. What information is presented may range in depth and scope from a few paragraphs at the end of a unit on World War II, to at most a short chapter, hardly enough material or time to cover the varied and complex issues raised by the Holocaust (Totten & Feinberg, 1995).

**The Role of Literature in the Holocaust Curriculum**

Whereas Bialystok was speaking primarily to history teachers, Parsons and Totten (1994) took a much more interdisciplinary approach, suggesting that the study of the Holocaust be included across the curriculum, including U.S. history, world history, government, literature, and science and technology, as well as in art and art history.
Commenting on the inclusion of Holocaust studies in the literature classroom, Parsons and Totten (1993) went on to say: “literature is capable of providing thought-provoking perspectives on a myriad of subjects which can engage students in ways that textbooks and essays do not…” (p. 13). It is no surprise therefore, that many of the state mandated/recommended Holocaust curricula stress the need for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching the Holocaust, with a strong emphasis on teaching the Holocaust through literature.

Elie Wiesel, cited in Landau’s *The Nazi Holocaust* (1994) states “The Holocaust defies literature…We think we are describing an event, we transmit only its reflection…Still, the story had to be told. In spite of all the risks, all possible misunderstandings. It needed to be told for the sake of our children.” (p. 3). Encompassing the four major genres of fiction, non-fiction, drama, and poetry, Holocaust literature is distinctive because, according to Lawrence Langer (1995a), “the best Holocaust literature gazes into the depths without flinching…we are left with an art that is rich in its unsparing demands on our sacred beliefs…” (p. 7). The events of the Holocaust are so singular, so catastrophic, so unimaginable, that the process of mass annihilation cannot be visualized unless it is somehow personalized (Markham, 1996). Literature shapes what happened during the Holocaust into an aesthetic which enables the adolescent reader to enter the events vicariously (Berke & Saltzman, 1996). The first person narratives, either the oral testimonies (in person or on videotape) of survivors, or memoirs and diaries written by victims and survivors (Totten, 1994b), allow the adolescent reader to truly personalize the history. As Yehuda Bauer (1998) observed, eyewitness accounts, by their very personal nature, contain information not found in
official documents. By giving a name, a face, and a voice to the Holocaust experience, the incomprehensible number of six million is reduced to the personal level of one.

While scholars agree that a study of the Holocaust that is steeped in its literature allows for a deeper exploration on the part of the student, they also caution that any literature-based study of the Holocaust must begin with a firm grounding in the history of the events (Brabham, 1997; Drew, 1995; Totten, 1994a; Kessler, 1991). This historical ground is critical, says Landau (1994), because the Holocaust did not occur in a psychological or historical vacuum. Isolated from the historical events, the experiences related in the narratives become unapproachable, a wholly eccentric phenomenon devoid of meaning. Drew (1995) points out that much Holocaust literature for adolescent readers, both biographical and fictional but especially the diaries of teens that did not survive (Frank, 1953: Boas, 1996), is written from the perspective of the narrator who was a child at the time the events take place. These child narrators, isolated from the larger scope of events around them, knew only what was happening in their own lives. Unless readers bring some historical background to the literary experience, they have no historical context from which to base what they have read.

Adolescents respond to Holocaust literature in much the same way that adults do. They are susceptible to the power of narrative, and particularly what Culbertson (1998) calls counternarratives, stories which may not reflect the accepted view of events of the era. The story of the Holocaust, when told through literary accounts, whether they be diaries, memoirs, or historical third-person accounts (including historical fiction), offers the reader a way to understand a kind of common sense about the times. Most Holocaust narratives fit into a general schema of briefly establishing a life before the war, vividly
illustrating the events during the war, and then diminishing in scope to a quick summary of the post-1945 period. Counternarratives illustrate how groups contest the dominant reality and the framework of assumptions that support it. They resonate with voices that do not glorify the war by recounting strategies and battles, but that represent the human suffering of individuals on both sides of the conflict. Using historical literature, adolescents are able to see the effect events have had on the course of events. A Holocaust curriculum based on literature therefore allows students to experience what Bialystok (1995) called the balance between the affective and cognitive domains, what Rosenblatt (1995) defined as the difference between the aesthetic and the efferent reading, by providing them with an opportunity to vicariously relive the experiences of the author/narrator.

First-Person Narrative: The Need to Tell the Whole Story

In developing a curriculum based on Holocaust literature, consideration must be given to the reality that no single first-person narrative can tell the entire story (Totten, 1994b). “The magnitude of the Holocaust is so great,” wrote Drew in 1989, “that any individual story, if read in isolation, is going to reflect only one aspect of the historical truth…Only when read within an historical context, with some knowledge of the scope and magnitude of the Holocaust, is the reader able to put the individual story into a more universal perspective.” (cited in Totten, 1996, p. 23). In their collaborative effort Guidelines for Teaching About the Holocaust, Parsons and Totten (1993) caution educators that first-person accounts tell but one small part of the overall genocidal situation, not its whole. Students should therefore be warned against “..overgeneralizing
from first-person accounts such as those from survivors, journalists, relief workers, bystanders, and liberators” (p. 6).

Since “every picture tells a story,” educators must be prepared to offer their students as many “pictures” as possible. Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl* (1953), perhaps the most-often-used narrative, ends before the Franks deportation to Auschwitz. Thus, there is no testimony from Anne herself regarding the experiences that ultimately led to her death in Bergen-Belsen. Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (1982), undoubtedly one of the most powerful survivor narratives, begins when nearly 80% of Holocaust victims had already been murdered; for the first five years of the Holocaust, his village in Hungary remained isolated from the genocidal events across the border in Poland. Alicia Appleman-Jurman’s (1988) *Alicia: My Story* and Gerda Weissmann Klein’s (1995) *All But My Life*, while chronicling their experiences from 1939 until 1948, never mention the death camps in their native Poland. Struggling to survive in Nazi slave labor camps (Klein) or hiding on the run (Appleman-Jurman), they too were ignorant of the mass genocide going on around them. It is therefore imperative that students be given reading choices and selections that address as many areas of Holocaust history as possible. Markham (1996) suggests that a balance of narratives from the early days of Nazi occupation, ghetto diaries, lives in hiding, passing as an “Aryan,” deportation and the concentration camp universe, resistance, and the rescuers be included in any literature-based Holocaust curriculum.
The Issue of Appropriateness and the Use of Fictionalized History

Writing in 1977, Eric Kimmel analyzed a number of Holocaust books written for children and stated that, up to that time, no book for children had dared to deal with the reality of the crematoria. “To put it simply,” he wrote, “is mass murder a subject for a children’s novel?” (p. 91). His comment still rings true. While survivor narratives such as Sara Nomberg-Przytyk’s (1985) *Auschwitz: Tales from a Grotesque Land*, Rudolf Vrba’s (1964, 1989) *44070: The Conspiracy of the Twentieth Century*, and Primo Levi’s (1987) *Survival in Auschwitz* all tell compelling stories, their graphic nature makes them inappropriate for classroom use with middle readers in general, although more advanced readers may be able to deal with these texts and others on an individual level.

In an effort to balance the issue of presenting the historical truth while minimizing the graphic nature of the history, teachers of Holocaust literature often turn to historical fiction, or in some cases “fictionalized history. These are more recent works, and many of them are based on actual people and events. Novels such as Lois Lowry’s (1989) *Number the Stars*, Carol Matas’ (1993) *Daniel’s Story*, Tamar Bergman’s (1991) *Along the Tracks*, Uri Orlev’s (1984) *The Island on Bird Street*, Gudrun Pausewang’s (1998) *The Final Journey*, and Art Spiegelman’s *Maus (volumes I and II)*, all serve to tell various aspects of the Holocaust story in terms which are non-threatening to adolescent readers. Many of these works have earned prestigious awards, including the Newbery Medal, in the area of children’s literature. In using these texts, however, caution must be taken to assure that the students realize that, though based on history, they are in fact fictionalized accounts. Most problematic are novels that intentionally confuse history and fantasy, such as Jane Yolen’s (1988) *The Devil’s Arithmetic*. Although the
of the need to preserve Holocaust memory by children of the modern generation is clearly the author’s intent, the method of the telling, as an ambiguous time-travel story, can confuse the reader who is not factually prepared. Because adolescents often find the events of the Holocaust unbelievable, introducing fictionalized accounts may cause some students to dismiss them as just another story. Langer (1995b) warned that when the Holocaust is the theme, history might become obscured with fantasy. Teachers need to be careful not to make a direct correlation between what Langer (1995b) called fictional fact and factual fact. Fictionalized accounts, he urges, should augment, not replace, the historical accounts: “…Since the factual fact is so dismal and unedifying, how are we to face the fictional fact that lifts it out of its original bedrock in history (where, four decades later, we still probe for its “meanings” in the layers of time), and translate it into an artificial setting?” (p. 77, emphasis is original).

Like Totten (1994b), Langer stresses that literature alone must not be used to teach historical facts. Literature, he argues, adds to and works with historical facts to bring events, places, and people to life, universalizing specific occurrences so that the meaning reaches beyond the historical facts themselves. Fictionalized accounts of the Holocaust can play a significant role in teaching the Holocaust story, especially to younger children and reluctant readers, but these accounts must be examined closely to insure that they are accurate in terms of historical fact and perspective, that the voices portrayed are accurate, and that the students are clearly aware that the accounts are fictionalized representations. As stated previously, unless the students (and the teacher) are firmly grounded in the history of the Holocaust, extra care must be taken when choosing fictionalized accounts when using Holocaust literature with adolescent readers.
In describing his sixth pedagogical consideration in teaching the Holocaust, Bialystok (1995) discusses the need to be aware of student sensitivities: “...this is a difficult history to study, and there is a point at which students will confront their own views and perhaps their own experiences” (pp. 138-139). Totten (1994a, 1996), Drew (1995), Kessler (1991), and Simon & Armitage-Simon (1995) all stress that classroom materials used with adolescents, including literature, should not overwhelm the student with graphic images and accounts. In so doing, the Holocaust educator runs the risk of alienating the student to further inquiry and worse, causing the student to perceive that the human character is flawed beyond redemption. Care should be taken to ensure that classroom lessons support the particular objectives of the lesson; the aim should never be to shock. Every student, every class, is unique; while one student may be able to come to grips with the horrors of Auschwitz as related in Isabella Leitner’s (1983) *Fragments of Isabella*, another may only be able to cope, at least initially, with her much simplified version, *The Big Lie* (1992). While one student may be able to come to terms with the agony of the children of Terezin in Hana Volvakova’s (1993) *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, another must approach this aspect of the Holocaust through Inge Auerbacher’s (1993) account of her confinement at Terezin as told in *I Am A Star: Child of the Holocaust*. Put in pedagogical terms, the student should be the teacher’s first concern, therefore any teacher who assigns a work of Holocaust literature to a student or class without first having read and evaluated the work is violating the trust the students have placed in them.
Reader Response and the Issue of Ethics in Holocaust Literature

Louise Rosenblatt (1978) postulated that there are two distinct purposes for reading: the *efferent*, wherein the reader’s attention is primarily focused on selecting out and analytically abstracting information, ideas, or directions for action that will remain when the reading is over, and the *aesthetic*, wherein the text is viewed as a work of art and the reader’s focus is primarily on reading for the enjoyment of reading. While there may appear to be a contradiction in reading Holocaust literature for the “enjoyment of reading,” it is the *affective* results that should guide the lesson. In *Literature as Exploration* (1995), Rosenblatt states that each reader comes to the text from life, bringing to the text all of their own personal experiences. An intense response to text, she argues, “…will have its roots in capacities and experiences already present in the personality and mind of the reader” (p. 41). For most readers, Holocaust literature surely constitutes an “intense response.”

Totten (1994b) and others (Brabham, 1977; Short, 1977; Drew, 1995; Kessler, 1991; Hoskisson & Biskin, 1979; Langer, 1975), all stress that adolescent readers need time to reflect on what they have read, and how it applies to their own lives. Allowing students to create reflective journals, wherein they are free to respond according to their own needs, is one means of evaluating their affective and cognitive responses to the literature.

The role of public education in the moral/character development of children has long been debated. If we return for the moment to the statements made at the outset of this work, namely that a basic purpose of education is to help young people become effective adults, and that education must therefore include honest and even painful
examinations of human behavior, Holocaust literature affords the educator with an
excellent vehicle. Thomas Lickona (1988), citing studies conducted by Kohlberg, Kegan,
Power, and others, stated that “…of the four processes of moral education, moral
reflection aims most directly at developing cognitive and rational aspects of moral
behavior…Moral reflection also helps children realize that, while it is often easy to know
the right thing, it is usually harder to do it” (p. 422).

While much of current young adult literature often makes clear delineations, there
is a certain ambiguity in Holocaust literature, as moral and ethical boundaries are blurred
by the historical situation. Through engagement with Holocaust literature, students are
confronted with ordinary people who commit extraordinary evil acts (Roth, 1999). If a
balanced history is presented, these students will also witness acts of extraordinary
courage and compassion, again the acts of “ordinary men.” Dealing with the ethical
dimensions of the literature of the Holocaust is, according to Farnham (1983), a
 “…strong invitation to students to confront the values of life in general…Teaching
students the historical and sociological facts of the Holocaust is of little value unless the
ethical implications of the facts are raised” (p. 67). The Holocaust offers illustrations that
good, as well as evil resides in humans and that individuals often are faced with difficult
choices. By entering vicariously into the lives and times of the Holocaust victim/survivor
narrator, they are able to discover the causes and consequences of decisions and actions.
Rosenblatt (1995) has argued that the teaching of literature “..inevitably involves the
conscious or unconscious reinforcement of ethical attitudes” (p. 16). The literature
classroom, therefore, can stimulate students to develop a thoughtful approach to human
behavior.
Holocaust Literature and Anti-Racist Pedagogy

A study of the Holocaust may actually help students and others to address the issues of racism such as fairness, prejudice, discrimination, injustice, stereotyping, and intolerance, not only in history but also in contemporary society (Totten, 1994b). While a study of the Holocaust will not in and of itself counteract all of life’s unfavorable pressures, it can, as Rosenblatt stated, “…be a means for helping the student to develop conscious resistance to those influences” (p. 88).

This concept poses a double-edged dilemma: on the one hand, adolescents need opportunities to recognize that they are not alone, no matter how “different” they may feel. Young adult literature, state Reid and Stringer (1997), can fill this need for many students, reducing their isolation by telling a story that they can relate to. This would appear to hold true in the case of literature that deals with accounts of extreme racism and prejudice. On the other hand, constant or gratuitous exposure to violence and other affronts to human dignity through literature, when reinforced with other media readily-available to adolescents, may convince students that this kind of behavior is “normal” (Totten, 1996; Simon & Armitage-Simon, 1995; Drew, 1995; Kessler, 1991).

Information alone does not change people. No single form of literature, including Holocaust literature, will of and by itself miraculously change student attitudes and perceptions of racism and prejudice, nor will it instantaneously cause adolescent readers to develop empathy and ethics. Moral development is not changing one’s point of view on a particular issue, but rather by transforming one’s way of reasoning by expanding perspectives to include criteria for judging that which was not previously considered (Pillar, 1979, p. 149, emphasis added). When used in a properly constructed curriculum,
Holocaust literature can give students “...unique opportunities for self-confrontation, self-understanding, and the enlargement of sensibility” (Totten, 1996, p. 19).

**The Teacher as Researcher**

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) define teacher research as systematic and intentional inquiry carried out by teachers, including but not limited to: teachers’ journals, essays, oral inquiry processes, and classroom studies. Cardell-Elwar (1993) argued that context-based research with its origins in teachers’ professional concerns might be a more fruitful source of research to improve teacher education and practice. According to Fuyeo and Koorland, (1997), teachers as researchers observe and analyze their plans, actions, and their subsequent impact on their students; make more decisions about what to change or not change; ask questions and systematically find answers; observe and monitor themselves and their students while participating in the teaching and learning process; and question instructional practices and student outcomes, thus allowing them to make data-based decisions which validate their practice. Citing work conducted by Dana (1995), Fuyeo and Koorland further state that, depending on how they are socialized, teachers often view themselves as employees who must follow institutional prerogatives rather than professionals with a distinct body of knowledge and the capacity and skills to act independently.

As early as 1975, research was being conducted at City College of New York and the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of North Dakota “that questioned the myth” that research specialists are better or more objective in the documentation than those who are intimately connected with children and that statistical studies and tests are
more meaningful than the informed reflection of those who understand the children they work with on a daily basis (Budin, 1975, p. 180). Writing in 1986, Lather argued that there has long been a standing differential in status between teachers who engage in practice, and researchers who employ theory, thus relegating teachers to a seemingly “second-class” status in the eyes of the researcher. Lather suggests that teacher research can be a “weapon of liberation;” teachers engaging in teacher research come to trust their own abilities to construct knowledge and to improve their own knowledge. Thus, argued Santa and Santa (1995), teacher research promotes “a dynamic approach to the profession as opposed to maintenance of the status quo” (p. 447) which encourages a dynamic process of self-examination, growth, and continuing change.

Teachers must be involved in education research so that theories can be developed that will ultimately relate to practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). These theories are often the outcome of observations, preliminary experimentation, and case studies which classroom teachers make available to academics (Santa & Santa, 1995). Because questions emerging from practice are more appropriate, the investigations are more natural. Thus, the findings are more credible and valid for school practice than is the case with research that is conceived and evaluated in the more clinical settings of academia (Flake, et al, 1995).

Howard Budin, writing in 1975, observed that the delivery of instruction, with all the attention to detail that it entails, is only half of the job of teaching. The other half, he states, the half that makes actual classroom interaction meaningful, is the process of observing, recording, and reflecting upon children’s development. Research carried on in the classroom provides the teacher-researcher with a practical way to identify effective
ways to improve teaching and learning. From this research, teachers can explore what works or doesn’t work with their students.

The following chapter, Chapter 3 – The Methodology, will discuss in depth the research and observational methods used in the carrying out of this study. Later, Chapter 4 will present the findings and Chapter 5 will discuss conclusions and implications that can be drawn from this particular study, as well as offer suggestions for future research directly aligned with the limitations of this study.
CHAPTER 3

THE METHODOLOGY

Overview

This study is designed to investigate the written and oral responses of eighth grade students to the witness narratives of Holocaust literature through the lens of moral development and reader response theories. Contained within this chapter are the methodological principals that framed this study and the specific methods used to carry out the research. Also included are discussions of the research site, the participants, data collection, validity, and data analysis.

It is the purpose of this study to examine:

- how middle school students respond to witness narratives when used within the context of a literature-based Holocaust course of study;
- how or if students demonstrate empathy and a code of personal ethics based on a personal response to the moral lessons of the Holocaust;
- determine if there are noticeable differences in care/compassion between the responses of male and female students based on the theories of Gilligan and Kohlberg.
The Research Questions

I argued in Chapter One that because it flows from true-life events in human history, Holocaust literature, particularly what I previously defined as the *witness narratives*, reveals fundamental truths about human nature. Of critical interest to the scope of this research are: developing an understanding, through engagement with the literary texts, of the human capacity for evil and the misuse of education and technology for genocidal purposes, and the development of an awareness of the dangers of prejudice, racism, apathy, and blind obedience to authority in one’s and society’s attitudes.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to explore and attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How do the students’ responses to the witness narratives reflect engagement through an aesthetic stance?

2. How do the students’ literary responses demonstrate empathy and personal ethics, based on the theories of Kohlberg, Gilligan, and others?

3. Given theoretical findings that emerge from studies conducted by Kohlberg and Gilligan, are there significant differences in the nature of the students’ responses that can be attributed to gender?

4. Do student writings demonstrate an application of these theories with regard to the roles of victim, perpetrator, bystander, and rescuer, as demonstrated in the witness narrative, in their own lives?

5. Do student responses, written or other, demonstrate how (or if) they can apply the lessons of the Holocaust to reduce racism within their society?
Methodology

Because it is inherently multi-method in focus, qualitative research does not countenance one single methodology over another (Brewer & Hunter, 1989). Therefore, working from a post-positivist paradigm allowed for the inclusion of varied qualitative methods of data collection and analysis while conducting this research.

This study was designed to explore how students in an urban middle school respond to Holocaust literature, and to analyze these responses, both verbal and non-verbal, within a framework of moral development theory as posited by Kohlberg, Gilligan, and others. Specific attention was given to a qualitative analysis of response differences, if any, between male and female students within this setting. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) claim that ethnographic methods provide rich, descriptive data regarding the experiences of the participants. Thus by its very nature, this study required a qualitative research methodology that is rich in narrative. Four primary qualitative methodologies were chosen for this study: qualitative interviews (Kvale, 1996), focus group interviews (Morgan, 1997), participant observation (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994), and reviewing student journals and oral discussions in response to text.

These methodologies were grounded within a social constructivist paradigm, with the assumption that researcher and subject(s) are interactively linked. Based on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978), constructivists argue that learning evolves from social interactions and collaborations with peers and older, more experienced mentors, which then become internalized as inner dialogue. Learning therefore consists of building on prior knowledge and restructuring this initial knowledge in widening or intersecting spirals of increasing understanding (Marshall, 1994). Thus the findings of this study,
grounded within the constructivist paradigm, were *literally created* as the study progressed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111, *emphasis original*). The constructivist view further argues that it is this interaction between existing knowledge or beliefs and new ideas or situations that allows for the creation of knowledge (Airasian & Walsh, 1997).

Constructivism is an epistemology of how people learn; its focus therefore is logically on classroom practice. Within the classroom setting, responses are often associated with certain, established social roles for both students and teachers that influence these responses. Learning can therefore be seen as the active construction of knowledge in gradually expanding networks of ideas through interactions with others and with materials in the environment. Social constructivism in particular places a greater emphasis on the role of social interactions through which contexts, knowledge, and meanings are constructed and reconstructed. This social context is continually constructed in dynamic and ongoing interactions among and between the teacher/researcher and the student participants.

This social constructivist approach supports the research questions posited above because by working within this paradigm, students needed to explain their thinking to others, namely the teacher/researcher and their peer group, as they revised their own understanding and attitudes. The student/participants also had to come to the realization that having the “correct answer” was no longer evidence of learning, but rather they needed to justify their answers and thinking in both a public forum, the focus group discussions, as well as a non-public forum, their reader response journals. Additionally, they had to understand content and concepts, not just focus on facts and follow procedure. From the constructivist point of view, the role of the teacher, or in this case
the teacher/researcher, was not to dispense knowledge, but rather to provide the students with the opportunity to build on their existing knowledge (von Glasserfeld, 1996).

Some will argue that the relationship that exists between a text and the reader will be the same in all cases. However, reader response theory that is grounded within a social constructivist paradigm advocates the position that reader responses are shaped by social roles, as well as by the attitudes and influences of the family, the community, and the school itself.

The Research Site

This study was conducted in an urban middle school in the Midwest. The school district consists of 89 elementary, 25 middle and 18 high schools serving a total population of approximately 63,000 students. Marshall and Rossman (1999) proposed that for a site to be conducive to carrying out qualitative research, the four following conditions must exist:

1. ease of entry;
2. high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions and structures of interest are possible;
3. the researcher is likely able to build trusting relationships with the participants in the study;
4. data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured.

As I have been a member of this school’s faculty since 1995, I was certain that all four of the above-mentioned criteria would be met.
The school selected as the research site is the largest of the middle schools, with a student population of 866 students in grades six through eight, based on enrollment data available when the study was conducted. Court-ordered bussing of students to achieve desegregation ended in the early 1990s, and the school’s student population reflects the neighborhood in which it is located. According to district demographic data, the school’s student population at the time the study was conducted can be broken down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Culture</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>20.21%</td>
<td>20.67%</td>
<td>40.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>28.22%</td>
<td>24.60%</td>
<td>53.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.31%</td>
<td>1.62%</td>
<td>3.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.12%</td>
<td>0.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.69%</td>
<td>1.27%</td>
<td>1.96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the total population, 90 students (10.39%) qualify for special education services, and 21.67% qualified for Federal free-reduced lunch assistance.

The school is located in a predominantly middle to upper-middle class residential neighborhood consisting primarily of single-family homes. In addition, a number of large, multi-unit apartment complexes are located on the outskirts of the school’s service area, several of which are designated as Federally subsidized housing, which creates a somewhat (+/- 10%) transient sector within the student population. Identified as a “neighborhood school” by the district, the majority of the students either walk to school or are transported by parents or other custodial adults.

The very size of the school’s student population necessitates a sizeable faculty of fifty-five teachers headed by three administrators (principal, assistant principal, and
administrative assistant). Eleven staff members comprise the sixth grade team, ten staff members the seventh grade team, and eleven staff members the eighth grade team. Thirteen staff members make up the unified arts team, with areas of classroom instruction that include vocal music, instrumental music (both brass and strings), computers, art, dance and drama, consumer education, and physical education. In addition, the faculty also includes four specialists: library/media, reading intervention, enrichment, and career awareness. Seven teachers make up the school’s special needs staff: four SLD teachers work with students with special needs, many of whom are mainstreamed, one teacher works with a self-contained unit of developmentally handicapped students, and two teachers who work with the school’s visually impaired students. Over one third of the teaching staff hold advanced degrees (21 Masters, 1 Doctoral).

In this school, like many of the middle schools in the district, the majority of Reading/Language Arts teachers are women; I am one of two male Reading/Language Arts teachers, having taught seventh grade my first four years in the building. Upon the retirement of one of the more senior teachers, I was asked by my administrator to move up to eighth grade, a move that I made at the beginning of the 1999-2000 academic year.

The culture of the school is one that fosters and encourages collaboration among staff members. Throughout the school year, students are assigned individual and small-group projects that reinforce the intertwining of the various academic subject areas, particularly between Reading/Language Arts and Social Studies or Science, and between Science and Mathematics. Also highly involved in this collaborative effort is the school’s library/media specialist; through her efforts, the school houses a very large, well-used library, which includes an exceptional collection of current reference materials.
in a variety of media to facilitate student research efforts. Additionally, the school has in its collection class sets of 30 copies each of more than 60 fiction and non-fiction titles for whole-class reading.

**Development of the Thematic Unit of Instruction**

Although the school is located in a suburban setting, our students, like many of their strictly urban counterparts, often have to contend with problems stemming from prejudice, be it racial, ethnic, cultural, or social. During my first year of teaching at the school, I approached the principal with an idea for a thematic unit on prejudice and racism that would demonstrate to the students that racism is not just about “race,” and that would cause them to explore and address their own attitudes toward those they perceived as “different.” Since I did not want my students to focus on the simplistic notion that racism is merely an issue of skin pigmentation but rather to understand the *universal nature* of racism, I developed a unit of instruction based on the Holocaust (Hernandez, 1995), using Holocaust literature as the medium. The unit was designed to meet the four following instructional objectives:

1. to allow students to put the Holocaust into historical perspective, particularly in terms of the Holocaust as a watershed event in human history;
2. to help students develop a sense of moral reflection, utilizing a wide range of intellectual activities including reading, critical thinking, debating ethical/moral issues, and conducting first-hand investigations to increase their awareness of the complex social system to which they belong;
3. to help students develop an awareness of racism, prejudice, and stereotyping
in their own behavior while developing a sense of empathy and respect for human life;

4. to help students appreciate the many forms of resistance, and to identify the consequences of blind obedience to authority.

Over the past six years, the unit has been revised and refined to meet the specific needs of my students. As more Holocaust literature for young adults becomes available, those texts are read and often added to the list of recommended readings. Over the past three years, lessons based on Holocaust poetry and drama have also been added to the unit. As a result of these efforts, I have presented workshops on the development and implementation of literature-based Holocaust education at various local, state, and national conferences. In 1998, I was selected to participate in a month-long seminar for Holocaust educators in Poland and Israel, and in April of 2000 I was named a Mandel Teaching Fellow by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.

One cannot begin an in-depth literature-based study of the Holocaust with any group of students, especially adolescents, without first providing a basis on which to construct new knowledge. During the grading period immediately preceding our unit of study, my students had been asked to question several aspects of personal and societal ethics that they would encounter during our study of the Holocaust and in their own modern-day existence. The use of “troubling literature,” stories that do have a “happily ever after” ending and require the reader to confront moral issues head-on, would serve as our schematic foundation.

In an age where issues such as the cloning of human beings and more recently the use of embryos for stem-cell research frequently make the headlines, Flowers for
*Algernon* (Keyes, 1975) asked my students to confront the ethics of medical experimentation on human beings and the treatment of the developmentally handicapped by mainstream society. Charlie Gordon, the protagonist, is a mentally retarded adult who, as a result of experimental surgery previously attempted only on mice, becomes for a short while a genius. But the results are not permanent; in the end, Charlie is worse off than before the surgery. The text and ensuing assignments asked my students to examine and evaluate Charlie’s treatment by his co-workers and society, as well as by his physicians in light of the American Medical Association’s standards for medical ethics. Later on, they will encounter the horrors of Nazi “medical” experiments on concentration camp inmates.

Likewise, Lois Lowry’s (1994) *The Giver* forced them to explore the trade-offs of living in a utopian society where the state, much like Nazi Germany, controls every aspect of human existence, and the dangers of blind obedience to that state. While such a society may appear to offer some benefits, my students were asked to make decisions as to whether these benefits outweighed the loss of individual freedoms. Before they could fully grasp the injustices of the Nuremberg Laws, my students had to first develop an understanding and appreciation of the personal freedoms they enjoy. Working in conjunction with two colleagues in the Social Studies department, I required my students to write a position paper in which they analyzed the Amendments to the Constitution. In order to help them develop a better understanding of the importance of Constitutionally guaranteed personal liberties, each student had to determine which three of the Amendments were, from their personal perspective, absolutely vital for the preservation of the American way of life. They then had to argue which three of the Amendments
were not. Both arguments had to be logically sound and convincing. This background of themes and the ensuing discussions formed the basis for scaffolding the thematic knowledge of literature in general, to which would be added the specific historical knowledge of the Holocaust.

In order to meet the first two instructional objectives listed above, the unit begins with a two-week introduction to the history of the Holocaust. Lessons utilizing historical documents and video detailing such subjects as religious and racial anti-Semitism, Jewish life in Europe prior to 1933, the rise of the Nazis, the passage of the Nuremberg Laws, the establishment of the concentration camp system, and the development and implementation of the “Final Solution,” provide the students with the historical grounding needed to effectively engage the literature. A pre-unit questionnaire, included in the appendices, was prepared in order to determine the students’ prior knowledge of the Holocaust as a historical event, as well as their attitudes regarding stereotyping, prejudice, and racism.

Working from the stance that no single account of the Holocaust can tell the entire story, the decision as to which witness narratives would be included was based on a need to provide the students with as wide a variety of experiences as possible. Two texts were selected whole-class reading, and class sets of thirty-two copies of each were secured. The students would also be required to read three additional texts of their own choosing from a pre-selected reading list. Also included in the whole-class reading assignments would be short stories, plays, and poetry written by both victims and survivors. Additional witness narratives would be presented throughout the unit by means of videotaped survivor testimonies. Such testimonies further personalize the Holocaust
experience by allowing students to put a name, a face, and a voice to the narrative. In this way, the focus is on the individual, not the unimaginable number six million.

Clear and well-structured guidelines were provided to the students as to how they should go about writing reflective journals. Specifically, the need for depth over superficiality, the need to avoid simply reiterating what one has read, and the critical need to comment on one’s own personal new insights and perspectives. These open-ended response journals with no scripted questions, allowed my students to:

a) examine their new-found knowledge and discuss the meaning that the literature has for their own lives;
b) raise questions on concerns that they have about what they have read, seen, or heard;
c) provide critical information in regard to the level of their understanding or misunderstanding.

Development and Implementation of the Study

While much has been written regarding Holocaust education, and in particular the role of literature in Holocaust education, I found that there was little in the professional literature that explored student responses and attitudes regarding the development of personal ethics within a literature-based course of Holocaust study. This was even more evident when middle school students are viewed as the primary audience. I initially approached my principal with the idea of doing a study of how students responded to these powerful lessons in the spring of 2000. At first reluctant to put her school and students “under a microscope,” she hesitantly agreed when assured that all possible
measures to protect student confidentiality would be taken. I left her with a copy of my proposal, which she promised to read over the coming weekend. At the same time, I shared my proposal with the science and social studies teachers with whom I teamed, as several of the projects that led up to the Holocaust studies unit would require the students to explore interdisciplinary areas in science and government. After reviewing my proposal and getting answers to their procedural questions, teachers and principal alike were very enthusiastic in their support of the study.

As a Reading/Language Arts teacher, I am regularly assigned three sections of between 28 and 32 students. These sections meet every day for a double-block period (84 total minutes) of instruction. At the start of the 2000-2001 academic year, I began observing my three sections of students in order to determine which one offered the best opportunities for conducting the study. Due to the size of these sections, I believed that I could not realistically do a whole-class study. There was a need, therefore, to select a much smaller focus group of students that represented as closely as possible the overall demographics of the whole class. I observed all three sections for one complete grading period (nine weeks) before deciding to use my 8th and 9th period section. This choice was predicated primarily on the convenience of having them at the end of the day, as this would facilitate any after-school meetings with the focus group, while allowing me time to reflect in my researcher’s log without the pressure of preparing for the immediate arrival of another class.

Having received my principal’s consent to carry out my research in our school, I then applied for and received written consent for my proposal from the school district’s Department of Pupil Services’ Research Proposal Review Committee and from the
University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). With these authorizations in place, I set about explaining the study to the class and selecting the students who would form the focus group.

**Participant Selection**

The students chosen to participate in this study were drawn from my regularly assigned 8th and 9th period Reading/Language Arts class. Comprised of thirty-one students, the class can be classified demographically as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>13 (41.94%)</td>
<td>4 (12.90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5 (16.13%)</td>
<td>4 (12.90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>3 (9.68%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2 (6.45%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the total class, one is a mainstreamed special education student. Ten students have been identified as “gifted and talented” by the school district, indicating that they are above average in language abilities and reading, and ten students are Federal free/reduced lunch program recipients. For the sake of manageability of data, particularly with respect to audio taped interviews, I decided to select a purposeful sample of students within the whole-class group (Patton 1990). It was my intention that the students selected should represent as much as possible the diversity of the larger group with regard to gender, race, and ethnicity.
I explained to the class, as I do at the beginning of each thematic unit, what our area of literary focus would be for the next nine weeks. This included a general overview of the literary genre, the in-class books that would be read by the entire class, and the list of recommended titles from which each student was to self-select the books to be part of their independent reading and journal writing assignment. I went on to explain that I had selected this particular class to assist me with a major research project for the University, and that their input would be vital to the study. This prospect generated a great deal of excitement in all but a few. I further explained that I would be using their reading response journals as an integral part of my study. I stressed that for this study, there were no “right” or “wrong” answers; that I was most interested in honest, candid responses to the literature, and not in what they thought I “wanted to hear.” Many of the students asked questions regarding the use of their real names; I assured them that I would use only pseudonyms that they themselves chose. Of course, all wanted to know if they would receive “extra credit” for participation; I restated that everything that would be done over the course of the study was standard classroom work, the only difference being the possible inclusion of some of their work in the final written study. I also went to great lengths to reassure them that they would not be penalized for non-participation, but reminded them that all tasks assigned were part of their quarter grade, and thereby carried the standard penalty for work not completed.

A consent form was drafted in accordance with University protocols describing the nature of the study and sent home with the students. A cover letter explaining the nine-week classroom unit, as well as the purpose of the study in detail accompanied the consent form. Students were instructed that the consent forms were to be signed both by
themselves and a custodial adult and returned to me prior to the start of the grading period. Over the next week, I spoke with each parent via telephone to answer any questions or concerns they might have. Most of their concerns mirrored the students’: assurances of anonymity and reward/penalty for participation/non-participation. A few parents expressed concerns over the sometimes-graphic nature of Holocaust literature and film; I assured them that every effort would be made to limit the use of graphic archival materials, particularly video. To this end, I provided parents with a complete list of the texts and films that would be used over the course of the unit, and extended the invitation to concerned parents to preview any film used in class beforehand, yet none requested to do so. Overwhelmingly, the majority of parents expressed their support for an extended lesson aimed at reducing prejudice and racism and the need to instill in adolescents an appreciation of diversity. Once all thirty-one students in the class returned the consent forms, I began the task of selecting the smaller focus group.

Knowing that not all students asked to join voluntarily in an after-school discussion group would be able or willing to participate, I nevertheless made a personal invitation to participate to the entire class. Much to my surprise, twenty students enthusiastically agreed to participate in the study. As this number was still considered unwieldy to be effective, I was now faced with further selection in order to create a representative group of much fewer participants.

It was of great importance to me that the focus group be as heterogeneous as possible, as one area of my investigation would be the differences, if any, in the responses of male and female students. At the same time however, I wanted the focus group to reflect as closely as possible the diversity of the whole group. Over the next few
days, I met briefly with each student outside of our regular class time, and explained in
greater detail the time commitment required of them as participants, as well as the need
for thorough, on-time completion of all class assignments. After several students
indicated that their afternoon commitments would preclude their participation in all three
after-school discussion sessions, the number of participants was reduced to twelve.
While this was still larger than I had wanted, I decided to use all twelve for the sake of
cohesion within the group. The self-selected group of students who became the focus
group mirrored closely the class as a whole:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>6 (50.0%)</td>
<td>2 (16.66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1 (8.33%)</td>
<td>1 (8.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>1 (8.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1 (8.33%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
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</table>

The first informal meeting took place the week prior to the beginning of the
grading period during which our study of the Holocaust would commence. Although
these students had already been together, in my class and others, for an entire semester,
this was to be a new experience for them. I did not want to presume that trust, of either
their peers or me, was a foregone conclusion. I especially wanted to define for them that
within the context of the focus group discussion, we would all play multiple roles. Yes,
they were my students, but during these discussion sessions, where they would be asked
to support or challenge statements made by other members, they would be my peers as
well. My primary function would be to collect their responses without question or
comment, and to serve as moderator for the discussion. Without calling it that directly, I explained participant observation as follows: being the classroom teacher allowed me to function not solely as a “researcher” who would simply come in, observe, and take notes, but as a participant, as a member of the group. By thus sharing in the day-to-day experiences of the classroom, we would also share each other’s perspectives (Denzin, 1994). By the end of this first informal meeting, Martin had given the group a name – “Mr. H’s Dirty Dozen.” The first steps toward trust had been successfully taken.

**Literature Selection**

The selection of the literature to be used was clearly a methodological choice. As previously defined in Chapter One, *witness narratives* are the first-person memoirs and diaries of victims and survivors, as well as their poetry, drama, and oral testimonies. Keeping in mind the caution stipulated by Parsons and Totten (1993), my students were warned against making overgeneralizations based on these narratives alone. I wanted my students to examine their own lives. I wanted them to decide, through the vicarious experience of the literature, what it means to be a just individual, to determine for themselves what prejudice, hate, and discrimination really are, and by “walking a mile in their (the writers’) shoes,” to consider the ethical and moral questions that determine whether one becomes a victim, a perpetrator, or a bystander. Additionally, I wanted texts to which my students, removed from the writers by generations and culture, could relate. Based on my experiences and observations as a classroom teacher, adolescent readers relate best to stories in which the protagonist is one with whom they can most easily identify, someone from their peer or age group. The witness narratives selected for this
study were either written by teenagers or by adults relating events that occurred during their teenage years, and although I was sacrificing other Holocaust genres, I believed these narratives to be the most effective and appropriate for the purpose of this study.

The first narrative selected for whole-class reading was *We Are Witnesses: Five Diaries of Teenagers Who Died In The Holocaust* (Boas, 1994). Told in simple terms, the words of the five diarists speak for themselves. David Rubinowitz is thirteen when his family is rounded up from their small village in rural Poland and sent to a ghetto in an urban center. By the time he is fourteen, David will die in the gas chambers of Treblinka. Fifteen year-old Yhitzak Rudashevshy has lived all his life in Vilna, the capital of Lithuania. He sees himself a Communist; being Jewish is secondary. He struggles to maintain a semblance of normalcy in the Vilna Ghetto, longing for the day the Red Army will drive out the Nazi invaders. Within a year, his diary ends; Yhitzak is murdered in the Ponary Forest. Moishe Flinker’s family decides to defy the Nazis by hiding in plain sight, passing themselves off as “Aryans.” This poses serious problems for young Moishe, a devout Orthodox Jew, who decries what is happening to other Jews throughout Europe. Moishe will die before his eighteenth birthday in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Eva Heyman lived isolated from what was happening throughout Europe until the Nazis invade Hungary in the spring of 1944. The daughter of a wealthy family, she cries in outrage when Nazi soldiers take away her bicycle. Like 1.5 million Jewish children, Eva will die, at the age of fifteen, at Auschwitz. The last diarist is perhaps the most famous child writer in history – Anne Frank, who dies before her sixteenth birthday in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.
The second text selected was Elie Wiesel’s (1982) *Night*, one of the most widely-read of all the witness narratives. In this slim, 109-page book, Wiesel recounts his experiences growing up in the peaceful Hungarian village of Sighet, his deportation to Auschwitz, the loss of family and faith, and the horrors of the 1945 death marches, culminating with the death of his father in Buchenwald just prior to the camp’s liberation by American soldiers. Highly evocative despite its simple style, Wiesel’s words take the reader deep into the heart of darkness. As one son turn on his own father for a crust of bread, another abandons his father during the death march from Auschwitz. Prisoners in the camp are forced to watch the hanging of a 12-year-old boy. All aspects of human behavior are brought into question, and through it all, the question “Why?” rings in the conscience of the reader, because as Wiesel stated, “we must remember those dark times” (Wiesel, 2001).

In addition, the students were given a list of sixty-five pre-selected witness narratives from which they were to select three as independent reading. During the reading of these texts, each student was to write a personal response journal in which they addressed how the particular text affected their overall learning of the Holocaust, and how it impacted them on a personal level. Given the nine-week duration of the grading period, these independent reading journals were due at three-week intervals.

Yet not all witness narratives have been committed to paper. Many exist only in the oral tradition, and for this reason, I make extensive use of video throughout the course of the curricular unit. Because my students need not be bombarded with horrific images filmed by German and Allied cameras in the camps, I selected a group of survivor testimonies that allowed my students to further personalize the Holocaust story by giving
the narrative a face, a name, and a voice. Ranging from fifteen to forty minutes in length, these films were the vehicles through which my students had their first “face-to-face” encounter with Holocaust survivors. Many of these films were readily available through commercial sources; still others were videos I made of survivors whom I have interviewed in the United States and Israel. Without resorting to the graphic images we so often associate with Holocaust film, these videos have become a vital part of the learning experience.

In selecting this group of witness narratives from among the hundreds of books available, I specifically chose texts that would:

- be appropriate for the students’ reading levels, not be too simple nor too complex;
- reinforce the classroom lessons without leading the student to make simplistic generalizations;
- provide a stimulus for the students to examine their own prejudices, particularly with regard to the treatment of people they perceive as “different”;
- raise the students’ ethical concerns about how “others” are treated in their own society;
- encourage them to continue to study the Holocaust by making them aware of the historical significance of the event and its impact on humanity.

As a culminating activity, each of my 90-plus students created a personal “tile” for the school’s “Wall of Remembrance.” This is not an original idea; I took the liberty of “borrowing” it from the Children’s Memorial at the United States Holocaust Memorial
Museum. Prior to the Museum’s opening in 1993, 3,300 elementary and middle school students from around the country were asked to paint a ceramic tile with a message of hope. These tiles were then permanently mounted for display in the Museum’s classroom area. While ceramic tile was not an option for me, paper was, and over the past six years, each student has produced a “memory tile” which is then laminated and mounted on the wall in the school’s lobby to form one continuous mural. Each year’s mural is first displayed in the spring during the school’s Holocaust Remembrance assembly, which features a local Holocaust survivor as guest speaker.

Data Collection

This study was conducted over the course of a standard nine-week grading period, although materials needed to construct or reconstruct new knowledge were presented during the semester prior to the actual study, and the final focus group meeting took place during the following grading period. The data collected comprise student in-class writings, response journals, artwork, and interviews with the twelve students of the focus group. The focus group sessions were conducted in three ninety-minute sessions.

Originally designed for use in marketing research, focus group interviews bring together participants to discuss their beliefs around a common-shared topic while the discussion itself allows the asking of follow-up questions to encourage continued discussion. The use of focus groups has both advantages and disadvantages: on the positive side, it is a method that is socially oriented, allowing for observation and study of the participants in a more natural setting than the often artificial “experimental” setting frequently associated with one-to-one interviews. It offers the flexibility to explore
unanticipated issues as they arise during the course of the discussion, and have been shown to be especially useful for gaining access, focusing site selection and sampling, and checking tentative conclusions. As a result, the results generated from focus group interviews have high face validity. Because the method is easily and readily understood, the findings appear to be believable. (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

However, caution needs to be exercised because, as Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 115) further point out, this method is not without certain disadvantages. First of all, the interviewer has less control over the group, which may lead to lost time discussing irrelevant issues. As context is essential to understanding the participants’ comments, the data generated may be difficult to analyze. The method requires special room arrangements and a highly trained observer moderator, which I am not. Although by their nature focus groups may often include divergent groups that are difficult to assemble, such was not the case with the focus group used for this study. Lastly, logistical problems may arise from the need to manage conversations while extracting quality data. Given these possible limitations, focus group interviewing permitted me to observe my students in a real-life setting that was natural to them, thus allowing us to explore and discuss issues as they presented themselves during the course of the discussion (Morgan, 1997; Morgan & Spanish, 1984) in a manner that was essentially easy to manage.

The timing of the first two sessions was determined by when the class completed reading each of the two in-class narratives, followed by a third session to be held sometime during the fourth grading period after the independent reading journals had been completed. For the sake of comfort and convenience, we decided to meet in our
regular classroom. The primary concerns in making this choice were the uncertain availability of other meeting spaces large enough to accommodate the group after school, the students’ perception that their classroom was a more comfortable and natural setting, and the need for relative quite in order to assure the quality of the audio taped recordings. Since our classroom was located on the second floor and had no exterior windows, it was the consensus of opinion that this would provide us an ideal location. To add to their comfort while at the same time ensuring a more relaxed and informal atmosphere, the students were encouraged to bring snacks and soft drinks to the sessions.

These sessions were conducted in an “open-interview” format, utilizing the types of interview questions suggested by Kvale (1996): introducing, follow-up, probing, specifying, direct, indirect, structuring, interpreting, and silence (pp. 133-135). It was my expectation that this type of questioning would avoid the simple “yes” or “no” response that would stifle further discussion. I decided to utilize this particular interview format because its methodology rests on the assumption that the questions asked are culturally significant to the participants (Harper, 1994, p. 410). Based on participant observation, employing this format permitted me to become more of a listener, while encouraging the dialogue among my students to continue. Within the purview of qualitative research, this type of interview, according to Fontana and Frey (1994) “…has the advantage of being inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding, and cumulative and elaborative, over and above, individual responses” (p. 356).

In Literature as Exploration (1995), Rosenblatt stated that each reader comes to the text from life, bringing to the text all of their own personal experiences. An intense response to text, she argued, “…will have its roots in capacities and experiences already
present in the personality and mind of the reader” (p. 41). For the students who comprised this focus group, Holocaust literature surely generated an “intense response.” The group discussions allowed me, as researcher, to probe the affective nature of their responses, to analyze their perceptions and attitudes, to examine perceived changes in their sense of personal ethics, and to explore significant shared patterns of commonalities existing across the student group.

Data Sources

The following sources provided the data for this study:

1. student reading/video response journals
2. any other reflective/responsive writings, including poems and artworks created by the students
3. the researcher’s own journal and anecdotal notes
4. audiotaped focus group interviews with students
5. pre-and post-unit surveys

Students Reading/Video Response Journals

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.277) make a clear distinction between documents and records. Records are formal texts such as marriage licenses, contracts, and so forth. Documents are created for personal reasons, while records, which include diaries, journals, field notes, and the like, being closer to speech, require more contextualized interpretation. As Totten (1994b) argued, these journals may assist students with their readings; help them to reflect more carefully on what they are reading, studying, and
discussing; help them to keep a record of their own evaluations and understanding of the subject, prompt them to ask questions; and enable them to carry on a personal dialogue with the teacher (p. 175). Based on reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1995), the purpose of these journals was to give each student the opportunity to approach the literature from a personal perspective, to “…let it mean something to him directly” (pp. 63-64). Students were instructed to write in their journals daily as they read each of the three books selected for independent reading, and time was provided in class for reflective writing immediately after viewing videotaped survivor testimony. Separate response journals were provided for the two whole-class texts.

Other Reflective/Responsive Writings, Including Poems and Artworks

Students’ reflective writings were not limited to their response journals. Many students gave voice to their feelings and insights through poetry, some of which was simply given to me outside of class on small scraps of paper. As previously discussed, each student also created their own “memory tile” for the school’s Wall of Remembrance. Many of these colorful, highly personal artworks also included brief (and some not so brief) poems that reflected the students’ thoughts and emotions.

Researcher’s Journal and Anecdotal Field Notes

One of my principle reasons for selecting my 8th and 9th period section was to allow me the opportunity to write daily field notes in my researcher’s journal without the pressure of preparing for either another class or school-related duty. I tried to give myself at least one hour, on a daily basis, for undisturbed, uninterrupted writing. While
the students were reading or writing silently, I made notes on scratch paper, which were then “fleshed out” during my writing time. My own reflective writings, which included notations of observed student behaviors and reactions, as well as reflections on my own teaching, became a vital source of information.

Audio taped Interviews

Twice during the thematic unit and once after its conclusion, I met with the twelve students who comprised the focus group. These sessions, as previously described, were held in our classroom after school, and were carefully audio taped on 90-minute audiocassettes. During the summer following the close of the school year, the three tapes were carefully transcribed, copies made of the transcriptions, and the tapes destroyed.

Pre-and-Post-Unit Surveys

Before I could begin to explore the my students’ responses in search of answers to my questions, I first had to determine their starting point - I needed a baseline from which I could later determine what growth, if any, had occurred. In past years, I had used a questionnaire (see Appendix A) designed to explore the students’ prior knowledge of the Holocaust as a historical event, as well as students’ understanding of key terms that we would use in class. Since I had used this instrument before, I decided to continue using it with this group of students as well.

When conducting her study on the moral dilemmas facing young women contemplating abortion, Gilligan posed a series of questions regarding the participants’ views on morality (Gilligan, 1982, pp.65-66). I adapted and broadened these questions
and presented them in survey form (see Appendix B) to the entire class prior to the start of our unit of instruction. During the month of December of the following academic year, I mailed the same survey to the students in the focus group, in order to explore what changes in perception, if any, had been fostered by the students’ study of the Holocaust.

**Credibility**

Credibility can be expressed as the way in which the findings of a particular research study agree with the perceived view of reality. Patton (1990) stressed that a credible qualitative study must address three questions:

1. What techniques and methods were used to ensure the integrity, validity, and accuracy of the findings?

2. What does the researcher bring to the study in terms of experience and qualifications?

3. What assumptions undergird the study?

Credibility is ensured by prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Prolonged Engagement**

Prior to undertaking an ethnographic study, a researcher must invest a considerable amount of time in order to learn as much as possible about the culture of the environment. Since these were my own students, I would be with them on a daily basis for an entire school year. As stated previously, I have been a full-time classroom teacher in the school site for the six years prior to commencing this study, specifically as a
Reading/Language Arts teacher. I therefore believed that I possessed the knowledge of the district, the school, its students, and reading instruction that would be required to implement and carry out the study. My experience with literature selection, specifically when dealing with issues of appropriateness of Holocaust literature for classroom use, coupled with methods of initiating and maintaining relationships with my students, were also greatly beneficial.

Any attempt at prolonged engagement requires the establishment of trust, which has previously been discussed. My students perceived me, first and foremost, as their classroom teacher; only during the focus group interviews, with the inescapable presence of the tape recorder, did my students see me as “researcher.” The number of students who initially volunteered to participate in the study – 20 out of 31 - gives an indication of the extent to which this bond of trust existed. Due primarily to my tenure within the building, this trust extended also to those staff members with whom I worked on the collaborative projects before the start of the actual study, where again, I had the advantage of being an “insider.” I have teamed with both the Social Studies and Science teachers involved for the past two years and all four were aware of the scope and content of my teaching practice, specifically in the area of Holocaust education. In the spirit of true collaboration, all four contributed to the development and assessment of the student projects.

Throughout the data collection process, I was able to interact with all of the students on a daily basis, both inside and outside the regular classroom setting. Having lunch/recess duty, a duty I shared with three of the four teachers with whom I collaborated, afforded me the opportunity to discuss various aspects of the study with
them, and I was also able to speak informally with the students, individually or in small groups, during non-class times.

Being a senior staff member who served on a variety of faculty committees assured that I was totally immersed in the culture of the school on a daily basis. As a teacher/researcher, my participation in the daily life of the school was therefore seen as neither intrusive nor threatening, but quite “normal” and highly conducive to the facilitation of the research.

Persistent Observation

Coupled with prolonged engagement, persistent observation further ensures the credibility of a study. The student participants and I were together on a daily basis for an entire 36-week academic year. During that time, they participated in classroom activities for two consecutive 42-minute periods every day, during which I was able to observe their academic and social behaviors and attitudes while fulfilling my duties as a classroom teacher. In addition, I was able to interact with, and thus further observe, these students in non-academic environments before and after school, and during lunch and recess.

Triangulation

Triangulation, the combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers, is a strategy that adds rigor, depth, and breadth to any investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2). As such, it is useful both as check mechanism for credibility as well as a tool for critique.
This study was conceived with multiple data sources in order to enhance the credibility of the findings: written responses in students’ journals, oral responses during class discussions and focus group interviews (including transcriptions), my observations as teacher/researcher, and my own reflective journal writings.

**Peer Debriefing**

As a writer, I have always grappled with my own words. As a teacher, I have always advised my students to seek help in editing their writings for whatever errors or inconsistencies may be present. In writing qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend the use of peer debriefing in order that the researcher may be more aware of what their values are and how these values affect and influence the study. Functioning in much the same was as an editor, my peer debriefers questioned my interpretations of the data, thus helping me find ways to make issues that were, to me implicit, more explicit for those who would someday use my study as part of their own research. For this very important task, I selected three colleagues: a fellow doctoral candidate at the University who was familiar with the many nuances of reader response theory as it pertains to young adult literature; a colleague at my school who recently completed her doctoral degree to aid me in focusing on methodological issues and questions; and a colleague in the Philadelphia Public School system for her expertise in the field of literature-based Holocaust education.

Throughout the data collection and analysis stages, they were able to provide feedback either during face-to-face discussion or via electronic mail.
Member Checks

By discussing some of my initial analyses of this study with my student-participants, I believe several, if not most of them took on some degree of ownership of the study. This discussion often led to follow-up, particularly with regard to their reading response journals, which they later voiced during the focus group interviews.

Trust and credibility were also enhanced by this sharing of the data at an early stage helped counter the often-made assumption that within a similar context, similar events or things have similar meaning. As these students were not a homogeneous group, member checks provided an opportunity to both my students and myself, at least in the initial stages of analysis, to give and receive valuable feedback and clarification of their written and oral responses.

Transferability

Within the “hard sciences” of quantitative research, the impartiality of data analysis and the findings generated by a particular study are dependent on two key precepts. The first is external validity, the extent to which the results of a study are generalizable. The second, generalizability, is the extent to which research findings and/or conclusions from a study conducted on a sample population can be applied to the population at large. Arguing that generalizability is not feasible, Miller and Crabtree (1994) stated, “…Local context and the human story, of which each individual and community story is a reflection, are the primary goals of qualitative research, and not “generalizability” (.p 348).
Transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 1994) is therefore relative, and depends entirely on the degree to which salient conditions overlap or match, verifiable through what they referred to as “thick descriptions.” Quite often the type of questions that form the backbone of surveys used in quantitative studies require a simple answer of “yes” or “no.” While these constitute a response in qualitative research as well, it is the rich and extensive sort of details concerning methodology and context that is the goal of any qualitative study.

My objective as researcher was not to develop data and findings that were generalizable nor even transferable. Any study of adolescent responses to Holocaust literature is contingent on far too many variables to be deemed “transferable,” for as Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued, any evidence of transferability rests ultimately with the “receiver.” While this study may answer, either wholly or in part, the questions which formed the research, it was my purpose to present and describe the unique context of this study and this particular group of middle school students and their learning experiences as the basis for on-going pedagogical inquiry.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of organizing and interpreting the data collected during the course of the study (Creswell, 1994; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). This process began, informally, at the very start of the school year, continued throughout the duration of the study, and was completed during the months that followed the completion of the actual data collection phase. Given the nature of the inquiry, particular attention was given to an examination of student responses to Holocaust literature from the perspective
of moral development theory (Kohlberg, 1981; Gilligan, 1982; Roth, 1999), and the
determination of what, if any, differences existed in the responses of male and female
students.

Student response journals and transcriptions of audiotaped focus group interviews
constituted the principal data sets of this study. Other data sources such as field notes
based on observations, student artwork and other ancillary materials created by the
students generated a considerable volume of data that had to be merged, grouped, and
categorized. This was accomplished by the development of a coding process based on the
reduction and interpretation of the data (Creswell, 1994). Coding by concepts (Miles &
Huberman, 1994) was employed as clear conceptual themes emerged and were identified.

Much as Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that the findings of a qualitative study
are often literally created as the study progresses, Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that
within grounded theory categories likewise emerge from the data and field experiences.
Comparing data collected from the pre-unit questionnaire to statements made by the
students in their response journals, I first sought to identify and define those responses
that demonstrated ways in which the texts affected the students’ learning of the Holocaust
as a historical event.

Further categorization and coding were utilized to identify ways in which the
students’ responses demonstrated a change in empathy and personal ethics. Focus group
interviews, response journals and reflective writings were examined from the perspective
of moral development theory (Kohlberg, 1981) and comparisons were made between
male and female students to determine what differences, if any, in the degree of care and
compassion could be gender-based (Gilligan, 1982). These responses were further coded
according to the students’ perceptions of the varying roles of victim, perpetrator and bystander and how these roles played out in their personal lives and attitudes. Lastly, student responses were categorized according to a demonstration of how, as a possible attitudinal shift toward an initiation of social action, the lessons learned could be applied in order to reduce prejudice and racism.

Working from the social constructivist paradigm, I examined each category in terms of how the categories emerged. Given the heterogeneous composition of the selective sample, these categories often had to be further broken down into sub-categories as a means to produce grounded theory. These sub-categories were then located within interconnecting themes for comparison within the framework of the group as a whole.

Limitations

Bias is inherent in research. While constructing holistic meanings, the analysis is often influenced by both the researcher’s personal biases and interactions with the subjects (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To counter this problematic situation, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that the researcher:

1. stay on the site as long as possible
2. use unobtrusive measures wherever possible
3. make sure that the research intentions are unequivocal for the participants

As previously noted, these criteria were strictly adhered to as the study was developed and implemented.

As the researcher influences the site, the site also influences the researcher. In order to minimize the site’s effect through prolonged engagement on the researcher,
Miles and Haberman (1994) further suggest that the researcher apply the following four practices:

1. In order to avoid elite bias, “lower status” participants must be included.

To counter this limitation, I made certain that those students identified by the district as “gifted and talented” did not dominate the selected sample. Of the twelve student participants, only five (41.66%) were so identified. This closely mirrored the 38.71% of the class as a whole who were so identified.

2. Although Miles and Huberman recommend spreading out site visits, this is not an option when conducting classroom research with one’s own students. I do not believe however that my daily interaction with my students had a deleterious effect on my methodology nor on my interpretation and analysis of the data.

3. Another means of minimizing the effects of the site on the researcher is the triangulation of data. As previously stated, triangulation of data was one of the measures taken to ensure the credibility of the study.

4. Finally, it is critical that the researcher keep the research questions firmly in mind. This was accomplished by having a written copy of the questions in front of me the entire time that the data were being collected and analyzed.

Several additional limitations were also encountered that must be considered as they relate to the question of transferability. First of all, although prolonged engagement and persistent observation were maintained throughout the course of the entire school year, the actual time during which data were collected was limited to a nine week period.
corresponding with one standard grading period of the normal school year. Secondly, the literature read by the students was purposely limited to the witness narratives, those first-person accounts (memoirs, letters, and diaries) written victims and survivors. This selection eliminated the inclusion of third-person accounts, general Holocaust histories, and relevant historical fiction accounts based on actual people and occurrences. Lastly, and perhaps most significant, was the size of the participant group. As previously detailed, only twelve students were comprised the focus group; the very size of the group necessarily precludes any possibility of transferability of the findings, but will hopefully serve as a catalyst for further research.

Summary

Research begins with the asking of a question. It is the soundness of the methodology and the research design that determine whether or not the answers make sense. This chapter described some of the methodological issues that arose during the design and implementation of this study as they related to the research questions.

As I stated at the outset of this chapter, my research was influenced by a post-positivist approach that allowed me to position the study within the context of a social constructivist paradigm. Once so located and grounded, factors such as site, participant and literature selection, data collection and analysis techniques, and limitations were discussed in detail to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and ultimate findings. Reader response theory tells us that every reader brings to the text the experiences that have filled their lives up to the point of encounter and that these experiences will elicit a definite response.
In the following chapter, I will present the findings of my research, as I perceive them to be, given the theoretical framework on which the research was constructed. In my efforts to discover the answers to the four questions that drove this study, I fully comprehend and acknowledge the limitations inherent with any study that tries to understand the workings of human nature. What prompts human beings to act in moral/ethical ways is not something that can be quantified; the “truth” of my students’ responses must be taken at face value, for who among us can truly get into the heart and mind of another human being? The methodologies selected for carrying out this study are those that I believed would allow for the greatest amount and freedom of participation by my students.
CHAPTER 4

THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the written, oral, and non-verbal responses of eighth grade students to the witness narratives of Holocaust literature through the dual lens of moral development and reader response theories. I first looked for evidence of literary engagement. I then examined these responses for evidence of a change in perception on the part of the students to the ethical and moral issues presented by the literature, and if these perceptions lead to a demonstration of change in their attitudes toward prejudice and racism.

This chapter examines each of the five research questions individually. Presented as part of this examination process is an explanation of how the data were collected, a description of how categories of data were developed, and an analysis of the data. Before any of this can occur however, we must first get to know the participants in the study.

“Mr. H’s Dirty Dozen”

I barely suppressed a chuckle when Martin announced his name for our group. Although I am fairly positive he has never seen the film *The Dirty Dozen* (MGM, 1967, directed by Robert Aldrich) I found his choice humorous and at the same time prophetically insightful.
"The Dirty Dozen" is an action film set during World War II. Major John Reiseman, played by Lee Marvin, is a combat veteran with a reputation for succeeding where other men would fail, but he has fallen on hard times. Major Reiseman has been given a mission upon whose success rests the fate of the Allied invasion of Normandy, as well as his last chance at redemption. But, as the saying goes, with the glory comes the pressure, for instead of being given highly-trained, highly-motivated, highly-heroic professional soldiers, Reiseman has been given twelve men, all taken from Army stockades where they are under sentence of death for such unheroic acts as murder and rape. These men however are well suited for their mission: a commando raid whose goal is the mass assassination of key members of the German officer corps in France. In the end, Reiseman manages to form these twelve dysfunctional malcontents into an effective fighting force, and although all but one of the “dirty dozen,” so named because of their refusal to bathe or shave unless granted certain privileges, die in action, the mission is a success and Germany is defeated.

My own “Dirty Dozen” was a diverse group of eighth graders. All twelve live in the “neighborhood.” To the school district, the term “neighborhood” defines the geographic area that constitutes the school’s contiguous service area, meaning that only those students who live more than two miles away, or who would have to cross major thoroughfares on foot are provided bus service to and from the school. Since the school’s service area includes five elementary schools, living in the “neighborhood” does not necessarily mean that the students are actually “neighbors.”

Being eighth graders, the “seniors” of middle school, meant that many of these students were well on their way toward an identification of self: how they saw
themselves, and in some cases more importantly, how others saw them. Through my observations of them, individually and as a group, all had developed a sense of social role within the context of the classroom. Be it “class clown,” “jock,” “bandie,” “good student,” “burnout” or “devil’s advocate,” these roles were known to themselves and their peers. What made this group even more interesting, from my perspective, was the interchangeability of these roles within the group. Using the pseudonyms they chose for themselves, I will now introduce my “Dirty Dozen.”

Alex

As we close our unit on the Holocaust, I come away with multiple questions and minimal answers. I hadn’t really expected that. Until now, I always thought that school was supposed to provide answers, not leave me with more questions. Bummer.

Alex’s response journal.

Alex is a thirteen-year-old self-proclaimed “middle child”, having an older sister and a younger brother and sister who are fraternal twins. An interesting combination of roles, she identified herself to the class at the start of our thematic unit as being “half-Jewish.” Alex likes to keep people “on their toes” by never revealing too much of her true nature. An honor roll student, she is a talented musician, a member of both the band and orchestra. At the same time, she likes to “push the envelope;” black nail polish and jewelry that depicts what many would construe as Satanic images are often her accessories of choice.
Alex lives in the neighborhood within walking distance of the school. She is one of those students identified by the district as “gifted and talented” based on her scores on state-mandated 4th and 6th grade proficiency tests, which is clearly represented in her reading and language skills. As a result, she has been in the same classes with most of her peer group since fifth grade. She is taking three classes as an eighth grader (Algebra I, Unified Science, and Spanish) that carry high school credit, and although she places a high value on academic success, she is by her own admission a procrastinator who often waits until the very last minute before tackling long-term assignments. “I don’t know why,” she replied when I asked her, “I guess I just work best under pressure.” In the classroom setting, Alex is quick to volunteer a response or opinion, and will defend her position if she believes it to be correct. This made her the perfect foil for Martin, who as we shall soon see, had an opinion on just about everything.

Socially, Alex interacts very well with students in class, but she does not stray far afield from her close circle of friends. At lunch and recess, she is most often found socializing with students who are not in her classes, many of whom are viewed as “bad boys,” “underachievers” or “trouble-makers” by some of the faculty. Many who don’t know her, and would judge her by her appearance and associations, would simply assume that Alex is just another middle school “burnout,” but this is far from the truth. She is an articulate deep thinker who chooses to show other aspects of her personality to the outside observer.
Alicia

_I know that I’ll never be able to completely understand the Holocaust,_

_ but learning and knowing to understand something is much better than_

_not knowing anything at all._

_Alicia’s response journal_

Several of my students read _Alicia: My Story_ (Appleman-Jurman, 1988). “I was so moved by her story,” she told me, “that I just had to take her name.” Alicia came to the United States from the former Yugoslavia at age twelve. Although she learned English in her native schools, she was identified upon arrival as being limited English proficient (LEP) by the school district, and was placed in one of two “welcome centers” which offer extended English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction for foreign-born middle and high school students.

Alicia lives with her parents and younger sister in one of the apartment complexes serviced by the school. Her work ethic is astounding. In my years of teaching, seldom have I had a student who was so meticulous in all of her assignments, most of which were turned in early. Although she still struggles at times with her spoken English, her written expression is a clear indication of her dedication to the pursuit of academic excellence. She was one of three of my students recognized in the “Promising Young Writers” competition sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Perceptive beyond her years, many of Alicia’s response journals reflected her experiences growing up in war-torn Bosnia, a fact which gained her the respect and admiration of peers and teachers alike. Although new to our school at the start of the year, she quickly established herself as a “straight-A” student. Her parents were strongly supportive of
Alicia’s academic efforts. Her father especially would take time off from his job as custodian of a local Catholic church in order to attend every parent conference and honor roll assembly to celebrate his daughter’s accomplishments. Very often, Alicia had to serve as interpreter, for he spoke very little English and I spoke no Serbo-Croatian, yet no interpreter was needed to understand his father’s pride.

Socially, Alicia is a shy, quiet and unassuming young woman. Although she would respond when called upon, she was often hesitant to volunteer in class, due in part to her lack of confidence with spoken English. Well liked and accepted by her peers, she nevertheless was observed as being really close to one other student in the class, a student from India named Aneesha. Perhaps drawn together by their mutual desire to excel academically, aided in part by the fact that they were the only foreign-born girls in the class, they became inseparable by the end of the first grading period. It was obvious to me however, the esteem in which she was held by her classmates. More than once I would pose a question to a student, only to have them end with, “Well, what do you think, Alicia?”

Alyssa

I know from life experiences that mental and emotional abuse are the most scarring. They last longer and feel as if it had happened just a week ago.

You never get rid of your feelings and emotional scars.

Alyssa’s response journal
Like Alicia, Alyssa was also new to our school, arriving in mid-November just prior to the Thanksgiving break. Like Alicia, she too bore emotional scars that were not obvious even to the most careful observer.

Although she lives in a somewhat affluent suburb to the north of the school district, she was assigned to our school because her biological mother lives within the school’s designated service area. Only fourteen, Alyssa has already experienced much of life’s darker side. Her biological father was in prison; I did not pry as to the reason. Her mother had remarried and moved into the area after being released from a substance-abuse rehabilitation center and Alyssa admitted to me that she herself was a recovering substance abuser: “I would get high before school to get me through the morning. Then I would get high at lunch to get me through the afternoon. At home, I stayed as high as long as I could.” Placed in a foster home by the court system, Alyssa lives with a very supportive couple who view her as their own child, and who afford her opportunities she would otherwise have been denied.

Alyssa is bright – exceedingly so. Had she been in the district prior to middle school, she would clearly have been identified as “gifted and talented.” Unafraid to speak her mind, she does not hesitate to participate in class discussions, often being among the first to raise her hand to volunteer. She is likewise very vocal in the defense of her opinions, which are most often well thought out and articulated. But it is her writing that separates Alyssa from the rest of the class. Like Rae, whom I will introduce shortly, Alyssa is one of the most naturally-gifted writers ever to sit in my classroom, displaying a fluency and extensive command of style and voice that is not readily found among middle school writers. Thoughtful and thought-provoking, her journals and other
writings reveal a sense of self-expression that exceed her equally strong command of oral communication skills

Socially, Alyssa can be somewhat distant. Relating better to adults than her peers, she prefers to work as an office helper rather than socialize with her classmates during recess. Always well dressed, Alyssa carries herself with a sense bordering on aloofness that sometimes impacts her peers negatively. “She’s cute, but she’s stuck up,” was Martin’s assessment.

Aneesha

*The Holocaust is one of the most terrifying memories that carries undescribable pain. It is a memory that we all shall carry to know it, and learn from it. To learn the outcome of such a horrible destruction, that we could learn to prevent from happening in the future. So, we must bear witness, to know the past, to learn from it, and not make a mistake by doing it again.*

*Aneesha’s response journal*

Aneesha, a native of India, was sent to live with an uncle in Illinois when she was nine years old. During the summer between sixth and seventh grades, she was joined in the United States by the rest of her family, and moved to our city the following summer. Like Alicia and Alyssa, she too is new to our school. Her father works in the family business owned by a brother, and one of Aneesha’s cousins is a student in one of my other sections.

Aneesha shares many traits with her closest friend, Alicia, including an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and a desire to excel academically. All of her
teachers remark that she is an absolute joy to have in class, and she is well liked by all of her classmates. Since her early education was in the British-styled schools of her native country, Aneesha possesses a very strong command of spoken English, although her written English, which is highly expressive and well developed, often reveals many of the syntactic errors common to non-native writers.

Early in the year, Aneesha was quiet and reluctant to participate in class discussions. But during our class study of Lowry’s *The Giver*, something struck a nerve. I had divided the class into small groups for a “book talk” discussion of the day’s reading, when suddenly, the usually-quiet Aneesha became very animated. It seems that her group had focused on the “Ceremony of Twelves,” a ritual during which all fifty of the community’s twelve-year-old children were given their “assignments,” the occupations they would have for the rest of their lives. Several students in her group thought that this was a good idea: after all, they argued, it took all the pressure off of the individual to make decisions that would affect the outcome of their lives. Chris, a tall lanky African American whose lack of attention to academics had cut short his middle school basketball career stated, “Just think about it. You don’t got to be sweatin’ no decisions. You don’t even got to try. You just do what they tell you, and the community gives you everything you need. There’s no pressure to compete.” Jill, also an African American student, agreed to an extent, saying that if you had skills the community needed, it would be “better for everybody” if the community decided your future occupation. Aneesha bristled at these statements, and proceeded to explain the caste system that still exists in India. Although she was from a fairly well off family, she related, the opportunities for education or employment under the caste system were
nothing compared to what she has here. This type of social class and gender-based prejudice was something my students had never heard of, much less experienced.

**Felipe**

*I kept asking myself: “Why did this have to happen? Why? Why, why, why?”*

“No reason,” I said to myself, “no reason at all.”

*Felipe’s response journal*

“I’m an immigrant from Brooklyn!” I knew from the very first day of school that I would have my hands full with Felipe. I knew his family well, having had his older brother Julio several years earlier when I taught 7th grade. Felipe was without a doubt the quintessential class clown, the second-shortest boy in the class, and the darling of all the tall, blonde Angelo girls. “It’s a Latino thing!” he would wink and say, knowing that I, being Cuban, would understand the nature of his humor.

Felipe’s parents immigrated to Brooklyn from their native Puerto Rico as children, and like me, Felipe and his brother grew up in a bilingual home. His parents, concerned about gangs, drugs and street violence in Brooklyn moved to the Midwest in order to provide their sons with a safer environment. Felipe attended one of the elementary schools in the neighborhood, and has been a student in our school since the sixth grade. He has grown up in a deeply Christian home environment; his father is pastor of a small church that serves the city’s rapidly growing Latino community. His profound religious beliefs became very evident whenever discussions generated by the witness narratives focused on the author’s loss of faith
Felipe struggles academically. Although his parents are very supportive of their children’s education, he struggles to make middling grades in all subject areas, particularly in reading. He reads fluently and comprehends at a 7th grade level, but readily admits, “I just don’t like to read. There are too many other things I’d rather be doin’.” As a result, he is often late in turning in assignments, and long-term assignments are often incomplete and poorly executed. His humor and classroom antics are often his attempt to mask his academic low self-esteem. Although he socializes well, he admitted to me on numerous occasions that he feels out of place and often intimidated by the taller, brighter female students in the class, especially Kayla, on whom he has an enormous crush.

Felipe is one of those students who communicate best orally. His participation in class discussions and in the focus group sessions was much more in-depth and reflective than anything he produced through his writings. Many of his written assignments, including his response journals, were either incomplete or non-existent, even after being given multiple extensions. “I don’t know why,” he told me on more than one occasion, “I know I have to get it done, I start out doin’ it, but I just can’t seem to get it done. You know what I mean?”

James

This whole experience with the Holocaust makes me angry and sad at the same time. To think that something like that could happen to me or my friends. I just can’t imagine pure murder, out in the open with no
remorse for the victims or their families.

James’ response journal

James moved here with his mother from a city in the northeastern part of the state just prior to the start of his 6th grade year. Although our school is racially balanced according to the district, James is one of only four African American males in the class. Very quiet, somewhat shy and withdrawn, he has few obviously close friends in the class and keeps to himself the majority of the time. His circle of friends includes students of all ethnicities, although most of them are females. Like Felipe, he is also very devout in his Christian beliefs, and he struggled mightily with the notion that the extreme circumstances endured by the authors of the witness narratives could erode their belief in God.

James is very bright, and masters concepts and ideas very quickly. More often than not his written and oral responses demonstrate that he has claimed ownership of these concepts and ideas. But like many of his peers, he would often take the path of least resistance when it came to his homework; especially long-term assignments that required spending time in the library. To his benefit, his mother is very supportive of his academic efforts and on more than one occasion she approached me to request deadline extensions for assignments that she believed were not indicative of his true abilities. Needless to say, the extensions were granted. Although she initially questioned why 8th grade students needed to do assignments that required extensive investigation of a topic, she eventually came to understand that everything we did in and outside of the classroom was in preparation for high school and beyond.
Given his natural shyness, James was nevertheless an active participant in class discussions, often volunteering information. He was never reticent to offer opposing perspectives, and although never aggressively argumentative, he seldom backed down when challenged by his peers if convinced that his point of view was valid. In his own quiet way, James made invaluable contributions to the class as a whole and to the focus group in particular.

Kayla

*It tears me up knowing that there are others that feel they have to be better and have to put down other people just to make themselves feel good. It's a sick world sometimes, but we all have to live and deal with it all.*

*Kayla’s journal entry*

Kayla is a tall, slender blond. An active member of the band and orchestra, she was also a starter on both the volleyball and basketball teams. She is, in every way, a “teacher’s dream,” a student who is outgoing, cooperative, focused and highly motivated. In addition, Kayla is well liked and respected by her peers. Her outgoing personality makes her extremely popular with both male and female students, regardless of race or ethnicity, and she counted Rae and Marie among her closest friends.

Kayla would argue that her status as an “only child” gave her a unique perspective; she would also eagerly take on anyone who dared to say that she was “spoiled” as a result of not having to share her parents or possessions with siblings. This came to the fore during class discussions of Eva Heyman’s diary in the book *We Are Witnesses* (Boas, 1996). Several students made the observation that Eva was a “spoiled
“brat” who in the face of the Holocaust still wanted to get her way. Martin, ever the cut-up, laughingly muttered, “Yeah, just like Kayla!” This brought on a barrage of comments from all directions in her defense, none so forceful as her own.

Academically, Kayla is a “straight-A” student. Identified as “gifted and talented” while still in the 3rd grade, she brings to the classroom a work ethic and dedication to her schoolwork that sets her apart from most of her peers, even within the ranks of the “gifted and talented.” Always among the first to participate in all phases of classroom activity, she brings an adult-like perception to any discussion that would make a casual observer forget that she is only thirteen years old.

Kayla was one of a small number of students who had any prior knowledge of the Holocaust and its historical significance and was readily willing to share her knowledge. As such, she was a very valuable asset to her peer group, which further enhanced her standing within the group.

During the course of this study, I was asked to participate in a joint project between the district and the local Jewish Federation. Six local Holocaust survivors would each visit a different middle school and speak to one class of students. Each student was then required to write an essay in which they discussed how the survivor’s story impacted their own lives, and how they could apply the lessons to improve relations in the community. As the goals of the project very closely aligned with my own pedagogical and research ideology, I readily agreed. Shortly after spring break and just prior to Yom Ha’Shoah, the Jewish Day of Remembrance for the victims of the Holocaust, a survivor of the Auschwitz death camp visited my class. Kayla quickly formed a bond with him that was clearly evident in her essay. Her essay was judged to be such that she was
invited to participate in a panel discussion moderated by the executive director of the city’s Community Relations Council, the chairman of the education committee of the Jewish Federation, the survivor, and myself. The discussion, which was aired over the city’s public access television station, was seen by many of my students, faculty colleagues, and residents of the community, which led several of my students to refer to her as their “TV star” classmate. Along with Alicia and Martin, she was invited by the mayor to attend the city’s Yom Ha’Shoah commemoration at City Hall. There she read her essay and participated in a very moving ceremony in which students and survivors lit six candles in memory of the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

Marie

_The KKK truly offends me. I just learned that they hate people of the Catholic religion (like me). It’s not that they didn’t anger me before, its that now that it’s personal they do it even more. You can’t solve hate with hate. That’s what Timothy McVey did. That’s why Matthew Sheppard is dead._

_**Marie’s response journal**_

Every year when I teach this unit, there is always a handful of students who are impacted in highly visible ways and who truly personalize the lessons. Marie is one of them. I first became aware of her sensitivities when, after watching the film “In Memory of Millions,” I observed that she was crying, softly so as to not attract attention, but crying none the less. Although it contains graphic archival footage – which I did not show – the bulk of the film is devoted to Holocaust survivors telling their stories against
the backdrop of the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It was the survivors’ words, not graphic images of death, which had moved Marie to tears, the sheer impact of one human being’s empathy for another’s suffering.

Marie, like her friends Kayla and Rae, is an honor roll student and very active in the school’s instrumental music program, but whereas they are active and outgoing, Marie can be shy and retiring until she feels comfortable with the situation. Marie lives in the neighborhood, attended one of our feeder elementary schools, and has been friends with most of her classmates for most of her schooling. At the start of the school year, the principal, at the request of their 7th grade Reading/Language Arts teacher, moved ten of the “gifted and talented” students to my afternoon section. Her reasoning for this move was based on her observation that these students, who had been together since 6th grade, were becoming too “comfortable” with one another, and that a change in classroom routine and a partial separation of the group might be in their best interests. This was discomforting for Marie: with a few exceptions, all of her friends would be in Ms. Boyle’s class. “Everybody knew that Ms. Boyle gets all the advanced kids,” she confided in me toward the end of the school year, “I was afraid I was being put in a dummy class where I wouldn’t learn anything.” For the first few weeks, Marie agonized over being in my class; the presence of her closest friends, who I later discovered shared her apprehension, did little to comfort her.

Eventually, Marie came to feel at ease. She opened up in class, began to participate enthusiastically in class discussions, and brought a marvelous sense of humor to the classroom. As the shortest of the girls, she was often on the receiving end of one “short joke” or another, usually aimed at her by one of her taller friends Kim and Kayla.
Never one to take things lying down however, Marie was most often quick to respond with a “zinger” or two of her own.

Academically, Marie is a perfectionist. On more than one occasion, assignments that had already been graded reappeared on my desk, completely redone yet with no request that they be re-graded. Marie would also ask me to look over assignments for her other classes, especially written reports. In the spring, Marie tried out for and made the school track team. The day before final journals were due, we were hit with a tremendous rainstorm; the downpour soaked Marie’s backpack and her meticulously-written journal. She came to my classroom the next morning during homeroom, practically in tears. “I just can’t turn this in! It’s ruined! You can’t possibly use this for your dissertation now!” she exclaimed. “Can I take it home over the weekend and rewrite it?” Although I assured her that it would dry out just fine, she insisted. Monday morning, I received a newly written journal.

Martin

*How could anybody kill that many people just because they didn’t like them? Can anybody really be born with or taught to kill innocent human beings in such an unfeeling manner? Until today, my answer would always have been, “No!”*

*Martin’s response journal*

What can I say about Martin that would do true justice to his character? Cut-up, cynic, devil’s advocate, the perfect foil whenever I became over-confident, Martin is all of these. Like many male teens, Martin likes to see just how far he can go before the reins
are pulled in. He knows just how far he can bend the rules before they break, and made it his daily practice to try the patience of his teachers, especially his math teacher. Always the first to instigate joking in the classroom, he was also the first to bristle when the barbs were aimed at him. Life in the classroom with Martin was, no say the least, never dull. Class clown one moment, he could become serious the next, playing the devil’s advocate whenever he felt his points were not being given the proper consideration by his classmates.

Martin’s procrastination and lack of effort was most frustrating for me as a teacher. He is very bright – he’ll be the first to tell you so! Yet the effort he put into his schoolwork did not do justice to his innate abilities. With a little more effort, Martin could have been a straight-“A” student, yet he was content with “just making the honor roll.” Even more so than Alex, Martin was my preeminent procrastinator. More interested in math and science, his journals and response writings were always guaranteed to be one thing: painfully brief. On the other hand, Martin was my most active participant during class discussions. There were many times when I had to ask him to please allow others to share their thoughts. He did, grudgingly, but he usually had a final comment to make. Martin was never at a loss for words!

Rae

Oh, my God...so many children...How could all of them have died? They were just like us, and then somebody decided to kill them! That’s just wrong! That little girl playing the violin reminds me of my friend’s little sister, Amber. I would be devastated if Amber died. I wonder how her
family felt...I wonder if her family even knew?

Rae’s response journal

Like many of our students, Rae lives within walking distance of the school, and has been classmates with most of her peer group since fifth grade. Like Alex, Kayla and Marie, she is a member of both the band and orchestra, but prefers to hang out with the “bad boys” of the school.

Like several of the other “gifted and talented” students who were switched to my class at the start of the year, Rae was upset: upset at being separated from her friends, and upset at no longer being in what the students perceived as the “gifted” class. She worried that she would not be challenged: “I’m in a class with a bunch of dummies! How am I supposed to learn in a class full of dummies? I’m going to be bored out of my skull!” I made it a point to put her fears to rest as quickly as possible.

Academically, Rae is brilliant, a permanent fixture on the honor roll. What stuck me most about her however was her skill as a writer. It would be an understatement to say that Rae is perhaps the best natural writer I have ever encountered as a middle school teacher. Midway through the first grading period, she came to me before class and handed me a notebook: “If you have the time, could you please look this over and tell me what you think?” What I found was a short story, ten hand-written pages that I literally could not put down until I had read the entire thing. This had been written by a thirteen-year-old! I knew instantly that I had found the way to reach Rae and challenge her academically. Rae entered nearly every writing contest that was offered during the year. Working with two other teachers, she represented our school in the annual “Power of the
Pen,” a state-wide competition where she reached the state finals, and with Alicia, was recognized in the NCTE’s “Promising Young Writers” competition.

Rae is also a social butterfly. Out-going, friendly and always ready to joke or share a laugh, her writings and comments nevertheless revealed a much more serious side to her nature. In many ways, she was like Marie; both girls often wore their hearts on their sleeves and would sob quietly when they empathized with a character in a story. Such was the case with Andy Jackson, the protagonist in *Tears of a Tiger* (Draper, 1994), whose suicide at the end of the novel had several girls, and a few of the boys, although they would not admit it, shedding a few tears of their own.

**Shakira**

*My thing is, why can’t we all just get along? The things I see all around,*

*I mean, if God made us all, why can’t we just get along? All this hatred going on, it just doesn’t make any sense. That’s why this world is so messed up because we can’t get along. We talk about other people and you can see what it can lead to. Just look at the Holocaust.*

*Shakira’s response journal*

My first encounter with Shakira came the previous year, when as a 7th grader, her locker had been right outside my door. Although very little in life is guaranteed, I knew that my 7th period class would be disrupted on a daily basis. This is when the 7th graders go to lunch, thus Shakira would be at her locker at the start and end of the period. Shakira was loud, *very loud*, and it seemed that the person she most needed to talk to was always at the other end of the hall! Not only was she loud, she would argue that it was
her “right” to be loud, because after all, this was her lunch period. Imagine my thoughts that first day of school when her name appeared on my class roster.

My initial perception of Shakira changed very quickly however. Standing almost six feet in height, Shakira is an imposing presence in the classroom. Her physical size was equally matched by her academic drive. Although not as skilled a writer as some of her classmates, she more than made up for any lack of polish by the thoroughness of her work, and her efforts were very strongly supported by her mother and stepfather. Shakira worked hard, and made the honor roll on a regular basis. Oftentimes, she struggled with assignments, often asking me to explain the directions numerous times until she was sure she knew what was expected of her.

At first, she was very reluctant to commit her true feelings to paper: “You said that, you know, that we were goin’ to have to share our journals and stuff, and you know, I’m not sure I want other people to know what I’m thinkin’ or feeling’, ‘cause, you know, that’s private. I don’t mind if you read ‘em, but I’m not sure I want to be sharin’ them just yet.” This quickly passed, and Shakira became a leader in class discussions, so much so that I often had to ask her, like Martin, to let others have a turn.

Walt

Why so much hate? Sometimes I think that there are people who just need somebody to use as a scapegoat, somebody to take their anger out on. But why?

Walt’s response journal
Walt was also new to our school at the start of the school year, but quickly made a name for himself as a member of the soccer team. A die-hard fan of the local University’s football team, I truly believe that if cut, he would bleed the school’s colors. Walt is an interesting combination of roles. Quiet almost to the point of shyness one moment, he would be ready to take on Martin and Felipe the next, exchanging verbal barbs and yielding no quarter, yet would return to his quiet, shy persona whenever complimented, especially by one of the more attractive girls in the class.

Bright enough to make the honor roll, he did so only twice during the year. Often, his assignments were late or incomplete, which necessitated the granting of many extensions during the course of the year. “I guess I’m just a natural slacker,” he grinned, “there was, you know, there was a (insert you favorite excuse here), and I just, um, didn’t get around to it. Can I turn it in tomorrow?” Taking the time to explain his rationale was a real bother for Walt, his least favorite assignments being those that ended with “…and why.” Although he reads fluently and at grade level, his journals were very often superficial at best, and his writings indicated a reluctance to reveal his true thoughts and emotions.

This reluctance to share his emotional side in class was in marked contrast to his abilities as a musician. Although a percussionist in the school band and orchestra, his first musical love was the piano, which he plays beautifully. Midway through our unit, I began class by instructing the students to clear their desks and put their heads down. I dim the lights, tell them to listen, truly listen, with their minds as well as their ears, to what they are about to hear. I then play a selection titled “Remembrances,” played by Yhitzak Perlman, from the soundtrack to the film Schindler’s List. At the end of the
piece, I brought the lights up, and the students were instructed to write a poem in free verse as to the emotions the composition evoked in them. The following day, Walt brought me an audiocassette and said, “Here’s my assignment from yesterday. I did the written one too, but this is the one I want you to grade.” What I heard when I placed the cassette into a player was a very evocative piece of music, on the piano, that conveyed in sound what Walt had tried to put on paper. I later asked him, knowing the answer ahead of time, who the composer was. “When I got home last night, I just, um, could not get that music out of my head, you know? So I read my poem again, and sat down at the piano. I just thought you might want to, you know, hear it.” Indeed I did.

The “Dirty Dozen” Redux

What began as a group of twelve students selected from a class of thirty-one had now begun to take on a new identity. After the first focus group session, Martin, apparently the spokesman for the group, asked if I could rearrange the seating assignments so they could all sit together in class. Knowing how cruel middle schoolers can sometimes be toward their peers, I was initially reluctant to do so out of fear that the rest of the class would see this as granting them “preferential treatment.” Having just begun to bond as a focus group, I did not want this cohesiveness to be adversely affected by the perception of the larger group that they were my “pets.” With more than a little trepidation, I gave in. The result was more than I could have hoped for.

Like their cinematic namesakes, my own “Dirty Dozen” became even closer as a unit. Support and encouragement replaced much of the snipping and verbal bantering that had existed during the prior semester. They fed off each other’s responses, and
began to demand more from each other in terms of depth in their verbal responses during class discussions. Perhaps more importantly, they seemed to care about what others had to say as well as about their own contributions. Students not in the focus group, who had never been strong participants, began to make their own voices heard, which added a newer, richer dimension to the class dynamics. Already leaders in many of their own minds, the “Dirty Dozen” were now perceived as leaders by their peer group, and rather than being separated from their peer group, they brought a greater sense of unity of purpose, not just to themselves, but to the whole class.

The end of the school year was more bittersweet than in previous years. Perhaps the hardest part of teaching eighth graders is knowing that, come June, the students who had shared their lives with me for the past nine months would be moving on to high school, becoming “adults” and leaving middle school behind. Often, their teachers become part of the flotsam they leave in their collective wake. I really hated to see the school year end, knowing that this particular group of students would not be returning to my classroom in the fall. Although the majority of them would be attending the same high school as my own children and I would still see them occasionally at school functions, they would no longer be my students.

During the second week of the new school year, I was in my classroom at the end of the day taking advantage of the peace and quiet, doing what most teachers do after school – grading papers. I was so immersed that I failed to hear the barely audible squeak of rubber-soled sneakers on linoleum.

“So, how’s the writing comin’, Mr. H? Is it Doctor H yet?” I looked up to find Rae standing in front of my desk, Marie, Kayla and Kim right behind her. “The ‘Band
Nazi’ (their name for the high school marching band director) let us out early, so we thought we’d come over and hang out with you!” We spent the next half hour discussing their new lives as high school freshmen, how their Challenge English classes were nothing compared to mine and, of course, boys. Eventually, the conversation turned to our work together. They were eager to read the transcripts of our focus group sessions: “Did I really say that?” Rae exclaimed, “Boy, I’m so smart!” I heard a soft but discernable intake of breath, followed by a long sigh, as Kayla read how I had described her: “You know me better than my mom, Mr. H! This is really good!” All too soon, they left, leaving me to return to my more mundane tasks. “You better keep us posted, Mr. H,” Kayla tossed over her shoulder as she left the room, “We’ve got a lot invested in you!” How true!

Teaching the Holocaust: The Findings

My students had all moved on to high school, their year with me completed; as I would soon discover, my own work was truly just starting. I began the process of rereading and analyzing their journals, and soon realized that the task before me would be far from simple. All year long, I had been telling my students to “look beyond the obvious” as they wrote their response journals. When they complained that a task seemed too difficult, my standard retort would be that “if it were easy, anybody could do it!” I was now finding that these carelessly tossed witticisms were coming home to roost.

Being what my students would call “old school,” I preferred to do the coding of data manually rather than utilizing a computer program, believing that this “hands-on” approach would give me better control of the data. I began by listening to the audio taped
interview session with the focus group while reading the transcriptions to check for accuracy. I then analyzed the students’ writings, looking for commonality in categories and themes, as well as for themes that might emerge solely from the journals.

As I analyzed the data, I used different color highlighters, colored markers, and different colored “Post-It” flags to identify responses by categories or themes. This process was then repeated for each of the five research questions in turn. I also photocopied journal pages, class writing assignments, and interview transcripts, particularly those that fit or could possible fit into more than one category, so that I could “cut and paste” groups of responses in order to get a better visual perspective of the commonality of patterns and emerging themes. This systematic multi-stage examination process provided literally hundreds of examples. As a result of this methodical repetition, I found that I was not lacking in the quantity of samples; it then came down to deciding which of the many samples were truly representative of the group as a whole, rather than individual, isolated responses. To determine the responses that best represented the group, I looked for commonality in ideas; wording was examined in order to find key words and/or phrases that indicated a commonality of thought or expression. From these, I then selected the samples that best articulated a response to the particular research question being examined.

Additionally, I also examined both the written responses and the transcriptions of the oral interviews to try to determine which mode of communication produced a higher degree of “comfort” on the part of the respondents. Their responses revealed that they were more inclined to “speak” more freely and openly in their written journals, knowing
that only I would be reading them, than in the open forum of the discussion groups, where perhaps they would have to “defend” their statements to their peers.

**Rules of Engagement**

Rosenbaltt (1995) proposed the notion that an efferent stance focuses primarily on finding the “correct” answer for tests, worksheets, and examinations. But as Bogdan stated, literature “…is neither a body of knowledge to be regurgitated on examinations, nor a stubborn structure to be dissected but a powerful means of furthering psychic growth and communicating values” (Bogdan, 1992, p. 104). In order to meet the objectives of this study, clearly what I was after were *not* efferent responses; before I could begin to determine whether engagement with the witness narratives had indeed made an affective change in my students, I first had to determine whether aesthetic engagement had occurred. I had to first define the “rules of engagement” – how could I determine whether or not the students were engaged with the text.

I considered all of the data sources: journals, poems, in-class writings and discussions, focus group interviews, and observations recorded in my field notes, for evidence of engagement. Written and oral responses became the primary source of evidence of engagement; *how* the student responded to the text, *what* they say and *how* they say it, the emotional response that indicates engagement. Equally important as evidence of engagement however are the non-verbal responses I had noted in my field researcher’s journal: body language, posture, as well as physical reactions to the text, are all indicators of engagement.
Aesthetic Responses and Their Impact on Learning

People say it’s all a hoax,  
People say it never happened.  
But what about the pictures of people starving?  
How do you explain that, then?  
Some people say,  
Who cares? It’s all in the past.  
Why learn about it today?  
So that we won’t make the same mistakes someday.  
But what about those other people,  
Those people who say it never happened?  
Will we make the same mistakes again  
Because of stupidity?  
No, because of ignorance.  
Because of stubbornness to not learn,  
A stubbornness to not learn about something so powerful,  
Something so powerful that it could change the world…  
A stubbornness not to learn tolerance.

Kayla’s poem, “Lessons from the Holocaust”

Defining the Aesthetic Stance

The aesthetic response often signals the beginnings of engagement, for it requires that readers respond in terms of their “living through” engagement with the text, rather than merely memorizing information to be recalled at a later date. This aesthetic stance is one in which the reader’s attention is “…centered on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 25). Engagement therefore, becomes more than just the student interacting with the text (what some teachers would define as “reading” – eyes moving along the signs on the page and making meaning from the signs). I was looking for evidence of how well the students understood what they read; how they interpreted what they read and related it to their own real-world experiences; and how they applied what they gleaned from the text in order to deal with
issues of social change. As a teacher whose practice focuses on literature as a vehicle for social and conscious change, I wanted to see my students’ articulation; how they brought “…. a vision of what is read into the open – sharing, baring, stumbling, formulating, changing, reflecting, and above all publicizing the response…becoming a part of the community – the community of the classroom and the broader community beyond the classroom” (Purves, Rogers, & Soter, 1990, p. 46) to their own reality. Or, as Alyssa wrote in her journal:

“This reminds me of me. I could be this girl. I remember that when I was in private school, it was fifth grade when everything changed. My friends, grades, and respect for life all changed. All I did was be myself, and they basically persecuted me for it. I hated it, I hated everything about that feeling – the feeling of such tremendous sorrow for being yourself.”

Teaching the Holocaust at any level is a difficult undertaking, and middle school is no exception. The events that occurred in Nazi-occupied Europe during the years 1939-1945 are far removed from the experiential knowledge of all but those who survived, witnessed, or participated in the mass destruction of eleven million human beings. Today’s students, being sixty years and a million cultural miles removed from the events, have great difficulty in grasping the reality and meaning these events have for their world.

Purvis, Rogers, and Soter define a response-centered classroom as one in which teacher and students really listen to one another, where feelings and authority are shared, where students explain things to one another, and where students are actually allowed - in my classroom they are encouraged - to disagree with each other and with the teacher
(Purvis, Rogers, and Soter, 1990, p. 76). Throughout the school year, I encourage my students to confront their own biases, pre-conceived ideas, and emotions through the literature they read. We discuss issues that need discussion – controversial issues – such as racism, war, suicide, and behaving in an ethical manner. What they are not allowed to do is be a bystander – they are challenged to take a stance on whatever issue is being discussed. These challenges were met in a variety of ways – oftentimes through very heated class discussions, as well as through their essays, poetry, and response journals.

Four short paragraphs – less than half of one page if the photos of prisoners at Buchenwald are excluded – is all the space allocated to the Holocaust in our 8th grade history textbook. Hardly enough information for students to learn about what Elie Wiesel has called the watershed event of the Twentieth Century. Taking a humanities-based approach, I combine history and literature for an entire grading period (nine weeks), with the expectation that such an approach, advocated by scholars such as Roth, Totten, Langer, Friedlander, Wiesel, and others, would enhance my students’ learning beyond just the historical facts and figures.

Louise Roesenblatt wrote that literature can provide the reader with experiences such as physical violence, hatred, and evil that it would not be possible or even wise to experience in reality (Rosenblatt, 1995). This is certainly true with Holocaust literature. Similarly, she continued, it is through literature that we look at characters living through crises, thus exploring ourselves and our world. The aesthetic stance, she argued, is not so much about acquiring information as experience; a “living through,” not simply “knowledge about” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 38). It is this very notion of the vicarious experience that Cox referred to when she stated that any text can be read efferently or
aesthetically because the reader moves back and forth along a continuum from efferent to aesthetic (Cox, 1997). Thus, a more aesthetic reading focuses on the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that text brings to the reader.

In analyzing my students’ journals for evidence of an aesthetic response to the witness narratives, I specifically looked for a sharing of personal thoughts and feelings to a specific text. In her journal for Night, Rae wrote:

“The book made me feel uncomfortable at times. It gave me shivers with every word I read, it was pure horror. I was envisioning it all as I went. I had felt like I was really there, I experienced almost everything Wiesel did. The Holocaust had never been so real to me. It was my first real glimpse into the personal reality of the Holocaust. I now understand, if only a small fraction, of what the Holocaust really meant.”

My intent in giving my students a reflective journal assignment was to provide them with a forum in which they could express what they considered to be new ideas and concepts, to explore their own reactions to these personal stories, to articulate what new insights they had developed about history and, more importantly, about themselves and the society in which they live. These responses quite often proved to be much more powerful statements than many of their other forms of writing, and just as often provided indications that for them, stereotyping, discrimination, racism and prejudice are important issues. I wanted them to focus on what was most meaningful to them, and what knowledge they would carry into the future.
“Every story has a lesson, a lesson that everybody should learn, know and memorize,” Alicia wrote in her journal. “The thing that hit me hard is that we should know this lesson without having these terrible events happen again to remind us of what can happen if we forget it.” The previous semester, we had read Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* (1994). Set in an undisclosed place and time, humanity has tried to create a perfect society by controlling all human endeavors. Even memory is controlled - an individual has only single-generation, individual memories; all of the society’s collective memory is held by one person, the Receiver of Memory. To set the stage for our future reading of the witness narratives and the importance of learning from the past, I gave my students the following assignment: Interview a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or other adult. Ask the following question, and write down their response:

*If you had only one memory to pass on to the next generation, what would it be, and why?*

I knew that Alicia was from Yugoslavia (Bosnia, to be exact), but I had not known that her father had been a soldier in the Bosnian army during the war that devastated that region. Her assignment, in which her father described being trapped in a bunker with other men from his unit while Serbian soldiers threw grenades into the bunker was, to say the least, highly emotional. He went on to describe his capture, imprisonment, and subsequent torture at the hands of the Serbs that lasted six months. “One thing kept me going,” he related, “and that was my family. I thought about my children a lot, and because of them, I knew I couldn’t give up.” Alicia’s closing
comments, which would appear throughout her journal responses, was simply, “Family is a very important thing. Having a family is the greatest thing in the world. Never lose faith, ‘cause God will help you.”

Three of the students read Livia Bitton-Jackson’s memoir, *I Have Lived A Thousand Years*. Bitton-Jackson, a survivor of the Auschwitz death camp, relates experiences that in many ways echo those of her fellow Hungarians, Eva Heyman and Elie Wiesel. Like them, she was in her early teens when the Nazis invaded Hungary in March of 1944. Like them, she was forced into a ghetto – the same ghetto, in fact, as Eva Heyman – before finally being deported to Auschwitz. Shakira’s journal contained the following:

“The things Ellie (Bitton-Jackson’s name was originally Ellie Friedman) did during the Holocaust, like going from camp to camp, being beaten, starved, etc. could be a lesson for all of us living in today’s world and for those of the future.”

Alyssa stated that:

“This was an amazing book that really forced me to look deep within myself. It was throwing up in my face how spoiled my life was and is. I suppose that most Americans are spoiled. We take so much for granted. Waking up and being able to go to work or school is a privilege. Not many choose to look at it that way, but it is.”

Totten and Feinberg (2001) stress that it is imperative to put a human face on the Holocaust to prevent the numerical statistics, the number six million, from causing students to lose sight of the fact that this number represents human beings, families much like their own. As Alyssa’s journal continues, we get a clearer understanding of how
Bitton-Jackson’s witness narrative has affected her learning as she posits a series of questions:

“What if I was that little girl 60-some years ago? Would I have been so oblivious to everything that was going on around me? Would I have not wanted to realize the depths of what was going on? How would I have felt? What would I have done? These are all questions that I need to answer and can’t. How can I answer questions that I have never been forced to answer? I wish that I could answer these questions to maybe find some type of comfort. Not only for myself, but for my writings/feelings. It deeply disturbs me that I don’t know how to answer them even to myself.”

Felipe, my “immigrant from Brooklyn,” ever the class clown, said this about his journal during one of our after-school focus group discussion sessions:

“I was supposed to tell what I felt, but it wasn’t so easy. What I feel isn’t easy to put into words. I had mixed feelings about all of what happened to her, and to all the Jewish people. What was so bad about these people that they deserved to be killed and to suffer like that? Why did racism and prejudice ever happen?”

Shakira’s journal ended with the following:

“I thought I knew what the Holocaust was. This book (I Have Lived A Thousand Years) made me think real hard, ‘cause what Ellie experienced, I could never do. I could never survive something like that. I don’t know how to react to what I read. Sometimes I just want to cry, then sometimes it makes me want to say horrible things. I thought I knew a lot about the Holocaust. I found out I don’t know as much as I thought I did, but I’m learning.”
Since Jackson’s memoir was an elective reading, these responses were written at different times during our study of the Holocaust, yet they all indicate that this particular witness narrative had caused these students to begin questioning, to try to seek answers, and to try to make some meaning out of what they had encountered. The answers they were seeking could not be found in any textbook; they do not lend themselves to multiple-choice or essay format test questions. They were questions for which they had to search deep within themselves for the answers, and most likely come away with only more questions. My students who read this book were so moved by it that they suggested that I use it as a whole-class reading in the future.

Henry Friedlander argued in 1991 that contemporaneous records, such as diaries, notes, and letters are “unquestionably the most authentic and thus extraordinarily valuable” (Friedlander, 1991, p. 91). With the exception of Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl*, many of the contemporaneous diaries to which Friedlander alludes either have not been translated into English, are not readily available, or are not, in my opinion, age-appropriate for middle school readers. Our classroom literature text includes the play “The Diary of Anne Frank,” which was based on her famous diary, and was therefore a readily available text. Yet I wanted to expose my students to something other than Anne’s diary. In 1998, I had spent three-and-one-half weeks in Poland and Israel, an intense study seminar for Holocaust educators sponsored by the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, where I had the opportunity to work closely with Elaine Culbertson, an administrator in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania public school system and long-time Holocaust educator, herself the daughter of Holocaust survivors. I had long believed that to teach the Holocaust in an abbreviated form using only Anne’s diary was
tantamount to giving my students a false perspective of the Holocaust as both a historical and human event. Culbertson stated that the diary, because it was written in isolation while in hiding, skirts the real issues of the Holocaust because Anne, as author, was so far removed from them (Culbertson, 1998-2002). This is true for many of the authors of the witness narratives, of whom many were unaware of the pervasive nature of the atrocities being committed until after the war. In the case of Anne’s diary however, this isolation leads to a point of view that does not depict the grim reality of the day-to-day life of the typical victim of the Holocaust. I was in full agreement with Culbertson that to devote the amount of class time required to read and discuss Anne’s lengthy diary would detract from the unit’s educational objectives. If my students were to learn any lessons about morality, ethics, and their own views on racism as a result of this encounter with Holocaust literature, I must offer them an alternative to Anne’s diary that presented a broader spectrum of the Holocaust experience; I needed to expose them to the realities of what human beings are truly capable of in terms of both good and evil.

To that end, I selected *We Are Witnesses: Five Diaries of Teenagers Who Died in the Holocaust* (Boas, 1996) as our first whole-class text. As the title implies, the book is a compilation of annotated excerpts from the diaries of five teenaged victims of the Holocaust: David Rubinowicz (Poland, gassed in Treblinka at age 13), Yitzhak Rudashevski (Lithuania, shot by Einsatzgruppen in the Ponary Forest at age 16), Moshe Flinker (Belgium, gassed in Auschwitz at age 18), Eva Heyman (Hungary, gassed in Auschwitz at age 15), and of course, Anne Frank (The Netherlands, died of typhus in Bergen-Belsen at age 15). Diverse backgrounds, yet all share a common fate. Admittedly, as my students all pointed out, *We Are Witnesses* is a difficult book to follow.
at times. The diaries, though presented as separate chapters, were actually being written concurrently; many of the Polish, Hungarian, and Lithuanian names are difficult to pronounce; yet it provided an effective, multi-perspective counter-narrative to Anne’s diary. Most importantly for our classroom purposes, the diarists were all young teens with whom my students could readily identify and connect, thus opening the door to engagement and aesthetic reading.

“I don’t’ get it – WHY?”

This not-so-simple question with a very large question mark scribbled below, inscribed on the left-hand side of the cover of Martin’s response journal for *We Are Witnesses*, makes a profound statement. “The whole time we were studying the Holocaust,” he wrote, “I wondered, what was it like for a kid my age? After reading this book, I have a better idea now, but I am even more confused.”

Carol Danks (2000-2002) stated that effective literature, by its very nature, transforms events of history and imagination into emotionally charged visions. My students were embarked on a voyage of discovery that was indeed emotionally charged. Marie’s journal contained the following:

“I’m not exactly sure what to say about this book. There really isn’t much to say, it’s stunning. It takes your breath away…. I do know one thing though: These children have something that no one I know has. Children now certainly lack something that let these children live as long as they did. If kids today had to go through this they would end up destroying themselves long before the Nazis got a chance to. It may be discipline and strength that we lack. I just
think we would go crazy.”

Martin, who presents a cynical, “wise-guy” image to the outside world, wrote:

“I don’t think I have ever read anything that touched me this much. There were so may questions going through my head during and at the end of this book that I forget half of them. The biggest question that I came away with was why did the world lose five great people with so much potential?”

Alyssa mirrored many of Martin’s sentiments:

“ This book also shows how much I take for granted in life…Going to school, even though it is not the most exciting place in the world, I am permitted to get an education…Many kids these days don’t realize that even school is a blessing…That makes me sick! If people only knew how well off they were! I know how it feels to be forced from your home into a place where you feel really uncomfortable. Feeling out of place is one of the most uncomfortable feelings in the world. I don’t know how to explain it.”

Expressions of estrangement, of isolation, of confusion and fear appear in the responses. “I have been in a similar situation,” Alicia wrote of her experiences growing up a child of war in Bosnia, “Even though I was only six years old, I can remember the fear and confusion. It was everywhere. I felt it, my family and neighbors did.” Alex, ever the minimalist wrote, “A great deal of doubt flowed through me as I read this book: doubts about God, about humanity, about fairness.” James focused on David Rabinowicz’ diary entry of December 12, 1941: “How is it that David could live in constant fear? I can’t even touch the surface of what he must have felt, but I do know
what fear is. You want to give up what you’re doing, curl up into a ball on the floor and
cry. To live like that seems unimaginable.” Aneesha also appeared to identify with
David; to her, David’s relocation from the Polish countryside to a ghetto paralleled her
feelings upon leaving her family home in India to live in Chicago: “The noise, the crowds
of people, the big buildings, it was all so confusing. I had been to cities before, but for
me this was almost like another world. It must have been the same for David, only worse
because he was forced there at gunpoint by the Nazis.”

Quite often, the students’ responses focused on the issues of uncertainty,
separation and alienation of which the diarists wrote. Whether forced into hiding or into
ghettos, all five teens found themselves separated from what had been familiar and
comfortable in their lives prior to the arrival of the Nazis. Our focus group sessions
proved to be very revealing, as my students took advantage of the opportunities that face-
to-face discourse provided:

ALYSSA: I grew up in the country, and when I lived out there, there’s so much
space. Then we moved to the city and it was a big difference. There was
a lot to do, but it was so different.

FELIPE: I came from Brooklyn, and Brooklyn is a big city. And when I would go
outside, there were a lot of Hispanics. When I went outside, I would see
other poriquos (slang for someone from Puerto Rico) just like me. But
when I came here, and I see a Latino, I would get all excited, because
there’s not a lot of my people here. So, you know, the environment for me
is a whole lot different.
KAYLA: But no one knew, really, what was going to happen. I mean you read about a few that had some idea of what was going on outside the ghettos.

MARTIN: Nobody really knew before they got into the ghetto that you could be shot just because you didn’t take your hat off when a soldier walked by, and nobody knew how much worse it was going to be in the concentration camps. Most of them didn’t even know about the camps, and if they did, they didn’t want to believe it.

MARIE: This might be a strange comparison, but it’s almost like trying to explain Disney World to a little kid...you can’t explain a death camp to somebody, you just can’t. It’s too unimaginable.

Shakira brought the entire concept of “ghetto” into perspective, which opened up an entirely new line of discourse:

SHAKIRA: I remember the first time you said “ghetto” in class, that the Nazis put people in “ghettos”. I thought that was kinda funny, ‘cause to me, “ghetto” meant something different. “Ghetto” means that you’re acting trashy, or dressing or talking trashy. “Ghetto” is a run-down part of the city where there’s a lot of crime and crack houses and crackheads. These ghettos were death traps.

ALEX: I think it was ironic that David (Rubinowitz) talks about how before he was put into the ghetto, he would see soldiers go past his house and how much fun it was to watch because they had never had that much excitement before. And then once he gets into the ghetto, his opinion changes completely.
MARTIN: Because when you’re in the ghetto, there were soldiers all around them. Once you realized, with the conditions in the ghetto, how bad it was actually going to get, you realized that the soldiers were not helping at all. After a while, they weren’t much fun to watch, because you realize that they are all watching you.

Alicia had witnessed war first-hand as a child in Bosnia, and knew all too well the fear that seeing soldiers walking the streets of your neighborhood can bring. My other students very quickly made connections to events they had seen on television:

ALICIA: Soldiers are not an indication of something fun. The soldiers take on a more menacing, certainly a more threatening role very fast. When the soldiers come to your door, you know that something bad can happen, and you can’t do anything to stop it.

MARIE: In any case, why would anyone find soldiers going through their house a thrill? I mean, the younger you are, the less information you have about what is happening, and that would make you more frightened.

KAYLA: The image that comes to my mind is that picture of Elian Gonzalez when the government agents kicked in the door of his uncle’s house in Miami. The picture of that little boy, huddled in a man’s arms as this government agent in full combat gear is pointing an M-16 at his head.…

MARTIN: I think that a child who didn’t know what was happening would be more scared than someone older, because when you don’t know, you have no idea what is happening to you or why.
RAE: But David wasn’t a little child like Elian Gonzalez. He was more like 12 or 13, and that’s kind of like around my age, so I guess I can relate more with him than with Elian.

Moishe Flinker’s family made the decision to “hide in plain sight” be trying to pass as non-Jews. Moishe’s diary, in my students’ view, was filled with controversy and contradiction: How could he, they argued, write about his emotional pain and guilt over the sufferings of “his people” at the hands of the Nazis, while at the same time denying his own faith? Issues of faith combined with the moral imperative to be honest with others and, above all else, with oneself:

KAYLA: What hurt me about his diary was that he pretended he wasn’t a Jew. Personally, I think I would rather die for what I believe in – die for what I am – rather than pretend to be something to go on living because I would have a guilty conscience, and would have to carry that guilt on my back for the rest of my life.

ALYSSA: I don’t agree with Moishe at all – how can you deny your faith? It’s just not right, not if that’s what’s important to you.

WALT: But without life, you can’t have faith.

KAYLA: I don’t think in any circumstances you should deny who you are and what you are.

MARTIN: Who you are…you’re nobody if you’re dead!

ALYSSA: But if you’re pretending to be somebody else, then you’re not you either.

Because they were in a relatively small room, all sitting around the same table, face-to-face interaction allowed them to make the immediate connection with yet another
tragic incident they had witnessed – the massacre at Columbine High School the previous year. Rae quickly made the point that one of the students died after her killers had asked her if she was a Christian, which sparked even more discussion:

RAE: It’s just like that girl Cassie at Columbine. She stood up for her faith, but see, if she wouldn’t have done that, she would have lived, but she stood up for who she was…

MARIE: And she didn’t die a nobody.

RAE: And she still is a somebody because the memory of her lives on.

KAYLA: But I was talking about this earlier with somebody…would they have not shot her if she had said “no”? I don’t think so. I think they (Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris) had made up their minds to kill everybody they could, and nothing she said would have saved her.

JAMES: But she said “yes,” not “no,” and now everybody knows that she believed and that she died for what she believed in.

ALICIA: But it’s like Alyssa and Kayla said – if Moishe had stood up for his religion, it’s not only him that’s in danger, it’s his family. He had to be thinking about his family. What he had to deal with was the collective responsibility for his actions. Kind of like when a teacher tells the class that if one more person acts up or causes a problem, the whole class gets a lunch detention.

Felipe had often questioned what he saw as passivity on the part of the victims – it took a great deal of convincing him that the victims did not meekly go to their deaths like lambs to the slaughter. Even after learning about the uprisings, seeing videotaped
interviews with survivors of the uprisings in Treblinka and the Warsaw Ghetto, and
meeting a survivor of the revolt in the Sobibor death camp, he still often made the
comments, supported with great American bravado, that began with the phrase: “Man, if
I’da been there, I would have…” Suddenly, my students were echoing ideas that I had
often introduced to stimulate discussions in class:

FELIPE: If somebody came up to me and put a gun to my head and said, “Are you a
Christian? If you say you’re not, you live.” If somebody came up to me
and said that, I would have to say, “I am a Christian, so go ahead and take
your best shot,” because I have faith. If I believe in something, I’m going
to stick with it, because that’s what makes me who I am.

JAMES: I disagree with everybody that said they wouldn’t deny it and everything,
because you’ve never been in that position…

MARIE: That’s true…

JAMES: …so you don’t really know…

KAYLA: It’s a life-and-death situation. I mean, you don’t know, if it came down to
it, what you’d do.

WALT: It’s a choiceless choice, because either decision you make is not going to
be a good decision.

ALICIA: It’s a no-win situation

Each student related to all five diarists in one way or another. The affective
connection between the world and the word had been made.
Before our unit began, I gave each student a short, simple questionnaire to help me understand their views on such issues as racism and hatred, as well as what they already knew about the Holocaust as a historical and human event (see Appendix A). While a few of my students had some idea of the Holocaust as a historical event, their responses indicated very little understanding of it as a human event, or of why the Holocaust happened.

Parsons and Totten, in *Guidelines for Teaching About the Holocaust* (1993, p. 3), give a very concise definition for the term “Holocaust”:

“The Holocaust refers to a specific event in 20th-century history: the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims – six million were murdered; Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.”

Through a logical extension of Rosenblatt’s ideas on aesthetic versus efferent reading, I believe very strongly that the definitions we take most to heart are those we develop ourselves. While I could have simply provided my students with this very scholarly definition, the survey question “What does the term ‘Holocaust’ mean to you?” had a two-fold purpose: first of all, it would allow me to see, from my students’ perspective, exactly what prior knowledge they already possessed, and secondly, it would
(hopefully) give me some insight as to each student’s understanding of the human side of the Holocaust. Their responses were as diverse as they were themselves:

“A time of hate and a time of war.”

“The mass murder of millions of people.”

“A time period when you could have been killed because of your religion.”

“A time when lots of people were persecuted and killed by the Nazis.”

“When all the Jews were put into concentration camps.”

“A time during World War I when a lot of people where killed because of their religion.”

“I don’t know.”

This last response appeared on nearly one fourth of the surveys. In the post-Schindler’s List era, with the recent surge in the release of Holocaust-related books, movies, and television programs, I was a bit surprised, especially given the demographics of our student population.

In a collection of essays entitled Preempting the Holocaust, Lawrence Langer emphasizes that teachers of Holocaust literature must provide both context and support for their students. His experience over many years of teaching the Holocaust at the college level led him to conclude that “the average student of Holocaust literature is unequipped by his or her background to venture into those dark corners of the concealed self” (Langer, 1998, p. 189). How much more would this apply to the “average” middle school reader?

Throughout their journal writing, my students, across the board, echoed Rae’s comment, “How could they not know what was going on?” Much Holocaust literature,
both fiction and non-fiction, is written from a child’s perspective (Drew, 1995). With very few exceptions, the witness narratives that my students read were written about events that occurred during the author’s childhood, and are thus told from a child’s perspective. As such, the children of the narratives neither knew nor understood the events going on around them, as evidenced by the diarists in *We Were Witnesses*.

As previously noted, Holocaust educators and scholars alike state that before a student, particularly a young student, embarks on a study of Holocaust literature, they must first be supported with the scaffolding that provides a firm grasp of the historical, before they can begin to attempt an understanding of the human side of the Holocaust. I also wanted my students to realize that not all Holocaust narratives end in death. While there are literally hundreds of works to choose from encompassing fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and drama, few works, in my opinion, can match the scope, both as literature and historical document, of Elie Wiesel’s *Night*.

Elie Wiesel was born in 1928 in Sighet, a Hungarian-speaking town in the Carpathian Mountain region of Rumania. His family was very Orthodox, and from the age of twelve, he began to immerse himself in the study of the Zohar, the cabbalist books of Jewish mysticism. In 1940, the part of northern Rumania where Sighet is located became part of Hungary. The nearly 800,000 Jews of Hungary were practically untouched by the genocide that had engulfed the rest of Europe. All of that ended abruptly when Germany invaded Hungary in March of 1944. It was during the week of Passover that Wiesel and his family, along with the approximately 15,000 Jews of Sighet, were loaded into cattle cars. Four days and nights later, they had arrived at their destination:
“In front of us flames. In the air the smell of burning flesh. It must have been about midnight. We had arrived – at Birkenau, reception center for Auschwitz”

(Wiesel, 1982, p. 26)

One hundred nine pages. Certainly the shortest book my students would read all year, but I knew from past experience that for many of them, this would be one of the most intense, most moving books they would ever read. For five weeks, my students had read, discussed, seen photos, and watched documentary film and videos of survivor testimonies. They knew the numbers – six million Jews, five-and-one-half million non-Jews. They knew about the Einsatzgruppen, the mobile killing squads that murdered millions in Russia, Poland, and the Ukraine. They had read about the death camps and seen the photos and videos I had taken during my trip to Poland. They were now ready to experience the horrors of Auschwitz through the eyes of one of their peers, a fourteen-year-old boy named Elie Wiesel. Without overwhelming the reader with graphic details, Night takes the reader on a journey deep into the darkest corner of the human heart, but because the author survives to become a world-renown author, educator, and humanitarian, it becomes a story of survival and hope. Even though Night was originally written more than ten years after the events occurred, to my students the fourteen-year-old Elie Wiesel who stood before Josef Mengele on the ramp at Birkenau could very easily have been one of them.

There are literally hundreds of approaches an educator can take when teaching what Reid and Stringer (1997) refer to as troubling literature. My approach was to use an audiotape recording of Night in order to facilitate both the reading and the ensuing discussions. As with previous in-class texts, I gave my students a prepared response
journal, but this one was different. There were no guiding questions – only blank, lined pages with a photograph in the upper corner on the first page for each chapter to help set the tone for that section of the book. The first such photo was of a fourteen-year-old Elie Wiesel, the last photograph known to have been taken of him prior to his deportation to Auschwitz; the last being the famous photo taken by a US Army photographer in the barracks in Buchenwald in which the skeletal face of Elie Wiesel peers from the dark recesses of a three-tiered bunk. My instructions were that they should write about those things that affected them as readers and human beings – what they did not understand, what disturbed them, what impacted their emotions, and what caused them to suffer conflicts with their moral sense of “right” and “wrong.” These journal writings would then serve as discussion starters before we continued reading.

Many of my students’ strongest reaction came after we had read the third and fourth chapters, in which Wiesel describes his experiences in Birkenau. Most striking were their responses to what they perceived as Wiesel’s loss of faith. Alyssa writes in her journal: “It made me, forced me, to take a look deep within myself. I wonder what I would have done. Would I have cursed God as well? Would I have blamed Him? What would I have done?” James was angered by what he perceived as weakness: “I know when we read or hear about these things, we say ‘Well, I wouldn’t have done that.’ Still, this time I believe I can sincerely say that my faith in God is strong enough that I wouldn’t lose it. On the contrary, my faith would keep me alive.” Surprisingly, Felipe’s response lacked his customary bravado: “I honestly have no clue how I would have reacted. I don’t really know if my faith could stand up to what he went through in those first few hours. I just don’t know. How could you witness all that death and cruelty and
still believe that God is just?” Marie, who in an earlier journal entry alluded to her Catholicism, wrote simply: “To lose one’s faith is a sin.” Later in the same journal entry, she went on to expand, “But when you sit down and really think about it, what’s one more “sin” in the world of the concentration camps? God certainly didn’t seem to be punishing the Nazis, if anything, he seemed to be punishing the victims by allowing them to suffer. So what’s one more sin? But still, how can you have hope if your faith is gone? Don’t the two go together?”

As I reexamined the data, I could find no similar responses emerging from the focus group discussions. Although they had been together in my class since the start of the school year, it was almost as if there were still some things that they were unwilling, or at the least reluctant, to verbalize in a group setting. The issue of loss of faith was still perceived as being too personal to share in a group setting.

Throughout the study, I kept asking my students to reexamine their initial responses and to try to search for meaning, to use what they were learning and apply it to their own lives and their own reality. Our knowledge of the world around us is socially constructed, as is the meaning we strive to derive from engagement with text. Rosenblatt (1995) argued that our life experiences and the ways in which we view the world determine the connections we make with text. We use this prior knowledge to construct new understandings as readers and learners. In order for engagement with the witness narratives to affect my students’ learning of the Holocaust as both a *historical* and a *human* event, they would have to construct some sort of logical meaning out of illogical events, and to think critically about the implications of their findings as it relates to the world around them. Shakira revisited Wiesel’s statement that we would never forget
seeing the bodies of children being burned in an open pit, and reflected on her grandfather: “He’s in a nursing home because he has Alzheimer’s. I looked back at the times before he got this disease and I realized how he changed dramatically. It brung (sic) tears to my eyes when I saw him. Then I realized how all I would see is him, in that condition. I can’t forget his face and what clothes he wore, just like Elie can’t forget the faces of those children. So, I can kind of relate to Elie.” Alex responded by equating Mengele’s decision-making on who would live and who would die to the shootings at Columbine High School: “The two boys running through the school were like Mengele, deciding in seconds who would live or die. A harsh comparison, but that’s my opinion.”

Alyssa’s reflection filled three pages. With many marginal notes, parenthetical comments, and sidebars, it was obvious to me that she had struggled mightily with her own thoughts as she tried to come to grips with the assignment:

“…then I ask, how could the Holocaust have happened? We live our lives with the hope of a better life tomorrow, and so did they, but they were destroyed by the Nazis. After having so many real-life examples of racism, could it happen again? After knowing how people suffered during that time, I wish the Holocaust was just a nightmare that had never happened. The Holocaust is a harsh truth about what can happen if we aren’t careful. I (hope) this truth has stuck with all of us that we must never, ever, let it happen again.”

Rae’s rethinking was also very noticeable – her initial responses were written very neatly in pencil, her afterthoughts an angry scrawl in blue ink – particularly her final reflection:

“Sometimes, I would be disgusted, or I’d be angry, but most of all, I just cried.
No one in class saw me cry, but when I read the book at home, I did. The hardest part of this book was knowing that it actually happened. I learned so much about humans. God doesn’t create heaven or hell, humans do. Some people are full of greed, and hatred, and these are the people that create hell for weaker people.

Terror, cruelty, and hunger can turn a man against God.”

Felipe decided to put his thoughts into simple verse:

_I can’t imagine the pain you feel._

_The story you tell, I can’t believe it’s real._

_You told your story of horrific pain,_

_I sometimes feel the whole world is to blame._

Felipe, untitled poem

Kayla’s reflection included the following passage:

“I responded to this text the way any thirteen-year-old would. Cries of ‘that’s not fair!’ could be heard for nights outside my room as I scanned those pages. It wasn’t fair! I couldn’t understand why the Jews were being persecuted! They lived just as everyone around them did, and, all of a sudden, all because of one lunatic’s ravings and centuries of prejudice, they were shunned from society, dehumanized, and betrayed by everyone they knew!

Why, **why, why?** Why were they shut up in those horrible ghettos and shipped off to concentration camps? I have a list of questions a mile long that I’m afraid will never be answered.”
Perhaps Aneesha summed it up for all of us. In a note she attached to her response journal, she wrote:

“Mr. Hernandez,

I thought this assignment might turn out to be not so hard. Though it is hard. How can you describe such a painful event? I don’t think nine weeks is going to be enough time to learn about the Holocaust. This event – the importance of this event – could be learned every day and that would not be enough. I think for me this event is going to be hard to describe, and my feelings are difficult to put into words. I’m sorry! Also, in my journal, I think you will find more question marks than periods.”

As I discussed earlier, I use audio taped recordings of the books we use in class for a variety of pedagogical reasons. One distinct advantage that this classroom technique affords me as a classroom teacher is that it frees my eyes from my own copy of the text so that I can observe my students as they read. During the course of this study, these observations, recorded almost daily in my field notes, were as revealing about my students as were their verbal and written responses.

Throughout our readings, I observed Marie softly crying as Elie Wiesel described seeing the cremation of a truck-load of babies; Kayla’s intake of breath as he related the hanging of a twelve-year-old at Buna; Walt fidgeting in his seat, obviously uncomfortable with the recounting of the death march to Buchenwald; Felipe’s sharp intake of breath and facial expression of anger as David Rubinowicz describes the beating he received from his father, and later at the thought of a son killing his father for a crust of bread on the death train to Buchenwald. I also saw Alyssa’s look of
disapproval as Eva Heyman’s diary recounts her expression of anger at the loss of her bicycle; echoed later by her journal response, “Doesn’t she realize that losing her bicycle at this point is THE LEAST OF HER WORRIES? What a spoiled BRAT!” Even poker-faced Martin, who tried to never reveal what he was really thinking, would occasionally allow his feelings to show as his eyes wandered from the text, his gaze fixated on some point beyond the front chalkboard.

I set out to determine how or if my students’ responses gave an indication that their responses to the witness narratives reflected engagement through an aesthetic stance. To find the answers, I referred again to Louise Rosenblatt (1995), who defined the aesthetic stance as focusing on the private as well as the public aspects of meaning. The public aspect, or efferent stance, Rosenblatt stated, is reading to find the answers to factual questions, excluding and pushing aside any personal feelings or ideas activated by the reading. The aesthetic stance requires that the reader also pay attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes and ideas that are pushed into the background during a solely efferent reading. As Rosenblatt (1978, pp. 25-27) goes on to say:

“Listening to” himself, he synthesizes these elements into a meaningful structure.

*In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text* (emphasis original).

The questions I was seeking to investigate required first and foremost that engagement had taken place, that my students had indeed connected the “word” of the text to their individual “world.” Did their responses indicate that they had, in fact, gone beyond the obvious by probing the depths of their own interpretations and
understandings? Had what they read caused them to reflect inwardly about their own lives and interactions with their fellow human beings? Based on the data samples, it would be logical to conclude that the students’ responses do indeed reflect engagement through an aesthetic stance. All of the data sources, journals, interviews, field notes, and observations indicate that the students’ associations, feelings, attitudes and ideas clearly come through in their responses.

Elie Wiesel stated in an interview with Walter Cronkite (*The Holocaust: In Memory of Millions*, 1993) that although he has seen all the documents, read all the books, he has no answers, just more questions. Kayla, Aneesha, Rae, and the rest of my “Dirty Dozen,” there is no need to apologize, for you are in good company.

**Moral Development and Response to Holocaust Literature**

Writing in 1932, Piaget theorized that children develop a sense of ethics – what is right and wrong – in two distinct stages. The first stage, called *heteronomous morality*, corresponds to Piaget’s preoperational stage of cognitive development, and occurs generally between four and seven years of age. This stage is characterized by the conception that rules and justice are unchanging properties of society, and thus removed from the control of the people who make up the society. The heteronomous thinker believes that rules are handed down by authorities viewed as omnipotent, and are therefore unchangeable. The second stage, *autonomous* morality, begins at about the same time as Piaget’s concrete operations stage, around age nine, and is characterized by an awareness within the child that rules and laws are created by people. Additionally, when judging an action, the intentions as well as the consequences must be considered.
As children become morally autonomous, they are more willing to accept change. Rules become socially agreed-upon conventions that are subject to change as need and/or consensus dictate.

Almost fifty years later, Kohlberg (1984) posited his theory that moral development in children occurs not as a result of passively accepting a cultural or societal norm of morality but rather as a direct consequence of their cognitive development, constructing moral thought as they pass from one stage to the next. He believed that peer interaction was the critical part of the social stimuli that challenged children and adolescents to change their views on morality. As discussed earlier, Kohlberg’s position was based on a justice perspective of morality; moral development flows from the rights of the individual, the impartial application of pre-established rules, and abiding by established codes of conduct.

One major criticism of Kohlberg’s theories has been that he placed too great an emphasis on moral thought and not enough emphasis on moral behavior. In our class discussions, the questions of “What were they (the perpetrators) thinking?” “Didn’t they know that what they were doing was wrong?” and “How could people just stand by and let this happen?” bear out that my students realized that perpetrators and bystanders knew right from wrong (moral thought), yet still did what was wrong (moral behavior).

As I discuss the moral and ethical dilemmas that arise from the witness narratives with students, I refrain from asking the obvious question – what would you do in a similar situation? – because I know full well that few if any of my students have the framework of experiential reference from which to base a realistic response. As I always
do, I asked the “Dirty Dozen” to consider and reflect upon issues arising from what Lawrence Langer (1982) referred to as “choiceless choices”:

- When the only choices are negative ones, when the only choice is between bad and worse, is there really a choice?
- When the entire world seems to have gone utterly mad, and behavior that goes against everything one has been taught to be moral or correct seems to be the acceptable norm, is it possible for human beings to still act in an ethical, moral manner?

In the introduction to *Ethics After the Holocaust: Perspectives, Critiques, and Responses*, John Roth challenges us to seek answers to these questions by asking one that is most crucial to this study: Where were the ethical traditions and teachings that seemingly should have kept such things from occurring? Roth’s work prompts inquiry not only about the failure of morality during the Holocaust, but more importantly, it calls into question “ethics after Auschwitz” (1999, p. xii).

During the first semester of their freshman year of high school, right before winter break, I sent each of my “Dirty Dozen” the previously-mentioned “Self and Morality” survey which asked, among other things, the following question: “If you had to say what ‘morality’ means to you, how would you sum it up? What is your *personal definition* of morality?” Of the four male students who comprised the focus group, only Walt and James responded to the survey, yet their response to this question very closely aligned with Kohlberg’s justice perspective:
WALT: “I would sum up morality by saying that it is a code or system of principles of right and wrong. I think that morality would also be someone who knows what the right and wrong decision is and base their choice on that.”

JAMES: “I feel morality is what is believed to be the political rights and wrongs of society. This does not mean that it is always correct. Morality is confusing because it can change depending on what situation you are in. Morality is a set of rules. If you don’t obey them by doing something wrong, society calls it ‘morally wrong.’”

In the same survey, the students were also asked “Why be moral?” The responses to this question from my two male students also seemed to agree with Kohlberg’s findings that morality is synonymous with justice and duty:

WALT: “Most of the respect you gain in life is because of your morals. It shows good behavior, character, arising from a sense of duty.”

JAMES: “Most people are moral or try to be moral to seek others’ approval. Even as adults, people still want to fit in with the crowd. Being moral is important.”

A Question of Right and Wrong

Vignette #1 – The Found Wallet Scenario

During the first few weeks of school, as I tried to determine my students’ self-concept of ethical behavior, I posed the following scenario: As you are walking home from school with two of your closest friends, you find a man’s wallet lying on the
sidewalk. You pick the wallet up, examine its contents, and discover a driver’s license, several photos of what can only be assumed to be family members, several credit cards, and three hundred dollars in ten and twenty dollar bills. One friend insists that the only proper thing to do would be to return the wallet to its rightful owner. The other, the one with whom you feel the strongest bond of commonality, suggests keeping the money after splitting it three ways and disposing of the wallet in a nearby dumpster. What do you do?

Perhaps I was being naïve, but I was quite dismayed by the results. Of the thirty-one students, twenty-six gleefully exclaimed that they would keep the money, citing “finders keepers” as their rationale. Even more surprising was that ten of these twenty-six stated that they would also keep the credit cards to purchase as much as they could before they were reported lost. The remaining five students, those who stated that they would return the wallet intact, were shouted down, jeered and taunted as being “goody-goodies” and “suck-ups” by their peers.

From the very beginning of the school year, I wanted to make my students cognizant of the need to make ethical decisions. In the literature we read, I was always asking them to evaluate the personal ethics of the characters, and how or if the characters’ decisions conflicted with their own sense of personal ethics. Perhaps the results of the lost wallet scenario were skewed by the fact that the students responded publicly; had I asked them to respond, anonymously in writing, would the results have been different? Were twenty-six of these predominantly middle-class students that callous, or was it more a manifestation of the “mob mentality” and the need for validation from your peers that prompted the response? We would refer to this scenario months later as we grappled with the distorted ethics presented in the Holocaust narratives.
As I began to look for data samples that related to the second research question, I once again examined all facets of the collected data. I once again color-coded responses that gave an indication of the students’ moral/ethical perspective, and further coded them according where they might be placed according to Kohlberg’s stages theory. While I considered all six stages of moral development theory, given the ages of my students, I focused primarily on Kohlberg’s third and fourth stages.

According to Kohlberg (1981), for children at Stage 3 moral judgments are based on trust, caring, and loyalty to others. It is at this stage that children often adapt the values and moral standards of their parents, and seek to be thought of as “good people.” By the time a child reaches Stage 4, Kohlberg continues, moral judgments are based on the individual’s understanding the social order – rules of justice based on laws and duties. Student responses were color-coded and categorized according to which stage of moral development they were most closely aligned.

Witness Narratives and Human Morality

Students’ writings often made connections to survivor testimonies they had seen prior to Night, and they made reference to questions they had had before that now seemed even more troublesome. At various times throughout the unit, I had shown the class selected interviews from Claude Lanzman’s award-winning documentary, Shoah (1985). Their reactions to this film were often clearly visible through a variety of physical responses – gasping, crying, and so forth. Surprisingly though, Filip Mueller’s accounts of his struggle to survive for three years as an Auschwitz Sonderkommando, the prisoners forced to work in the gas chambers and crematoria, and Abraham Bomba’s emotional
recounting of his experiences as he cut women’s hair inside Treblinka’s gas chambers, also brought about a response of a totally different nature as two students began to question the ethics of the victim/survivor:

ALEX: I remember a video we watched about the man who cut the women’s hair just before they were gassed at Treblinka, and the question that came to my mind was, isn’t he helping the Nazis? Why doesn’t he tell these people the truth – that they’re going to die, that in a few more minutes they’ll all be dead? Then it hit me – what good would it have done? Wouldn’t the Nazi not have killed them, just because he told them? Chances are they would have killed him too. He did what he had to do to survive, to stay alive.

MARTIN: How can you live with yourself day after day after pulling bodies out of the gas chamber at Auschwitz? No wonder he wanted the Nazis to kill him! But if they had, or if he had killed himself, would the world have ever known his story? Would the world have ever known what it was like inside those gas chambers? I don’t think so.

From these responses, it appears that both Alex and Martin are operating at what Kohlberg identified as Conventional Reasoning, where judgments are based on understanding the social order and the society’s definitions of what constitutes law, justice and duty. This level, which Kohlberg posited as occurring between the ages of nine and twenty, coincides with Piaget’s Formal Operations Stage. Both developmental theories assume the individual to be reasoning abstractly, and according to Kohlberg, there is an awareness for conforming to the rules of the society. Both students argue that
the behavior displayed by these men is contrary to the “rules of society” in that they are aiding the Nazis in the commission of genocidal acts. Viewed from this perspective, Alex and Martin find their actions to be unethical. But, contained within these responses is yet another question, one that could indicate that perhaps Alex and Martin are on the cusp of what Kohlberg identified as Postconventional Reasoning, because they are calling into question the situation in which these two men find themselves.

Similarly, my students’ responses to Elie Wiesel’s Night often reflected the inner turmoil being caused by conflicting ideas regarding morality and what constituted ethical behavior. My students’ response journals contained no scripted guiding questions, as I wanted to give my students the freedom to be as visceral in their responses as possible. What emerged were highly insightful responses into the nature of human relationships, particularly parent/child relationships, the very nature of good and evil, and of right and wrong. My students’ writings express the dilemmas they faced as they grappled with how a specific situation often brought the drive for survival into direct confrontation with what they believed to be an immoral act or immoral behavior, with what we called “situational ethics:”

ANEESHA: There were a lot of things that Wiesel talked about that upset my beliefs in ethics, that really contradicted a lot of my personal beliefs. One of the things that I was really surprised was the arguments between fathers and sons. It was very upsetting to see what happened when struggling for survival took over, or when fear took over.

JAMES: When, the choice is between ethics and death, it makes you think a lot differently. If your father is starving and you took his bread to survive,
then that would be obviously unethical, but if you felt that he was already
going to die, then maybe you wouldn’t think it was so unethical.

MARIE: Wiesel talks about how wrong it was to take things from those who were
still living, but it was perfectly OK to take things from the dead. In our
society, we consider stealing from the dead grave robbing. But in
Auschwitz, it meant life. If someone died and had extra food in their
pocket, or a better pair of shoes, or even a uniform, they certainly weren’t
going to use it, so you take it, or you take it and give it to someone who
can use it. I’m not saying that it’s ethical to steal from the dead, but if it
means your life, I guess you have to.

WALT: To have to witness a son kill his father over a piece of bread, like he was
some kind of animal, and then to be killed himself by other men in the car
over that same piece of bread! Does starvation really dehumanize people
that much? Or was this the ultimate punishment for having stolen the
bread from his father in the first place?

When seen through the lens of Kohlberg’s moral stages theory, knowing that it is
wrong to steal is an indication of Stage 4 development, where moral judgments are based
on one’s understanding of the social order, law, justice, and duty. Simply put, it is
wrong, according to society as we know it, to steal. Yet all six students’ responses
indicate that they are questioning the immutability of the social order. They are
discovering that laws and social constraints were not set up to deal with the situation
faced by people in the death camps and ghettos. Yes, it is wrong to steal or lie, but given
the situation, could it be justified? Without knowing it, my students had, in a sense,
reaffirmed the results of Kohlberg’s famous “Heinz and the Druggist” dilemma (Kohlberg, 1984).

At this stage of moral development, conformity to society’s rules is based on the belief that rules exist for the good of the society. But in the upside-down world of the concentration and death camps, as in Heinz’ dilemma, we often find that there are circumstances beyond the rules and regulations of the society. My students all know that it is wrong to steal, but could there be times when the situation warrants stealing?

FELIPE: For them, it was every man for himself. It was survival, and I think that’s how they saw it, where it was survival. That dead body doesn’t need that extra piece of bread, or even that raggedy old uniform. But I do. It might just be what I need to stay alive in this hell-hole. Staying alive is what it’s all about.

It was this questioning of the societal standards that I found most interesting. At this point in my life, I had raised three teenagers of my own, with a fourth rapidly approaching his teens. Consequently, my students and I had joked countless time throughout the school year about what seems to be the collective battle-cry of the American teenager – “That’s not fair!” Questioning authority, questioning the perceived sanctity of rules and regulations, “pushing the envelope,” all seem to be behaviors brought on by situations that require moral reasoning.

So the question arises that if I know an act is wrong, but my reasons are moral, how do we apply consequences? How much of a role does the situation in which we find ourselves dictate the morality or immorality of an act? The process of moral education that Lickona calls moral reflection strives most directly at developing both the cognitive
and rational aspects of moral behavior (Lickona, 1988a, p. 422). Simply put, moral reflection helps children realize that while it is often easy to know what is right, doing what is right can be much more difficult.

**Moral Development and Gender**

Much of the criticism leveled against Kohlberg’s stages theory is based on the fact that his participants were almost exclusively white middle-class males. Carol Gilligan’s (1982) critique of Kohlberg stems from the position that women’s moral perspective is based on caring about the suffering of others, preserving emotional connectedness and a sense of responsibility to the *individual* rather than to the society as a whole. Her research, based on extensive interviews with girls ages six to eighteen, found that girls interpret moral dilemmas not in terms of “right and wrong,” but rather in terms of human relationships.

**Gender and the Care/Compassion Perspective**

As I examined and reexamined my students’ responses, I now focused on those responses that gave clear indication of falling into one of two categories: justice/duty and care/compassion. Once again, I reviewed the data, highlighting those responses that gave an indication that the nature of the response might be gender-based. Not surprisingly, this reviewed revealed that there did in fact appear to be a noticeable difference in the nature of responses between my male and female students.

Given the subject matter, it also not surprising that every student in the focus group had an opinion on the subject of taking a human life. The examples below are
typical of the students’ responses, which appear to indicate a very definite difference in keeping with Gilligan’s theory:

JAMES: It’s wrong to kill. Everyone knows it. It’s just wrong, and there’s never a time when it’s right. The Bible says, “Thou shalt not kill.” Plain and simple.

ALICIA: When we read this, something flipped inside me. How can anyone kill women and children? Don’t they (the Nazis) have any integrity, any morality, any feelings? Anyone who kills men, women, and children for amusement is an animal.

MARTIN: Only society should have the right to kill, and then only to protect the society from criminals who would kill, rape, and harm other people. The laws are there to protect everybody, and if you break the law, you should be punished.

KAYLA: NOBODY, and I do mean NOBODY, should EVER have the power to just go and kill whoever they want. It’s sick and degrading. Never in my wildest dreams could I ever imagine doing such a horrible thing.

Martin and James’s statements indicate that they are responding from a justice perspective; in contrast, Alicia and Kayla’s responses seem to indicate care perspective. According to Gilligan (1982), girls have the innate ability to sense different rhythms in relationships. In a male-dominated society however, justice based on adherence to rules is more valued than this interest in intimacy, and even though we are valued and expected to be caring and altruistic, by the time they reach adolescence, many girls begin to silence their “different voice.”
Gilligan’s care perspective views people in terms of their interconnectedness, and emphasizes interpersonal communication, relationships, and overall concern for others. While some of these aspects appeared in my male students’ responses, they were much more evident in the responses of my female students. A major theme for class discussion and journal writing as we read Night was the role of parent/child relationships. In his autobiography, Elie Wiesel describes incidents wherein sons abandon their fathers during the death march from Auschwitz (Wiesel, 1982, p. 87), and another where a son kills his father over a crust of bread only to be killed himself by other, stronger prisoners (Wiesel, 1982, p. 96). These accounts caused my students to reflect on their own family circumstances, and how our society often takes these relationships for granted.

Alicia wrote about the importance of family in her journal: “When I read about Elie Wiesel’s relationship with his father, and how it changed in the camps, I am reminded of things that happened in my life. I have learned how important it is to be closer with my parents. Just thinking back to the times I had similar to these, I now have a much closer relationship with them.”

Marie also wrote extensively about family: “Everybody today is so spoiled! Nobody really thinks of the real meaning of life, nobody gets up and thanks God just for being alive for one more day. But these people did. I learned that they obviously had more strength and courage and hope than we will ever have. I guess I learned that the human being is a really powerful thing. I know I will never take something as important as my relationship with my family for granted ever again. It’s too precious, and too easy to lose.”
Reading Wiesel’s account also caused Alyssa to reflect on her fragmented biological family: “I remember the one time I saw my father cry and it took me a very long time to get over it. It pains and troubles everyone who loves their parents to watch them suffer. I can’t stand watching my mother cry especially. It’s just too heartbreaking.”

I had told my students that they were being treated like young adults, and that I expected them to live up to my expectations. Rae took me at my word: in her response journal for *Night*, her anger at the injustices and horrors described by Wiesel was clearly evident. Perhaps the most gifted writer I have ever had the joy of having as a student, Rae pulled no punches in her journals:

> “Mengele chooses who lives and who dies. Who gave him the right?…. Children!?! Being burned before their eyes and yet no one cried? How can you feel no emotion when you see children, babies, thrown into a burning pit? How can you not cry? How could you forget what Elie saw? Is it humanly possible?.....Who in their right friggin’ mind can kill a child? How could they do that with so little emotion.....Poor Rabbi Eliahou! His son left him in the dust. How could you do that to your own father? How could you leave the only family you have left behind?.....How could someone not cry when their father dies? What kind of person do you have to be?”

These sample responses appear to indicate that, as Gilligan postulated, women are different. “The conception of morality as concerned with the activity of care,” she writes, “centers around the understanding of responsibility and relationships” (Gilligan, 1982,
Whereas men follow a path of moral development that stresses separation and an ethic of justice based on clearly defined and socially constructed rules, women’s path focuses on connections between and among people and an ethic of taking care of those people. Moral decision-making therefore is predicated on concerns about both oneself and the social environment in which one lives. This “different voice” that women bring to moral decision making stems from an “ethic of care, the tie between relationships and responsibility, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 174).

Relationships require connection; these responses from my female students substantiate the notion that, although separated by decades in time and thousands of miles geographically as well as culturally from the authors/victims/survivors of the witness narratives, the capacity for empathy, for care and concern, a connection has been made that is substantially different from those made by my male students. Referring to the incident in which Wiesel describes a son killing his father over a piece of bread, Martin wrote that it was “ironic” that the father and son both “died for the exact same reason – they had bread, somebody stronger wanted it, and they took it. What the son did was wrong. He got what he deserved.” It would appear that Martin, ever one to voice his opinion as to whether something was “right” or “wrong” was responding from a Kohlbergian point of view, one dominated by rules, laws, and justice.

Wiesel also describes two separate hangings he witnessed at Auschwitz. The first is that of a young man: “He had three years of concentration camp life behind him. He was a strong, well-built boy, a giant in comparison with me” (Wiesel, 1982, p. 59). The second describes the hanging death of a twelve-year-old boy: “…a child with a refined
and beautiful face…the sad-eyed angel” (Wiesel, 1982, pp. 60-61). Responding to this incident in their journals, Felipe and Walt both were very clear about where they stood.

Felipe, my “class clown” who had seldom revealed his serious side in public, was adamant with regard to the application of “justice” in his journal response: “He was twelve. So what. Did he break a rule? In a concentration camp, everybody knew the penalty for breaking rules. They would beat you just because you didn’t take you hat off fast enough when a SS guard walked by! What did he expect? That he would get special treatment just because he’s a kid? He was lucky not to have been sent to the gas chambers when he arrived.”

Walt’s journal response was also very rules/laws/justice oriented, but not as strident as Felipe’s: “I feel sorry for him, cause he was just a little kid, but even 12-year-old kids know that when you break a rule there are consequences. Especially if the consequences are so strict.”

Marie’s journal response was clearly more aligned with Gilligan’s care/compassion theory: “The thought came to me that to him, it (the second hanging) was worse because he watched the boy struggle for life. Everybody else he saw hanged died instantly when the weight of their bodies caused the rope to break their necks. But this little boy hung there for half an hour. He hung there, and you had to walk past and look him in the eyes. There’s a sense of identification between Wiesel and this boy. I can feel it too. He’s not much younger than me. I think of my little sister – how could she ever do anything that would deserve hanging?”

As before, some students made connections between the event in the text and their own world. During our focus group discussion of Night, I raised the question, “Can we
become so accustomed to death as an everyday occurrence that it no longer affects us?”

My students’ responses showed no signs of indecision:

WALT: To me, this passage is saying that, yeah, he’s used to seeing people die all the time. I mean, he’s in a death camp! But it struck me that it struck him so much seeing this twelve-year-old kid hanging there.

ALYSSA: Well, isn’t that how we are today? I mean, like, with all those commercials about starving kids in Africa or South America, or wherever there’s poverty. We know it’s going on, but it doesn’t hit us that people are dying until we see it on a TV commercial or something. That must be how it was with him, too.

JAMES: I don’t think he wasn’t affected by people dying. He knew that people were going to the gas chambers every day, but he couldn’t see them in the gas chambers. But when someone, someone close to his own age gets hanged right in front of him, I thank that affected him more.

ANEESHA: It’s like Kitty Hart said in her film. Every day, she watched thousands walk past her on their way to the gas chambers – since she worked in the sorting barracks, she knew where they were going and what was going to happen. But she didn’t think anything about it, and she says she can’t remember any of their faces. But the one time a Nazi shots a woman right in front of her, that face she says she’ll never forget. For Wiesel, seeing this little boy die was the same thing.

Kayla even made the connection to the visit to our classroom by a local Auschwitz survivor:
KAYLA: It’s kinda like you showing us all of those survivor videos – a name, a face, a voice and a story instead of the number six million. I know that of all the survivor stories I’ve read and heard this year, the one I’ll never forget is Morris Dach’s. I mean, come on! I saw him standing right in front of me! I saw the number on his left arm with my own two eyes.

This is not to say, however, that moral development based on an ethic of care and concern is limited only to women or that one based on an ethic of justice based on rules is limited strictly to males. The students’ responses also indicated that both genders are quite capable of using both justice and care to shape their moral reasoning, especially when responding to events described in *Night*.

WALT: After the first hanging, Wiesel says that “the soup tasted excellent that night.” After the second hanging, the one of the young ‘piple,’ the “soup tasted of corpses.” To me, this is saying that even though they were so used to dying that the hanging of an adult was nothing unusual, the hanging of this little boy, hanging being a penalty you normally associates with adults, this really hits him hard. It hits *me* hard! This is a kid only two years younger than me, and I’m the same age Wiesel was when he saw this. I can’t imagine having to watch a young child hang.

JAMES: It was harsh to see a child suffer. For a child around my age to suffer like that. I don’t think a young child should have to, much less such a horrible death. It hurt him (Wiesel) more to have to watch that little kid die than it did the adult. I think I could deal with an adult’s death. Children aren’t
supposed to die. It’s just not right, no matter what that kid did, he didn’t deserve to die like that.

Martin made a connection between the death of the twelve-year-old boy at Auschwitz with that of a fictional character in a novel the class had read during the fall quarter, Sharon Mills Draper’s *Tears of a Tiger* (Draper, 1994). One of my strongest proponents of the idea that rules determine right from wrong, Martin nearly always couched his responses in those terms. For him, there were no gray areas:

**MARTIN:** We expect older people to die. But when a child dies, it breaks the continuum. Everybody is supposed to grow old and die in their sleep – that’s that natural order. Andy Jackson’s suicide was shocking for the same reason: it wasn’t natural. Nothing that child could have done would have justified a public hanging. Maybe what this child did was wrong – in the world of the concentration camps, maybe what he did or helped do could have been considered criminal. But to hang a twelve-year-old boy?

No. That’s just not right under any circumstances.

When I consider all of my students’ responses, I believe it is a fair assumption to make that there do indeed appear to be differences, some subtle, others significant, in the nature of these responses between male and female students. The majority of the responses from my four male students, and indeed many of those from my eight female students clearly align with Kohlberg’s fourth stage of moral development, where moral judgment and decision-making are based on one’s understanding the society’s rules regarding order, laws, duty, and justice. Several responses gave indications of aligning with Kohlberg’s fifth stage. Although Kohlberg argued that this stage is usually not
reached until a person has reached the age of twenty, if it is reached at all, there were those that seemed to indicate a recognition that laws are important for maintaining the society, but that laws can be changed if the need arises. The very discussions surrounding the issue of “stealing from the dead” referred to earlier indicate a level of response that my students recognized that alternative moral courses did/do in fact exist, and that they must be free to explore these options and decide on a personal moral code.

Victim, Perpetrator, or Bystander – Who Are We?

Vignette #2 – A Lesson in Apathy

During the very first week of school, each student was asked to fill out a 3” X 5” index card. Surely this was nothing new: name, if they have a nickname by which they prefer to be addressed, address, home telephone number, parents’ names and work telephone, all routine information. On the back of the card, I asked for more “routine” information: name of 7th grade Reading/Language Arts teacher, favorite author, and favorite book. I also asked for two pieces of “non-routine” information: height, and whether they were right- or left-handed. This last request earned me some very quizzical looks, but they complied, as most 8th graders are prone to do.

By the time we were ready to begin our study of the Holocaust, most of my students had forgotten about the index cards with the strange information. The first day of our unit, they walked into a classroom totally stripped of posters. The bulletin board, covered in black paper, bore the words: “Voices of Witness...Messages of Hope” in four-inch gray letters. Yellow six-point stars, cut from felt, were scattered amongst dust covers of books stapled onto the black background; in the center of each star, was written
the word “Jude” in black. Six strange names, Belzec, Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka, Chelmno, and Auschwitz, with numbers in the hundreds of thousands, were also stapled amongst the book jacket (see Appendix C – “Illustrations and Photographs”). The chairs, normally arranged in a horseshoe to facilitate discussion, were now in straight rows. Once the students were all seated, I called, sternly, for quiet, and told them all to stand to one side while I read off their names and assigned seats in very old-fashioned alphabetical order. Their familiar learning space had suddenly become very discomforting. Without any attempt at explanation, I began the day’s lesson on the Jewish faith and anti-Semitism.

Day Two saw more changes and more discomfort. Several desks had been separated from the group. Before anyone could sit down, I read off six names, and told these students to occupy the desks along the far wall. The remaining students were told to stay in alphabetical order and fill in the gaps where students had been moved. Again, puzzled looks, but overall compliance was the order of the day. Once again, no one questioned my reasons, and as the lesson continued, no one noticed that all six of the separated students were left-handed.

Day Three saw even more desks along the wall. There were now sixteen. Again, students were told to take assigned seats. As I began the day’s lesson on the rise of the Nazis, Rae asked why some students had been separated from the rest of the group. Her question went unanswered. As before, no one noticed that all of the shorter members of the class had joined the lefties.

Day Four. Now the sixteen desks were crammed into a very small space between the door and a storage cabinet while the remaining seats were given ample space in the
room’s center. There was no need to tell the sixteen where to sit; they simply accepted. The remaining students were told they could sit wherever they chose – this was something new! As the lesson began, I spoke only to the fifteen students in the center of the room. The sixteen isolated students saw only my back. Their questions were ignored, as were all attempts to get my attention. Suddenly, it was as if they were no longer there. To make matters worse, the students in the center were given candy each time they answered a question correctly, and they joked and taunted their removed classmates. By now, disgruntled mutterings could be heard, along with cries of, “Hey, that’s not fair!” and “What’s goin’ on?” After twenty minutes, I dimmed the lights, and turned on the television.

Maurice Ogden’s poem (1982) “Hangman” formed a perfect lead-in to the day’s lesson on apathy. The twelve-minute animated film features a dramatic reading by Broadway actor Herschel Bernardi; it tells of an unnamed town that falls victim to the apathy of its citizens as one by one, the hangman murders all of the inhabitants. At the end of the film, as I brought the lights back up in the room, I could see that the lesson of the past four days had finally hit home. I asked all of the left-handed students to rise and remain standing. I then did the same with all of the students who were less than 5 feet, 4 inches in height. To the surprise of all thirty-one students, only those who had been separated for the past three days were standing.

Now the questions began. Why didn’t the rest of the class speak up for their classmates? Why didn’t the sixteen speak up for themselves? Why had no one challenged my authority? Why did they, the remaining fifteen, allow me to treat their classmates – their friends – so unjustly? The reason, I explained, was apathy. “Yeah,”
said Kayla, right-handed and one of the tallest girls in the class, “it’s like, if it isn’t happening to me, I’m not going to get involved!” Marie, one of the shortest girls replied, “But it did happen to me. Why didn’t anybody stick up for me?” to which Martin, very often the class cynic retorted “Why didn’t you speak up for yourself?”

With the class reunited, we viewed the film again, and each student was given a copy of the poem. Their writing assignment that evening: “Which is more dangerous – hate or apathy? Why?”

Every day, my students walked the same hallways I did. They saw the same bullying, the same aggressive behaviors that I saw. I can only assume that they also saw the same kids being victimized, to one extent or another, that I saw. I had fully expected a prolonged encounter with Holocaust literature, which is filled with accounts of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, to elicit more of a response from my students with regard to apathy and the need for social action in light of what goes on daily in our schools and our society as a whole. Having seen what can happen when people refuse to speak up for their fellow human beings, I expected their journals to include some reflection on this issue.

As I revisited the data yet again, I looked for responses that demonstrated an application of Kohlberg’s and Gilligan’s theories to the roles of victim, perpetrator, and bystander. Given the experience with the three-day apathy simulation that we had gone through just a few weeks prior, I was somewhat dismayed that while a few responses that could have addressed this question were evident, patterns of response were very scattered and did not truly present an answer. I was left pondering the question as to why this was the case.
Earlier in the school year, we had read novels that elicited a very definite response to this very question, although they did not realize it at the time. In their journals and our discussions, the students clearly saw *Flowers for Algernon’s* Charlie Gordon as a victim before the experimental surgery and after. There was no question but that they identified those who made fun of the retarded Charlie as perpetrators; when Jonas’ father kills the newborn twin in *The Giver*, they clearly identified the roles of victim and perpetrator. While they spoke freely in class about victims, perpetrators, and bystanders as they encountered them in the witness narratives, there were no journals references to be found in which they made the connection between the text and their own reality. Perhaps the knowledge that what they were reading was reality, had actually happened as the authors described it, prevented them from connecting the reality of the world of the Holocaust to their 21st Century reality.

**Taking the Lessons Personally**

For many years, society has looked to education, using words such as *confront, expose, argue out* or *stamp out*, when dealing with issues of racism and racist ideas. If students were made aware of their biases, it was argued, racism would be overcome (Thompson, 1997). Demonstrating that “different” was not synonymous with “bad,” it was alleged, could change the way adolescents think and feel about each other.

Quite often, the methods implicit with the language of confrontation are not effective in persuading people to change; just the opposite, for when challenged in this fashion, people often tend to withdraw themselves further from situations where their thinking is being challenged (Wells and Wingate, 1986). It is ironic therefore that society
sees education as the vehicle for effecting change with regard to racism and prejudice. If one accepts the premise put forth by Troyna and Carrington (1990), racism is inherent in all of society’s structures and institutions, and education is no exception. If education is to prepare students of today to be the active, global citizens of tomorrow, they must be able to reflect upon the strategies needed to combat institutionalized racism (Carrington and Short, 1997).

In my classroom, there are thirty copies of the 1986 edition of Webster’s High School Dictionary, which contains the following definition:

**racism:** 1. the belief that certain races of people are by birth and nature superior to others. 2. discrimination against members of one or more races based upon racism.

Prior to beginning our unit of study, I had given my students a series of questions designed to establish an initial baseline as to their attitudes and conceptions. One of the questions was to define “racism” in their own words. I purposely waited to hand out the questionnaires until I had all students present so there would be no discussion to compromise the results (although the class consisted of thirty-one students, one of my male Latino students was habitually truant from school, and as was often the case, he failed to turn in any assignments during the entire nine-week time period). Their responses yielded the following results:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Response</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Racism is…”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not liking someone because of race</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a type of discrimination</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hate due to color or ethnicity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a type of prejudice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hating someone because of their beliefs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not liking someone because they are different</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hating someone because they are not the same as you</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>judging someone by the color of their skin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making fun of a race or color</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not surprisingly, all of my students responded that they have no prejudice toward any group, nor do they view themselves or their ideas as particularly racist. One student even echoed the comment made by Keisha years before that initially prompted me to examine not just my students’ and colleagues’ attitudes and ideas, but my own pedagogy as well: “…being black, I can’t be racist. Only white people can be racists.” This was especially troubling for me, because like Keisha before him, I had overheard this student say that he did not want any “…of those smelly Somalians (sic)” sitting at his lunch table. When I asked him, in private, about how this comment seemed to contradict his stated
beliefs that he has no racist ideas, he simply replied that he “didn’t mean it,” and that he only said it because “…that what all my friends think about them (Somali students).” Clearly, there is something being lost in the translation with regard to racism as part of the school culture.

Although the concept of racism is nothing new in American society, the notion of racism as a belief in racial superiority was not evident in any of my students’ responses. Like most Americans, fifteen of the thirty aligned their definition of “racism” directly with skin color; this concept of racism, so vital to understanding the racial policies and ideologies of Nazi Germany that led to the murder of six million human beings, had eluded all thirty students, and only nine included the word “hate” as part of their definition.

Messages of Hope

Rosenblatt argued that since literature is a “lived through” experience, the interchange of ideas brought about through the literary experience can lead the student to dissatisfaction with his present knowledge about human relations (1995, 228-229). It is this disequilibrium, this questioning, that can often lead the reader to formulate new ideas and personal value systems regarding his relationship with others. I wanted to explore my students’ responses further to determine how or if their encounter with the witness narratives affected the way they view the issue of racism, and more importantly, how or if they believed they could apply those lessons to combat racism. If they were sufficiently dissatisfied with their present knowledge about human relations, would they be dissatisfied enough to do something about it? With this lofty goal in mind, I asked my
students to respond to the question: “How can we apply the lessons of the Holocaust in order to eliminate hatred, prejudice, and racism during your lifetime in our society?”

Many of my students took the easy way out, and without hesitation answered “no.” A few, those who all year long had quickly responded with the answer they thought I wanted to hear – those students that the rest of the class just as quickly labeled “suck-ups” – very enthusiastically responded in the affirmative. Yet when asked how they would accomplish this daunting task which had escaped all previous attempts over the centuries, they had no glib response. Then there were those who paused, thought about what they had learned, and formulated introspective responses:

“Be a more active, positive role model.”

“Get to know people. Do something really radical – talk to people, not about what makes you different, but about what you have in common.”

“Stand up for what you believe, even if you’re the only one who believes it.”

“If your friends make fun of you for what you believe, you don’t need friends like that.”

Once more, I began to revisit the data, this time looking for responses that indicated an awareness of evidence of racism in statements or attitudes. Again, using color highlighters and markers, I examined the data. Not surprisingly, every student had something to say about racism in our society.

RAE: What’s the point in even reading about it if we’re not even going to try to change things? If we aren’t even willing to try, if all we’re going to do is just sit there and do NOTHING, why bother? We MUST do something,
or it’s not going to get any better and our kids will be asking the same questions that we’re asking today.

KAYLA: I thought prejudice was about fear of others because of their differences, but really, it’s about power. I heard about the Master Race, or the Aryan Race in class, and in the books I’ve read. They thought themselves to be perfect, and everyone that was not like them was to crushed under their heel. It hasn’t changed over the decades. Today, people still believe themselves to be built of better stuff than those who do not look or live like they do. People hate blacks, Jews, Hispanics, Asians, and homosexuals because they find their skin color, or their religion, or their culture, or their way of life “obscene.” They put themselves on the proverbial pedestal and refuse to be swayed in their beliefs, exiling innocent people whom they have never met and know nothing about.

One of James’ responses indicated that my lesson on the “Pyramid of Hate” had struck a nerve:

JAMES: I have a lot to say about hate, but most people don’t want to listen. The reason some people are so prejudiced is because they are uneducated about other races. Education is our most important tool to prevent prejudice, and there is no more powerful lesson than the one taught by the Holocaust. When I was in the fifth grade, another kid called me a “jig-a-boo.” I was too young to understand that kid’s words, I only wondered what they meant. Now, when I think about what that kid said to me, I wonder where he learned such hateful words. His parents or some other
adult had to have used them, or they would never have existed in his vocabulary.

Alyssa also tied one of her responses to the Pyramid of Hate: “Racism. The word itself sounds disgusting. It’s like hate and prejudice all bunched up nice and neat, right below Genocide of the pyramid of hate.”

During one of our first classes that quarter I showed the film “Preserving the Past to Ensure the Future” (Yad Vashem, 1989), which includes a scene of a young mother, wearing a baseball cap emblazoned with the letters KKK. The mother is marching in a parade, carrying an infant; smiling for the camera, she says, “Say KKK! Say KKK!” over and over to the child. As I looked around the room, studying my students’ faces, Marie was very obviously angered. Some time later, she wrote the following in her journal:

“I want to topple the belief that one ‘race’ is better than another. We are all human beings. Not a single one of us is more important than the next guy. The way I see our society going now, I don’t believe we can overcome racism in my lifetime. You see it on TV, hear it in music (oh my gosh, I sound so old!) and see it every day at work or school.”

Shakira was one of the students who had equated racism with the concept of “race.” In her journal she wrote: “I realized that racism is not just about race, about skin color. Racism can happen to anybody, anywhere in the world, no matter what color your skin might be. Hating somebody because you think you’re better than them, that’s racism.”

Martin also had reevaluated his personal definition of racism: “Before I learned about the Holocaust, I believed racism was simply discrimination based on race, on skin
color, a hatred of people because of their appearance. But now, I understand that racism is much more than that – it’s about fear and about power.”

As a closing entry in her journal for *Night*, Kayla wrote the following: “This book has humbled me as a person. I now know what the Holocaust was really about. I used to think that racism just happened here, between blacks and whites. Now I realize it is much more than that, and that racism is not an American problem, it’s a human problem.”

Among the many things that decorate – some would argue clutter – the walls of my classrooms are famous quotes that I want my students to think about and take possession of during our year together. They include statements from Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert F. Kennedy, Medgar Evers, and Elie Wiesel. When I began to examine my students’ responses for evidence of affective change in their perceptions of racism and their role in making the world a better place in which to live, two quotes, one from Mohandas Gandhi, and the other from Albert Einstein, stand out:

Gandhi: “We must become the change we want to see.”

Einstein: “It’s not that evil men did evil things, it’s that good men stood by and did nothing.”

Many of my students’ responses indicated that they had truly listened, not only with their ears, but with their consciences as well, throughout this time, and had spent time truly reflecting on their role as agents of change.

ALEX: We as a people can learn that violence is not the way and that killing people will not give you happiness in the world. The color of our skin or the God that we pray to are not issues to be blown out of proportion. The racism that people go through in our society is intolerable. Getting kids at
a young age to learn that all people are equal is the right thing to do. Hate crimes will continue to occur until we stand up and do something about it.

RAE: I think the only thing we can do is to teach how far racism and prejudice can actually go. A lot of people don’t know that much about the Holocaust. They don’t know what it was really about. If people knew how evil it all was, they just might put themselves in the other person’s shoes and realize…Oh my God! This is WRONG! The single-most important lesson of the Holocaust is look what happened when people stood by and watched it happen. We need to teach people to actually get involved when they KNOW that something needs to change. For me, it’s taught me not to judge. I can’t look at somebody and make fun of them. I don’t know what they’re really like and I know how making fun of people can lead to something like the Holocaust.

FELIPE: You want to stop racism? Good luck! You want to know why racism is still with us? If you want to stop racism and hate, you have to look at something deep inside a person, not just at what’s on the outside, including yourself, and too many people are afraid to do that. They’re afraid of what they might find. I think we should start with the children of the world, teach them not to hate. We should teach them not to practice hate and prejudice. After all, anyone who stands by and watches prejudice and hate take place, they themselves are potential victims.

SHAKIRA: The only way I can think of overcoming prejudice in our society is just accepting people for who they are. This may not happen, but is we really
give it an honest try, I think this world would be a better place to live in.

If we accept black people, white people, Christians, Jews, or anybody else, we would all get along much better.

MARTIN: Don’t sit by and do NOTHING!

ANEESHA: Peace is not when two people meet and find a place to live in. Peace is when two people meet and find a place to live in among the nations. Peace is when people accept others, when they honor and respect their uniqueness, and who they are, not what they are.

ALYSSA: If we deny the Holocaust, we are denying history. We are also saying that hate is and that harming another human being is just fine. Hitler’s prejudice and hatred of Jews is what led to all of this death and murder, and yet we in America still prejudice others. America is probably the most diverse country in the world, yet we still judge people before we get to know them or even talk to them one time. If we would just take more time to talk to different people we would learn what people think. By getting to know someone we can understand what makes us different, but more importantly, what makes us alike.

It was Alicia’s response, simple and to the point, that seemed, in many ways, to sum up what the rest of my “Dirty Dozen” were trying to articulate.

ALICIA: There are many simple ways to start to overcome hatred and prejudice. Parents shouldn’t teach their children to hate, but to love and respect those around us. We should teach each other that it’s not okay to judge or discriminate against somebody just because they are “different” than us.
Sometimes things that are said as a joke end up hurting someone. “Jokes” quickly turn into words full of hatred. And we as a society should not teach our children to how to make fun of others. We need to explain how hurtful these words can be before they are said. We need to make them aware of what can happen if this kind of behavior continues to grow and get worse. If we do, pretty soon we’ll discover that inside we are all the same: with a lot of love to give, full of excitement and energy. Having a different shade of skin should be no more important than height or weight. We’re friends with people who are taller, shorter, fatter, and skinnier than we are, so why is skin color, or religion, or where they’re from any different? We can do this. All we have to do is realize that we can and then just do it.

By the conclusion of our nine-week unit of instruction, discussion, and reflection, twenty-four students – 80% of the class – responded in a post-unit survey (see Appendix A) that they now viewed racism as more than just a skin-color issue. Of these, fifteen stated that racism “is when you think your group is superior to any other,” while another nine responded that racism is “the hatred of an entire group of people because of race, religion, ethnicity, sex (male/female), or sexual orientation.” The remaining six students still viewed, at least based on their responses, that racism is purely an issue of skin color.

I would be remiss if I did not share a very insightful comment that was written by Tiffany, a member of the class although not one of the “Dirty Dozen.” After reading her comments, I decided to make her an honorary member:
“I went home last night and looked in the mirror. I mean, I really looked in the mirror. What I saw was someone I recognize, someone I’ve seen every day of my life, the person I’ve seen change from when I was a child growing up until now. I see the person that I know is me.

Looking at myself in the mirror, I don’t think there is anything I could tell myself that would make me a better, more caring human being, because telling my outer self that isn’t going to make me a better or more caring person, because what makes me a better or more caring person is what’s inside of me, not what’s on the outside. I feel that the actions I take in my life, my attitudes towards life, people, and myself are what are going to make me a better and more caring human being.

And what I’ve learned over the past nine weeks is that it’s what on the inside of all of us that matters. What’s inside is the real gift – the outside is just the wrappings.”

**Summary**

As the decades pass us by, the Holocaust, its victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and rescuers fade into our collective memory. For too many of us, it is rapidly becoming not much more than a passage in a history text that we skim over while trying to cram for a test on World War II. The day is rapidly approaching when the voices of witness, even the eloquent voice of Elie Wiesel, will be silenced, or in Kayla’s words, “We are the last generation that will have the survivors to tell us their stories.” Their narratives, written and on film, will be all that remains of the victims of what many consider to be the greatest hate crime ever perpetrated.
It has been posited by scholars and educators alike that a study of the Holocaust may actually help students and others address the issues of racism, such as fairness, prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, and intolerance, not only in their historical context but as they apply to our present and future society (Totten, 1994a). While a study of the Holocaust and its literature, particularly the witness narratives, will not in and of itself counteract all of life’s unfavorable pressures, it can, as Louise Rosenblatt stated “…be a means for helping the student develop conscious resistance to those influences” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 88).

As the data show, at the conclusion of our nine-week study of the Holocaust there had been attitudinal changes among my thirty students. As the initial pre-unit survey indicates, fifteen students (50%) defined “racism” solely in terms of skin pigmentation; none of the students in this group perceived racism as having anything to do with the notion of racial superiority. Nine weeks later, twenty-four students (80%) now stated that they saw racism as more than a “race” issue, and 62.5% of them now identified racism with the belief in racial superiority. Even within this small of a group, this represents a major shift in their thinking.

Most interesting of all however, was that the development of these new ideas, the construction of new schema quite often happened instantaneously and quite unexpectedly. Middle school students can be quite expressive at times, and as my field notebook reveals, my students were no different. Facial expressions, a sharp intake of breath, sudden posture changes, were all indications that something had caught their attention, shifting and redefining their thinking. Adolescents have very strong opinions about many things, and when challenged, will very often defend those opinions
vociferously. What makes teaching this age group so interesting and taxing at the same time is that they are also equally receptive to new ideas, new interpretations of old ideas, and quite willing to debate the issue. It was these spirited discussions, as they began to take ownership of new perceptions and newer concepts that were most rewarding.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout the year, we have focused our studies in Reading/Language Arts on how literature can help us in developing our own sense of ethics. Stories, fictional and non-fictional, have given us the opportunity to examine the best and worst of human behavior in a variety of situations and to learn from these stories.

Of all the lessons we studied and discussed during the past year, the lesson about the Holocaust had the most influence on me. It was the only lesson that I had not known much about compared to the other lessons. The Holocaust consisted of long events of suffering and pain, something I couldn’t relate to, something a lot of people in this modern world could not relate to. It was hard to believe that one’s hatred for a group of people could change so many lives for the worst. That these innocent people, Jews, gypsies, gays, anyone who the Nazis didn’t want, were deprived of their rights and treated like animals, less than animals, because of who they were. That they were killed either by being gassed, starved, or shot, without their killers seeing anything wrong with it. It showed me how heartless humans could be and I hope that nothing of the sort ever happens again.
I think I’ll be able to apply this lesson in my own life to make our society a better place to live by being a role model. Being a role model would influence other people, especially the younger generation, to stop hatred and racism in our country and in our world. This would involve getting together with other groups or cultures and helping people treat each other as equals. By setting good examples, I would be helping people around me to stop racism and hatred.

Finally, the Holocaust is the only lesson that has helped me develop my own sense of personal ethics and given me the opportunity to examine the best and worst humanity has to offer. It has also broadened my knowledge about what the event we call the Holocaust was about, and taught me what stereotyping, prejudice, and racism can lead to. Above all, it has taught me that we must never forget.

Alyssa’s response journal, final entry

I set out to investigate how or if an extended study of the Holocaust, utilizing the first-person witness narratives, would impact how middle school students learned about the Holocaust and viewed ethical issues, in particular, issues of prejudice and racism. To accomplish this task, I had definite research ideas supported by solid pedagogical methods and objectives. For ease of entry and exit, I chose as my research site the middle school where I had been teaching for the past six years. Of my three Reading/Language Arts sections, I selected the one that afforded me the convenience of having them at the end of the day. From this whole-class group, I then asked for volunteers to participate in the more in-depth portion of the study, and those twelve students then became the focus group.
As an insider, participant-observer, and teacher-researcher, I had been with these students since the beginning of the school year, thus we were very familiar with one another; they were well aware of my expectations in the classroom, and I was very familiar with their capabilities and limitations so there were few, if any surprises. Furthermore, over the previous semester I had already gained the confidence and trust not only of the students, but of their parents as well, which greatly facilitated the signing of consent waivers. Over the course of the next several months, I would meet with the “Dirty Dozen” for three “book-talk” discussions, which were taped and transcribed, where we exchanged ideas and opinions about the books they had read, either collectively (We Were Witness: Five Diaries of Teenagers Who Died During the Holocaust and Night) or individually (each student self-selected two other witness narratives). In addition, all students completed a pre-and-post-unit survey, and ten of the focus group completed a “Self and Morality” survey six months after the conclusion of the actual period of instruction.

In this chapter, I will provide a general synopsis of the study, along with a discussion of each of the three modified research questions and the conclusions thereof. Additionally, I will discuss the implications of the study, its limitations, and offer suggestions for future research.

Synopsis

Before any study that attempts to draw conclusions based on how students respond to a particular text, genre, or literary form, there must first and foremost be engagement of the student with the text. In order to connect the word with the world
(Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995), it was critical that my students make the connection from the reality of their 21st Century reality to the world described by a child of the Holocaust, not an easy transition. Yet as their responses indicate, typified by Alyssa’s response of “This reminds me of me. I could be this girl,” this difficult transition was made. This is due in no small part to the amount of historical background they were given as part of our classroom instruction and activities prior to beginning their readings.

It was not by coincidence that the texts I chose for both the whole-class and individual readings were written by a victim/survivor/author who was a teenager during the Holocaust. As a result, in my students’ minds, they did not see narrators as they are now, in their seventies (or in the case of We Are Witnesses, dead for nearly sixty years) for in their minds, they were reading a book written by someone who is/was their chronological peer. While it would be nearly impossible for my students to relate to the life experiences described in these narratives, the age of the narrators created a connection that piqued their interest while stimulating and solidifying engagement.

These personal connections were clearly evident in many of their responses, both written and oral. The majority of their journal writing in response to the two common texts, We Were Witnesses and Night, were done in class; therefore, I feel very confident that there was little opportunity for “collaboration,” yet there are many marked similarities in their responses. During our round-table book talks, they often fed off one another, using each other’s comments as springboards for more in-depth discussion as well as legitimate tangents. Each brought their own ideas, preconceptions, and personalities to the table, and in true middle school fashion, they held nothing back and
pulled no punches. A great deal of the credit for this happening goes to the relationships they established over the previous semester and knowing their role in the class dynamics.

Responses to the witness narratives became the medium for investigating moral development and the students’ conceptions of personal ethics. Their responses very often became an outlet for their expressions of anger, disbelief, horror, sympathy, and empathy; implicitly and quite often explicitly they gave voice to their innermost feelings. As Gilligan (1982) stated, without voice there is no possibility for resistance, for creativity, or for change, and as Rae so aptly put it, “What’s the point in even reading about it if we’re not even going to try to change things?”

Finally, the responses to the witness narratives give a clear indication of the students’ commitment to social action in the form of making a difference in the on-going battle against prejudice and racism. For many of my students, who were perhaps a bit jaded with regard to issues of social justice, our study of the Holocaust came as a wake-up call. They discovered, albeit vicariously, what can happen when citizens become complacent, when a people cease to be vigilant about the doings and machinations of their elected leaders. The issue of a President lying about sex in the Oval Office pales in comparison to Mein Kampf, the Nuremberg Laws, or the Wannsee Protocol, all which document the horrific event sanitized and euphemized as the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” Relating what to them is “distant” past to more current events, they saw the parallels between the “Final Solution” in Nazi-occupied Europe and the “ethnic cleansing” of Muslims in the Balkans, the genocide in Rwanda, and the mass murder of the Kurds in Iraq. They were also able to take a stand, at least on paper, for what they believe unjust in our own society.

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Discussion of the Research Questions

Herein, then, is a discussion of the relationship between questions and data, and how the data support the theoretical pedagogy that drove the questions.

How do the students’ responses to the witness narratives reflect engagement through an aesthetic stance?

The data gathered from the focus group during the nine weeks of our literature-based study of the Holocaust indicate that the “Aha!” response that typifies aesthetic engagement (Bogdan, 1992, p. 178) occurred early and often. The reader has to decode the images, concepts, or assertions created by the symbols on the page. Simultaneously, the reader must pay attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that are aroused by the words created by these symbols. This is the “listening to self” and “living through” the text that Rosenblatt (1978, pp. 24-25) refers to as aesthetic reading, and it is this aesthetic reading that is the crucial basis from which affective learning begins.

When we examine the transcribed round-robin conversations of the focus group discussions, we see clear evidence of learning that evolves from social interactions and collaborations (Vygotsky, 1978). Bakhtin argued that dialogue (“utterances”) involves two levels of communication, because the internal, wherein a person constructs an intrapersonal dialogue, must take into account the potential for an external social context. Articulating responses, according to Bakhtin, is central to existence, for it is through the articulation of response that we achieve understanding (Morson and Emerson, 1990). This articulation is evident in all manner of response. Encouraging multiple perspectives and de-emphasizing the standard “only one right answer” mentality that so many students
have been conditioned to expect opens doors for the kind of new and exciting dialogues that Purves, Rogers, and Soter (1990) encourage.

Tottten (1994a, 1994b, 1996), Drew (1995), Langer (1995a), Totten and Feinberg (1995), Parsons and Totten (1994), Short (1997), and many others have long argued that a study of the Holocaust that is steeped in literature allows for a much deeper, more personal exploration, which in turn provides a more meaningful learning experience. Great care was given to the literature selection to assure its age-appropriateness; the data, namely intertextual responses made by the students, clearly supports the postulation that an engaging encounter with the witness narratives, when supported by proper historical grounding, does in fact enhance a student’s learning of the Holocaust, both as a historical and a human event.

As this study bears out, the genre of witness narratives is truly literature for transformative change. In many of our university-level teacher preparation classes in children’s and young adult literature, nonfiction is often overlooked as a literary genre that can generate profound engagement in young readers. Similarly, we as educators frequently steer away from confrontational or controversial literature; literature that does not have a “happily ever after” ending. This study indicates that today’s students readily embrace literature that mirrors reality; they know, perhaps all too well, that life is not fair, and are engaged in literature that portrays this reality. Nonfiction has a viable place in the English Language Arts classroom curriculum that goes beyond being viewed simply and primarily as “resource material” for reports, projects, and term papers.
How do the students’ literary responses demonstrate empathy and personal ethics, based on the theories of Kohlberg, Gilligan, and others?

When we examine the moral development theories of Piaget (1932), Kohlberg (1981, 1984), and Gilligan (1982), we find all three postulating very definite theories as to moral development being achieved through a series of incremental stages. When the responses of the “Dirty Dozen” are measured against Kohlberg’s stages, it is not surprising to discover that the responses are characterized by an awareness that it is society that makes the rules. Simultaneously, there is also an understanding that socially agreed-upon conventions are not hard-and fast; they can and should be changed according to the needs of the society. In Piagetian terms, the “Dirty Dozen’s” responses give evidence that they are functioning at a stage of autonomous morality.

In terms of Kohlberg’s theories of moral development, the issue is not easy to discern. Certainly, the responses are compatible with Stage Four, where moral judgments are based on the child’s understanding of the social order, and of law, justice, and duty. Many of Martin and Walt’s responses for example, and in many ways, those of Alex and Rae, appear to be firmly based in this justice perspective.

But the issue of Kohlbergian stages is not that clearly delineated, for there are many responses; those of Alyssa and Kayla for example, appear to be approaching Stage Five. This stage, which according to Kohlberg is not reached until at least age twenty, if ever, very closely aligns with the latter stages of Piaget’s autonomous morality in that the individual understands that values and laws are relative, and that standards that apply to one person or situation may not apply to another even under similar circumstances. Additionally at this stage, some values, such as liberty, are perceived to be more...
important than laws or rules. The disequilibria created by the question of complicity on the part of survivors in accounts such as Filip Mueller’s and Abraham Bomba’s indicates that it was more important to survive to bear witness than to die with one’s principles intact. Elie Wiesel’s descriptions of the role reversals that occurred between fathers and sons, and of the ethics of taking from the dead what one needed to survive also indicates that many of my students, if these responses are a true indication, are well ahead of the moral development “curve” with regard to where they appear to be on Kohlberg’s continuum.

Unlike the homogeneity of participants that was the basis for criticism leveled against Kohlberg over the years, the “Dirty Dozen” in many ways represent a microcosm of the school community. As previously discussed, the eight female and four male students who volunteered to be the focus group closely mirrored the overall composition of the whole-class group, while reflecting the overall ethnic dynamics of the school population.

There are several factors that must be considered when evaluating the apparent contradictions to Kohlberg’s theories produced by this study. First of all, one must consider the heterogeneous composition of the students in this study. Due to the classroom context, the students were of a varied racial, cultural, gender, and socio-economic mix. Secondly, the age of the participants was most certainly was a factor when one compares this group of 13-to-14 year-olds to Kohlberg’s older participants. Because of their relatively young age, it can be argued that the students who comprised the focus group for this study were not as “set in their ways” as Kohlberg’s older participants, which could possibly account for the apparent overlap between the
justice/duty and care/compassion perspectives. Lastly, American society has changed dramatically in the decades since Kohlberg first posited his stages theory, and the mores and values of our society are reflected in our children.

Given theoretical findings that emerge from studies conducted by Kohlberg and Gilligan, are there significant differences in the nature of the students’ responses that can be attributed to gender?

Issues of compassion, care, and concerns seemed to almost dominate the journals of Alyssa, Marie, Alicia, and Aneesha, and Kayla’s to a lesser extent. Far more concerned with relationships than with justice or rules, these young women’s responses are clear indications of the connection between self and others, and with the universality of the need for care and compassion (Gilligan, 1982). Overall, the female students’ responses saw the moral dilemmas of the witness narratives more in terms of the emotional impact on relationships than on simply “right and wrong.” There were many more shades of gray in their responses when compared to the “justice and duty” responses of Martin and Walt, where issues were simply black and white and matter-of-fact.

As with Kohlberg, Gilligan (1982) has been criticized over the years for using a homogeneous (all female participants) group in her initial study. Others argue that with the passage of two decades and changes in the role of women in American society, some of Gilligan’s original findings are perhaps in need of revision. Women are no longer relegated to the background; there is a definite blurring of the lines delineating gender
roles as more women enter the workforce and more men are either “stay-at-home-dads” or are absent altogether.

While the “Dirty Dozen” was a more heterogeneous group than either Kohlberg’s or Gilligan’s study participants, it was certainly a much smaller sample, which precludes any attempt at generalization based on the data. Although of the four male students only James and Walt responded to the “Self and Morality” questionnaire I mailed six months after the initial period of the study, there was still, I believe, enough of a variance in the nature of the responses to the witness narratives to indicate that further research into this particular question is warranted.

More interesting still was what appeared to be an overlap, a crossover, between the two theories of gender-based moral development. Quite a few of my female students’ responses showed flashes of a justice and duty perspective. Rae and Alex, in particular, were very vocal in their assertions as to what was right or wrong, quite often more so than any of the males, yet both were very capable of letting their emotions take center stage and view a situation from the care/compassion perspective. Similarly, all four of my male students were quite capable of discussing relationships, especially those between fathers and sons, as being of paramount importance. Felipe in particular was very emotional in his response to an excerpt from David Rabinowitz’ diary in *We Were Witnesses* in which the author relates being beaten by his father. All four were very emotional as they responded to Elie Wiesel’s relating the breakdown of father-son relationships, especially those that resulted in the death of one or both.

The data support the theory that while there are differences in the nature of response that can be attributed to gender, these differences do not appear to be as cleanly
defined or clearly delineated as originally presented by Kohlberg and Gilligan. As these responses indicate, there appear to be areas where the boundaries become blurred.

**Do student writings demonstrate an application of these theories with regard to the roles of victim, perpetrator, bystander, and rescuer, as demonstrated in the witness narrative, in their own lives?**

As previously discussed, the data that emerged was insufficient to address this particular question. Consideration must be given to these *terms* themselves. Although we had discussed these roles repeatedly before, during, and after our study of the Holocaust, it was only during this nine-week unit that the *labels* victim, perpetrator, bystander, and rescuer were actually applied to these roles. What few responses, and there were less than five, that addressed the topic were very random in nature; perhaps as direct result of my expectation that the students would spontaneously use these labels in their journal responses. Or perhaps, as stated earlier, it was the nature of the text that limited responses. All year long, my students had been reading texts that we then used to explore issues of ethics and human moral behavior, but those texts had been fictional accounts, the product of a writer’s imagination. Perhaps the fact that what they were now reading was non-fictional precluded a response to the question, yielding yet more implications for future research. The study did give strong evidence however of how effective nonfiction can be as part of the English Language Arts curriculum. Often relegated to the realm of “reference material” for term papers and reports, this study indicates that nonfiction can be a powerful agent for affective, transformative change.
Do student responses, written or other, demonstrate how (or if) they can apply the lessons of the Holocaust to reduce racism within their society?

It is estimated that there are literally thousands of sites on the World Wide Web devoted to hate propaganda and hate mongering. Targeted by these sites are Jews, blacks, gays, Latinos, and other minorities that are portrayed as inferior, and in many cases, less than human. Caricatures are often used to depict exaggerated racial stereotyping at its very worst, and targeted groups are portrayed as a vile enemy whose only mission is to destroy “our way of life,” whatever that may be. Most often, these hate sites push the issue right to the edge – advocating, but not coming right out and saying – that these groups need to be eliminated from our society if “our way of life” is to survive.

Even if the web surfer is just a casual observer, hate propaganda can still have the effect of inflicting collateral damage: it can create doubt, especially in the mind of the unsophisticated adolescent who suffers under the misconception that “if it’s on the Web, it must be true;” it can instill fear, especially if the target group is one the surfer has little real knowledge of; and it can certainly create obstacles to the promotion of understanding. Hate propaganda has divided human society for hundreds of years, but today, it comes into our homes from cyberspace, very often without even the most responsible of parents being aware that it is there. Hitler and the Nazis did not invent anti-Semitism. The Holocaust did not begin with the Einstatzgruppen or the gas chambers – it began with words, words that instilled mistrust, fear, and hatred, and ultimately led a people to genocide. Likewise, racism and hatred did not begin with the Ku Klux Klan nor the Aryan Nations; racism and hatred are, in the words Christopher Browning (1993), the work of “ordinary men.”
As their responses indicate, my students were well aware of the prejudice and racism around them. But, as their responses also indicated, they were relatively unaware of the many manifestations that racism can exhibit: for the majority of my students, racism meant one thing – race. While most, if not all of them, would have quickly equated the murder of James Byrd in Jasper, Texas with racism, few, if any, would have done so with the murder of Matthew Sheppard in Laramie, Wyoming. Getting my students to comprehend the Nazi notion of a “Jewish race,” in light of their very American way of thinking, was at times an uphill struggle: we don’t see Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, or any other religious group as a “race,” so why should anyone else? It took two days of reading, discussing, dissecting, and comparing the Nuremberg Laws to the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and our own local city ordinances that to finally achieve the “Aha!” reaction.

“I don’t have any prejudices.” It’s a statement I hear from my students every year as I challenge them to begin to explore their inner selves. As expected, I heard it from this year’s students, with the same tone of sincerity as the classes before them, yet Cameron had made it perfectly clear that he did not want to share his lunchroom table with other black students because they were Somali. Jennifer admitted that she avoided certain students because she did not want her friends to think that she “was like those people.” The concept of “othering,” the very foundation for stereotyping, discrimination, prejudice, and ultimately racism, had escaped most of my students’ thought processes in terms of themselves. “Other people” were prejudiced and racist, not them, they insisted.

Most encouraging of all however, was the belief that having learned about the Holocaust as a historical event, and having experienced the human side of the story
through an encounter with the witness narratives, many of these same students who originally thought of racism only in terms of skin color were now actively talking about issues of social action: “We MUST do something or it’s not going to get any better!” Rae wrote in her journal. Alyssa echoed these thoughts when she wrote, “I don’t want to have to explain to my kids why the same old hatreds and prejudices are still around.” Felipe, although I’m sure he thought he was being humorous, was actually quite profound when he blurted out in class: “Hey, it’s like Spike Lee (the film director) said: ‘Just do the right thing’. That’s what it’s all about. It simple!”

Conclusions

At the beginning of each nine-week grading period, my students and I embark on a journey. Like the mariners of old, I warn my students that we are going to be sailing to the far reaches of their educational horizon, and that indeed, “there be monsters here.” Unless they are willing to venture far from shore, away from the relative safety of the shallows, and allow themselves to challenge and be challenged by the mysteries of the deep, they will never experience the true joy that literature can bring. I tell them right from the start that I am not interested in making them comfortable – that’s what television is for. I’m also not interested in spending hours reading “book reports” in which they rehash and retell the stories that they’ve read, for such is not the life of a deep-water sailor.

Each nine weeks then, we set sail in search of new, unexplored territories: we examine stories that confront the personal and societal ethics of the characters, then hold our own ethical codes up to the same scrutiny. We laugh with characters that according
to my students “do really dumb things,” then gasp in shocked disbelief when 17-year-old Andy Jackson commits suicide. We marvel at Charlie Gordon’s transformation from retardate to genius; we cry when his newfound intelligence disappears, and we accuse the doctors who used him as a guinea pig of playing God. We recoil at the loss of freedom in the futuristic, utopian community where Jonas lives, and ponder the meaning of the warning to our own society. We confront the ovens of Auschwitz, experience the Vietnam War through the eyes of four young “grunts,” and come away determined to make our world a better place for all humanity.

The data support that an encounter with the witness narratives of Holocaust literature, particularly one in which engagement is real and prolonged, does indeed have a positive, affective influence in the student’s learning of this very painful history. The historical grounding provided at the outset of the lesson enhances its effectiveness, as so many scholars and educators (Brabham, 1997; Totten, 1994a; Parsons and Totten, 1993; Kessler, 1991; and Landau, 1994, to name but a few) have recommended over the years.

The developmental alignment of this group of students, when measured against the stages of moral development theory, was a natural outcome of the data. Regardless of gender, the students who participated in this survey were all within expectations on the developmental continuum in terms of both cognitive (Piaget) and moral (Kohlberg) development. Interestingly enough, the data seem to support that, for this group at least, while there were some very clear distinctions in the nature of response between male and female students, as posited by Gilligan, there also appeared to be a degree of overlap, where responses by female students indicated a duty and justice perspective, as per
Kohlberg, while some of the male students’ responses more closely aligned with Gilligan’s care/compassion model of moral development.

There also appears to be an affective change in the students’ perceptions of issues or racism and prejudice, as well as a heightened awareness of the call to social action if this evil is to be eradicated from our society. The research clearly shows, through the students’ response writings, that there has indeed been a raising of their social consciousness as a result of this unit of instruction. Their responses indicate an awareness of the evils of racism and prejudice, an understanding of the many manifestations that racism and prejudice can present, as well as a recognition of the need for opening new avenues of dialogue within their own peer group to counter the effects of hate propaganda and hate mongering, and a willingness to do so.

Limitations

Every qualitative study has its limitations, and this study was no different. First and foremost by its very nature, the students who participated in this study were limited in their choice of literary genre. As was stated earlier, Holocaust literature encompasses the entire spectrum of literary genre: this study, because of its focus on the first-person witness narratives, automatically excluded plays, poetry, and fictionalized accounts of the Holocaust, many of which are written by survivors and based on true events. As a result, texts such as Uri Orlev’s *The Island on Bird Street* (Houghton-Miflin, 1984), based on his survival as a child in the rubble of the Warsaw Ghetto, Hana Volvakova’s *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* (Schoken, 1993), a collection of the art and poetry of the children of Terezin concentration camp, or Peter Weiss’ play *The Investigation* (McMillian, 1966),
based on the 1963-64 Auschwitz Trials, were not available to them as part of their reading assignment. Further, the majority of the data collected was in response to the only two texts all twelve participants shared in common: Night and We Were Witnesses. While I have no way of prognosticating whether their responses would have been substantially different, in past years and subsequent years when my students have had open access to all forms of Holocaust literature, the substantive and affective nature of the responses has been very similar.

Secondly, I readily admit that I am, first and foremost, a teacher of literature. I am not now, nor have I ever been nor claimed to be, a trained developmental psychologist. Therefore, my interpretation of my students’ responses in terms of moral development theory are not as thorough as those that would have been made by a specialist in the area of the developmental psychology of children. These conclusions therefore, are based on a very limited and very literal interpretation of Kohlberg and Gilligan as pertains to the responses of this particular group of students, and no wide-scale generalization is intended nor implied.

Thirdly, the size of the group is far too narrow to allow for any generalizations. The results presented herein are based on one class of thirty students, in one of twenty-five middle schools that was assigned to me for the course of one school year out of a total district population of nearly 66,000 students. As such, it truly was a “closed casting call,” since no students from outside the class were solicited. Even within the scope of the school itself, this group represents approximately 10% of the total 8th grade population that year. The “Dirty Dozen,” on whose responses the findings are based, represents an even smaller sample.
Fourth, the constraints placed on the study by the students’ personal schedules made more in-depth follow-up, such as the after-school round-robin book talks, nearly impossible. In an ideal world, there would have been ample time for extended sessions, both individual and whole group, as well as potential discussions involving the entire class.

Lastly, there was the over-all time constraint. I envy my colleagues at the high school and university level who can devote an entire semester to a study of the Holocaust. Nine weeks is not enough time to devote to the study of this history, much less to do justice to its rich, evocative literature. All too often, bells signaling the end of the period interrupted our best discussions. By the time we reunited the next day, the moment had passed us by and many thoughts and ideas were often lost.

**Implications for Future Research**

There are many implications for future research associated with this study, implications not only for pertaining to issues of pedagogy and methodology for delivering the Holocaust lesson to future generations, but in the area of teacher preparation. Several of the limitations listed above could, in some way, be an invitation for further research.

A study that incorporates multiple genres of Holocaust literature may or may not yield similar results as one that limits students to just one particular genre. The availability of reality-based historical fiction, much of it written by or in collaboration with survivors, provides a rich medium for exploring student responses with regard to affective learning. Because of the fictional nature of the characters in these stories, they
would never age, unlike the real-life survivors. For the young adult reader, therefore, the protagonist would always be their chronological peer. Well-written Holocaust fiction is becoming more readily available, as evidenced by the work of writers such as Lois Lowry, Jane Yolen, Carol Mataas, and many others. Another untapped source, as far as this particular study is concern, is the area of Holocaust picture books. David Adler has produced several excellent books in this genre, and Roberto Inocenti’s *Rose Blanche* is considered a classic. Among Elie Wiesel’s latest contributions is a picture book titled *After the Darkness: Reflections on the Holocaust*, which incorporates photographs from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s vast collection. As mention previously however, any curricular unit dealing with Holocaust literature must first be preceded by an in-depth presentation of the historical background in order to provide cognitive grounding for the students.

A second consideration might entail a joint study conducted by literature teachers, Holocaust educations, and someone well versed in the developmental psychology of children, particularly in the area of moral development. Perhaps with a larger sample or a more extended, perhaps even a longitudinal, study, more definitive conclusions may be arrived at with regard to the questions of affective change in terms of moral decision-making. It would be interesting to see, for example, if the students’ attitudes toward racism, which they so clearly defined at the conclusion of this nine-week unit of study, remain steadfast as they undergo the developmental changes that teenagers go through in high school.

Yet another area for future study, as stated earlier, would be to explore how students perceive the roles of victim, perpetrator, bystander, and rescuer in other forms of
literature, particularly in non-fiction. Perhaps in a literary form that is not as daunting as
the witness narratives, this study would be feasible. The world of young adult literature
contains many examples of what Reid and Stringer (1997) called “problem novels,” those
that do not have “happily-ever-after” endings; a study based on student responses to these
novels might produce better findings for this question.

The Holocaust is not any easy subject to teach, and an educator who plans to take
his or her students on this journey into the darkest corner of the human heart must be well
equipped for the voyage. This requires intense preparation, not only to know the
material, but equally important, in the knowing how to deliver the message. Unfortunately, graduate-level teacher preparation courses in the area of Holocaust
education are often hard to find. Quite often seminars presented by local Holocaust
education groups, and certainly the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s
education departments do an excellent job of filling the gaps, but this is only the
beginning. The issue of age appropriateness is critical, as Totten and others have so
frequently stated. Lastly, the research indicates that the message of the Holocaust is most
often best taught through literature. The approach that I use and advocate is one that
combines the historical and human stories, thus allowing the students to truly personalize
the learning experience. A teacher undertaking this approach must be very well versed
not only in the history of the Holocaust, but in its literature as well, and must be able to
meld the two disciplines into a seamless presentation. There are many very good
resources available in the area of curriculum development and lesson planning, and many
of the state-mandated Holocaust curricula are readily available.
In an urban system, where many of the children do not have easy access to the resources of a public library, the school librarians and media specialists become an invaluable resource for the Holocaust educator. Most school librarians are absolute masters of the art of stretching budget dollars, and are thus able to provide sources of Holocaust literature for students. In many cases, they can also be excellent sounding-boards with regard to issues of age appropriateness for both text and video choices.

Finally, any educator undertaking the daunting task of teaching the Holocaust, at any grade level, must be dedicated to the concept of bearing witness. As Elie Wiesel so eloquently stated:

“…Silence has never been an answer, the survivors chose to teach; and what is their writing, their testimony, if not teaching? To tell the tale and to bear witness”  (Wiesel, 1978, p. 267).

Closing

Another year has come and gone, and another group of eager young minds have passed through the door of my classroom. Once again through literature, they have experienced the best and worst that humanity has to offer. I can only hope that they will learn to emulate the former and defend against the latter.

Years ago, when I was a student teacher, I had the pleasure to learn from one of the best. My mentoring teacher, Geri Granger (to this day my wife refers to her as “my other wife” for the amount of time she and I spent together), gave me a very sound piece of advice: As a teacher, strive to do no harm. There are those who would argue that “exposing” middle school students to the horrors of the Holocaust is potentially harmful;
of them I ask, how much “harm” am I doing if I allow my students to go through life looking at the world through the proverbial rose-colored glasses?

The “Dirty Dozen” will be graduating from high school soon. I have now had several of their younger siblings in my class, yet many of them still come to visit their poor, old, middle school literature teacher from time to time, to chat and bring me up to date with what is going on in their lives. But they still want to talk about our time together, of what they learned and shared, and for me, that’s truly what being an educator is all about. I did no harm; I’ve made a positive impression on the heart, mind, and conscience of the future, and in one small sense, have touch immortality.

To my “Dirty Dozen,” wherever your journeys may take you, remember the words of Elie Wiesel that you saw every day in our classroom:

For the dead, and the living, we must bear witness.
APPENDIX A

PRE-STUDY/POST-STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questionnaire was designed to explore the students’ prior knowledge of the Holocaust as a historical event. It is given to every single student as an in-class assignment the very first day and at the end of the nine-week unit.

Read each statement carefully. Circle “A” if you agree with the statement, or “D” if you disagree. In the space provided, explain WHY you agree or disagree. Please answer as honestly as possible – there are no “right” or “wrong” answers.

A   D   There are some groups of people who should not be allowed to live in certain neighborhoods or hold certain jobs.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

A   D   “Might makes right.”

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

A   D   A government’s primary responsibility is to protect the rights of its citizens.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
A D People who are different should keep to themselves.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

A D People should mind their own business and not get involved in the affairs of others.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

A D The opposite of love is not hate: the opposite of love is indifference.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What is meant by the following terms:

Stereotype:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Prejudice:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Genocide:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Discrimination:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Oppression:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Ghetto:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Racism:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What does the term “Holocaust” mean to you?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Who was Adolf Hitler?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B

POST-STUDY SURVEY*

The following survey was sent to the twelve students who comprised the focus group five months after the classroom unit of instruction was concluded.

Please respond to the following questions and/or statements in as much detail as possible. You are assured of maximum confidentiality; only the pseudonyms you selected will be used in any published form of these responses. Please submit your final responses in double spaced typed format.

1. If you had to say what “morality” means to you, how would you sum it up? What is your personal definition of morality?

2. What does it mean to say that something is morally “right” or “wrong”?

3. Why be “moral”? Is being moral really all that important? Why or why not? Explain your responses.

4. It is important to respect other people? Why/why not? Explain in as much detail as possible.

5. What does the term self-respect mean to you? Is it important to you? Why/why not?

6. Are self-respect and respect for others related? How? If not, why not?

7. Do concepts of respect have anything to do with moral behavior? What, if any, connection is there between self-respect, respect for others, and moral behavior?

8. In what way(s) did your study of the Holocaust and your engagement with the witness narratives impact your personal perception of morality?

* Adapted from Carol Gilligan’s In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.)
In 1998, I was selected as one of 45 middle and high school teachers from across the country to participate in the three-and-one-half week seminar “The Holocaust and Jewish Resistance” sponsored by the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. The photographs, slides, and home video that I took during that trip afford me a marvelous opportunity to show my students first-hand evidence of the Holocaust. We usually will spend a total of three forty-two minute class periods viewing the slides and video. Many of the photographs were copied and made into presentation posters. It amazes me how many times I here the question, “Mr. H, is that YOU?”

**Fig. C.1  Treblinka Death Camp**

Monument marking the site of the gas chambers, Treblinka Death Camp

**Fig. C.2  Ghetto Uprising Memorial**

At the Ghetto Uprising Memorial
Warsaw Poland, July, 1998
Much of our reading and discussion centers around the death camp at Auschwitz. The photographs below were taken during my visit to Auschwitz in July of 1998.

**Fig C.3** *Auschwitz-Birkenau*  
Inside the main gate at the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center

**Fig C.4** *Main Gate, Auschwitz I*  
“Arbeit Macht Frei” – Works Makes You Free  
The entrance to the main camp, Auschwitz
Fig C.5  Classroom Bulletin Board

The bulletin board in my classroom reflects the books we are reading. During our Holocaust unit, the board features color dust jackets of many of the books my students will be reading. The names of the six death camps, Chelmno, Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek, and Auschwitz, each showing the number of victims murdered at each camp, are also featured, as are quotes from survivor/authors. The words, “Voices of Witness, Messages of Hope” reflect the theme of our unit: that through the voices of the victims and survivors, my students will bear witness and resolve to never permit something like to happen again.
In October of 2001, I had the pleasure of meeting author, educator, and Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel at Ashland University, Ashland, Ohio. After reading *Night*, my students write letters to Professor Wiesel in which they share with him their reflections on his memoir, as well as what they have learned. He never fails to answer their letters; framed and matted copies of his letters to my students adorn one wall of my classroom.

*Fig C.6  With author Elie Wiesel*
THE WALL OF REMEMBRANCE

One of my favorite places at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is the wall opposite the classroom space on the lower level. Here, 3,000 ceramic tiles, painted by elementary and middle school children from all across America express, though art, what these children have learned. Since ceramic tiles were not a practical option. I decided to use eight-inch paper squares, which are then glued onto two-foot wide strips of blue bulletin-board paper and laminated. The panels are then joined to create a mural that is displayed in the school lobby during Yom Ha’Shoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day). All of the previous murals are on permanent display in the school’s central lobby.

The artworks below were created by my “Dirty Dozen,” and are part of the 2001 mural. In order to maintain anonymity protocols, the students’ names have been covered.

Fig C.7 Alyssa
ALL UP IN SMOKE!

Lives
Drems
Heaars
Hope
Bodics
Twist,
Turn,
and
Bowl
As asbes are blown in
Many people who cuyl
Now we have to say
our lives
Aneesha

Fig C.8  James

Fig C.9  Aneesha
Fig C.10  Alicia

Fig C.11  Kayla
Don’t forget the children of the Holocaust

We need to bear witness

Fig C.14  Shakira

Fig C.15  Marie
Fig. C.16 Felipe

Fig. C.17 Martin

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Walt, my student of few words, summed up very nicely two of the major points that I had been trying to get across to my students throughout nine weeks of Holocaust study. His “tile” for our Wall of Remembrance incorporated a yellow Magen David (Star of David) with the number 6 in the center, and two quotations that my students had seen displayed on my classroom walls all year long: a quotation from George Santayana, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,” and the other from Elie Wiesel, “For the dead, and the living, we must bear witness.”

![Fig. C.18 Walt](attachment:image.png)
The Wall of Remembrance as it appeared in 1999. Several more mural panels have been created since this photograph was taken, but sunlight from the windows facing the murals is bleaching out the color of the students’ memory tiles. We are trying to find a way to protect the students’ artwork before adding any more panels to the display.
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**Holocaust Literature Sources**


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**Young Adult Literature Sources**


Annotated Videography of Films Used in the Classroom

Two survivors of the Auschwitz death camp return to the camp with family members to document their experiences.

*Children Remember the Holocaust.* (1996). Chicago, IL: SVE and Churchill Media. (c/b&w, 0:45).
Narrated by Keanu Reeves, this documentary uses personal photos and archival film footage to give a visual history, while reading from diaries, letters, and memoirs remind the viewer of the 1.8 million Jewish children murdered by the Nazis.

Based on Robert Rashke’s book by the same title, the film recreates the uprising and escape that destroyed the death camp in October of 1943.

Kitty Hart Felix survived nearly three years in Auschwitz-Bierkenau, as a slave laborer and later as a member of the “sorting kommando” in the infamous “Canada” barracks. She returns to the camp with her grown son to relive her experiences.

This award-winning film, narrated by Ed Asner, uses archival footage and the testimony of three survivors and an American liberator to personalize the Holocaust.

Winner of the 1995 Academy Award for Best Documentary, Gerda Weissmann Klein recounts her survival through a series of slave labor camps until her rescue by American soldiers.

*Preserving the Past To Ensure the Future.* (1989). Yad Vashem: Jerusalem, Israel. (c/b&w, 0:15).
Using Yad Vashem and its exhibits as a setting, this film is an excellent introduction to the roots of the Holocaust, and of the need to preserve memory.
Claude Lanzman’s ward-winning documentary includes interviews with survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders, many filmed at the location – camps, railway stations, villages, and towns – where the events of the Holocaust took place.

Produced for cable TV by Showtime, this film recreates the lives of two women, Gertruda Babilinska of Poland and Marie-Rose Gineste of France who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

Television and film star Robert Clary (“Hogan’s Heroes”) returns to his native France, to the Drancy transit camp, and to the Buchenwald concentration camp.

**The Holocaust: In Memory of Millions.** (1994). New York: Discovery Communications. (c/b&w, 1:30)
Using the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as its location, this film, narrated by Walter Cronkite uses archival film and interviews with survivors to provide an introduction to the Holocaust.

Produced by the Southern Poverty Law Center, this documentary chronicles America’s history of racism and intolerance from Colonial days to the present.

Using archival film and photos and a narration by survivor Vladka Meed, this film chronicles the history of the Warsaw Ghetto, showing everyday life within the Ghetto, up through the Uprising of April, 1943.

Written, produced, directed, and narrated by survivor Pierre Sauvage, this film documents the story of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, a small Huguenot village in France and how its people hid and cared for 5,000 Jews, many of them children.