A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF INTERMEDIATE GRADE STUDENTS’ EXTENDED TRANSACTION WITH THE PICTUREBOOKS OF AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR PATRICIA POLACCO

DISSEPTION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

Picturebooks have traditionally been part of the literary life of young children. However, picturebooks today are not only appropriate for older students, but many are expressly written for that audience. The purpose of this study was to investigate the value of a small group of intermediate grade students’ extended transactions with several diverse picturebooks by author/illustrator Patricia Polacco. In this study, I looked at the types of responses the students made in their efforts to make meaning of the books, how they used the illustrations to further this process, how extended time with one author/illustrator’s work deepened this development, how they employed their own lives in the task, and how the voice of the author/illustrator assisted in my understanding of the students transactions. This study has potential significance in adding to the body of research on reader response, picturebook use with older students, small group literature discussions, and extended time with the work of one author/illustrator.

Data collection took place during twelve sessions over a nine week period. I used a qualitative viewpoint and acted in various roles as a participant observer, audiotapes of read aloud sessions with full transcription, field notes of my
observations, student journal entries, and an interview with the author/illustrator.

The major findings of this study were: intermediate grade students utilize a wide variety of responses, both individually and as a group, to both story and illustrations, to construct meaning; the personal response became a crucial category in revealing how students’ backgrounds assisted them in dealing with all emerging issues of the literature, including issues of diversity; extended time with the work of one author/illustrator allowed discoveries that built on earlier understandings; the voice of the author/illustrator confirmed students’ ideas and answered their questions; though the researcher attempted to play as small a role as possible in the study, I necessarily entered into the discussions; and, the longer we met and discussed as a group, the less the researcher became part of the group and the more the author/illustrator entered into the conversation.
Dedicated to my family,
who made this,
and all of my accomplishments, possible.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Picturebooks have traditionally been part of the literary life of young children. In my experience with children, however, I’ve found that many older children, after they’ve become secure readers of chapter books, tend to return to the picturebook section of my library media center to check out old favorites and new titles alike. Furthermore, there is a fairly recent trend in picturebook publishing to produce more sophisticated books particularly for this audience. Many of these complex books “contain content of interest to an older audience as it relates to the life experiences of an older reader or as it relates to the types of topics typically studied in the upper grades. The combination of the familiar format of the picture book, when used to present new, stimulating content, serves both to capture and stretch the unique intellect of the older reader” (Imdieke, 2001, p. 626). In my experience, this is especially the case when those books are read aloud, as the format of the picturebook, though appealing to some older students, may put off others as a genre that they see themselves too mature for.

According to Baddeley and Eddershaw (1994) using picturebooks with older readers “stimulate[s] interesting language work…and [helps] them concentrate…on aspects of storywriting that they find difficult,…think more
deeply about issues raised…deal with a potentially sensitive areas,…and [give them] the capacity for empathy” (pp. 23-26). These books can serve as models and examples of these techniques and issues for student’s further exploration. Furthermore, the “brevity of text [in a picturebook] allows swift comprehension and overview that [older students] seldom achieve when they read novels” (p. 45), therefore allowing investigation of literary elements and subject matter in a shortened time span.

Author/illustrator Patricia Polacco, a prolific creator of picturebooks which engage children of various ages, aims several of her titles at this older audience. She has written and illustrated over thirty picturebooks for children, at least one every year since 1987. Maughan (1993) writes that Polacco’s “books are noted for their themes of hope, resilience and tolerance, are often steeped in cultural heritage, and feature characters of different races, religions, and ages. Polacco is not afraid of tackling challenging ideas and situations. As seen through the eyes of a child narrator, though, even complex issues take on a simple sense of wonder” (p. 3). Many of her books with her above themes and topics are very appropriate for the older child.

Others add that Patricia’s books “tell wonderful stories, and to make them even more wonderful, there are her illustrations. They overflow with color, action and the joy of living” (Elliott, 1996). Polacco (2001) herself, says that “art was my one and only claim to my humanity, to something that made my soul sing” (p. 1). Indeed, it’s what seemed to validate her life. And the value her books bring to
older readers is allowing them access to both story and pictures that combine to make a whole that’s revealing in theme and meaning for children.

Jenkins (1999) includes Polacco in her book *The Allure of Authors: Author Studies in the Elementary Classroom* because her “works are rich in themes of family, particularly grandparent-child bonds, or ethnic heritage, of social tolerance, and of magical moments. Because Polacco reveals these themes both explicitly and implicitly, she invites critical exploration” (p. 221). Explicitly, she uses story and illustrations to point out the values she wants to convey. Implicitly, she often reveals truths through her illustrations that extend the story, or adds dialogue that allows the reader to infer her themes.

Vandergrift (1996) notes the storytelling purpose of Polacco’s work when she asserts that “Polacco’s stories deserve serious attention because of their importance both as children’s literature and as the voice of a woman who truly celebrates women’s lives. Her work embodies the metaphoric power that unites human beings” (p. 260). These themes are particularly appropriate for the intermediate age child, as this age group is beginning to be able to step out of their egocentric world and look deeper into the collective human condition. This power is seen in the way she writes multiculturally “in the broadest sense of the word. Different nationalities, races, religions, and ethnic groups all appear on the pages of her books” (pp. 261-262). Polacco combines her varied ethnic and religious background with those of friends and neighbors to reveal worlds that children can both identify with and learn from. In the end, “the power of these stories is that they present these differences respectfully and joyfully…while
allowing child readers to participate, not just in the characters’ stories, but in the larger stories of what it means to be human” (p. 261) in a very touching way.

In a section entitled “Illustration as Story,” Vandergrift (1996) notes that “Polacco’s illustrations have warmth, sensitivity, humor and a kind of folksy nostalgia that perfectly complement the verbal presentations of her stories” (p. 263). She comments on the intertextuality of the characters and even the patterns of fabric in illustrations between books. She remarks that Polacco’s “brilliant colors…are more expressive than representational” (p. 264) and that “while Polacco’s books do have a lot of action, they are most definitely stories of characters and subtleties of feeling as well as of events and relationships” (p. 265). Polacco’s stories often reveal recurring characters, and her expressive style is a common thread in all her work that allows the reader to easily identify a picturebook as her work.

Polacco often “goes beyond the next resolution of a story to continue in a way that ties that story from the past to the life of a child character” (Vandergrift, 1996, p. 269). And part of that connection is her inclusion of a “pervasive morality without moralizing and teach[ing] important lessons about life in a natural and lighthearted metaphoric manner without being didactic” (Vandergrift, 1996, p. 274). These ideas share Jenkins’ (1999) thoughts on Polacco’s implicit and explicit themes. For all of these reasons, Patricia Polacco’s picturebooks seem to display a promising mix of elements, that of rich themes, multicultural characters, and artistically pleasing illustrations, that appeal to the intermediate grade child.
Because intermediate grade students often show reluctance to share ideas as readily as do young children, it was necessary to explore the use of the small discussion format for upper elementary children. The research on small group discussion of literature reveals that the key to success is the “dynamic role of interaction in the group structure. The degree to which the group members support each other as they work together correlates strongly with the degree to which the group performs effectively” (Kennedy, 1988, p. 3). As part of this interaction, Nystrand, et. al. (1993) discovered in their study that the “higher degree of [student] autonomy, the more likely group time was to contribute positively to achievement” (p. 20). An extension of this is revealed by Meek (1982) who discovered that “left to comment on their own, without the stimulus of a question, children often choose to talk about quite other aspects of a tale than those that preoccupy their elders…They create a tissue of collaborative understanding for each other in a way that no single question from an adult makes possible” (p. 289). And in a small group, particularly one consisting of classmates that are familiar with each other, talk can flow freely. Also, by the teacher attempting to stay out of the way of the conversation, talk can emerge from the ideas and interest of the child participants.

Furthermore, Eeds and Wells (1989) note that the intermediate grade students they studied formed a “group which approaches agreement about an interpretation…They recalled; they verified recall, they inferred, they supported their inferences, they read critically…Each group also became collaborative rather than competitive. Atmospheres were created which encouraged …risk-taking
behaviors…” (p. 26). As these studies point out, the small group setting for literature discussion among intermediate grade students seem to be a particularly appropriate arrangement for collective meaning making.

Also of interest in my study is the research done on the use of a single author’s or illustrator’s work with children over an extended period of time. Temple, et. al. (2002) note the advantages of such a study in writing “when a teacher engages students in an author or illustrator study, the teacher is helping them to build a store of knowledge about the ways in which particular authors (or illustrators) work. It is through such study that children discover what is distinctive about the work of particular authors and/or illustrators” (p. 513). They also can note common themes, characters, and illustration styles that can allow them to stretch their meaning making more deeply across a set of books.

Bloem and Manna (1999) undertook a study of author/illustrator Patricia Polacco’s books with second and fourth grade students. The authors fail to state how many of her books they used or for what length of time, though they note the time span was short. The researchers focused on the richness of questions the children asked about the texts, and noted several conclusions. They write that the “children engaged in an aesthetic reading experience, delighted in the nuances of the texts, and found great pleasure, at the end of the project, in learning ways that the text reflected Polacco’s history and recorded her family history” (p. 806). Bloem and Manna found that the “nature of children’s questions shifted as the project progressed, from text-based questions to questions revealing the connections they were making with Polacco and with her books” (p. 806). This
kind of deep engagement would not have been possible without extended time with her books. However, none of the other various aspects of response, such as personal, analytical, and performative responses, as proposed through the many reader response models, was investigated.

The text that most informed my thinking about a research study involving students extended engagement with a single author/illustrator’s work is Vivan Paley’s *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* (1997). Paley’s book is a year long study of her Kindergarten class as they read, critiqued, and responded to the picture books of Leo Lionni. She had not intended for the children’s fascination with Lionni’s books to consume the whole school year, but she recognized the children’s need to learn about themselves individually and collectively, and about their wider world, through the thought provoking stories. One girl, Reeny, became the primary spokesperson in the class, and it is often through her eyes that Paley relates the children’s’ discoveries. The students respond in a variety of spontaneous ways to the books, including discussion, both large and small group, writing, art work, and dramatic activities. The book reads like a fascinating tale while showing that extended time with a single author-illustrator’s work can be very valuable. The limitation of the book, for my purposes, is that Paley’s audience is a Kindergarten class. More studies are needed which provide insight to the extended use of picturebooks by a single author/illustrator with intermediate grade students.
Purpose of the Study

After having considered the audience of the picturebook, the diverse titles by author/illustrator Patricia Polacco, the dynamics of small group discussions of picturebooks, and the value of extended engagement with the work of a single author/illustrator, I came to focus my inquiry in the following way. The purpose of this study will be to investigate the nature of a small group of intermediate grade students’ extended transactions with several diverse picturebooks by author/illustrator Patricia Polacco.

Research Questions

Based on the above statement of purpose, I’ve formulated the following research questions for my study:

1) How do intermediate grade students transact with Polacco’s picturebooks? How can these transactions be classified and/or categorized? What do they mean to the student?

2) How do these students utilize the illustrations in Polacco’s work to make meaning of the text and vice versa?

3) How does extended transaction with the work of a single author/illustrator, Patricia Polacco, enhance the meanings derived from the works? What kinds of understandings are gained that allow them to make even more in depth discoveries in subsequent books?

4) How do the students’ prior knowledge and social background support their meaning making of Polacco’s books? How do these components allow them to recognize and contend with issues of diversity in Polacco’s books? How do they relate new understandings garnered from Polacco’s books to their lives?

5) How can the informed voice of the author/illustrator herself aid in my interpretations of the students’ transactions?
Scope and Limitation of the Study

As an elementary Library Media Specialist, I have spent the last fourteen years sharing literature with children in a wide variety of approaches. In that time, as stated above, the picturebook, traditionally a genre for young children, has come to be recognized as valuable for intermediate grade students. Furthermore, though the literature offers a wealth of research on using picturebooks with younger children, there is a smaller body of research on the use of the genre with older children. Likewise, I have noticed that study of a single author and/or illustrator, regardless of the age of the students, produces levels of understanding that surpasses that which can be garnered from a broader, but less in depth, study of several authors and/or illustrators. Likewise, picturebooks deal with issues of diversity that children can recognize from their own experience, or if not part of their own lives, can begin to understand vicariously. For these reasons, I’m proposing this study.

The study is not intended to lead to conclusions which can be generalized to other small groups of intermediate grade students. This study reports on the experiences of one group in one school in their development during an extended transaction with selected picturebooks of author/illustrator Patricia Polacco. This study attempts to provide a description of this group in order to enable the reader to determine the transferability it has for other groups in other schools. Subjectivity is also a limitation. I have evaluated the dynamics and setting to the best of my ability from my own unique experiences as a researcher and a teacher.
Significance of the Study

There is a need for more research on the impact of the use of a single author/illustrator’s work with a small group of intermediate grade students over an extended period of time. Many teachers and researchers have described the importance of author studies and small discussion groups for the intermediate grade students, but currently, little formal research has been conducted on the dynamics and the ways the group makes meaning. The findings from this research should be useful to other Library Media Specialists in extending their work with intermediate grade students, classroom teachers in enhancing their literary instruction with intermediate grade students, and language arts coordinators and administrators in designing language arts curriculum.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Reader response theory provided the conceptual framework for this study. This review begins there, then moves on to explore components specific to this study and ends with critical evaluations of Patricia Polacco’s work. In particular, this chapter includes discussions of the following: theories and models, including the transactional theory, of reader response and particularly, a variety of frameworks describing how children respond to picturebooks; works about how text and pictures inform each other in picturebooks; the use of picturebooks with middle grade children; writings about sustained engagement with a single author/illustrator; studies of small discussion groups; and evaluations of author/illustrator Patricia Polacco’s work. I will now overview the literature within these six areas and how it contributes to the rationale of my proposed study.

Theories and Models of Reader Response

Several researchers of reader response theory acknowledge the critical importance of the reader’s cultural background in the meaning making of text. Louise Rosenblatt (1994, 1995) began writing of the transactional nature of
reading as early as 1938. Rosenblatt claims that the meanings of texts are created as the reader and the text transact to create the poem, or the story. Therefore, neither the text nor the reader has the key to making meaning, rather it is the reader’s background that must transact with the text to create a meaningful story for that particular reader. This transaction is reciprocal in nature, and can only come to fulfillment when the two parties, reader and text, create something new.

Her later work (1994) points out two differing ways readers can bring attention to texts. The first is an aesthetic stance, or an emotional, artistic mood, and the second is an efferent stance, or a more detached, information gathering purpose. In the first, the focus is on the moment, on “what happens during the actual reading event” (p. 24). In the second, “the reader’s attention is focused primarily on what will remain as the residue after the reading” (p. 23). In both cases, there is evidence of metacognitive thought focusing on which stance will produce for readers their desired outcome. It requires thought processes that require readers to know why they’re reading and to know what mindset will be necessary to achieve their desired reading outcomes.

Scholar Louise Rosenblatt designates a constructivist view of the reading process when she writes that the “elements or factors [are]…aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other” (1994, p. 17). I’ve come to identify closely with her views both as a reader of literary texts and as a teacher of literature to children. Rosenblatt’s work is important for my proposed study because it speaks to the varying ways children respond to stories, both
because of their differing cultural and personal backgrounds, and because of their differing purposes for reading.

Rosenblatt’s work has profoundly affected ideas on reader response studies ever since. Hickman and Cullinan (1989) state that “theories of response to literature affirm that reading and responding are in themselves active processes” and a “sense of pattern or frame of reference for literature grows as children become familiar with more books and stories of various kinds, but it also depends upon children’s own growth and experience in the real world” (p. 9). For this study, I’m drawn to those theories that look at the whole child, their past literary experiences, and their outward manifestations of response.

This idea of a reader’s cultural background being a vital piece in meaning making begun by Rosenblatt is extend in Hepler and Hickman’s work (1982) on the challenges that older children present for reader response theory. They note that “while young children wear their uniqueness openly, like a badge, it takes more careful observation to see the older child’s personal concerns at work in the transaction” (p. 278). In other words, recognizing, classifying, and interpreting older children’s responses may require a more critical eye on the observer’s part. The authors reference “a group of fifth grade boys, ‘The Gang of Four’” as “they read informational books and nonfiction together; they sat together and talked about pictures and captions; they read aloud interesting parts of the books, they asked and answered questions; and perhaps most importantly, they shared each other’s enthusiasm for reading” (pp. 280-281). Younger children may not be self-conscious about allowing an observer to listen to what they share, however, older
children may be. Even in small groups older children are more acutely aware of others’ opinions and may require “a response-centered point of view [that] urges teachers to help children see meaning and value in literature but at their own pace and in their own way” (p. 9). This becomes more evident in Hickman’s (1983) later research.

A progression of response by a child’s level of maturity is outlined by Hickman (1983) as she reports on the spontaneous responses and the solicited responses of children in grades Kindergarten through five, indicating several age related patterns. She found the following responses to appear increasingly as children grow older: “reliance on verbal modes of response; confidence in verbal expression; repertoire of response strategies and terminology; appearance of abstracted or generalized language in summaries, classifications, theme statements; [and] evidence of distancing self from story in expressing distinction between real and make-believe in projecting own behavior as a character” (p. 12).

In an earlier publication on the same research, Hickman (1981) notes that “the most striking feature of the [grades] 4-5 group’s responses…was…in levels of execution…In considering the quality rather than the nature of response events, it was generally true that children’s responses reflected their level of thinking and language development” (p. 350). This framework, with the emphasis on the levels and intensity of response, is particularly intriguing when considering responses of older children. These studies indicated my need to think carefully about how middle grade students are unique in their fashioning of response and possible reluctance to share.
More specific models and ideas about reader response include those by Kiefer (1993, 1995), Sipe (1999, 2002), and Arizpe and Styles (2003) to picturebooks. The earlier research begins with children of primary age, but later studies progress to picturebook responses by older children. Barbara Kiefer has written extensively on the artistic elements of the picturebook, which I will discuss in a later section, as well as children’s responses to the genre. In one publication (1993), Kiefer reports her findings of first and second grade children’s responses to picture books. She developed a framework of responses that include: how children look, choose, talk about, see, and otherwise respond to picture books. She looked further into the ways children talk about books. She grouped these into four categories of responses: informative, heuristic, imaginative, and personal. Kiefer devotes a section to what stylistic factors children see in picture books, and notes that they tend to see “small details…that adults miss” (p. 277). She ends the chapter with some suggestions of how teachers can create an environment that will allow children to interact with picturebooks in ways she describes.

In a later work, *The Potential of Picturebooks* (1995), Kiefer extends her research to older elementary students. She explains her descriptive framework of how children respond to picturebooks, their four levels of verbal responses mentioned above, and gives a broader variety of examples of children’s work. She concludes with how children “open up their awareness of art and aesthetics” (p. 41). This piece of Kiefer’s is especially telling for my work as it directly relates to my audience of interest and their transactions with picturebooks.
Further work on reader response theory done by Lawrence Sipe (1998, 1999, 2002) is related to Kiefer’s model, yet he broadens the types of responses children display and more deeply defines how children make meaning of a text. One article (1998) is a summary of his 1996 doctoral dissertation entitled *The Construction of Literary Understanding by First and Second Graders in Response to Picture Storybook Readalouds*. Sipe (1998) classifies their responses into five categories: analytical, intertextual, personal, transparent, and performative. He classifies the teacher’s techniques also in four categories: managers, clarifiers, wonderers, and extenders. One conclusion he (1998) draws is that “by according illustrations equal importance with the text, teachers can encourage a richer diversity of interpretation, and facilitate children’s ability to integrate visual and verbal information” (p. 63). Sipe’s work is a model for understanding responses to both text and illustration, yet, again, his work focuses on younger children.

Sipe (1999) furthers his ideas on response by looking at the subcategories of his previously defined category of a performative response, or as he identifies as the context of response. In “A typology of expressive engagement” he discusses the five ways: dramatizing, talking back, critiquing/controlling, inserting, and taking over. His work is very revealing about what ways children employ in response to, and meaning making from, picturebooks. And though his ideas can help frame and explain my proposed study, his work is with primary age children. There is little research published that looks at picturebook response in similar ways with older children.
One such study on picturebook response that spans a wider range of age groups is by Arizpe and Styles (2003). They conducted group discussions and interviews in eight elementary schools with students aged four to eleven in England in the attempt to “investigate how visual texts are read by children using the work of well-known picturebook artists” (p. 1). The most telling conclusion they’ve drawn is that “children frequently used personal analogy to try to understand the feelings of characters or animals in the books and their responses were often sympathetic and thoughtful” (p. 225). This statement about response links closely back to Rosenblatt’s ideas of the reader creating the text.

These studies frame ideas about picturebooks requiring interactive approaches to make meaning, how children bring their own backgrounds into that meaning making, and how extended time with picturebooks enriches their responses. However, none of the studies take the view of responses of upper elementary grade students to extended time with the picturebooks of one author/illustrator. Research and scholarly work on picturebook illustration itself, and how it relates to the ideas about reader response is discussed in the next section.

Picturebook Illustration: How Text and Pictures Inform Each Other

Several noted scholars have studied the picturebook; they have written about its literary qualities, as well as its artistic qualities. Some have taken stances primarily on the former side, others primarily on the latter. Others have taken a more unified look at both in an attempt to see how the two portions work
together to become more than the sum of its parts. But almost without exception, scholars of the picturebook agree that these books hold a unique place in the world of children’s literature. I set out to discover the various researchers’ methods of considering picturebooks and found an array of ideas of how this is accomplished. I found that scholars borrow from, and expand on, each other’s ideas, yet each brings their own unique perspective to the study of picturebooks. In addition, I also found that most researchers of the picturebook consider the genre as primarily for young children.

Several scholars, including Perry Nodelman and Barbara Kiefer, look at the picturebook as a symbol bearing medium. Nodelman (1988) defines picturebooks as “books intended for young children which communicate information or tell stories through a series of many pictures combined with relatively slight texts or no texts at all” and that they are “unlike any other form of verbal or visual art” (p. vii). He (1996) asserts that “a picture is a classic example of a sign. Any given picture not only represents something but communicates further information about the thing it depicts by the ways in which it depicts it…I focus on how pictures imply attitudes toward their subject through their composition, their style, and through details in their content” (p. 185). It is in this way that children make meaning through the illustrations of a picturebook.

Nodelman (1996) goes on to argue that pictures are no more concrete than are words, and that children need to learn the “systems of codes and signifiers” (p. 217) to make sense of pictures just as they need to learn decoding and meaning making skills to understand words. Nodelman emphasizes, however, that
“pictures can help to understand words” but that the greatest offering to children from picturebooks are their “pleasurable experiences” (p. 218). To gain from these pleasurable experiences, the reader needs to appreciate “how illustrators make use of these differences between words and pictures” (p. 218)

In denoting how illustrators convey meaning, Nodelman (1996) discusses six elements of picturebooks with which readers need to become aware: format, mood, style, meaning of visual objects, pictorial dynamics, and movement and time. Format includes all the “particular expectations [that] arise from each of the physical qualities of a book” (p. 219), meaning the information conveyed through the cover, the type the illustrator has chosen, and the possible choice of borders to extend the story-making qualities of books. This includes color choice, the use of black and white space, line and shape, choice of media, and how each element contributes to mood. Style suggests borrowing from conventional styles, such as surrealism or impressionism, national styles, or styles of individual artists. Visual objects include cultural codes and signs. Dynamics in pictures are two- and three-dimensional effects, including the use of shape, size, line, color, perspective, blocking, and more. Finally, Nodelman discusses how movement is portrayed in pictures through line, distortion, and context with other pictures.

Nodelman (1996) follows this discussion by extending his method of understanding pictures with the contention that “pictures focus our attention on specific aspects of the words and cause us to interpret them in specific ways. As a result, a picture book contains at least three stories: the one told by the words, the one implied by the pictures, and the one that results from the combination of the
other two” (p. 240). He goes on to claim that “in some of the most interesting picture books, the third story…emerges from the contradictions between the two stories” (p. 241). Nodelman’s exhaustive work truly lays a foundation for how illustrations in picturebooks are a method of communication and how this means of communication transacts with the written story, thereby allowing children to make meaning from the picturebook as a whole. This work is pivotal in my understanding of the dynamics of picturebooks and how my students utilize these dynamics to construct their own meanings.

Barbara Kiefer (1993, 1995) not only writes of children’s responses to picturebooks, but she also discusses picturebook art. She echoes Nodelman’s arguments for the picturebook being primarily a pleasurable vehicle. She (1995) defines the picturebook as an “aesthetic experience [that] arises from images and ideas combined in some complete form that is remade as an audience brings to it their own personal intellectual and emotional understandings” (p. 70). Unlike Nodelman, Kiefer acknowledges the necessity of an audience and the reader’s response to bring the picturebook to its fullest expression. She does, however, agree with Nodelman that a picturebook is complex because “we are dealing at the very least with two different codes or systems of communication” (p. 116) and that any “theory of visual criticism of picturebooks must explain how the art conveys meaning” (p. 117). Kiefer feels that style is an effective means to explore both the literary aspects and the artistic aspects of a picturebook.

“When judging the quality of a picturebook, the critic must begin with the verbal text…[Then] we can evaluate how well the artist has chosen artistic
elements, principles, and conventions to convey those meanings visually” (p. 120) is how Kiefer (1995) expresses her method of approaching the dual nature of the book. She then goes on to delineate the elements and principles of art, as well as the technical choices an illustrator makes, in creating a unified whole. Kiefer’s work bridges the gap in my understanding between the technical aspects of picturebooks and the necessity of a reader to bring the book into its fullest expression. The study that I undertook explored this interaction of picturebook and reader with an older audience of children.

Other scholars take this interaction between words and pictures to an even more complicated level in explaining the various ways that illustrations work to make a picturebook more than the sum of its parts. Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) attempt to “offer new perspectives and theoretical tools to interpret and appreciate the complex relationships that can exist between words and pictures” (p. 225), as do Nodelman and Kiefer. However, Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) describe this complicated relationship in the following manner:

Pictures in picturebooks are complex iconic signs, and words in picturebooks are complex conventional signs; however, the basic relationship between the two levels is the same. The function of pictures, iconic signs, is to describe or represent. The function of words, conventional signs, is primarily to narrate. Conventional signs are often linear, while iconic signs are nonlinear and do not give us direct instruction about how to read them. The tension between the two
functions creates unlimited possibilities for interaction between word and image in a picturebook (pp. 1-2).

The authors are describing essentially the same give and take, back and forth, counterbalancing relationship between the verbal and visual parts of picturebooks as do Nodelman and Kiefer. However, Nikolajeva and Scott delineate five interactive levels between word and image that illustrates the complexity of the relationship a bit differently than the others. These levels are: symmetrical, or that word and image tell the same story; enhancing, or that the image extends the meaning of the word; complementary, or an enhancement that becomes very significant; counterpointing, or the point at which word and image combine to make meaning beyond what either one could convey alone; and contradictory, or when word and image are opposite of each other. Nikolajeva and Scott’s work provides for me and my study very specific ways of how words and illustrations interact to convey the story to children. Neither alone can accomplish what both together can.

Cotton (2000) takes on this concept of the image and the words producing what neither alone can when she writes about “metafictional elements” (p. 31), or a more seamless blend of word and image. She states that “writers and artists question notions of how stories are told and meanings, conventions and techniques subverted. Often boundaries are broken between the writer/illustrator and reader” (p. 31). Cotton gives examples of books whereby a character addresses the reader directly either/both in text and picture, thus actively breaking down barriers between author/illustrator and reader. She also writes of the
intertextuality of stories and images as a vehicle for helping children understand and make meaning for themselves. The use of a single author/illustrator’s work, as I conducted with older students, may provide a powerful basis for such intertextual connections.

Cotton (2000) recognizes that “it is often possible to indicate through pictures things that are difficult to say in words. So the power of the illustrations enables children to appreciate a familiar story in a new way and find deeper layers of meaning...Picture books show children that illustrations and words complement and enhance each other” (p. 36). Cotton (2002), like Nodelman (1996), writes of picturebooks lending a symbolic, or semiotic, feel that can be analyzed through visual codes and narrative techniques and that the visual portion of picturebooks have a special role in “establish[ing] a sense of place in stories” (p. 7). It is through illustrations and the powerful position they hold in picturebooks that the students in my study found “deeper layers of meaning” (p. 36).

Giving more specific language to the elements of picturebooks has been one of the contributions to the study, by such researchers as Lawrence Sipe (1998, 2001) and Molly Bang (2000). Sipe, who has written extensively on children’s response to picturebooks as has been discussed above, has also written two articles about the interactions between text and illustrations in picturebooks. In the first, “Learning the Language of Picture Books” published in 1998, Sipe defines a picturebook as a book where the “words of the text and the sequence of the illustrations contribute equally to opportunities they provide for constructing
meaning. In this way, picturebooks differ from illustrated texts” (p. 66). He expands this definition in his second article, “Picturebooks as Aesthetic Objects” published in 2001. He writes that “picturebooks are unified artistic wholes in which text and pictures, covers and endpages, and the details of design work together to provide an aesthetically satisfying experience for children” (p. 23). The first article is almost a reference piece pointing out examples of media, style, perspective, and endpages, supplying a glossary of terms, and providing an extensive list of resources about every aspect of the picturebook. The second article deals more with the physical features and the elements of design of the picturebook and how they contribute to the meaning of the story.

These features and elements include: size and shape, covers, endpapers, paper, binding, color, line, shape, texture, value, style, point of view, media, framing, arrangement, narrative sequence, and page turns. Sipe (2001) echoes other scholars, including Nodelman and Kiefer, in concluding that “the ultimate purpose of analysis and criticism should be to assist us in returning to any given picturebook with the power of seeing and feeling more intensely, thereby increasing our pleasure and capacity for wonder” (p. 39). Sipe takes what the above scholars delineate in the interaction between word and image, particularly Nikolajeva and Scott, and breaks it down in specific terms. This afforded the students in my study concrete ways of relating what they see and hear to their understanding.

Like Sipe, Molly Bang gives specific language to the art of the picturebook and how it relates to the meaning making of the reader/viewer.
Bang’s book *Picture This: How Pictures Work* (2000) is an essential piece about the dynamics of illustration from a master illustrator herself. In her preface, she explains what a professor of the psychology of art once pointed out that her work accomplishes: “I had understood some basic connection between emotions and how we see pictures” (p. 7). This understanding is closely related to Rosenblatt’s (1994) work on the aesthetic experience of a reader. She goes on to say that she posed one question to herself in creating *Picture This*: “How does the structure of a picture affect our emotional response? It analyzes in very simple terms this one element of how pictures work” (p. 7). In using this as her premise, Bang is connecting illustration with reader (or viewer) response. She goes on to show and tell how a picture is built through line, shape, position, and color laid out in ten guiding principles. Bang hones in on the use of space and its arrangement, and therefore, how a viewer is brought into a picture. In essence, a picturebook becomes a dynamic whole whose primary purpose or goal is to bring pleasure, as Nodelman (1996) and Kiefer (1995) assert, to children through an aesthetic experience. Her work, like Sipe’s, is basic for the critical analysis of the Polacco’s illustrations my students encountered.

Since picturebooks have traditionally been within the domain of young children, I now turn my attention to studies and scholarly works that look at the sharing of picturebooks with older children.
Picturebook Use with Older Readers

As several of the researchers and scholars noted in the above section allude, the study of picturebooks has usually been undertaken with young children. However, picturebooks, many of which are now written expressly for older readers, hold a great aesthetic and educational potential. Bishop and Hickman (1992) delineate several tasks of the picturebook for upper elementary and middle school readers. They write that picturebooks are a “source of personal pleasure and aesthetic satisfaction” (p. 4) and that often these books “reflect their experiences and concerns” (p. 5). Picturebooks are educational in several ways, including their content, and their ability to help students become “better readers and writers” (p. 6). As part of this, picturebooks reveal “conventions by which illustrations communicate meaning” and present an opportunity for students to “examin[e] form and structure” (p. 7) of both text and pictures. Oftentimes the “content of some picture books makes them appropriate only for readers beyond the primary grades” as are “picturebooks that contain a great deal of text” (p. 9). In sum, Bishop and Hickman note that picturebooks hold potential for audiences whether they are “four, fourteen, or forty” (p. 10). The more mature titles by author/illustrator Polacco were viewed by the older children in my study as a vehicle that “reflects their experiences and concerns” (p. 5).

Like Bishop and Hickman (1992) Cotton (2000) provides extensive rationale for picturebook use with older readers, explaining so in the following passage:
Many modern picture books are intellectually sophisticated and may demand a range of experience and developmental understanding that are beyond very young children, while being visually engaging for older children…The best picture books are open to interpretation because they leave so much unsaid; coming to terms with the subtext, however, demands serious thought because, although the texts of these books seem straight-forward, the meaning behind them is not…Older children are enabled to think more deeply about the issues raised by stimulating visuals and minimal well-chosen text. Brevity of text is one of the most important advantages for older children working with picture books, as it allows a swift comprehension and overview seldom afforded by novels and enables them to discuss the books in, arguably, a more sophisticated and satisfying way (pp. 38-39).

And precisely because of these arguments, more research is needed with the transactions between picturebooks and older readers.

Other researchers put the ideas of Bishop and Hickman (1992) to the test with older children. In describing a unit she and her fifth-grade students undertook using picturebooks, Benedict (1992) notes that they “spent eight weeks reading, savoring, analyzing, and writing picture books. We identified topics to research…We studied the authors themselves…We recorded our observations. In the end we shared our finding with the entire school” (p. 34). Benedict presents evidence of her students writing and drawing to show how they grew over that eight week period. In my study of eight fifth graders I borrowed some of the
A variety of other scholarly works delineate the benefits of using picturebooks with older readers, as well as ideas for ways of incorporating them in the curriculum. Mathis (2002) promotes using text sets of five to fifteen picturebooks “that relate conceptually in some way…[yet]…reflect different perspectives on the same concept” (p. 1) to teach about literary elements. She claims that teaching elements through picturebooks “can facilitate successful, meaningful reading of other genre[s], such as the novel” (p. 5). Carr, et. al. (2001) support the use of picturebooks in teaching social studies, language arts, science, and math because they can “provide background and context” (p. 2). Hurst (1997) makes a case for studying picturebooks at the middle grades in the areas of fine arts, physical sciences, natural sciences, and history. And Imdieke (2001) notes that the “increasing use of literature in curriculum has coincided with the publication of picture books for older readers (p. 627) and that the “combination of the familiar format of the picture book, when used to present new stimulating content, serves both to capture and stretch the unique intellect of the older reader” (p. 626). In all, the growing publication and use of picturebooks for older readers seems to be the direction for now and years to come and helps provide a rationale for further study of picturebook use with older readers. I will now look at the studies published of single authors or illustrator’s work over an extended period of time.
Single Author or Illustrator Studies Over an Extended Period of Time

Unfortunately, I was able to find very few scholarly works that addressed the use of a single author’s or illustrator’s work with children over an extended period of time, despite the fact that scholars and researchers note the advantages to such a study. Temple, et. al. (2002) argue that “when a teacher engages students in author or illustrator study, the teacher is helping them to build a store of knowledge about the ways in which particular authors (or illustrators) work. It is through such study that children discover what is distinctive about the work of particular authors and/or illustrators” (p. 513). However, they don’t indicate any of the ways children are likely to respond to the extended use of a body of literature. Also, McElmeel (2001) notes in her guide for visiting authors that as children:

Read more and more of the author’s/illustrator’s books, they will see connections among them…Recognizing each new connection leads to a sense of achievement and challenges the reader to think in new terms. The more connections children discover, the more they will bring literature and books into their daily lives, across all subject levels. Children learn that their ideas and connections have validity and that each idea can lead to more connections and learning (p. 64).

She alludes to the phenomenon of responses when she talks about connections, but makes no specific references, either, on how children respond.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Introduction, Bloem and Manna’s (1999) study of author/illustrator Patricia Polacco’s books with second and fourth grade
students and Vivan Paley’s (1997) study of author/illustrator Leo Lionni’s books with her Kindergarten class are important pieces that speak to the extended engagement of students with a single author/illustrator’s work. Again, the limitation of Paley’s book, for my purposes, is that her audience is a Kindergarten class, whereas my study is with middle grade students.

Since my work with fifth grade students included only eight members, I will now turn my attention to studies of small discussion groups.

Studies About Small Discussion Groups

Work by such researchers as Kennedy (1988), Nystrand, et. al. (1993), Meek (1982), and Eeds and Wells (1989), as noted in more depth in Chapter 1, Introduction, form a basis for the use of small groups in literature discussion. This seems to be especially appropriate for students in the intermediate grades and higher. Kennedy indicates that interaction between group members is the key to effective discussion groups at this age level. The support that students provide each other, he concluded, greatly affects the quality of the discussion. Part of this depends on the degree of student autonomy which creates a level of discussion beyond mere teacher questioning discovered Nystrand, et. al. and Meek. Nystrand notes that the “higher degree of [student] autonomy, the more likely group times was to contribute positively to achievement” (p. 20). Meek takes this a step further to directly point to the teacher by writing “left to comment on their own, without the stimulus of a question, children often choose to talk about quite other aspects of a tale than those that preoccupy their elders…They create a tissue
of collaborative understanding for each other in a way that no single question from an adult makes possible” (p. 289). Talk can flow less inhibited as undirected questions and comments emerge.

According to Eeds and Wells (1989), this allows a collaborative atmosphere where meaning making is constructed and risk taking is accepted. What they saw form was a “group which approaches agreement about an interpretation…They recalled; they verified recall, they inferred, they supported their inferences, they read critically…Each group also became collaborative rather than competitive. Atmospheres were created which encouraged …risk-taking behaviors…” (p. 26). This research, seems to indicate that the small group is preferable to the whole class size setting for intermediate grade students’ transactions with literature, and therefore was my choice of grouping students for my study.

Further support for the wisdom of choosing small discussion groups for intermediate grade students comes from Hoffner (2001) when she refers to the work of Robb on teaching reading in middle school. Hoffner affirms the need to respect the “social and emotional concerns” of middle school children and that small discussion groups are an effective learning forum (p. 2 of electronic version). She quotes Robb as asserting that several literary forums, including literature discussion groups, are “ideal environment[s] for high-energy middle school students who love to chat and socialize” (p. 2 of electronic version). Further research by Galda and Beach (2001), as part of their scholarly work on literary response, acknowledge the importance of encouraging small groups to
give students the “opportunity to control the content and flow of discussion. Students were responsible for bringing ideas to the discussion and for asking for and providing clarification during discussion” (pp. 6-7 of electronic version). This is the forum I attempted to create for my students.

One of the several advantages to small discussion groups, according to Gangi (2004), is that there is opportunity to show that “literature has multiple interpretations. Instead of one correct response, readers can see that literature has multiple meanings…[and that] both thoughts and feelings are welcome in the discussion” (p. 182). Furthermore, Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (2005) contend that “the advantages of small-group discussions are that students are in control, have more opportunities to express their opinions, and can become more actively involved” (p. 260). This atmosphere of sharing multiple perspectives can be more readily encouraged in a small group.

One of the most informative pieces on literature discussion groups for intermediate grade children was Evans’ (2002) work with fifth graders. She discovered three themes that emerged from the students’ perceptions of the discussion group that point up the effectiveness of small literary groups for these age students. The first is a clear understanding of how the group is to function. The second was that gender makeup of the group influenced participation, and the third was that some personality types, particularly “bossy” (p. 24 of electronic copy) members, also influenced group dynamics. This study influenced my thinking about how to formulate and construct the group, and how to structure the format.
Fountas and Pinnell (1996) advocate small discussion groups, or literature
circles, as a “means for more intensive talking and thinking about books…When
children share their personal responses and interpretations of a book with one
another, they are able to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their
world” (p. 31). The authors contend that small groups allow discussion of
“characters, setting, plot, language, or illustrations…[and can] make connections
between one book and another, compare works by an author or illustrator, contrast
versions of a story, or relate a story to their own lives” (p. 31). It’s this aspect of
comparison of the works of a single author/illustrator that supports my choice of
small discussion groups for this study.

I will now turn my attention to the work of author/illustrator Patricia
Polacco and why several of her books seem particularly well suited to older
children.

Evaluations of Patricia Polacco’s Work

Polacco’s work has garnered both praise and criticism. Mathis (2001)
sums up Polacco’s work in the following way:

Combining her artistic talents and her gifts as a storyteller, P[olacco]
draws upon both the stories told by her grandparents and her own life
experiences as she shares her rich cultural heritage with readers of all
ages. Her books are noted for their family and multicultural points of
view, as she includes, in a naturally positive light, diverse ages, gender,
and ethnicities that have shared in her own life experiences (p. 636).
Mathis goes on to note Polacco’s family history, education, and range of genre, including folklore, fiction, autobiography, fantasy, and poetry. She also comments that themes in Polacco’s books range from “family stories…multicultural experiences…[and] literacy events” (pp. 636-637). And here seems to lie one of Polacco’s many strengths: variety and diversity that can span generations of readers.

Maughan (1993) concurs with Mathis (2001) and goes on to add that Polacco’s “books are noted for their themes of hope, resilience and tolerance, are often steeped in cultural heritage, and feature characters of different races, religions, and ages. Polacco is not afraid of tackling challenging ideas and situations. As seen through the eyes of a child narrator, though, even complex issues take on a simple sense of wonder” (p. 3). Others add that Patricia’s books “tell wonderful stories, and to make them even more wonderful, there are her illustrations. They overflow with color, action and the joy of living” (Elliott, 1996). Polacco (2001) herself, says that “art was my one and only claim to my humanity, to something that made my soul sing” (p. 1). Indeed, it’s this seeming validation of her life that makes for many opportunities to share with the older reader.

Jenkins (1999) includes Polacco in her book The Allure of Authors: Author Studies in the Elementary Classroom because her “works are rich in themes of family, particularly grandparent-child bonds, or ethnic heritage, of social tolerance, and of magical moments. Because Polacco reveals these themes both explicitly and implicitly, she invites critical exploration” (p. 221). She lists
The Bee Tree (1993), Babushka’s Doll (1990), Babushka Baba Yaga (1993), and Thunder Cake (1990) as some of the titles that contain explicit themes of hard work, selflessness, acceptance, and overcoming fears. Implicit themes include intercultural friendships, intergenerational love, and ethnic pride. Polacco’s books that exemplify these themes are Pink and Say (1994) and Mrs. Katz and Tush (1992). Jenkins goes on to include sections on Polacco’s life-literature connections, and Polacco’s habits as a writer and an illustrator. Jenkins seems to concur with Maughan (1993) that Polacco’s work is rich for the older child reader.

Vandergrift (1996) broadens the storytelling purpose of Polacco’s work when she asserts that “Polacco’s stories deserve serious attention because of their importance both as children’s literature and as the voice of a woman who truly celebrates women’s lives. Her work embodies the metaphoric power that unites human beings” (p. 260). This power is seen in the way she writes multiculturally “in the broadest sense of the word. Different nationalities, races, religions, and ethnic groups all appear on the pages of her books” (pp. 261-262). In the end, “the power of these stories is that they present these differences respectfully and joyfully…while allowing child readers to participate, not just in the characters’ stories, but in the larger stories of what it means to be human” (p. 261).

In a section entitled “Illustration as Story,” Vandergrift (1996) notes that “Polacco’s illustrations have warmth, sensitivity, humor and a kind of folksy nostalgia that perfectly complement the verbal presentations of her stories” (p. 263). She comments on the intertextuality of the characters and even the patterns
of fabric in illustrations between books, which is a compelling argument for the extended use of her books. She remarks that Polacco’s “brilliant colors…are more expressive than representational” (p. 264) and that “while Polacco’s books do have a lot of action, they are most definitely stories of characters and subtleties of feeling as well as of events and relationships” (p. 265).

Polacco often “goes beyond the next resolution of a story to continue in a way that ties that story from the past to the life of a child character” (Vandergrift, 1996, p. 269). And part of that connection is her inclusion of a “pervasive morality without moralizing and teach[ing] important lessons about life in a natural and lighthearted metaphoric manner without being didactic” (Vandergrift, 1996, p. 274). These ideas share Jenkins’ (1999) thoughts on Polacco’s implicit and explicit themes. Vandergrift does point out some of the criticisms of Polacco’s work, particularly errors of traditional Jewish foods depicted in *Chicken Sunday* (1992) and the stereotypical image of the elderly Native American woman in *Boat Ride with Lillian Two Blossom* (1988). Other criticisms by book reviewers can be found in Chapter 4, Presentation of Findings, in the subsection Overview of Picturebooks.

In summary, there are several groups of research that have helped to inform my thinking about the study I conducted. These include theories and models of reader response, particularly those associated with picturebooks. These studies frame ideas about picturebooks requiring interactive approaches to make meaning, how children bring their own backgrounds into that meaning making, and how extended time with picturebooks enriches their responses. Scholarly
works about the interplay of text and illustrations in picturebooks also helped inform my thinking. Most of these scholars view the picturebook as a unique genre that is an interplay between text and illustration that creates an aesthetic whole. However most scholars also view the picturebook as the domain of the young child. Studies on the usefulness of picturebooks with middle grade students points out the advantages of using books that explore topics of interest to older students while enabling them to interact with the book and its literary elements in one sitting. Writings on extended transactions with the works of a single author/illustrator are scarce and for the most part include younger children. Studies of small literature discussion groups show the comfort level and degree of autonomy this structure allows middle grade students; and praise and criticism of author/illustrator Patricia Polacco’s work points out the usefulness of her work for the older elementary child.

However, the literature is limited in that it fails to: pinpoint the use of picturebooks with intermediate grade students in small discussion groups using a single author/illustrator’s work, while focusing on the variety of ways students may make meaning. My research, therefore, was conducted with a group of eight fifth grade students from a variety of ethnic, language, academic and socioeconomic backgrounds in Alton Darby Elementary School in Hilliard, Ohio with a focus on picturebooks by author/illustrator Patricia Polacco that are appropriate to this audience. This study was significant in that it attempted to fill the gaps in the research for the validation of picturebook use in small discussion groups with intermediate grade students with a single author/illustrator’s books.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative, descriptive study documented the meaning making process of eight fifth grade students in one elementary classroom as they transacted with picturebooks by author/illustrator Patricia Polacco in read aloud sessions. Data collection took place over a nine-week period, and the types of data collected included: (1) audio tapes of read aloud sessions with student responses; (2) student reflection journals; (3) field notes of observations; and (4) author/illustrator interview.

Selection of Site

Site Entry

The selection of the suburban school in this study was based on accessibility. I have been the library media specialist at the school for the past four years and am very familiar with the administration, faculty, and students. Criteria for the decision to base the study at this site included: (1) a language arts curriculum that includes the Literacy Collaborative® (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996) model and therefore multiple literacy opportunities; and (2) a faculty well versed with Literacy Collaborative® through ongoing professional development. Criteria for the selection of the classroom from which the students were drawn
included: (1) willingness of the classroom teacher to allow a small group of her students to work with me during part of her language arts time block which facilitated scheduling times; and (2) knowledge by the teacher of her students’ range of diversity of background and abilities. Criteria for the selection of the students was based on this diversity of (1) ethnicity; (2) language; (3) socioeconomic level; (4) family structure; (5) cognitive abilities; (6) gender; and (7) health issues.

I made initial contact with the classroom teacher and then approached the building principal for clearance of the research study. Both were very open to the work I expressed an interest in conducting and both granted their permission. Soon after, formal approval was granted from the Ohio State University Human Subjects Review Committee during Winter Quarter 2004.

Issues of Access

Since I am a teacher at the school and have had a working relationship with the building principal, classroom teacher, and the students for nearly three years, issues of access were at a minimum. The classroom teacher and I worked out a schedule of meeting times during her language arts block whereby I could work with the students in the Library Media Center for read aloud sessions. This arrangement was approved by the building principal as well as the students’ parents/guardians.

Through informed consent, the principal, teacher, parents/guardians, and student participants were made aware of the purpose and methods of the study to
allow them to make a choice on participation. Permission was sought from each parent/guardian and student for participation according to the Ohio State University guidelines. An oral explanation was given to the eight children in our initial meeting, as was a detailed letter explaining the letter with attached permission slip to be given to their parents/guardians. (See Appendix A for copies of the oral explanation and letter.) Consent was granted for all eight children to participate in the study. Consent was granted by all parent/guardians for the children to be audiotaped. Participation was strictly voluntary and at any point a child was free to discontinue their participation.

The School District and Building

The elementary school is located in a rapidly growing suburban area outside a large midwestern city. The population of the district at the time of the study was approximately 14,000 students in grades preschool through twelve in thirteen elementary schools, two sixth grade buildings, three middle schools, and two high schools. The pupil/regular classroom teacher ratio was 16:1. Total spending per pupil per year was $8,366 as compared to the state average of $8,081.

In addition, the district had earned an excellent rating (21 or 22 performance points) on the state’s school district report card for the first time. In previous years, the district had earned an effective rating (between 17 and 20 points) but had improved to a score of 21.
The Building

The elementary building in which the study was done serviced kindergarten through fifth grade students in a multiage setting. Groupings were K/1, 2/3, and 4/5 among a population of about 550 students. Thirteen percent of the students were identified gifted and nineteen percent were on free or reduced lunches. Average class size was 21 students. There is a growing population of students from Central and South America, Somalia, and Middle Eastern countries attending the school, and therefore the school has a larger percentage of ethnically diverse students than do the other elementary schools in the district.

The physical layout of the school is a north and south wing radiating from a central entrance way that includes the office, small support services classroom space, and the Library Media Center. The atmosphere is warm with student work of all types, including framed art, hanging in the hallways, and a series of student designed flags that express the core virtues of the Basic School philosophy of which the school is a part. Additionally, the vision and mission statements are prominently displayed upon entering the building.

The Library Media Center

The Library Media Center (LMC) is centrally located in the building. It is one of the first rooms to be seen when a visitor walks in the front doors. Two of the four walls are glass windows and it is approximately the size of two classrooms. The Library Media Program is run on a flexible schedule whereby
students have access all day every school day. It’s not unusual to have a whole class working on a research, technology, or literary topic in one part of the facility, while small groups from other classrooms are working on projects in another part. And at the same time, individual students are browsing the shelves or reading quietly.

Because of this use of the Library Media Center, I chose to conduct my research in my office attached to the LMC. It’s a room approximately the size of a classroom, and is carpeted. We would convene there, close the door to reduce noise and interruptions, all sit on the floor, and conduct our sessions.

The Language Arts Program

This suburban school utilized the Literacy Collaborative® (LC) (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) model as the basis of their language arts curriculum. All the components of LC model could be witnessed daily in every classroom for approximately 60-90 minutes, and components of it were also utilized in the LMC program. Literature is an integral part of the LC program and trade books are used to teach all content areas. Text books are only used in the 4/5 classroom and then only as a resource, not as the core curriculum.

Instruction in the LMC is team planned and taught with classroom teachers. Within the LMC instruction and in the classrooms, learning is a constructive act between teachers and students and students and students. Discussion is a regular part of learning, and individual, small group, and large group teaching and learning is evident in all learning areas of the school.
Participants

Library Media Specialist/Researcher

I was the teacher in the study, and as such, I brought fourteen years of teaching experience, with two additional years as a public and academic librarian, to the task. All of my years of teaching have been in an elementary setting, with the last three also including preschool. Exposing children to fine literature has been a basic, and most favored, part of the LMC program, along with research and technology needs of students and teachers. Furthermore, reading aloud to students has been an integral part of the literature program.

During the nine week period collecting data, I was a part-time doctoral candidate at the Ohio State University in the College of Education in the School of Teaching and Learning. My focus was on language, literacy and culture and my cognate areas were multicultural literature, literature in early childhood education, and literary theory and reader response. In addition, I was teaching at the elementary school half time, teaching classes in children’s literature at a large state university, and teaching library and information science classes at a small private university.

During this study, I was the only teacher involved and planned to move along a continuum of observation and participation. I selected and read aloud the books but then tried to minimize my involvement in discussions. It was especially vital that I not lead students with questions to garner responses I may unknowingly be looking for. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that qualitative
researchers study participants in their natural settings and attempt to interpret and make sense of the phenomenon in terms of the meanings the respondents bring to them. My goal, therefore, is to describe and interpret. I look at how the students understand their worlds and how they create and share those meanings about their experiences. During the act of describing and interpreting, new knowledge is generated through the ensuing interaction.

Students

The eight students in the case study group were all fifth graders taken from the same multiage classroom of fourth and fifth graders, but with very diverse backgrounds. All eight participants were granted permission to take part in the study and none moved out of the school during the nine week period the research entailed; therefore there were no membership changes. The criteria for diversity included gender, socioeconomic status, ethnic background, language, academic ability, family structure, and health issues. We assembled a group of eight students whose diverse experiences ranged along a continuum of these issues.

Five children were female and three were male. Five were European American, one was of European American and African American mix, one was Somalian, and one Pakistani. English was a second language for both the Somalian and the Pakistani children, as the primary languages for these two were Somali and Urdu, respectively. However, only the one that spoke Urdu as a primary language received English Language Learners services. One was
cognitively gifted, another gifted in math, and three scored slightly above average academically. Additionally, one received intervention services in reading and another in math. Four were on free or reduced lunch, and five children lived with both parents, while two with their mother and stepfather, and one only with her mother. Three students had health issues, one being a diabetic, another dealt with severe allergies, and a third was on medication for attention deficit disorder.

This group of eight students had been classmates for 1 _ years when the study began. They were very comfortable with each other and didn’t seem reserved about speaking their mind among themselves. Two students were naturally more outspoken, and two were naturally quieter, but all were voluntary participants. As discussion was a regular part of language arts classroom time, and during LMC classes, participation in this case study group involved no stress to the students.

Research Design

This section deals with the roles assumed by the researcher, the timeframe of the data collection, and the types of collected data. The qualitative methods used were (1) audiotape recording; (2) taking field notes of observations; (3) content analysis; (4) interviewing; (5) and transcribing notes and audiotapes.

Organization of the Study

Prior to the beginning of the study, I consulted with the classroom teacher to identify a group of her fifth grade students that were as diverse as we could
assemble. This particular teacher is flexible with her classroom time and open to new experiences for her students. We talked on two occasions about the criteria for diversity we wished to represent and who the possible members could be. We went about this in a very purposeful way to try to assure a variety of viewpoints during the read aloud and discussion times of the study.

Data collection took place for nine weeks during January, February, and March of 2004, with opportunities to meet with the students one to three times a week for time blocks of 45 to 60 minutes during their regularly scheduled classroom language arts block. The first session consisted of my explanation of the study to the students, distribution of the parent letter and permission forms, and introduction to Patricia Polacco and a brief overview of the kinds of picturebooks she creates. I read aloud Polacco’s autobiography *Firetalking* (1994) to facilitate this introduction.

During week five of the data collection schedule, I had the opportunity to conduct one short interview with author/illustrator Patricia Polacco. She was in the geographic vicinity of the suburb in which the elementary school is located doing an appearance at a local public library. Through her publicist, I was able to gain permission to ask her a few questions after her presentation. During the approximately 45 minute interview, Ms. Polacco answered questions the students had posed to me, as well as questions that had arisen in my mind, during read aloud sessions.

Following is a chart of the organization and time frame of the study:
### Types of Data Collected

The types of data collected included audiotaped read aloud sessions, student reflective journals, field notes of observations, and the interview of the author/illustrator.

### Read Aloud Sessions

There were twelve read aloud sessions with one of Patricia Polacco’s books shared at each session. The books that were shared were: *Appelemando’s*...
Dreams (1991), I Can Hear the Sun (1996), The Trees of Dancing Goats (1996), The Christmas Taspestry (2002), The Butterfly (2000), The Keeping Quilt (1998), Pink and Say (1994), Meteor (1987), When Lightning Comes in a Jar (2002), My Rotten Red Headed Older Brother (1994), Thank you, Mr. Falker (1998), and Thunder Cake (1990). I chose the first two titles because of their fantastical elements, and the characters who live outside of mainstream society. The next two I chose because they begin to tap into Polacco’s family background and heritage. In the discussion of the The Christmas Tapestry, the students became interested in the characters who had spent time in the German concentration camps in World War II, so I selected The Butterfly to share next. The Keeping Quilt was requested by a student, and since it ties in many of Polacco’s family issues we had encountered, I read it aloud. Pink and Say, another example of Polacco’s historical fiction, was a natural title to share next. The next three titles all continue to build on Polacco’s experiences, and the last two titles were students’ requests.

In the twelve meeting times, the read aloud procedure was fairly consistent. Either I had previously selected a book to share based on titles that are particularly appropriate to older elementary students, or I honored a request for a particular book. We all sat on the carpet in a circle in my office with the tape recorder in the middle of the circle. I started the tape and would begin to read. At times, students would begin their discussion after I had only read the title, or even before I had said anything at all. As I read aloud the students were allowed to interrupt, question, or comment at any time, before, during, or after the read
aloud. The children would banter back and forth, building on each other’s comments and questions, sometimes agreeing with each other, sometimes disagreeing, sometimes even arguing. However the exchange was conducted, meaning was constructed collaboratively.

At the close of each read aloud session, the students were given the opportunity to add to their reflective journals. This could be in the form of writing, drawing, or both. Each child contributed in this way each time. Also, during this time, I would write field notes of my observations. All sessions were successfully recorded and later transcribed.

Student Reflective Journals

During the weeks of our study, each student was asked to keep a reflective journal. I provided a folder and loose leaf paper and asked that they complete one entry, of writing, drawing, or both, for each session. They wrote their names, the title of the book shared, and the date on each entry and stored them all together in the folder. These were distributed by me at the beginning of each session and collected at the end. According to the classroom teacher, the students were used to keeping journals of their responses to literature in the classroom, so journal keeping for this study was a natural extension of their classroom activities. I explained to the students that they might write or draw anything they chose that pertained to the study, either from that day’s reading, or from a previous read aloud.
There was usually 10-15 minutes available for the students to write or draw and there was no word minimum or maximum. If that much time wasn’t sufficient, students were allowed to either take the journal with them to complete their entry and return it at another time, or stop by the LMC later in the day or another day to complete their ideas. The intention of the journal was as an open-ended response log with little direction from me.

From the journal data, I hoped to learn about the students’ questioning, connecting, transacting, and impressions of the books. I did not suggest topics for the students to write about, as I truly wanted them to write or draw whatever suggested new learning or understanding on their part. At times, students would mention that they didn’t know what to write about, so I would ask them what will they remember about the book. I kept the journal entries, as was understood by the participants, so as to assist my analysis by allowing me to return to them frequently to see the connections and growth the students were making. Hancock (1992) notes that student journal writing for older students can “serve as a way to help teachers and others think about written responses as a mode of meaning making, as a means of extending children’s response to literature, and…may also provide a framework for insights into the complex personalities of the individuals we teach” (pp. 37-38). It was my hope to be able to return to the journal entries repeatedly to see if any of these benefits were realized.
Researcher Log

My researcher log was kept in two formats. At first, I kept notes handwritten in a spiral bound notebook that alluded to my observations and understandings of the group dynamics, the individual personality styles, body language, notes about the text and illustrations, and beginning categories of reader response. I would then use the same log for handwritten transcription of the audiotape and comments on the length of time for transcription and my thought processes on the research and the progress. I would later type the transcription and comments.

About one quarter of the way through the study, I switched to a less time consuming method of skipping the handwritten portion of transcription and directly type the transcription into a word processing document. I then imported the word processing document into N6 software and used the memo option attached to each as my observation log. I later used the same memo function to record notes on coding as patterns and categories emerged. The purpose of the log, in both formats, was to record and monitor my own subjectivity as a researcher as well as make notes on the study as a whole as a reminder to me at a later date.

Transcription

As indicated above, I transcribed all of my own data, first in handwritten format, and later typing it. Not long into the study, I switched to directly transcribing into word processing software. The transcription included each
audiotaped read aloud session and the author/illustrator interview I conducted. The read aloud sessions were transcribed verbatim, but the author/illustrator interview was not. I had not audiotaped this interview, rather opting to take handwritten notes with direct quotations. It was these notes and quotes that I transcribed. As I transcribed the read aloud sessions I was afforded the opportunity to become continuously more familiar with the students’ dialogue and characteristic ways of interacting. However, there were factors that affected the quality of the transcription. Those factors included occasional background noise from the main part of the LMC, students who spoke too quietly, students who would begin to speak over the voice of other students, and the pace or speed of a student’s speech patterns. On occasion, there were outside interruptions to our sessions, and those were not transcribed.

Transcription proved to be a very advantageous process, as I was able to “relive” the session as I transcribed, and acquaint myself more thoroughly with the data. In addition, the memo option on the N6 software gave me a convenient and easily accessed location to record my researcher log.

Data Analysis

In an interpretivist study, the analysis is ongoing as determined by the developing findings. According to Schwandt (2000), interpretivism “considers understanding to be an intellectual process whereby a knower (the inquirer) gains knowledge about an object (the meaning of human action)” (pp. 193-194). Therefore, data analysis cannot be separate from data collection. The
The interpretivist paradigm sees reality as socially constructed, formed through cultural lenses. Schwandt (1997) defines interpretivism as a “philosophical perspective interested in the ways in which human beings individually and collectively interpret or construct the social and psychological world in specific linguistic, social, and historical contexts” (p. 19). To support this way of interpreting, I transcribed data as soon after collection as possible.

Because of this viewpoint, data analysis was ongoing and repetitive and took place throughout all the stages of the research process. Though I began with an existing framework from the literature on reader response, categories and patterns truly emerged as data was collected and considered. I looked at the data with an eye for categories that further aligned into themes. I organized the data by coding into categories, patterns, and themes with an eye to negative cases and alternative explanations. I attempted to build a descriptive study and interpret how an extended engagement with one author/illustrator’s picturebooks can help intermediate grade students make meaning of literature and of themselves.

Data analysis was begun by reviewing my purpose for the study and my research questions. I did this with an eye to what the existing research said and how my findings could relate to, or deviate from, the work. My analysis fell into six stages, though they were, at times, not mutually exclusive, rather nonlinear: (1) organizing the data; (2) beginning analysis with a previously existing framework on reader response; (3) refining and generating categories, themes, and patterns that emerged from the data; (4) coding the data; (5) searching for
negative cases and alternative explanations; (6) and writing the analysis in Chapter 4.

As the data were collected and transcribed I imported it into N6 software. I chose to code in text units of one sentence each, or when students spoke in sentence fragments, one single meaningful chunk of conversation. Since this particular piece of qualitative analyzing software organizes the data alphabetically by title of the imported piece, I had to decide if I wanted to deal with the data in this method or work with it by date of importation. I decided the date was more valuable, as it would allow me to see the students’ progression during the study over time. To overcome this obstacle, I made notations in the heading of each document as to when the data were collected, transcribed and imported. This information is readily apparent when scanning through the list of documents to analyze.

Next, I began the coding of each document using the existing framework on reader response developed by Lawrence Sipe (1998). This framework included the following categories of response: analytical, intertextual, personal, transparent, and performative. The first involves students asking for, or providing, clarification on either or both the text and illustrations. The second is the students’ comparing or contrasting the text or illustrations to other texts. The third are responses whereby the students relate the text and/or illustrations to their own life experiences. Next, the transparent response refers to the students projecting their own interpretations onto the text and/or illustrations. And last, the performative response indicates the students acting out or reacting in some
physical way to the book. I chose to begin coding using Sipe’s framework because during the data collection phase of the study I had witnessed evidence of all five methods of response.

For example, in our second read aloud session, during the sharing of *I Can Hear the Sun* (1996), one participant, John, commented on one of the characters, Willy Jack, a homeless Vietnam War veteran, though in the text Polacco doesn’t explicitly tell the reader/viewer that information. John interpreted what he saw in the following way:

I kinda thought he was a hippie because he said, “Man”…Peace signs on his forehead…Maybe he’s using drugs or something…I was going to say if Willy Jack were younger, he could be like Ozzy Ozborne, but in a good way.

I coded this passage under Sipe’s category of personal response because John’s was relating what he saw and learned about Willy Jack through his own personal knowledge, or perceived knowledge, about hippies.

After finishing coding all the documents transcribed for the whole study through Sipe’s (1998) five categories, other categories, themes, and patterns emerged from the data soon after. First, two more categories of response emerged after Sipe’s, global and motivational. The first is for responses that go beyond the personal and connect with the world wider than the students’ experiences. The second, dealt with speculation about Polacco’s motivation for writing and illustrating as she did.
From there, it became readily apparent that Sipe’s (1998) personal response category broke down further into seven subcategories. These were coded as connections to self, connections to family, connections that point out diversity, connections to popular culture, connections to friends, connections to societal beliefs, and connections that reflect the student’s philosophy of life. For example, John’s personal comments, as quoted above, subdivided into both the categories of connections with popular culture and connections that point out diversity. Furthermore, Sipe’s category of intertextual response further subdivided itself into four subcategories as I analyzed the data with the question in mind of how an extended study of one author/illustrator’s work can enhance childrens’ understandings. It then became apparent that I needed to analyze the data for my role as a participant in the study and how the students’ understandings were dependent on me. Five categories emerged from this level of analysis. They are: connections with other author/illustrators’ books, connections on authenticity, connections for content, and connections on Polacco’s intentions.

Each time that I revisited my research questions, and then revisited the data, more categories emerged. Two categories presented themselves while I studied the data with an eye to how the students utilized the illustrations to make meaning. And three more became apparent when I studied Polacco’s interview to see how the informed voice of the author/illustrator could aid in my interpretations of the students’ transactions. Below is a chart of all of the categories with an explanation of each. More explanation and examples will be provided in Chapter 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analytical responses</td>
<td>Seeking clarification of texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertextual responses</td>
<td>Comparing/contrasting texts with other texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal responses</td>
<td>Relating texts to self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparent responses</td>
<td>Projecting interpretations to texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performative responses</td>
<td>Physically reacting to texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational responses</td>
<td>Projecting ideas about author/illustrator’s motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global responses</td>
<td>Relating ideas about larger issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations for clarification</td>
<td>Using illustrations to answer questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations to make a point</td>
<td>Using illustrations to make an assertion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections with other author/illustrators’ books (subcategory of intertextual response above)</td>
<td>Linking Polacco’s work to other author/illustrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections on authenticity (subcategory of intertextual response above)</td>
<td>Questioning truthfulness of Polacco’s work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections for content (subcategory of intertextual response above)</td>
<td>Discovering connections between works by Polacco</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.2: Categories and Explanations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connections on Polacco’s intentions (subcategory of intertextual response above)</th>
<th>Questioning Polacco’s meanings in texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My role as clarifier</td>
<td>Answering questions or addressing confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My role as questioner</td>
<td>Posing questions to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My role as disseminator</td>
<td>Diverting questions generated by students back to group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My role as emphasizer</td>
<td>Repeating what is said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My role as student</td>
<td>Learning from the text or students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections to family (subcategory of personal response above)</td>
<td>Relating texts to family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections that point out diversity (subcategory of personal response above)</td>
<td>Identifying texts that show diversity of all types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections to popular culture (subcategory of personal response above)</td>
<td>Identifying texts that relate to current popular issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections to friends (subcategory of personal response above)</td>
<td>Relating texts to friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections to societal beliefs (subcategory of personal response above)</td>
<td>Linking texts to widely held assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections that reflect philosophy (subcategory of personal response above)</td>
<td>Discovering issues in texts that imitate the student’s life philosophy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued
The fourth stage of the data analysis, coding the data, was done at the same time as the third stage described above. At every return to the data to code, it was with an eye to my research questions. The system of coding was developed through those questions and with the intent of characterizing the content of student and teacher talk throughout the read aloud sessions, within the student reflective journals, the researchers’ field notes, and the author/illustrator interview. As each category and sub-category emerged, I thoughtfully revisited each piece of data in its entirety and coded each relevant example in N6. As each new theme and category evolved, always through the focus of the research questions, I would return to each data document. Sometimes, one piece of data would support more than one category and I would code multiple times, as N6 will allow. In this way a bigger picture of the data began to emerge.

Next, after searching the data several times for themes and categories, I went back to search one more time for negative cases in the patterns that had developed and for alternative explanations. On encountering a case that seemingly didn’t follow the previous themes or categories, I would, knowing the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polacco answering students’ questions</th>
<th>Answering questions and projections of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polacco affirming themes</td>
<td>Affirming projected ideas about themes of books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polacco addressing style</td>
<td>Explaining writing and illustrating styles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
background and other responses of that student, search for other possibilities for the negative case. For example, one possible negative case was a child’s unwillingness to use the both the illustrations and the read aloud text to make meaning. Rather, he chose to focus on the illustrations almost exclusively at one point. An alternative explanation for such a case could be the child’s inability to focus on both, possibly because of his attention deficit disorder, rather than his willingness.

Finally, when I finished examining the data numerous times, and had coded the emergent patterns and themes, I began to write the narrative piece (Chapter 4). During that time, I continued to analyze as the work of writing my grounded theory required.

Issues of Trustworthiness, Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, or checks for authenticity and balance, can be safeguarded through criteria for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Credibility denotes “being responsive to those standards of evidence and proof that are favored by clients and stakeholders” (Chambers, 2000, p. 862). Ways to help ensure those standards include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. The first two refer to the amount of time a researcher spends in the field observing to learn the respondents’ culture, build their trust, collect data, and recognize
negative cases. As the Library Media Specialist in the school at which the
students attend, they are very familiar with me as a teacher. Likewise, this was
the third year I had worked with most of the students and have been able to
develop a rapport with them and have come to understand them as students. Also,
I met with the students once to three times a week over nine weeks for 45-60
minutes for each session. Triangulation is the “use of multiple methods…[which]
reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in
question” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5). I collected audiotaped read aloud
sessions, written observations, response logs, and an author/illustrator interview to
triangulate the data. All three issues, prolonged engagement, persistent
observation, and triangulation, used together speak to the very real issue of
credibility.

Transferability, or the degree to which results of a study can be applicable
to a similar case, can be furthered through thick descriptions of the “case’s own
issues, contexts, and interpretations” (Stake, 2000, p. 439). This allows for a
more authentic look at a particular set of respondents, which may or may not
allow applicability to other cases. I attempted through extended contact with my
students to provide a thick description of their transactions. The resulting
interpretations may be applicable to another teaching situation at another time.

Dependability can be furthered through audit trails, or documentation of
research through hard copies. I documented as described in the “Types of Data
Collected” section above, as well as maintained a researcher’s log and memos.
Finally, confirmability, which refers to the checking of the data throughout the
inquiry process by an outside researcher, is aided by the audit trail. There was another doctoral student in my department at OSU who was conducting research on reader response that was willing to act as the outside researcher to check my accumulating data.

Persistent Observation

Persistent observation is a qualitative research method that will help to provide for “a rounded account of the lives of a particular people, the focus being on individuals and their ever-changing relationships” (Angrosino & de Perez, 2000, p. 695). To increase the credibility of my study and attempt to discover those relationships, I spent as much time as possible in the environment we had created to gather as much data as possible and therefore, help determine the credibility of that data. The ten weeks of the study, nine of it being spent intensively working with the students, was the appropriate time frame, as it fit into the classroom teacher’s schedule between winter break and preparation for state and standardized testing.

Transferability

Transferability, or the extent to which the findings of a study can be transferred, or applied, to another setting, can’t be guaranteed. Rather, it is the qualitative researcher’s responsibility to provide a thick description of the participants and their interactions; that is, an in-depth look at the “case’s own issues, contexts, and interpretations” (Stake, 2000, p. 439). This would provide
for a basis on which other researchers may be able to compare and make useful inferences.

Sampling is also an issue in transferability. As described in the “Selection of Site” and “Participants” sections above, the site was chosen because of my role in the school, the students’ familiarity with me, and accessibility. The teacher was chosen because of her flexibility and willingness to work with me. It was my aim to make my sample as diverse as possible so as to take in as many viewpoints as I could, which could aid in another researcher’s ability to use the information at another time in another setting.

Audit Trail

An audit trail, or paper trail, of documentation is necessary to preserve information on how the study was conducted, data was collected and analyzed, and findings discovered. In my study, documentation included field notes, transcription of read aloud sessions and author/illustrator interview, and student reflective logs. I depended on these documents to record observations and dialogue of the participants, my thought processes, and notes on emerging themes. With these documents and data in hand, the constant comparative method of analysis was made possible. Charmaz (2000) notes that this method is critical in utilizing grounded theory. She writes that the constant comparative method allows for “(a) comparing different people (such as their views, situations, actions, accounts, and experiences), (b) comparing data from the same individuals with themselves at different points in time, (c) comparing incident with incident,
(d) comparing data with category, and (e) comparing a category with other categories” (p. 515).

Charmaz’s (2000) first approach above included my keeping in mind the diversity of the students’ backgrounds, and attempting to understand how this affects their responses. For example, Deqa is an ELL student, therefore, most of her responses were attempts to make meaning of the story, whereas, John, who is firmly grounded in popular culture, makes connections through his experience. The second approach, comparing data of the same individual, would include Nicole’s usual willingness to answer questions that others pose with the instance where she lost patience with Annie who had become fixated with trying to understand what parts of a book were true and which weren’t. The third approach, comparing incident with incident, I took into account when some books, such as *The Butterfly* (2000) created much discussion, while others, such as *Thunder Cake* (1990) generated very little. Charmaz’s approach of comparing data with category I continuously undertook as codes and categories emerged. And finally, comparing category with category occurred as codes emerged and I attempted to better understand how they fit with the data. For example, in attempting to understand how the students’ personal responses might show me how their backgrounds helped them make meaning of a text, seven subcategories emerged. In comparing the data with each subcategory this understanding was fine tuned. This constant comparative method helped to insure that results from this study were data driven rather than formulated by my preconceived notions.
Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing, according to Spillett (2003), is the process whereby: Researchers meet with one or more impartial colleagues in order to critically review the implementation and evolution of their research methods. The role of the peer debriefer is to facilitate the researcher’s consideration of methodological activities and provide feedback concerning the accuracy and completeness of the researcher’s data collection and data analysis procedures (p. 1 of electronic copy).

This process serves to “enhance the credibility of the qualitative research” (Spillett, p. 1 of electronic copy) and adds trustworthiness. The use of this external audit process allowed me to explore my evolving analysis with outside, impartial professionals.

I asked Dr. Susan Hayward, a 2002 graduate from The Ohio State University in the College of Education, and Erin Sanchez, a fellow graduate student working on her doctorate at about the same pace as me, to function as my peer debriefers. Both Dr. Hayward and Ms. Sanchez worked with me intermittently throughout the data collection and analysis portions of the study. With both peer debriefers, I talked about developing categories, codes, and themes, and would ask their opinions as to the soundness of my thinking. And likewise, both individuals questioned and guided me about my reasoning and added significant insights. Dr. Hayward, especially, challenged my interpretations and assisted me in thinking more deeply about my conclusions.
Additionally, my dissertation committee members became significant debriefers throughout the research process.

**Reiteration of Research Questions and Data**

The following chart is a reiteration of my research questions, in shortened form, and how the types of collected data assisted in answering those questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Read Aloud Sessions</th>
<th>Student Reflective Journals</th>
<th>Researcher Log</th>
<th>Author/Illustrator Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do intermediate grade students transact with Polacco’s picturebooks?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do these students utilize the illustrations in Polacco’s work to make meaning of the text and vice versa?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does extended transaction with the work of a single author/illustrator enhance the meanings derived from the works?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do the students’ prior knowledge and social background support their meaning making of Polacco’s books?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can the informed voice of the author/illustrator aid in my interpretations of the students’ transactions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.3: Research Questions and Supporting Data
With this structure in mind, I will now move onto Chapter 4, Presentation of Findings.
CHAPTER 4
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter on the findings of my study is divided into six sections. The first is an overview of each of Patricia Polacco’s picturebooks used in the study, and the final five sections correspond with one of each of my research questions and the data which relates to it.

Overview of Picturebooks

Before I begin my discussion of each research question, I will give a brief synopsis of each of Patricia Polacco’s books, in the order in which they were shared. The first, Appelamando’s Dreams (1991), I chose because of its fantastical elements and Polacco’s employment of characters outside of mainstream society. A reviewer from Publishers Weekly (1991) referred to the book in this way:

A group of children stuck in the drabbest of villages share a secret: when their friend Appelamando dreams, they can actually see brightly colored, amazing objects float out of the top of his head. Soon they discover that the images stick to anything moist, and disaster strikes one rainy day
when--in a place that frowns on nonconformity--the boy's kaleidoscopic dreams "hold fast to the walls and storefronts of the town" [(unp.)]. To escape the villagers' ire Appelemando and his friends run off into the woods and are lost, but in the end, his dreams save the day…The contrast between the dingy village and villagers, rendered in subdued tones of gray, brown and black, and the vivid hues of Appelemando's phantasms makes for an arresting visual juxtaposition and provides Polacco's fertile imagination with plenty of room (p. 1 of electronic copy).

Likewise, the second book shared, *I Can Hear the Sun* (1996), also deals with the fantastic, but with more realistic characters, who are nonetheless, quite outside the walls of mainstream society. Reviewer Sharon R. Pearce (1996) wrote this description about the book:

Stephanie Michele works in the park caring for the wildlife, and, unofficially, for the homeless folks who live there. A boy, Fondo, shows up one day and seems to belong. Stephanie and Fondo share a sensitivity to nature that others can't comprehend or appreciate. Then, they learn that the people at the settlement house where Fondo lives plan to send him away because he is a special-needs case. He runs away and accepts an invitation by the geese to fly away with them. The park "family" vow to keep his disappearance a secret, but readers are let in on this "true story" because Polacco knows Stephanie Michele personally…The artist places
her subjects center stage on the white pages and does an expert job of capturing their poses and expressions with an economy of line and touches of color (p. 1 of electronic copy).

Both titles took students outside of their own worlds.

The next two titles, both holiday stories, tap into Polacco’s family background and heritage. The first, *The Trees of Dancing Goats* (1996), was described by an unnamed writer in a review in *Publisher’s Weekly* (1996) in the following manner:

On the family farm in Michigan, Trisha and Richard watch as Babushka and Grampa prepare for Hanukkah in their native Russian way, hand-dipping the candles, carving the children gifts of little wooden animals, cooking the latkes. When scarlet fever debilitates their neighbors, Trisha's whole family pitches in to make and deliver holiday dinners and Christmas trees (decorated with the children's wooden animals). Polacco's characteristically buoyant illustrations embody the joy of holiday traditions even as her robust storytelling locates the essence of that joy in sharing and friendship (p. 1 of electronic copy).

In *The Christmas Tapestry* (2002), Polacco introduces Jewish characters who spent time in German concentration camps. A review published in *School Library Journal* the same year the book was published had this to say:
Jonathan has made a good adjustment to life in Michigan after his father takes over as the pastor of a rundown Baptist church. The whole family has worked hard to renovate the building and restore the congregation. The boy becomes distraught, however, when a snowstorm causes a leak and ruins the wall behind the altar just before Christmas. In a series of events that would strain belief in anything other than a holiday story, he and his father find a tapestry to cover the wall and bring about a reunion between two Holocaust survivors who had used the hand-stitched cloth as their wedding canopy. An author's note cites two different Christian ministers as the source of this sentimental story (p. 1 of electronic copy).

From this title, the students became more interested in the Holocaust and Polacco’s life.

For these reasons, we went on to share *The Butterfly* (2000) and *The Keeping Quilt* (1998). Hazel Rochman, a well known scholar of multicultural children’s literature, had this to say about the first title:

In a quiet author's note, Polacco tells the true story on which this picture book is based. Her aunt Monique was a child in France during the Nazi occupation. Monique didn't know that her mother was active in the French Resistance and was hiding a Jewish family in the cellar of her house. Told from the child's viewpoint, the facts are spellbinding: Monique's discovery of the hidden refugee child, Sevrine, the end of the girls' strong friendship
when the Jewish family is forced to flee and face the Nazi patrols. Unfortunately, the storytelling and pictures are melodramatic and sentimental. The sustained metaphor of the title refers to a fragile butterfly that Monique brings to Sevrine in hiding. It flutters "like the kiss of an angel," but is crushed in the fist of an ominous Nazi. In the end Monique sees a group of butterflies flying free and takes that as a sign that her friend is safe (p. 1 of electronic copy).

Despite Rochman’s criticism, the students were enthralled with the tale and Polacco’s Jewish roots. *The Keeping Quilt* helped satisfy some of their curiosity about who Polacco is. Bock (1988), a reviewer for *School Library Journal*, described the book as follows:

Polacco's first-person voice moves her narrative forward gracefully from the time when her Great-Gramma Anna came to America during the last century to the present…Particularly striking are the faces of the Russian Jewish immigrant families who people the pages. The only color used is in the babushka and dress of Great-Gramma Anna, which become part of a brightly hued quilt. Following that quilt through four generations is the basis of this account. Customs and fashions change, but family is constant, visually linked by the ""keeping quilt” (p. 1 of electronic copy).
We shared the tenth anniversary issue, which according to a reviewer from *Publishers Weekly* (1998) "adds a few squares to the original story with expanded text and art" (p. 1 of electronic copy. This title extended the historical theme that was begun by earlier titles. From here it seemed natural to share another of Polacco’s historical fiction titles, *Pink and Say* (1994). An unnamed reviewer writing for *Kirkus Reviews* (1994) gives this synopsis of the book:

A white youth from Ohio, Sheldon Russell Curtis (Say), and a black youth from Georgia, Pinkus Aylee (Pink), meet as young soldiers with the Union army. Pink finds Say wounded in the leg after a battle and brings him home with him. Pink's mother, Moe Moe Bay, cares for the boys while Say recuperates, feeding and comforting them and banishing the war for a time. Whereas Pink is eager to go back and fight against “the sickness” that is slavery, Say is afraid to return to his unit. But when he sees Moe Moe Bay die at the hands of marauders, he understands the need to return. Pink and Say are captured by Confederate soldiers and brought to the notorious Andersonville prison camp. Say is released months later, ill and undernourished, but Pink is never released, and Polacco reports that he was hanged that very first day because he was black (p. 1 of electronic copy).

It is a tale that has been passed down from Polacco’s great-great-grandfather and every generation since.
The next three titles that I read aloud continued to build on the students’ knowledge of Polacco’s life and experiences. *Meteor* (1987), one of Polacco’s older titles is described as:

A pleasant enough tale of a small town's excited reaction to the landing of a meteorite in a front yard. The family cordons off the “rock,” and the townspeople soon flock to the spot. Some auction meteor basket lunches and sell popcorn, the local high-school band gives a meteoric performance, and university science departments come to analyze the meteorite. The entire town seems filled with a special magic inspired by touching the meteorite (McGinn, 1987, p. 1 of electronic copy).

One of her newer titles, *When Lightning Comes in a Jar* (2002), is also a remembrance of a family incident:

While awaiting her family's arrival, Trisha thinks back on other reunions, which were always filled with food, contests (bag races, watermelon-seed-spitting contests), games, and even rides on Grandpa's draft horse. But one particular reunion was special to Trisha, the one at which Gramma shared a generation-old tradition--catching "lightning in a jar." The watercolor-and-pencil illustrations, skillfully composed on the pages, expressively sketch the characters, including Trisha's bespectacled, cheeky aunties, and catch the exuberance of times gone by. At the end, listeners discover that Trisha has become the family elder, and is looking forward to passing on
family traditions (catching lightning bugs in a jar) and stories to another generation (Cummins, 2002, p. 1 of electronic copy).

And My Rotten Red Headed Older Brother (1994) became a favorite of the group:

Patricia can't quite understand how anyone could possibly like her older brother Richard. Whether picking blackberries or eating raw rhubarb, he always manages to outdo her, rubbing it in with one of his "extra-rotten, weasel-eyed, greeny-toothed grins." When their Bubbie teaches Patricia to wish on a falling star, she knows just what to ask for. The next day her wish comes true; although dizzy, she remains on the carnival merry-go-round longer than Richard. Her nemesis turns into her hero, however, when she takes a spill and he carries her home (Fleishhacker, 1994, p. 1 of electronic copy).

The final two titles were read aloud because of student requests. One student called Thank you, Mr. Falker (1998) “my story” meaning that it was her favorite of Polacco’s titles. Dennis (1998) wrote in School Library Journal this description:

Young Tricia wants desperately to read but when she starts school she finds that the words “wiggle” on the page. Teased by her classmates, she retreats into dreams and drawings. It's not until the family moves to California and Tricia has managed to reach the fifth grade that a new
teacher finally recognizes her pain and distress. What's more, he does
something about it (p. 1 of electronic copy).

And finally, Thunder Cake (1990), was requested by one student who had
previously heard it read aloud in her English Language Learners class. A
Publishers Weekly reviewer (1990) notes that “in Thunder Cake, a grandmother
helps her granddaughter overcome her fear of thunder by baking a special cake
while a storm threatens” (p. 1 of electronic copy). It centers around Patricia as a
very young child and the warm care her grandmother takes in distracting her from
the storm while at the same time helping to overcome several fears.

I will now turn my attention to my five research questions and the
corresponding data. The notation which follows each piece of data references the
location of the transcript. For instance, (RA1) refers to Read Aloud Session One.
Also, SJ will stand for Student Journals, FN will represent Field Notes, and AI
will be the abbreviation for Author Interview. Students are referred to by a
pseudonym, first name only; “A” denotes a comment all, or most, of the students
made; author/illustrator will be designated as Polacco, and I identify myself as
“R,” or the researcher, throughout the transcripts.

Research Question One:
How do intermediate grade students transact with Polacco’s picturebooks? How
can these transactions be classified and/or categorized? What do they
mean to the student?

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As explained in Chapter 3, both in the section on Participants and in the section on Organization of the Study, the group of fifth grade students were chosen purposefully. With the classroom teacher’s assistance, I assembled as diverse a group of students as possible to facilitate as many varied responses to the literature as possible. The issues of diversity included gender, ethnicity, language, cognitive ability, socioeconomic status, family structure, and health issues.

Also as explained in Chapter 3, in the Data Analysis section, I began coding with Sipe’s (1998) categories. I chose to begin coding in this manner for two reasons. First, I had witnessed evidence of all five manners of response with my students during the data collection stage, and so it seemed productive to analyze what became obvious. Second, as I wasn’t certain what other responses would make themselves apparent, it seemed more efficient to start with an established model.

Sipe’s (1998) framework included the following categories of response: analytical, intertextual, personal, transparent, and performative. Two additional categories of response emerged that I titled motivational and global. In an attempt to discover some understandings about research question one, as stated above, I will now look closely at each category of response, the two new categories that emerged, and the data that corresponds with those categories. Subcategories emerged from the intertextual response, but I will talk about those during the discussion of the findings for research question three, as they became important in
attempting to answer that question. Likewise, subcategories grew from the personal response, but I will discuss those as part of the findings for research question four.

**Analytical Responses**

Analytical responses are those whereby students ask for, or provide clarification, for a question, comment, or confusion dealing either with the story or illustrations, or both. This response seemed to provide for the students a sense of understanding, and sometimes relief, in that their questions or confusions are made clear. This type of response occurred more frequently than did any other type and, as I had written in my field notes, most read aloud sessions began with analytical questions or comments. The analytical response was coded in 340 units of transcription of read aloud sessions out of a total of 1977 text units, involving 17% of the text.

One rather extended example of the analytical response involved the following exchange early in the study while discussing the illustration of the pond at the park in the book *I Can Hear the Sun* (1996). The illustration to which they are referring is a double page spread with the pond and geese prominently displayed in the foreground, and the characters and other geese on the shore receding in the background. The water is colored shades of green and yellowish green with swirls that suggest movement by the geese. A reflection of each goose is apparent in the water. In illustrations on subsequent pages the water appears to
be the same colors as noted in this illustration, but is also at times flecked with red. The conversation took place as follows:

   Drew:  Yeah, why is that water green?
   Annie:  They say they clean it everyday.
   R:  Let’s see here now (turning pages back). What is that?
   Drew:  Seaweed?
   John:  Scum?
   Nicole:  Reflection?
   R:  Could be.
   Annie:  It’s dark.
   R:  Why’s it reflecting red?
   A:  The sun.
   R:  The sun is reflecting. So maybe…
   Annie:  So maybe the sun is reflecting.
   R:  The sun is reflecting.
   Drew:  On the water, makes it greenish.
   Jennifer:  But water is blue.
   R:  Is water really blue?
   Annie:  It reflects the blue sky.
   Jennifer:  Particles go together.
   R:  It’s reflecting off the sky. So this is probably…
   Drew:  Green grass.
   John:  You can see the ducks’ heads reflecting.
   R:  Shadows.
   Nicole:  It’s not shadows.
   R:  Patricia Polacco is pretty amazing. It’s not shadows, it’s reflecting, you’re right. (RA2)

Through the students back and forth exchanges with analytical responses, they were able to create some understandings as a group and at least partially satisfy Drew’s original question. It is evident that they utilized both illustrations and the text to understand the coloring of the pond.

    One phenomenon I noted early in my field notes was that though I was attempting to stay out of the students’ conversations, I was drawn in. In this example, I questioned the students’ responses, affirmed their ideas, and facilitated the discussion by referring back to the book. As the read aloud sessions
progressed, my role diminished in the discussion. I will look at this phenomenon more closely later in this chapter when talking about the coding I discovered for my roles.

I will now turn my attention to the students’ use of intertextual responses.

**Intertextual Responses**

Intertextual responses are connections that students make between texts, either with the story, or the illustrations, or both. They compare and contrast the book at hand either with other books by the same author/illustrator, or with books by other individuals. These responses seem to provide for the students a sense of continuity as they make meaning by making connections from what they already known to new understandings. The intertextual response was coded in 183 units of transcription of read aloud sessions out of a total of 1,977 text units, involving 9.3% of the text. Though these responses occurred less frequently than analytical responses, they showed the students’ use of connections between Polacco’s books, and other texts, to make meaning.

The first example of intertextual response, as reproduced below, was during the reading of *Thank you, Mr. Falker* (1998). We had looked at the covers, endpages, and title page of the book, and I was reading the dedication page. That page is illustrated with what appears to be a white doily on which rests a somewhat shabby copy of *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Beside it is a canning jar with a golden colored substance filling it about three-fourths of the way to the top. The discussion took place as follows:
Nicole: Is that a jar of jelly? (Pointing to the illustration on the dedication page).
John: It looks like iced tea.
Annie: It looks like marmalade or iced tea.
Drew: It looks like honey. Oh, I know what it is!!
Zachary: What’s marmalade?
Annie: Like a golden type of jelly. Kind of like honey, only in jelly form.
Segal: And I hate honey.
Nicole: I read one of her books before and the grandma was talking to the girl, and she put a dab of honey on the book. And said like this book is as sweet as the honey is because, I can’t remember all of it. The girl didn’t like to read and she didn’t like books.
R: She was just learning to read. It was *The Bee Tree*. (RA8)

I had only gotten as far as the dedication page in sharing the story when Nicole stopped me with an analytical response. During the ensuing discussion, she makes an intertextual response that assists in clarifying her initial response and seems to provide a sense of continuity from what she knew to a new understanding. Though *The Bee Tree* was not one of the books by Polacco that we had shared, it was one that Nicole had read and gave assistance to her, and then ultimately the group, in making meaning. Furthermore, I suspect that Drew also knew what the meaning of the honey in Polacco’s stories entailed, though he didn’t elaborate. If Zachary hadn’t interrupted with an analytical response, he might have spoke further about what was on his mind.

By this read aloud session, the eighth, my role in the discussions had diminished significantly. Students were relying on each other, for the most part, to answer their questions, address their comments, and to assist them in making meaning. They were discussing for longer periods of time without asking for, or expecting, my intervention.
A second example of an intertextual response is a reference to a book that is not one of Polacco’s, yet made a difference to Annie in understanding the book *The Butterfly* (2000). She offered this response during the final discussion of the title, after the book was finished, and was displayed in the middle of the circle so all could see the front and back covers. The students had completed quite a lengthy discussion about Hitler and the Holocaust and their impressions and knowledge of the time period. Here is Annie’s comment:

> Annie: I read a book, it’s called *Sweet Valley*, and it’s called *It Can’t Happen Here* and it’s about this gang that they started to learn about Hitler’s time. And there was one leader and he got to choose who was in the club and who wasn’t and he chose people who were like him and he kicked out people who like didn’t have a lot of money like he did. Because his father was rich and he kicked out people who didn’t have a lot of money. He kicked out a girl who couldn’t hear, she was deaf. And he kicked somebody out because she didn’t believe in him. Because she thought his ideas weren’t right. He had done a lot of new things. (RA4)

Annie appeared to be building a bridge for herself from previous learning to a new understanding. In addition, she was equating the gang’s actions to those of Hitler’s and thus, it appears, attempting to assist the other group members in understanding how Hitler’s influence began and spread.

The personal response, the third in Sipe’s (1998) model will be discussed next.

**Personal Responses**

Personal responses are connections that students make to their own lives. Text and/or illustrations spark a connection to their own world and they make comment of it. This response seems to provide for the children an awareness that
literature has meaning for their own lives. In the read aloud sessions, personal responses were coded 216 times out of a total of 1,977 text units, accounting for 11% of the text.

One example of this type of response was apparent when we were sharing Thank You, Mr. Falker (1998). John, who like Polacco, has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), is identifying with the main character, Trisha’s, frustration. We were about half way through the book, when the new teacher, Mr. Falker, was praising Trisha’s artistic talent and scolding the students that teased her about her lack of reading skill. The text takes up about the upper half of the right side page and the illustration occupies all of the left page and the lower half of the right page. Trisha is standing beside Mr. Falker who is showing her picture to the class. The desk and blackboard are partially showing behind them. One of the students at a desk can be seen from the back pointing to Trisha’s picture on the right page. What started as an analytical question by Nicole about Polacco and ADHD, became an extended personal response by John. The transcripts are as follows:

Nicole: Didn’t she [Polacco] also say that she had some, umm, not like a disease?
Annie: Dyslexia. You see all these numbers really differently.
Nicole: She said that sometimes the numbers and letters will like turn around so she sees it backward.
R: Dyslexia is where the letters are jumbled up and backwards and upside down. Dysgraphia is when the numbers do it.
Annie: Does Patricia have both?
R: She has both.
Segal: Why does that happen?
R: It’s a condition, a learning disability that you’re born with. They don’t know why some kids are born that way and some are not but she has both.
John: I have ADD.
Drew: Actually it’s ADHD.
R: It’s two different conditions. ADD is where you have attention problems.
John: Attention deficit disorder.
R: ADHD is attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
Drew: I think my cousin has ADHD.
John: I have both.
Segal: What’s that again?
R: It’s where you can’t sit still and you can’t pay attention. And it’s not that you’re just not trying, it’s that you really can’t.
Segal: Forrest had that.
Nicole: Oh, my god! Forrest in third grade had it really bad. And you’d never guess that Patricia Polacco has that now because she’s so great an author and illustrator.
R: The other thing she said was she had one more condition and I can’t remember the name of it, but it was where if she stood still.
Nicole: She would do something with her legs.
R: If she stood still she could not pay attention because her surroundings were moving.
John: Yeah, you see a bunch of stuff moving around for some reason, right. It looks like if I stare straight at the wall and there’s stuff on it, it’s like something floats up and moves.
R: So she said if you would move, then the rest of the world would stand still. The way it’s supposed to. So maybe she has attention deficit too. She said when she would go out on the playground and swing, and swing, and swing and never want to get off. Because when she was in motion, the rest of the world would stand till the way it was supposed to, but when she would stand still the rest of the world would move.
Zachary: Cool.
R: You’re not allowed to do your math homework on the swing, so it would be hard. Right?
Zachary: It’d be hard, but it’d be cool.
Annie: I’d be cool if you didn’t have to keep it forever.
R: So if you could experience it a while but not be like that forever?
Annie: Yeah.
Nicole: Didn’t she say that some of her teachers would have to pull her off and drag her back in?
R: When she was little, yeah. Drag her back in from the swing because she didn’t want to get off. Cause the rest of the world finally looked like it was supposed to while she was swinging.
Zachary: We were coming home from church yesterday and I saw a chicken
beside the road. It’s like “Dad, I saw a chicken!” He said, “I think you’re delusional. Do we need to stop to the hospital?” (Laughter.)
Annie: What did that have to do with the world moving and standing still?
John: He said delusional.
Nicole: And seeing things that weren’t really there.
Zachary: I thought I saw a chicken. It’s like “buck!” (Laughter.)
John: I do that all the time. It’s like out of the blue there’s something in
front of me. (More laughter.)
Nicole: Is there a turkey right there?
John: It’s like when you’re really frustrated and mad there’s something
there that I didn’t see before. I see farm animals a lot. (More laughter.)
Zachary: Mooo! (RA8)

John’s personal experience with ADD not only helped him understand Trisha, and
ultimately Polacco, better, it also allowed the group to make meaning about the
condition. Furthermore, some of the group members gained a greater
appreciation for Polacco’s work knowing the conditions under which she worked.

Some of this growth in understanding can be seen in the reflective students
journals. Drew, who had mostly been listening throughout the above
conversation, showed his understanding of how the conditions dyslexia and
dysgraphia changed the way a person saw letters and numbers through his
drawing immediately after the read aloud and discussion. Though the drawing is
crude and looks somewhat hurried, the viewer can see what Trisha saw before and
after the intervention by Mr. Falker and the reading teacher, Miss Plessy. (See
Appendix D: Student Journal Entries, Figure D1).

I will now return to Sipe’s (1998) fourth category of response that was
readily apparent in the discussions of my students.

**Transparent Responses**

Transparent responses refers to the students projecting their own
interpretations onto the text and/or illustrations. This response seems to provide
for the students a way of helping create the story, or a way of legitimatizing the story for themselves. Transparent responses were coded in 154 units of transcription of read aloud sessions out of a total of 1,977 text units, involving 7.8% of the text. Though these responses occurred less frequently than the three categories above, analytical, intertextual, and personal responses, they showed the students’ attempts to interpret the stories and illustrations and assign motivations to the characters’ actions.

At one point in the title, *The Butterfly* (2000), there is a page that depicts a close up of the main character, Monique, in her colorful garden with a disturbed look on her face. There is the grey, gloved, clenched hand and part of the forearm of a Nazi soldier reaching down in front of her face. The text on right reads, “One [Nazi soldier] reached over the wall and took the butterfly in his leather-covered fist…He grinned at Monique, then squeezed his fist” (unp.). In the midst of a comment on the illustrations, there comes an analytical response, and then several transparent responses as the students try to infer the motivation of the soldier:

Nicole: I really like the colors here because most of the pages are dark. And I think this page really pops out when you look at it.
Deqa: Why did they squash a butterfly?
R: Who can help her?
Jennifer: ‘Cause, how to explain this. Because they don’t want you to have fun like that. They want to take over their country. He’s just being mean to them.
Deqa: But what if you had a horse. Would the Nazis just kill a horse?
John: Not really, I think it’s because she’s like a little kid and he was squishing the butterfly just to show you that he had something to do with the Jewish people.
Segal: Maybe he wanted to show her that he had more power than her.
Nicole: He wanted to show off.
R: Why would they want to show off?
Annie: To make them afraid.
Nicole: I think they squashed the butterfly because they don’t want her or anybody else to have joy and like [Segal] said, to have more power. Jennifer: I think they want to make it a tempting country. Make it like where we’re strong and you’re not, we can beat you up, and throw you in prison and do whatever we want with you. (RA5)

Nowhere in the illustration or text are any of these interpretations said or shown, but rather the students are using their inferencing skills to assign possible motivations for the soldiers actions. In doing so, the students seem to be making right for themselves Polacco’s choices of actions of her characters.

And now I’ll discuss the final response category based on Sipe’s (1998) model. From there, I will explore two other categories that emerged during coding.

**Performative Responses**

Finally, the performative response indicates the students acting out or reacting in some physical way to the book. In this manner of responding, students seem to take ownership of the book and even to some extent transform it into something of their own. This response was coded only twelve times in 1,977 text units, accounting for 0.61% of the text. Before the read aloud session of *Meteor!* (1987), what began as two analytical responses, turned into a performative one:

Deqa: What’s a meteor?
Zachary: It’s a piece of falling star.
Jennifer: Sometimes doesn’t it land on things and destroy them?
R: It can.
Zachary: Can I make a sound that it sounds like? (Makes a swishing sound). (RA8)
Then on the second page of the story, Polacco wrote, “As it fell through the night sky, the geese honked their alarm, the chickens cackled, and the goats bleated and jumped wildly about” (unp.). Again, what begins as an analytical response turns performative:

Annie: They bleeded?
R: Bleated, not bleeded. Anyone know what that means?
John: Like yelped. (John and Zachary makes yelping sounds). (RA8)

Then, about half way through the story, the scenario occurred one last time. We were sharing the double page spread where the celebration of the “meteoric event” is getting underway with the arrival of several entertainment groups, including the Union City Ladies Lyceum. The following conversation ensued:

Annie: What’s a lyceum?
R: That’s a performing group. And we have our own performing group here. (RA8)

Zachary did his interpretation of what a ladies lyceum would act like, and three pages later, when “scientists arrived from Battle Creek College, The University of Michigan, and Michigan State University” to puzzle out the mystery, both Zachary and John scratched their heads as Polacco wrote the scientists did (unp.).

John’s response journal entry for this read aloud session is as animated as were his responses during the read aloud. As he ascribed himself performative roles during the reading, so he ascribed a personified demeanor for the meteor.

(See Appendix D: Student Journal Entries, Figure D3).

The performative response, though tending to happen several times during one reading, didn’t happen as frequently as Sipe (1998) reports. Possibly the
difference can be attributed to the differences in age groups. He worked with first
graders, who tend to be more physical with their responses, and I worked with
fifth graders, who tend to be more reserved. However, it still seemed to assist my
students in allowing them to take ownership of the stories.

This concludes the categories of response as outlined by Sipe (1998). However, two other categories emerged from the interactions of my students that weren’t apparent with Sipe’s children. Those two categories I coded as motivational and global. Possibly the explanation for these two additions lies in the fact, again, that my students were older than were Sipe’s and were able to think in broader terms. Possibly the explanation lies in the fact that we explored the work of a single author/illustrator, so as to become more intimate with her work, rather than the work of several creators of children’s books. As seen in the above five categories of response, my students moved back and forth between making analytical responses for clarification, intertextual responses to other works, personal responses to the text and illustrations, transparent responses of their own interpretations, and performative responses that seemed to allow them to became much more intimate with the text. This fluid interchange may not have taken place without the extended time they spent on the work of only one author/illustrator. Next, I will relate evidence for the category of motivational response.
Motivational Responses

Motivational responses are those whereby the students question or project about Polacco’s motivation for creating a book, or portion of the book. It also includes their attempts to find direct connections between her life and her creations. This type of response seems to have grown out of the students’ extended time with Polacco’s work, and seems to have allowed the students the right to question Polacco. The motivational response occurred in 98 text units out of 1,977 which was 5% of the text. After we finished sharing Thunder Cake (1990), our final read aloud, Deqa questioned Polacco’s family’s role in creating the cake:

Deqa: So did they like invent the thunder cake?
Annie: I think generations before did.
Segal: Their family did before them.
Annie: Probably years and years ago.
Segal: It was probably in the family from ancestors. (RA12)

Deqa, who had heard this book read aloud in ELL class and had requested it read again in our group, drew an interesting illustration in her response journal that depicts large bolts of lightning entering the cake, whereby they become smaller. Possibly she is signifying that the cake had reduced Polacco’s fears. (See Appendix D: Student Journal Entries, Figure D4). And Nicole’s response journal illustration seems to indicate that Polacco has generalized her new found freedom to everything, rather than just her former fear of thunder. (See Appendix D: Student Journal Entries, Figure D5).

As the read alouds progressed, the students became so familiar with Polacco’s work that they talked about her almost as if she were in the room with
us. Her family stories are so closely intertwined with her art, both stories and illustrations, that it seemed to be impossible to talk about her books without talking about her. As can be seen in the above quotation from the final read aloud, the students weren’t satisfied to accept the story without questioning the role of the story in Polacco’s life and how it fits into her heritage.

The final category of response that emerged from my students’ transactions is global connections to the wider world around them.

**Global Responses**

Global responses were broader than personal or intertextual; they were responses that projected ideas about issues around them, both contemporary and historical. I coded 120 text units out of 1,977 as global responses; that is 6.1%. This response occurred during our reading of *Pink and Say* (1994) with a discussion of racism and the Civil War. It also occurred during our reading of *Thunder Cake* (1990) with talk about Russia to a connection to present day Armenia. Several of the stories, including *The Christmas Tapestry* (2002) and *The Butterfly* (2000) either dealt directly with the Holocaust or alluded to it.

Following our sharing of *The Butterfly* (2000), Deqa returned to the illustration and incident involving the soldier crushing the butterfly when she delivered an analytical response:

Deqa: Why did they squash a butterfly?
R: Who can help her?
Jennifer: ‘Cause, how to explain this. Because they don’t want you to have fun like that. They want to take over their country. He’s just being mean to them.
Deqa: But what if you had a horse. Would the Nazis just kill a horse?  
John: Not really, I think it’s because she’s like a little kid and he was squishing the butterfly just to show you know that he had something to do with the Jewish people.  
Segal: Maybe he wanted to show her that he had more power than her.  
Nicole: He wanted to show off.  
R: Why would they want to show off?  
Annie: To make them afraid.  
Nicole: I think they squashed the butterfly because they don’t want her or anybody else to have joy and like Sagal said, to have more power.  
Jennifer: I think they want to make it a tempting country. Make it like where we’re strong and you’re not, we can beat you up, and throw you in prison and do whatever we want with you.  
Annie: Sagal said they have power. Really the Nazi’s didn’t have power, they were mostly afraid of Hitler, so they really wouldn’t have done that if they hadn’t been so afraid of Hitler, probably.  
Deqa: Like if Hitler came they could squish him or kill him maybe.  
John: If Hitler wouldn’t have killed himself, what do you think the world would be like now?  
Zachary: It probably would be really bad and wouldn’t be like the government American’s have now. They probably would’ve taken over more of the world, instead of just that part of France.  
John: Do you think he would’ve gotten to America?  
Drew: He might’ve made it to America, but he would’ve died as soon as he got here.  
Nicole: I didn’t mean that they had more power, but that they probably THOUGHT they had more power.  
Annie: I know this is probably what you were going to say. But they probably really didn’t want to do this. They were afraid of Hitler and knew if they didn’t do what he said, they would probably be killed too.  
Drew: Why did Hitler pick the Jews and not anyone else?  
Annie: He didn’t like the Jews.  
Nicole: He didn’t like anybody that was different.  
John: Like [Nicole] said, he didn’t like anybody different. Like he was really depressed and sad.  
Segal: Was Hitler ever married?  
John: (Shaking head no).  
Jennifer: He was too evil to be married.  
Annie: He didn’t have any love in him.  
John: Is there still anybody who’s related to Hitler now?  
Annie: Hitler was the last one in his family. (RA5)  

What resulted was a rather lengthy conversation between all eight group members, with me almost completely left out of the discussion, as I had noted in
my field notes, that went beyond the immediate analytical questions to talking about Hitler’s motivations, personality, and influence. They even speculated as to what the world would be like now had Hitler succeeded. The transactions became truly global and seemed to serve as a way for the students to look beyond themselves and see stories as part of a bigger picture of contemporary and historical life.

**Summary of Response Categories**

The following chart is a summary of the students’ response categories, beginning with Sipe’s (1998) five and finishing with the additional two. I’ve also included the percentages of responses for each.
The above seven response categories speak to how the group of eight intermediate grade students in my study transacted with twelve of Polacco’s picturebooks. It became apparent that the majority of their responses were analytical, followed by personal, then intertextual. The next most common was the transparent response, then the global, motivational, and finally the performative. Each category represented a different way of making meaning of the stories and illustrations for each student, and between students.

As can be seen in the percentages of occurrences of each category, they vary by session. The analytical response tends to remain fairly constant, while the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Response</th>
<th>Percentages of coded text units</th>
<th>% of coded text sessions 1-4</th>
<th>% of coded text sessions 5-8</th>
<th>% of coded text session 9-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analytical responses</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertextual responses</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal responses</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparent responses</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performative responses</td>
<td>0.61%</td>
<td>.42%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational responses</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global responses</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.1: Categories of Response.
personal response increases as the sessions go on. The intertextual response is much greater in sessions five through eight, possibly because the books shared during those sessions either speak strongly to Polacco’s life and ancestry, or they show issues of historical and social importance. Transparent responses remain fairly constant over time, and global responses are greatest in the middle group of session, again possibly because of the issues of historical and social importance the books convey. Motivational responses rose during the final sessions of the read alouds, possibly because of the students increased familiarity of Polacco’s books. And finally, performative responses were shown occasionally throughout the study.

It was through these different ways of making meaning that students seemed to grow in their own understandings. For example, Annie’s connections between the Butterfly (2000) and a novel she had read seemed to make clearer to her the way Hitler had manipulated his people. John seemed to not only provide for the group a deeper understanding of ADD, but he also seemed to be acknowledging the condition in himself. And, John and Zachary’s performative responses to Meteor! (1987) may have served to help them realize a physical need to be part of the story to make it real for them. Therefore, it seems that the variety of the seven response categories allowed the students to create understandings for themselves in whatever way was most meaningful to them at the time.

I will now turn my attention to the second research question and the data that correlates with it.
Research Question Two:

How do intermediate grade students utilize the illustrations in Polacco’s work to make meaning of the text and vice versa?

After analyzing the data for response categories, I returned to the data with an eye to the ways the students used illustrations to make meaning of text, and how text helped make meaning of illustrations. The comments students made, or body language used, that referred to illustrations divided into two categories. First was their use of illustrations for clarification. In other words, they utilized the pictures to help them answer questions they posed about the story. Secondly, the students utilized the illustrations to make a point. They saw the pictures as evidence in defense of an issue.

Illustrations for Clarification

The first category, using illustrations for clarification, appeared in 211 text units out of a total of 1,977. That calculates to be 11% of the total text units of the read aloud documents. While we were beginning the read aloud of *Pink and Say* (1994), at the third double page spread, we encountered the word mahogany in reference to the color of Pink’s skin. Pink says to Say, “‘Where you hit? ‘Cause if it’s a belly hit, I gotta leave you here’” (unp.). Say answers, “‘Hit in the leg…Not bad if it don’t go green’” (unp.). Two double spreads later, there is an illustration of Pink dragging Say over some rocks. There is no text on those pages, rather it is a closeup of Pink and Say on the left, with Pink struggling to
heave both of them over the rocks. On the right, is earth and more rocks, and

Pink’s arm extends over in an attempt to grasp onto some grass. The colors are all earth tones; even their uniforms are rich greens and blues. At this page the conversation began with an analytical response by Annie:

Annie: What’s mahogany?
R: The color of mahogany? Anybody?
Drew: Mahogany is a type of wood.
R: Right about the color of his skin.
Zachary: Like a reddish brown.
Nicole: The guy who’s carrying him has green on his ankles.
R: Um, hmm. It does have green coloring on it. See the tear in his pants?
Deqa: On the back page with the illustrations, why would she make it green?
R: Why do you think she has green coloring, here, here, and there’s more down here?
John: Grass stains.
Nicole: Probably the wound, because he said don’t let it go green.
R: Do you know what that means?
John: That means gangrene infection.
R: And it actually looks red or green. It’s actually gets so infected they sometimes have to cut the leg off.
Nicole: I’ve heard about that, like in wars. They have to cut off arms and legs.
John: That can happen if they aren’t taken care of right. (RA7)

The students were making use of the illustration to make sense of some of the previous vocabulary in the story, while at the same time using that vocabulary and conversation in the previous text to make sense of the picture. Furthermore, they were doing this co-constructively among and between themselves. As I noted in my field notes, the students, by this seventh read aloud, very readily answer each other’s questions and extend from each other’s stories.
Illustrations To Make a Point

The second code, that of the students utilizing the illustrations to make a point, appeared only in 49 text units out of 1,977. This represented 2.5% of the total text. In these cases, the students used the pictures as evidence in defense of an issue. After our read aloud session of *The Butterfly* (2000), some of the students were interested in making sense of Polacco’s use of color. The conversation began in this way:

Nicole: I like the end pages, the black.
R: Why do you think she picked black?
Nicole: The Nazi’s and how cruel they were.
R: Remember what they called the Nazi’s in the book?
John: Tall boots.
R: And they were shiny black. (RA5)

Then the discussion moved into a defense of how they felt she could have more effectively illustrated. Nicole turned back to the page where the Nazi soldier crushes the butterfly in the garden:

Nicole: I think the pictures gives away too much of what’s to happen. I’d rather she have the garden and the men.
Jennifer: I’d rather just have it of her in her apron and her cat. It gives away too much. (RA5)

This conversational turn then gives way to the extended discussion that appears above in the section on global responses. The students very capably move between text and illustrations in a variety of ways to search for the meaning and affirmation they require.

To summarize, the intermediate grade students I worked with utilized the illustrations in Polacco’s work to make meaning of the text and vice versa in two
ways. First, they used the illustrations to clarify their questions and confusions, and second, they used the illustrations to make a point. However, at times, categories overlapped, or one category led to another. At other times, students seemed to be talking to make sense on their own; at other times, they talked together to make meaning co-constructively.

**Research Question Three:**

How does extended transaction with the work of a single author/illustrator, Patricia Polacco, enhance the meanings derived from the works? What kinds of understandings are gained that allow them to make even more in depth discoveries in subsequent books?

In returning to the data to search for clues to answer question three, I realized that I needed to search through the students’ intertextual responses in chronological order from the first read aloud session, and the corresponding students’ response journal and my field notes, to the final one. In doing so, four categories emerged that spoke to how the students connected the various books as the study progressed. While undertaking this process, I discovered that I needed to look more closely at my roles in the read aloud discussions to see if I was enabling the students in their search for meaning. This, in turn, produced five categories. I will first discuss the sub-categories of the students’ intertextual responses, and follow it by the roles I played in the sessions.
Subcategories of Intertextual Response

The following chart is an overview of the four subcategories of intertextual responses that emerged from the data as I was searching for ways that a prolonged transaction with the work of a single author/illustrator could aid in the ways students make meaning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories of the Intertextual Response</th>
<th>Number of coded text units</th>
<th>% of coded text sessions 1-5</th>
<th>% of coded text sessions 6-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connections with other author/illustrators’ books</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections on authenticity</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>.07%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections for content</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.39%</td>
<td>3.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections on Polacco’s intentions</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2: Subcategories of Intertextual Response.

The first sub-category denotes those occasions whereby the students make associations with books other than Polacco’s. The second questions Polacco’s authenticity of a story or illustration. The third sub-category shows the connections the students made between Polacco’s books. Connections with Polacco’s intentions denotes how the students try to determine Polacco’s motivation in creating a story or illustration. As can be seen in the chart, all of the

100
responses increased after our fifth session. This may be due to the occurrence of
the interview with Patricia Polacco between the fifth and sixth sessions. It may
also be due to the students’ increased exposure, and cumulative time with,
Polacco’s work.

Connections for Content of Other Author/Illustrators’ Books

Though it may seem irrelevant to a research question dealing with how
students learn about one author/illustrator’s work to look at how they connect to
others’ work, it may truly be beneficial. Looking at the topics they choose to
connect with across author/illustrators’ work may help determine how they make
connections between books by the same creator. This code was found in 52 text
units out of 1,977, meaning it occurred in 2.6% of the text.

This connection with books by other author/illustrators was apparent
during the final discussion of *The Trees of Dancing Goats* (1996). The following
is a portion of the conversation whereby one student, Annie, connects the book
with diarist Anne Frank’s book *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (1967):

Annie: When you were talking about how they…It reminds about a story
of Anne Frank.
R: Anne Frank was a Jew in Germany and she…
Annie: Stayed in her attic for two years because of soldiers killing all the
Jews.
Nicole: I thought she lived…
John: Were the soldiers Hitler’s soldiers?
R: Anne Frank’s? Yes, and many of the other stories we read will deal
with Nazi soldiers.
Nicole: Will we read *The Butterfly*?
R: We will next week.
Nicole: Yeah! (RA3)
The talk then continued to turn toward Hitler, the Jews, Christians, Nazis, and World War II. Clarification was made that the original Hanukkah was thousands of years ago, and that World War II took place in the 1940’s. In my field notes, I wrote that the students tend to be fascinated with any book that makes reference to Nazi Germany, Hitler, and the Holocaust, particularly John. This bit of discussion not only points out that the students connect books to other books and to the wider world, but that conversation is often brought back to another story by the same author/illustrator.

I will now turn my attention to the intertextual sub-category of students questioning Polacco’s story’s authenticity.

Connections on Authenticity

After reading several of Polacco’s picturebooks, the students started to expect that her books be true, or at least grounded firmly in her life story. If something in the book seemed less than truthful, someone of the group members might question it. This occurred in 46 of the 1,977 text units, accounting for 2.3% of the text.

One such transaction became rather lengthy. By the time we had shared *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (1998), our eleventh book, the students, and Annie especially, were expecting to see a strong correlation between Polacco’s life and the story. The discussion centered around her need to understand the fictionalized parts. Here’s the conversation that ensued after we finished the book:
Annie: Finally, I get to hear my book! How is this supposed to be fiction? She says her books are fiction. But this seems basically true about her life.
R: What grade was she in?
Nicole: Maybe she didn’t remember everything that happened. Maybe there’s a lot she made up. I know there was a Mr. Falker.
Sagal: Books are based on true stories.
R: They’re based on true stories, right.
Nicole: So they’re not always true.
John: But sometimes she remembered like back in her childhood she wasn’t that great, she couldn’t read. And some boy, she couldn’t remember his name, and maybe the first name that came to her head is Eric.
R: So she changed names maybe.
Annie: OK, but she says she writes fiction books. But how is this fiction?
R: Does anybody have anything else to say before I say what I know? She was, like [Nicole] said before, fourteen or fifteen years old, for real before she learned to read. What grade was she in in this book before she learned to read?
Nicole: Fifth.
Annie: But it didn’t say that, and she looked older at the end. (We look at the illustration on the final full page spread, again. The left page portrays Trisha curled up on a window seat clutching a book in her right arm and a jar of honey in her left hand as she gazes out the window at the night sky. Trisha’s hair is in a bun, and the viewer can only see her profile).
John: It looks like she could be fourteen or fifteen.
Drew: Or about thirteen.
R: But she was in fifth grade. In reality she was in high school before she learned to read.
Nicole: Maybe she didn’t want to tell people that she was fourteen or fifteen before she learned to read.
Segal: That would be embarrassing.
R: And the other thing too when people fictionalize stories they don’t remember all of the conversation and dialogue exactly the way it happened so they make that up too.
Annie: Do they make up (inaudible)?
R: Because they can’t remember the conversations word for word.
Annie: So they make up the whole thing instead of trying to remember!?
R: I didn’t say they made up the whole thing.
Annie: It sounds like that!
R: I said they make up the dialogue because you can’t
remember…[Annie], she wrote her first book when she was forty-one. This was not her first book. So she was older than forty—one when she wrote it. How years have gone by since say fourteen and forty-four? John: Too many.
R: Thirty years. Now how can you remember the exact conversations for thirty years?
Annie: I don’t know, but they make up the whole thing and can’t just remember a little tiny part!? Nicole: They remember little tiny parts but they don’t remember everything.
Annie: She just said she made up the whole dialogue! R: No, no, no. Part of it at least. I don’t know exactly how much. Nicole: Build a bridge and get over it! (RA11)

As the conversation progressed, Annie became obviously distressed over what she saw as needless falsification of the story. Others, including myself, attempted to explain the need for some fictionalization, but she wasn’t assuaged. Nicole finally lost patience with Annie and wanted to move on to a less emotional discussion. My field notes indicated that Annie’s search for validity and truthfulness of the story was genuine, and that my role, as the conversation progressed, became somewhat of a referee.

I will now move on to the next most frequent sub-category of intertextual response, connections between books on issues of content.

Connections on Content

Students’ connections with content, or their making associations between Polacco’s books, didn’t occur as frequently as I had anticipated. Only 34 out of the coded 1,977 text units, or 1.71% of the text, was coded in this subcategory of intertextual response. Nevertheless, the students did make connections across books that assisted them in understanding Polacco’s work and life.
About half way through reading the book *The Christmas Tapestry* (2002), we came upon the full page spread with a closeup of the old woman examining the tapestry carefully on the right side of the page. There is a look of concentration on her face, while the main character, Johnathan, appears on the left side of the spread, under the text, with his hands in the air and a look of wonder on his face. The old woman had just identified the tapestry as her own, one she had made sixty years prior for her wedding. Nicole quickly related this incident to another of Polacco’s books. Following is the conversation that ensued:

Nicole: Didn’t she write another book about her getting married and they did the same thing and her children used the same cloth or tapestry?
R: It’s called the *Keeping Quilt*. Did you read that one Deqa?
Annie: Are we going to read that one?
R: We might. It’s not one that I had decided for sure, but we could.
Annie: That one’s really good. (RA4)

Because of Nicole’s prior experience with the *Keeping Quilt* (1998), she readily identified the theme and use of the quilt, or tapestry, in Polacco’s experience. And because of the interest in the book among the group members, I did choose to share the book at a later read aloud session. And it was during this reading of *The Christmas Tapestry* that I noted in my field notes that the students were beginning to make more intertextual connections both among Polacco’s books and other texts.

I will now turn my attention to intertextual connections that students made about Polacco’s intentions.
Connections on Polacco’s Intentions

One of the intertextual connections the students made concerned Polacco’s reasons and intentions for creating the books, both story and illustration, as she did. Only 19 of the 1,977 text units were coded this way, or 0.96%, but when this type of connection occurred, it was significant to the students in that they had come to expect how books connected to her life and that she had a real purpose in telling and illustrating the story the way she did. While sharing the third double page spread of the title *Thunder Cake* (1990), the last of the books we read, Annie questioned about the sequence in which Polacco had written the book. On that spread, the left side is completely taken up with the grandmother in a rocking chair cuddling the child close to her. In the background is some other living room furniture and pictures, some very Russian in style. On the right hand page is the text at the top, and living room rugs and a stretching cat at the bottom. All of the background is white, as is the characters’ skin, with the clothing and furnishings deep, rich earthtones. This situations sparked the following exchange:

Annie: Is this book one of her older ones?
R: As a matter of fact it is. This is a 1990, so it’s fourteen years old. Does it look like any of the older books we’ve read? Does anything about it look similar?
Nicole: The faces and the hands and the legs, like if you see the little girl are in pencil and the clothes are in color.
R: Any ideas why she did that?
John: Probably because she had trouble finding a skin color. And she wanted the clothing to stand out.
Nicole: They use bright colors in Russia.
R: That’s true.
Zachary: Some of the others are all white in the background like this one.
Segal: It looks dull.
R: Duller colors compared to her newer ones. Artists’ styles do change over the years, and hers has some. But hers hasn’t as much as some have. (RA12)

By this final sharing session, the students are comparing titles for style and color of illustration, age and sequence of when they were written, and the background and intentions of Polacco.

This in depth look at the students’ intertextual responses revealed that the extended time of working with one author/illustrator’s books allowed the students to reach understandings that built on early discoveries. It also revealed to me that my role as an observer participant varied within read aloud sessions. I also began to wonder if my role was enabling the students in their search for meaning. This part of the study uncovered five categories that described how I interacted with the group. I will now discuss and give examples of those codes.

Researcher’s Role as Observer Participant

In attempting to understand how I functioned in the group, I returned to the transcribed data from the read aloud sessions and my field notes. It was my original intention to act as little as a participant as possible. However, five categories emerged that described how I was an observer participant in the group. They are listed in the following chart:
As a clarifier, I answered students’ questions or addressed confusions; as a questioner, I posed questions the students had not yet considered. In the third category, as disseminator, I turned students’ questions back to the group to answer. As an emphasizer, I repeated what a student had shared or asked, and as a student, I learned something new from one of the books, or from the children.

As can be seen from the above chart, the clarifier role stayed a consistently important role throughout the study, though it seems that possibly the stories with heavier historical and social significance in the fifth through eighth sessions required more of me as a clarifier. Even though I tried to stayed out of the conversations, I functioned as a questioner throughout the study with,
surprisingly, more incidents at the end. My role as disseminator decreased as the students came to rely on each other more for answers and clarification. My role as emphasizer decreased sharply after the first four sessions as I realized from the audio recordings that my voice was too prominent in the discussions. And finally, as a student in the group my participation peaked during the middle sessions, again, possibly because of the themes of those stories.

Role as Clarifier

My position as clarifier, or answerer of questions or making clear confusions, occurred 362 in 1977 text units, or encompassed 18% of the text. As we were looking at the cover of *The Keeping Quilt* (1998), Zachary realized that an extra piece of paper that wrapped around the front and back covers depicted a red printed piece of fabric and had printed on it 10th Anniversary Edition. This is how the conversation of the book began:

Zachary: It says the 10th anniversary edition.
R: It says that because this book was originally written in 1988. So 10 years later in 1998 Patricia Polacco did a new version. And she adds on to the end of the story. And I’ll show you the part she adds on. (RA7)

Zachary really isn’t asking a question here, rather seeming to wonder out loud. Since I had information that could enlighten his observation, I offered it.

We made progress about half way through the book and arrived at the page where the full color quilt was the table cloth on the picnic table under Polacco’s first birthday cake. Polacco, three other young children, a dog, and a
teddy bear, all pencil sketches appear on either side of the table. Annie offered this comment:

Annie: Is this where it originally ended?
R: No, not yet. (RA7)

Again, I had the information to answer her question, so I offered it.

About two thirds of the way through the book, we arrived at the page where Polacco is holding her baby daughter in the quilt with her husband standing behind her looking on. The text on that page reads, “Many years ago I held Traci Denise in the quilt for the first time” (unp.). At that point I offered the following:

R: That’s where it originally ended. Then she went on to add pages. (RA7)

None of the students commented, but we went on to explore the final pages that Polacco added to this tenth anniversary issue. In my field notes, I offered the comment that my role as clarifier was still stronger at this seventh read aloud session than I had hoped it would be. I noted that I tried to disseminate the question to the group for answers, but when it was necessary, I still acted as a clarifier.

The next most frequent role I assumed is that of questioner.

Role as Questioner

As a questioner in the group, I posed questions that students had not yet considered. I had originally planned to not assume this role at all, rather allow the students questions be the only ones exchanged. And even though I never planned
questions to ask, they spontaneously came to mind, and I asked them. This role was apparent in 191 out of 1977 text units, or in 9.7% of the transcribed text.

At the end of the discussion about *I Can Hear the Sun* (1996), since the talk about the marginalized characters had been dealt with in a mostly superficial manner, I posed the following question, with the resulting exchange:

R: How should these people have been treated?
A: Nicer, better.
Jennifer: Just because they don’t have a home and never went to…college.
R: So there’s people in society who haven’t been treated fairly?
Annie: Just like the people downtown in our world. (RA2)

Annie’s comment is a reiteration of an earlier statement she had made about her father working with homeless people.

My role as a questioner in this instance was an attempt to nudge the conversation to a more in depth level. I wrote in my field notes that this read aloud exchange was the second session we were together and it was also the second document I coded about my roles. I noted that during this read aloud my roles are rather heavy as questioner. As the read aloud sessions progressed, this role decreased significantly. The role of disseminator, the next category I will discuss, became more prevalent.

Role as Disseminator

As a disseminator, I attempted to turn the questions and comments posed by the students back to the group to answer rather than supply information myself.
This role was apparent in 151 out the 1977 text units and made up 7.6% of the coded text.

During our read aloud of *The Christmas Tapestry* (2002), we came upon the double page spread about two thirds of the way through the book where the old woman is showing Jonathan and his family the numbers on her arm that she had received during her confinement in a concentration camp. This full color scene is pictured along the bottom of both pages with a pencil sketch of her memory of her wedding day being married beneath the tapestry above them on the upper left hand page. In the text, which appears in the upper right hand side of the page, the old woman says, “I shall never forget his sweet eyes, the way he looked at me. I never saw him again. We were all sent to concentration camps…” She pulled up her sleeve and showed a row of faded blue numbers on the inside of her lower arm” (unp.). This sparked a conversation about concentration camps, World War II, and Hitler. Annie questioned:

Annie: Where was Hitler from?
R: Does anybody know? [John]?
John: From Germany. (RA4)

Rather than jumping in with the answer, I turned the question back to the group. John, who is very well read on World War II, not only answered Annie’s question, but also supplied several other answers in the discussion. In this way, as I wrote in my field notes, the students came to rely more frequently on each other and looked less at me as the one able to supply their answers. I will now explain and share an example of my role as emphazier.
Role as Emphasizer

As the emphasizer, I tended to repeat questions or comments students made to add importance or weight to their words. This role appeared 87 times out of 1977 text units, or it occurred in 4.4% of the text. For example, as we were nearly at the end of reading aloud Apulelemando’s Dreams (1991), we shared the page that is a double page spread, but divided by forest trees so the viewer focuses on the villagers looking for their lost children on the left side while the children are trying to convince Apulelemando to dream on the right side. One of the characters, Lark, says, “‘You can help, Apulelemando…If you dream a dream big and bright enough, it will rise above the trees. People in the village will see it and know we are here’” (unp.) Apulelemando protests that he can no longer dream because of the unbelieving adults. But “then he looked into the eyes of his friends. In Lark’s eyes there was certainty. In Jefftoe’s, steady sureness. In Petra’s and Dorma’s, complete expectation, for they loved his dreams. Then he closed his eyes and began to see” (unp.).

Segal made the following comment:

Segal: I think he’ll dream a big dream ’cause his friends are confident in him.
R: He’ll dream a big dream because his friends are confident in him. They need his help. (RA1)

I repeated her comment, and extended it a bit, to add weight to it. As I noted in my field notes, I found that in the early read aloud session I use the emphasizer role extensively. Possibly it’s because I want the others in the group to hear a comment or question again, or maybe I’m trying to get them to listen more
closely to each other. In either case, as the read alouds progressed, I employed this role less frequently.

The final role that I took on was that of student.

Role as Student

My role as a student occurred when I learned something new either from one of the books, or from the students. In 1977 text units, this role was coded 45 times; it was apparent in 2.3% of the text.

We were sharing *The Butterfly* (2000) and came upon the fourth double page spread where the main character, Monique, and her friend, Denise, are horrified at the Nazi soldiers capture and treatment of Monsieur Marks, their friend. In the text, Polacco writes, “‘Schwein…Judenschwein!’ they heard the Nazis shout as they pushed Monsieur Marks to the ground” (unp.) Deqa was confused by the words, as can be seen in the following transaction:

Deqa: I heard a French word in that.
R: Schwein, Juden schwein.
Deqa: Yeah, what does that mean?
John: I think it means, “come on, hurry up.” Something like that.
R: I honestly don’t know. Let’s check the back. Sometimes books have lists of words like glossaries.
Annie: Vocabularies.
R: And there’s not. I’m not going to be able to help you with that one. But I have a feeling it was not too nice. If they’re grabbing him, and pushing him, and kicking him. (RA5)

Deqa offered an analytical response and I wasn’t familiar enough with the language to be able to help her. John attempts to, but being rather sure he wasn’t right, I decided to use the resources that could have been in the book to find the
answer. When that option wasn’t available, we went back to the illustration for context. It was useful in helping us make sense of the language somewhat.

To summarize my roles in the study, it appears that I acted as a clarifier, questioner, and emphasizer more often in the earlier read alouds, and though those roles remained in the later sessions, my roles as disseminator and student increased. It appears that my intervention was needed less and less as the students came to depend on each other more and more.

Summary

In returning to question three, and how intermediate grade students use the extended time with a single author/illustrator to make meaning, it seems that their understandings were built on early discoveries from other read aloud sessions. As those findings accrued, the students not only served to enhance their own learning, but that they used those discoveries to assist each other’s learning and make a wider connection to their world and Polacco’s world. It also appears that my roles shifted over the time period from the students’ need for more support to less support. Indeed, I became a very insignificant part of the group.

Research Question Four:

How do the students’ prior knowledge and social background support their meaning making of Polacco’s books? How do these components allow them to recognize and contend with issues of diversity in Polacco’s
books? How do they relate new understandings garnered from Polacco’s books to their lives?

In considering this question, it became obvious that because of the personal nature of the question, I needed to return to question one at the students’ types of responses. Because this question ties so closely to who the students are and what their backgrounds are, it became apparent that it was the personal response that I needed to look more carefully at. In returning to the data, six subcategories of personal response presented themselves, as are outlined in the graph below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories of the Personal Response</th>
<th>Number of coded text units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connections to family</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections that point out diversity</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections to popular culture</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections to friends</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections to societal beliefs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections that reflect student’s philosophy of life</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first subcategory relates the text to issues with family members, while the second reveals issues of diversity in themselves or the wider world around them. The next category pulls in ideas from popular culture, while connections to friends relates the books to issues with friends and acquaintances. The fifth category taps into images the students are used to seeing or hearing about in the media, while the sixth brings up an issue that mirrors the students’ attitude for life.

Connections to Family

The first subcategory of personal responses was student connections to their family members. This type of connection showed up most strongly with Polacco’s book *My Rotten Red Headed Older Brother* (1994). The responses about family members began with the front cover. It depicts Trisha and her brother Richard in a patch of rhubarb. Trisha is seemingly gloating about something, as she is holding a stalk overhead and pointing to Richard who is making a terrible face. There are several farm animals in the background mimicking his look. John begins the conversation:

John: The title of the book is *My Rotten Red Headed Older Brother*. It’s pretty much the same with me but it’s my sister.
R: Is she rotten?
John: Yeah, and she’s red headed. And she’s older.
R: So she’s your rotten red headed older sister. (RA10)

So it seems that John feels he’ll make a very close connection to the book.
We then explored the reproduced photos of Polacco and her brother in the front matter of the book, read the half title page, and then shared the dedication and title pages. On these two pages is one illustration that encompasses the bottom half of both pages. On the far right hand side are the two children being hugged by what appears to be a grandmother. The children are wearing a feather on their foreheads and holding bows in their hands. They are laughing and the boy is pointing to the girl. The left side and center of the illustration looks to be a back yard of a farm house with a partially obscured old building, water pump, barrel, chickens, and a tree with a bull’s eye. On it are three arrows stuck to the center. At this point, this conversation ensued:

Zachary: It sounds like my brother. He’s mean.
R: He’s younger than you.
Nicole: He’ll do something to you, or you’ll do something to him?
Zachary: He does it to me.
R: I wonder what story he would tell?
John: I think we all have a lot of relationships with the book. It’s got to do with brothers and sisters.
Nicole: I don’t. My sister’s 10, 11 years older than I am.
John: I bet if she were still here, though, it would be the same.
Nicole: No it wouldn’t. (RA10)

It seems John is attempting to include everyone in the meaning making process, but Nicole is excluding herself. Interestingly enough, in her student journal, Nicole chooses to depict the brother as an evil character, though she alludes to the fact that she has no experience with sibling rivalry herself. (See Appendix D: Student Journal Entries, Figure D2). Possibly she was just making an image like one in the book, but Polacco never calls Richard evil.
Then on the second full page spread of the story, Richard is seen teasing Trisha by holding her doll by the foot out of her reach on the left side of the page while the grandmother, seemingly oblivious to the commotion, is feeding the geese behind her as she walks off to the right. Richard sports a toothy grin while Trisha is reaching for the doll. The text reads, “the one thing my bubbie [grandmother] didn’t seem to know was how perfectly awful my brother really was! Mind you, he was always nice whenever she was around us; but as soon as she’d leave, he would do something terrible to me and laugh” (Polacco, 1994, unp.). John, Zachary, and Drew made connections with family members at that point:

John: My mom says brothers and sisters are made to annoy each other.
Zachary: It sounds like my mom and her younger brother, Uncle Bob. He always does stuff to her when he’s here.
R: Still, now that they’re all grown up?
Zachary: Yeah.
Drew: My brother would always take my Game Boy and set it up on top of the bed. When he was about two, he would take it and throw it up on top of the bed. And I would have to keep going up and getting it. He’d throw it up again. Then I would stop caring and just leave it up there for about an hour. And then when I’d want to play with it I’d go up there and get it. (RA10)

Drew, especially, seems to be suggesting an alternate behavior that Polacco could’ve used in dealing with her sibling. This kind of comment became more frequent as the read aloud sessions progressed. Furthermore, my role, by this tenth read aloud session, seems to be more just comments on their connections, rather than the students requiring me to be the group member that can supply answers to their questions.
Connections That Point Out Diversity

The next most frequent subcategory of personal responses, though it occurred less than half as often as family connections, is that which points out diversity of many varieties. Polacco’s book that generated the most discussion about diversity was *I Can Hear the Sun* (1996). During the final discussion, the issue of homelessness appeared to remain troublesome to some of the students.

Below is the transcripts of that discussion:

R: So there’s people in society who haven’t been treated fairly?
Annie: Just like the people downtown in our world.
Jennifer: “Change. Spare change, ma’am.”
Jennifer: But people really do get fed and stuff because they go to the homeless shelter and all they do is go out and beg for money.
Annie: Some live in camps. My daddy works with them.
Nicole: I was at this Christmas thing.
Annie: We put corn…
Nicole: And stuffing and beans and toys for poor people. And some of them weren’t even poor.
Annie: Some looked like they just got back from manicures.
Nicole: One lady had a fur coat on.
Jennifer: Maybe she found it.
John: She killed animals.
R: Maybe there were some that really didn’t need it, but were there some that did?
Annie and Nicole: Yeah.
Annie: Hard to tell the difference, because some could’ve been dressed like beggars.
Jennifer: Some of ‘em might’ve dress like hippies and said, “Spare change, Ma’am. Spare change, Dude.”
R: Does anybody have anything last to say?
Jennifer: I’m going to go to college and be a veterinarian. (RA2)

Annie, especially, but also Nicole, had some first hand experience with homeless people and seemed to be able to assist the group in meaning making while they were talking through the incident for themselves. Jennifer’s comments on “spare change” harken back to an early discussion during the book about how homeless
people live, and her final comment of the transcript is a reference to yet another earlier discussion about why homeless people may be homeless. Jennifer had insisted that if they had gone to college they would have a good job and not be homeless. Much heated debate ensued, particularly with John who reasoned that there are good jobs to be had without a college education.

In addition, John’s comment above about the fur coat is one of several of his throughout the transcripts where he seems to attempt to turn the conversation in a direction that could cause controversy. In this case, it didn’t work, but in others it does. I will explore this more during later sections. One last note on John that I wrote about in my field notes is that he physically moves himself away from the group during the read aloud sessions and then moves himself back. This could be a function of his attention deficit disorder, or it could have another explanation. Maybe his comments that seem to attempt to talk the group away from the current conversation and his physical distancing are part of the same motivation.

With these comments about John, I’ll turn to the students’ personal connections that relate to popular culture.

Connections to Popular Culture

As can be seen by the above chart, connections in this subcategory occurred nearly as frequently as those to issues of diversity. And seemingly, the two are related. In the transcripts of the read aloud sessions, it seems that when issues of diversity arise, the students often rely on their knowledge of popular
culture. This is especially true of John. The following exchange also took place
during the read aloud session of I Can Hear the Sun (1996). We were sharing the
final double page spread of the story where the character, Stephanie Michele, the
grounds keeper of the park, is standing on the right side of the page shading her
eyes and looking up to the sky. The geese are around her and the lake is in the
background. The illustration spreads a bit onto the lower left page while the text
is on the upper part of the left page. Stephanie Michele appears to be African
American and has worn her hair in a variety of styles, both up and down,
throughout the illustrations of the book. John, seemingly, has noted this:

John: I had a comment on her hair. It look like she has dred locks.
R: Back here? (turning pages).
Annie: What are dred locks?
R: Twisted hair.
John: (Gesturing with his hands) Braids that come down to here. (RA2)

It seems he may have relied on his popular knowledge about African Americans
and their hair to project and explain something about their culture to the group,
although he could have first hand experience with someone with dred locks. The
conversation continues with John projecting a popular image of hippies to explain
another character, Willy Jack:

John: I kinda thought he was a hippie because he said, “Man.”
Jennifer: He had junky clothes on and rips his pants. Holes in his pants
like this (points to her pants).
John: Peace signs on his forehead.
Annie: Head bands around their head.
Jennifer: And these glasses (holding hands to eyes) with purple over them
(makes peace sign).
Annie: I think he lost his foot.
Jennifer: No, I think I saw it on the last page.
(Annie takes book to find the page.)
R: You find it, [Annie]. Maybe his foot was just bent before.
Jennifer: He was probably running like this (shows us) and was crying.
Nicole: It was back farther (speaking of the page).
R: Oh, so you’re right. Good for you. He’s not missing a leg.
John: Maybe he’s using drugs or something.
Jennifer: Or maybe he just didn’t finish college (looking at [John]).
(RA2)

The students go far beyond what they see in the illustrations and learn from the story about Willy Jack to show what they believe about hippies. And one popular image gives rise to another until a rather graphic image about hippies is established and their reasoning for why Willy Jack may be one. The students became quite animated during this discussion, something that I addressed previously in the section on performative responses. Again, the conversation ends with a returning to a previous discussion on college and its necessity to obtaining a good job.

I will now turn my attention to the students’ personal connections with friends, a growing interest with this age group.

Connections to Friends

Responses to friends occurred eleven times throughout the read aloud transcripts; I expected to see more responses of this nature, since children in the intermediate age groups are developing close ties to peers. However, the connections that were made oftentimes allowed a child to get to know another child better. For example, we had finished sharing My Rotten Red Headed Older Brother (1994) and were looking at the reproduced black and white photographs
of Polacco and her brother that span a forty year relationship on the final pages when Segal commented:

    Segal: I like the book, because I have an older brother.
    Nicole: I always thought you were an only child. (RA10)

It was a brief exchange, but a meaningful one, between two friends as it allowed the girls to get to know one another better.

    Connections to societal beliefs will be explored next.

Connections to Societal Beliefs

    The above section on connections to popular culture dealt with common media images that the students related to. Connections to societal beliefs had more to do with common assumptions about who Americans are and what they should strive for. Again, I return to our reading and discussion of *I Can Hear the Sun* (1996) and the exchange I alluded to in the section on popular culture and the need for a college education. We were at the end of the book and Jennifer was discussing the homeless character Mae Marie:

    Jennifer: She never finished college.
    Nicole: How do you know that?
    Jennifer: ‘Cause she lives on the street.
    Nicole: What’s that got to do with it?
    Annie: [John] might not go to college. And [John] might go to college.
    Jennifer: You can’t get a job if you don’t go to college.
    John: You can get a job if you don’t go to college.
    Annie: You can work in a gas station.
    Jennifer: If you don’t go to college you can’t get a good job.
    R: So maybe Mae Marie didn’t go to college and couldn’t get a good job.
    Jennifer: Teacher is a good job.
    Annie: Librarian is a good job.
    Nicole: Most teachers can have candy and soda.
    John: You can work in a skateboard shop. (RA2)
Jennifer clings fast to the belief that prosperity comes with a college education, while John tries to debunk her ideas. The topic arises a second time when the character of Willy Jack is being discussed:

John: Maybe he’s using drugs or something.
Jennifer: Or maybe he just didn’t finish college (looking at [John]). (RA2)

Jennifer brings it up a third, fourth, and even fifth time, as we finish talking about characters’ lives, motivations, and consequences for their actions:

Jennifer: Maybe they didn’t finish college. (RA2)

Jennifer: Just because they don’t have a home and never went to…college. (RA2)

R: Does anybody have anything last to say?
Jennifer: I’m going to go to college and be a veterinarian. (RA2)

Jennifer may be insisting on this belief so frequently just to needle John, since the comments were directed at him, but she also may sincerely trust that it’s true.

I now turn my attention to the final subcategory that emerged on personal responses.

Connections That Reflect Students’ Philosophy of Life

There appeared two connections in the transcribed read aloud sessions that were powerful in that they seemed to demonstrate the life philosophy of the child that spoke the words. For example, during the final discussion of Thank You, Mr. Falker (1998) there was an exchange about Trisha’s age in the book and
Polacco’s true age when her learning disabilities were discovered, and speculation about why she might have made herself younger in the story. Segal mentioned that it might have been an embarrassment to her. John had this to add:

John: [Segal] said she could feel embarrassed. I wouldn’t be. If anyone teased me I’d say, “Accept my differences, or don’t even talk to me.” (RA11)

As mentioned in earlier sections, John seems to enjoy his status as slightly outside of the group, maybe even slightly outside of mainstream society. Therefore, his comment speaks to his self image and overall philosophy about life. If he clings to these ideas, they may make a significant impact on his life.

Summary

In returning to question four, or how students’ prior knowledge and social background support their meaning making of Polacco’s books, it seems they did through various personal connections. Those connections range from the story and/or illustrations mirroring students’ lives to issues of diversity that are far removed from the students’ experiences.

And I will now turn my attention to the final research question of the study.

Research Question Five:

How can the informed voice of the author/illustrator herself aid in my interpretations of the students’ transactions?
In analyzing the data collected from the interview with Polacco, it became obvious that the answers and comments she shared fell into three categories. Since I had only a forty-five minute time period to interview her, I had to be very selective in what I asked. (See Appendix C: Author/Illustrator Interview Protocol). Consequently, I chose only to ask those items that were uppermost in the students’ minds. Also, since the interview took place at the mid point of the study, I could only ask her about those questions and comments that the students posed in the first half of the study. First, her answers commented on the students’ questions; second, her answers affirmed the students’ ideas about theme; and third, her comments addressed her writing and illustrating styles.

The first category is best demonstrated by the first question I asked: The students are always curious about the personal connections in the book. Is there always a personal connection? Polacco assured me that there always is. She responded that even in *Casey at the Bat* (1988) she makes a personal connection of modeling the illustrations of the main character, Casey, after her brother. This was a book that we didn’t share, as it isn’t an original story of hers. Instead it is a retold version of Ernest Lawrence Thayer’s poem. However, what Polacco’s comment did was to allow me to always assure the students, whenever issues of authenticity and questions about how her books relate to her life arose, that Polacco truly does place herself in her stories.

The second category is best shown through the fourth question: What do you want children to take away from the books? In other words, what are the themes you most want to impart to your young readers? Polacco stated that she
wants them to learn to “respect differences, to honor and celebrate differences.”
She stated that her books are intergenerational and multicultural, and that the
world can be a harmonious place but that harmony must begin in their hearts.
These comments affirmed the students’ connections with family members, issues
of diversity, and assertions that could change their lives.

And finally, the third category, Polacco’s addressing her writing and
illustrating styles, was brought up through question six: I call your style
exaggerated. What term do you use to describe it? Polacco agreed with me and
added that she also calls it expressive. She noted that she also calls her writing
sentimental, and pointed out she made no apologizes for that. She chooses to
write about the best in people, both in her relatives and in others, and tries to bring
that strength of character to her readers. In her drawing, she wants the viewer to
feel the pose and movement of the characters. This information allowed me to
enlighten the students at times when they wondered about Polacco choice of
character, dialogue, or actions. This particularly became important as the study
progressed and Polacco almost became a presence in the group.

Conclusion

In this chapter I overviewed Polacco’s books that we shared in our read
aloud sessions, and presented characteristic data that assisted in answering my
five research questions. I began coding with a preexisting model of reader
response, but the data quickly took over and revealed many codes and categories
that uncovered six themes that I will address in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature and meanings of a small group of intermediate grade students’ extended transactions with several picturebooks by author/illustrator Patricia Polacco. After having considered the audience of the picturebook, the diverse titles by author/illustrator Patricia Polacco, the dynamics of small group discussions of picturebooks, and the value of extended engagement with the work of a single author/illustrator, I came to focus my inquiry in this way.

According to Imdieke (2001), “the combination of the familiar format of the picture book, when used to present new, stimulating content, serves both to capture and stretch the unique intellect of the older reader” (p. 626). In my experience, this is especially the case when those books are read aloud, as the format of the picturebook, though appealing to some older students, may put off others as a genre that they see themselves too mature for.

And Polacco’s books seem to be particularly appropriate for older readers as they are “noted for their themes of hope, resilience and tolerance, are often steeped in cultural heritage, and feature characters of different races, religions,
and ages. Polacco is not afraid of tackling challenging ideas and situations. As seen through the eyes of a child narrator, though, even complex issues take on a simple sense of wonder” (Maughn, 1993, p. 3). Many of her books with the above themes and topics are very suitable for the older child.

The small group format is most readily applicable to the intermediate grades, as revealed by Meek (1982) who discovered that “left to comment on their own, without the stimulus of a question, children often choose to talk about quite other aspects of a tale than those that preoccupy their elders…They create a tissue of collaborative understanding for each other in a way that no single question from an adult makes possible” (p. 289). And in a small group, particularly one consisting of classmates that are familiar with each other, talk can flow freely. Also, by the teacher attempting to stay out of the way of the conversation, talk can emerge from the ideas and interests of the child participants.

And finally, the text that most informed my thinking about a research study involving students’ extended engagement with a single author/illustrator’s work is Vivan Paley’s *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* (1997). Paley’s book is a year long study of her Kindergarten class as they read, critiqued, and responded to the picture books of Leo Lionni. The limitation of the book, for my purposes, is that Paley’s audience is a Kindergarten class. More studies are needed which provide insight to the extended use of picturebooks with age appropriate themes by a single author/illustrator with intermediate grade students. These four aspects of interest, picturebook use with older students, the diversity of Polacco’s picturebooks, the small discussion group format for intermediate grade students,
and extended study of the work of one author/illustrator, helped focus my research.

Based on this focus, I formulated the following research questions for my study:

1) How do intermediate grade students transact with Polacco’s picturebooks? How can these transactions be classified and/or categorized? What do they mean to the student?

2) How do these students utilize the illustrations in Polacco’s work to make meaning of the text and vice versa?

3) How does extended transaction with the work of a single author/illustrator, Patricia Polacco, enhance the meanings derived from the works? What kinds of understandings are gained that allow them to make even more in depth discoveries in subsequent books?

4) How do the students’ prior knowledge and social background support their meaning making of Polacco’s books? How do these components allow them to recognize and contend with issues of diversity in Polacco’s books? How do they relate new understandings garnered from Polacco’s books to their lives?

5) How can the informed voice of the author/illustrator herself aid in my interpretations of the students’ transactions?

This chapter is a discussion of the interpretations of the findings, how those interpretations relate to the existing research, and the themes that emerged from chapter four.

Method of Study

This study was a qualitative, descriptive study that attempted to describe the meaning making process of eight fifth grade students in one elementary classroom as they transacted with picturebooks by author/illustrator Patricia
Polacco in read aloud sessions. The study revolved around a cycle of data collection and analysis. Data collection took place over a nine week period, and the types of data collected included: (1) audio tapes of read aloud sessions with student responses; (2) student reflection journals; (3) field notes of observations; and (4) author/illustrator interview. Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method on N6 software. As the researcher, I acted as a participant observer, though my roles varied in type and involvement.

The study was conducted through a framework of reader response theory. In this stance, neither the text nor the reader has the key to making meaning, rather it is the reader’s background that must transact with the text to create a meaningful story for that particular reader. This transaction is reciprocal in nature, and can only come to fulfillment when the two parties, reader and text, create something new. The scholar that most informed my thinking on this constructivist point of view was Rosenblatt (1994, 1995).

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Theme One: Intermediate grade students utilize a wide variety of responses, both individually and as a group, to both story and illustrations, to construct meaning.

styles, 2003), there is a wide range of ways in which children show their meaning making processes. Depending on the ages of the children, the responses can vary.

I chose to begin my analysis with Sipe’s (1999) five categories of response that his first graders had demonstrated, as his framework fit most closely to the responses my students exhibited. Those responses were: analytical, intertextual, personal, transparent, and performative. But it became apparent quickly that my fifth grade students went beyond these responses to include motivational, or questioning or projecting reasons for Polacco’s choices in her books. They also looked at her work through global responses; these are responses that are deeper than personal or intertextual. Global responses projected ideas about issues in the world around them, both contemporary and historical. It may be that because my students were older than Sipe’s, they were able to more readily consider beyond the text and illustrations to the creator of the books and the wider implications of her art. It may also be that because we didn’t share work by any other author/illustrator, my students were able to become so deeply immersed in Polacco’s work that they were able to think more intensely beyond Sipe’s five initial categories.

**Theme Two: The personal response became a crucial category in revealing how students’ backgrounds assisted them in dealing with all emerging issues of the literature, including issues of diversity.**

The personal response as revealed by Sipe (1999) indicates connections students make to their own lives. Text and/or illustrations spark a link to their
own world and they make comment of it. It was in analyzing these personal responses that it became obvious that six subcategories emerged that spoke more specifically as to how Polacco’s books connected with particular parts of the students lives, as well as how her books made a difference in their lives.

The six subcategories were connections to family, connections that point out diversity, connections to popular culture, connections to friends, connections to societal beliefs, and connections that reflect student’s life philosophies. For example, connections to family was the most frequent subcategory, which seems to indicate that though intermediate grade students are venturing out into the world, home and family remain their main focus. Connections to diversity pointed out the ways in which they see themselves and how that compares to those around them. In some cases, the students identified with characters, and in others they saw a sharp difference. In most cases, they were tolerant of those differences, but in others they strongly disagreed with a character’s choices. In connections that reflect life philosophies, though this was an infrequent response, the students revealed understandings about life that could remain with them and possibly make a difference in their future.

Again, maybe my students were able to express these subcategories of the personal response because of their higher age and level of maturity than Sipe’s (1999) students, or maybe because of their immersion in Polacco’s work more subtle distinctions could be made.
Theme Three: Extended time with the work of one author/illustrator allowed discoveries that built on earlier understandings.

The intertextual response as revealed by Sipe (1999) indicates connections students make between texts, either with the story, or the illustrations, or both. They compare and contrast the book at hand either with other books by the same author/illustrator, or with books by other individuals. In analyzing these intertextual responses, five subcategories presented themselves. They were connections with other author/illustrators’ work, connections on authenticity, connections for content, and connections on Polacco’s intentions.

The first subcategory deals with their connections with titles by other author/illustrators. But the other three subcategories reveal a deeper connection with Polacco’s work. Connections on content revealed the students’ thoughts on the similarities, and dissimilarities, among Polacco’s books, both in story and illustration. Their connections on intentions and authenticity reveal a deeper understanding of her work. In the first case, the students questioned why Polacco chose to write and draw as she did, how it served the effectiveness of the book, and how it connected with her life. In the second case, the students questioned what in the story was true and what was fictionalized. In some cases, it was a matter of accepting Polacco’s choices, and in others it was a matter of being dissatisfied that she fictionalized what the students felt shouldn’t have been.
**Theme Four: The voice of the author/illustrator confirmed students’ ideas and answered their questions.**

Because my opportunity to meet and talk with Polacco was brief, and because the opportunity occurred at the midpoint of the study, I confined my questions to the questions and concerns the students had expressed up to that point. However, her voice became valuable in my making meaning of the students’ concerns as well as valuable to the students’ understandings.

First, the interview with Polacco answered some questions about her work that I wasn’t able to answer for them. Second, the students’ ideas about themes in her book were confirmed, allowing them and me to know that they were making accurate assumptions and insights into the books. And third, Polacco’s comments on style, both writing and illustrating, brought us as a group closer to her work and her intentions in creating books for children.

**Theme Five: Though the researcher attempted to play as small a role as possible in the study, I necessarily entered into the discussions.**

Several researchers cite the value of small group discussion with literature for intermediate grade students (Kennedy, 1988; Nystrand, et. al., 1993; Meek, 1982; and Eeds & Wells, 1989), but Meek’s comments spoke to me most closely when deciding how I should approach the study as a participant observer. Meek notes that “left to comment on their own, without the stimulus of a question, children often choose to talk about quite other aspects of a tale than those that preoccupy their elders…They create a tissue of collaborative understanding for
each other in a way that no single question from an adult makes possible” (p. 289). Talk can flow in a less inhibited way as undirected questions and comments emerge.

Therefore, I entered the study with the intention of staying out of the way of the students as much as possible. I realized that before the study even began, several factors already colored that picture. First, my being a teacher in the school in which they were students, and that they had had contact with me two and one-half years prior already established me as an authority figure. Second, because I designed the study, the choice of author/illustrator reflected my preferences. Third, my choice of titles, at least initially, showed my judgments as to which books were more appropriate for intermediate age students. Next, because I chose to read aloud, though it was to level the playing field between the academic levels of the students, my voice was already part of the group. And finally, because the students, at least at the beginning, relied on me to supply them with answers to their questions, I played a greater role in the discussions.

However, I truly tried to stay out of the students’ way as much as possible and allow them to “create a tissue of collaborative understanding for each other in a way that no single question from an adult makes possible” (Meek, 1989, p. 289). What resulted was my being a participant, but with changing roles and waning importance as the study progressed. It appears that I acted as a clarifier, questioner, and emphaziser more often in the earlier read alouds, and though those roles remained in the later sessions, my roles as disseminator and student...
increased. It appears that my intervention was needed less and less as the students came to depend on each other more and more.

**Theme Six: The longer we met and discussed as a group, the less the researcher became part of the group and the more the author/illustrator entered into the conversation.**

Paley (1997), in allowing the Kindergarten children in her classroom to take on an extended study of author/illustrator Leo Lionni’s work, notes that “surely there is merit in concentrating on a single author, if for no other reason than to discover what happens” (p. 17). One valuable reason she found for undertaking the study was that “one or two books, isolated, are understood only superficially” (p. 20), but that extended time with Lionni’s work made the “existing intellectual life of the classroom more accessible because he offers us a clear and consistent frame of reference for our feelings and observations” (p. 18). She finds that “the characters enter our stories, our play, and our ordinary conversations” (p. 49). And that “the children…are in the habit of questioning everything that concerns Leo Lionni” (p. 93).

So it shouldn’t have surprised me that my students questioned Polacco’s intentions, her reasons for including or excluding content, both in story and illustrations, as she did. It shouldn’t have surprised me that they wanted to come to know more about her life and how those incidents in her life became part of her stories. And when students became angry with some of Polacco’s choices, and questioned the authenticity of her work, I shouldn’t have been surprised either. They addressed questions and comments to me and each other almost as if
Polacco were part of the group, but then had to rely on what we knew and could share about her to at least partially answer their questions. But it all did surprise me; and happily, I became less of a player in the group and Polacco became more.

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM/LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER PRACTICE

As an elementary Library Media Specialist, I have spent the last fourteen years sharing literature with children in a wide variety of approaches. In that time, the picturebook, traditionally a genre for young children, has come to be recognized as a valuable art form and tool for intermediate grade students. Furthermore, though the literature offers a wealth of research on using picturebooks with younger children, there is a smaller body of research on the use of the genre with older children. Likewise, I have noticed that study of a single author and/or illustrator, regardless of the age of the students, produces high levels of understanding. Likewise, some picturebooks may deal with issues of diversity that children can recognize from their own experience, or if not part of their own lives, can begin to understand vicariously.

Therefore, findings from this research could be useful to:

- Other Library Media Specialist in extending their work with intermediate grade students,
- Classroom teachers in enhancing their literary instruction with intermediate grade students,
• Language arts coordinators and administrators in designing language arts curriculum.

Unfortunately, Library Media Specialists (LMS) often aren’t allowed the opportunity to work intensively with groups of students over an extended period of time because of the numbers of students, faculty, and staff that they are required to service. Because the Library Media Center (LMC) is a teaching and learning site for the whole school community, the LMS has the opportunity to impact the total school population, which is fortunate, but often hasn’t the time to take on extended work with any one group of students, which is unfortunate.

Scheduling is also often a major obstacle. If the school district requires that the LMC program be part of contractual planning time for classroom teachers, very little time is available for the LMS to devote to instruction time with students outside of that schedule. To further complicate the picture, oftentimes the LMS plays the role of clerical aide in districts where there is no Library Aide to administer the non-instructional roles of the LMC. For these reasons, too often and teaching and learning opportunity as is represented by this study is not possible.

However, when the LMC program is run on a flexible schedule whereby students have access all day every school day and the schedule of classes is not tied to classroom teacher planning time, there is teaching and learning time and opportunities for in-depth, extended work with smaller groups of students. In this type of program, it’s not unusual to have a whole class working on a research, technology, or literary topic in one part of the facility, while small groups from
other classrooms are working on projects in another part. And at the same time, individual students are browsing the shelves or reading quietly.

And when the LMS is valued as a partner teacher in a school, and is spared the time needed to perform clerical tasks, opportunities to be creative with teachers and flexible groupings of students present myriad possibilities to have impact on students with extended study with literature.

Classroom teachers, too, could benefit from a study of this type in finding a model for enhancing their literary instruction with intermediate grade students. An author/illustrator study of this type could be undertaken in a whole class, as did Paley (1997), or in a small group, or as part of an individual reading plan. Such a study could be conducted with a formulated plan, either teacher directed or planned cooperatively between student and teacher, or it could emerge from the students’ interests, as did Paley’s study. The small group format could be loosely directed, as was mine, or it could be more formally directed, as with specific student roles, like a literature circle.

Either a LMS or a classroom teacher may be able to benefit from some of the aspects of this study. First, reading aloud can level the playing field between students of differing academic abilities. Second, allow the conversation to be student directed as much as possible. And finally, allow response modes to be flexible. These three components could give intermediate children the necessary autonomy to respond as they feel comfortable.

Language arts coordinators and administrators may find some indications for designing language arts curriculum in the study of literature from this
investigation. First, it may be valuable to build into the curriculum more in-depth and lengthy author/illustrator studies for intermediate grades students. Second, encouraging the picturebook as a viable form of literature for these grades levels may have benefits. Third, small group arrangements for literature study may be the most viable for middle grade students. And last, encouraging multiple modes of response in the classroom seems to be advantageous.

In addition, language arts coordinators and administrators could provide for these aspects of author/illustrator studies to more easily take place by funding and making available professional development for classroom teachers and specialists. They also could facilitate the use of this mode of teaching literature by providing the necessary resources. These resources could include both adequate copies of books as well as support faculty such as LMS’s, literacy coordinators, intervention specialists, English as a second language teachers, and special education teachers, both remedial and gifted. These teachers can help meet the various needs of the diverse learning communities of today’s schools, as well as provide an opportunity to break large numbers of students in classroom into smaller, more effective groups.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Several findings from this study could have implications for further research studies. Since much of the work on reader response to picturebooks has been done with primary school children, particularly Sipe’s (1998), work, there is a need for more research into using picturebooks with older children, even into
the middle and high school years. There may also be a need to closely document how their responses compare and contrast with younger children’s reactions, and how maturity levels of the older students may affect these differences.

Furthermore, picturebooks that point out issues of diversity seemed to draw the most controversy in group responses. Though several of Polacco’s books that were chosen for this study portrayed issues of diversity, both historical and contemporary, several did not. More research into using books that deal with possible contentious issues for older elementary readers may be needed.

With the exception of Paley’s (1997) study, there is little work done with extended time in studying one author/illustrator’s work. My study took place over a ten week period, short in comparison to Paley’s year long look at her students’ transactions with the books of Leo Lionni. My students would have gladly extended the study, but with time constraints of testing and vacation schedules, it wasn’t feasible to continue past ten weeks. Furthermore, student interviews at the conclusion of the study and/or documentation by the classroom teacher of any comments made by the students in the classroom may have strengthened or weakened conclusions. Therefore, studies that lengthen the time frame and/or incorporate these data collection methods may be needed.

And in conjunction with this, more study is needed with how the author/illustrator’s voice can become a more prominent player in the discussions. If the students had had the opportunity to participate in an author/illustrator visit by Polacco, her voice may have become an even richer part of the small group
sessions. This is probably the area that this study addresses that most warrants further research.

Conclusion

As I stated at the beginning of the first chapter, picturebooks have traditionally been part of the literary life of young children. In my experience with children, however, I’ve found that many older children, after they’ve become secure readers of chapter books, tend to return to the picturebook section of my library media center to check out old favorites and new titles alike. Additionally, there is a fairly recent trend in picturebook publishing to produce more sophisticated books particularly for this audience. Many of these complex books “contain content of interest to an older audience as it relates to the life experiences of an older reader or as it relates to the types of topics typically studied in the upper grades. The combination of the familiar format of the picture book, when used to present new, stimulating content, serves both to capture and stretch the unique intellect of the older reader” (Imdieke, 2001, p. 626). As this study seems to indicate, older students are very much taken by picturebooks that capture and stretch their intellect.

They seem to respond to this genre in a wide variety of ways to construct meaning for themselves and others. They seem to use the personal response in ways that reveal their backgrounds and assist them in dealing with issues of diversity. And extended time with the work of one author/illustrator seems to allow greater understandings to build, while they almost take on that creator as
another member of their group. It seems that the use of picturebooks for older students has potential for meaning making that has only begun to be tapped.
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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS AND SCRIPT FOR STUDENTS
Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am not only the half-time library media specialist here at Allen Darby Elementary School, but I am a teacher and graduate student at The Department of Education at the Ohio State University. Dr. Barbara Lehman is my advisor. That Department supports the practice of informed consent and protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you will allow your child to participate in the study being conducted by me entitled "A Descriptive Study of Intermediate Grade Students' Extended Transactions with the Picturebooks of Author/Illustrator Patricia Polacco." Your or your child may withdraw his/her participation at any time.

Your child will be asked to participate in a voluntary literature discussion group that will meet one or two afternoons a week for a minimum of five to ten weeks in the Library Media Center for a thirty to forty-five minute time period during their regularly scheduled language arts time block. Discussion group members will listen to picturebooks by author/Illustrator Patricia Polacco read aloud by me and will be encouraged to respond with comments, questions, and dialogue. Discussions will be audiotaped and/or videotaped and the students will be asked to keep a written log of responses to document the progression of the group. However, your child will in no way be identified in the study results. The data will be stored at my home and will be destroyed six months after the completion of the research.

The purpose of this research is to explore the value of middle grade students' transactions with picturebooks by a single author/Illustrator, Patricia Polacco, while investigating the ways they collectively and individually make meaning. Choosing not to participate in this discussion group, or choosing to withdraw from the group at any time, will have absolutely no negative consequences for your child and will not affect other classroom activities or grades.

If you would like any additional information regarding this study before, during, or after its completion, please contact me by phone. Thank you for your time and consideration in this project.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Christina Dorr
Library Media Specialist
Work Phone: 614-574-1400
Home Phone: 614-870-2414

Dr. Barbara Lehman
Ohio State University Professor of Education
Work Phone: 419-755-4263
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

Protocol title: A Descriptive Study of Intermediate Grade Students' Extended Transactions with the Pictures of Childhood Trauma Panorama

Protocol number: 20031001

Principal Investigator: Dr. Barbara Lehman, Mrs. Christine Derr

I consent to my child's participation in research being conducted by Dr. Barbara Lehman & Mrs. Christine Derr of The Ohio State University and his/her assistants and associates.

The investigator(s) has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures that will be followed, and the amount of time it will take. I understand the possible benefits, if any, of my child's participation.

I know that I can (and/or my child can) choose not to participate without penalty to me (and/or my child).

If I agree to participate, I can (and/or my child can) withdraw from the study at any time, and there will be no penalty. I consent to the use of audiotapes and/or videotapes. I understand how the tapes will be used for this study.

I have had a chance to ask questions and to obtain answers to my questions. I can contact the investigator(s) at 614-292-4209 (Dr. Lehman) or 614-292-4600 (Mrs. Derr). If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I can call the Office of Research Affairs Protection at 614 688-4742.

I have read this form and I have had it read to me. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Print the name of the participant: ________________________________

Date ____________________________ Signed: ______________________

(Signature of Parent) ____________________________ (Parental) ______________________

(Signature of Investigator or Authorized Representative) ____________________________ (Person authorized to consent for participant, if required)

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and Culture
and Technology Education
and Learning
and Culture
and Technology Education

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Script for Students

I am a student at the Ohio State University’s Education Department and I will be conducting a research study to investigate the value of middle grade students’ interacting with picturebooks by a single author/illustrator, Patricia Polacco. You are being asked if you’d like to participate as a discussion group member to help conclude if this type of interaction is valuable.

If you agree to participate in this voluntary group, we will:

• Meet once or twice a week for five to ten weeks for thirty to forty-five minutes in the afternoon in the Library Media Center.
• Listen while I read aloud one book each meeting by author/illustrator Patricia Polacco.
• Think about the ways Patricia Polacco’s books can relate to your life.
• Respond to the book with comments, questions, and conversation with the other group members and in a written log.

Discussions will be audio or video taped, and you can choose not to be taped at any time. If you feel uncomfortable with a book discussion topic you are free to decline to respond or withdraw from the discussion group. If you choose not to participate, or want to withdraw from the study at any time there will be not negative consequences and it will not affect your other classroom activities or grades.
If you’d like to participate, please take this letter home, ask a parent to read and sign it, and return the permission form to me as soon as you can. Are there any questions?
APPENDIX B

TIME LINE OF STUDY
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>LOCATION, METHODS AND FOCUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 2003</td>
<td>Human Subjects Review</td>
<td>Ohio State University and Site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2004</td>
<td>Field entry to establish schedule with classroom teacher and students and video or audiotaped observations, students’ response log time</td>
<td>Site, fieldnotes, tape transcriptions, researcher’s journal entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2004-March 2004</td>
<td>Conduct text/illustration analysis of picturebooks Ongoing analysis of student data and picturebook data. Begin to look for emerging patterns. Try to conduct interview with author/illustrator.</td>
<td>Site and author/illustrator location, picturebooks, fieldnotes, tape transcriptions, students’ response logs, researcher’s journal, interview notes and transcriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2004-May 2004</td>
<td>Ongoing data analysis. Continue to look for emerging patterns and start to develop themes.</td>
<td>same as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2004-August 2004</td>
<td>Continue data analysis and writing.</td>
<td>same as above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure B.1: Time Line of Study
APPENDIX C

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
1. The students are always curious about the personal connections in your books. Is there always a personal connection?

2. They wondered about the personal connections in *Casey at the Bat*. Were there any?

3. What about the shading in the illustrations? The students have noted that it makes faces look dark.

4. What do you want children to take away from your books?

5. The students asked why the *Keeping Quilt* is in black and white.

6. I call your style exaggerated. What term do you use to describe it?

7. I asked if she believed in coincidence or that all is “meant to be?”
APPENDIX D:

STUDENT JOURNAL ENTRIES
Figure D.1: Drew’s Journal Response to *Thank you, Mr. Falker.*
Figure D.2: Nicole’s Journal Response to *My Rotten Red Headed Older Brother*. 
Figure D.3: John’s Journal Response to *Meteor*. 
Figure D.4: Deqa’s Journal Response to Thunder Cake.

I liked how she made the recipe and how Patricia tried not to be afraid of the chickens and the mean old cows.
Figure D.5: Nicole’s Journal Response to *Thunder Cake*.