UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE WHEN PICTURE BOOKS ARE USED AS TOOLS TO SUPPORT INQUIRY IN AN EIGHTH-GRADE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

A dissertation submitted to the
Kent State University College
of Education, Health, and Human Services
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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Date, 2024

MOINI CHAGHERVAND, SHABNAM., Ph.D., DECEMBER 2024

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LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM (107 pp.)

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The purpose of this dissertation study was to investigate the use of the picture book as a curricular resource and instructional tool to support student inquiry in an eighth-grade ELA classroom and to describe students' experiences in an inquiry-based classroom. The research methodology of the study was a basic interpretive qualitative design. A total of 22 eighth-grade English Language Arts students, including 9 girls and 13 boys, participated in this basic interpretative qualitative study.Data analysis revealed several important findings, which were discussed under four major categories: 1) Inquiry as a generative and unpredictable process, 2) The power and importance of student personal interests in inquiry, 3) The power and potential of picture books in an inquiry-based classroom, and 4) The Literature Response Cube as a reader-response instructional tool.

These major findings validate the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 1. These theories prioritize students as active participants in the classroom, urging educators to facilitate exploration, discovery, and the construction of meaning through inquiry. Furthermore, these theories advocate for students to contribute their own personal interpretations of texts rather than passively receiving meaning. It is believed that inquiry-based classrooms create opportunities for students to investigate, hypothesize, and revise hypotheses to generate new understandings. This

perspective posits that meaning is not simply uncovered by the reader; rather, it is individually

constructed through the dynamic interaction between the reader, the text, and the context.

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CHAPTER I

This dissertation research asks the following question: What lessons were learned about teaching and learning when students used picturebooks to support their own inquiry in an 8th grade ELA classroom?

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce this research question. It begins with a vignette that provides the impetus for this study. Then, it continues with a short introduction to inquiry and a description of the power and potential of picture books. Next, it explains the significance of the study, followed by an introduction to the theoretical framework that forms the basis for this study. Finally, this chapter ends with a summary and an introduction to chapter 2.

Vignette

As a second language learner, I observed firsthand that the literacy instruction currently practiced in my home country of Iran is not engaging or motivating for students. Instead of encouraging students to create their own personal meaning, instruction focuses on textual meaning, and reading for understanding significantly suffers. Clearly, dramatic changes need to be made in the literacy practices that are typically found in my country if Iranian students are to read with clarity and depth of understanding.

In the Iranian educational system, students are expected to cram for tests. Iran is a test-driven society. The priority is given to textbook memorization, teacher-directed instruction, and the achievement of high-test scores. While these practices are traditional and may offer students some skills in terms of basic content knowledge and retrieval, the over-emphasis on such priorities can also be limiting. Students instructed in this way tend to focus on rudimentary, factual information rather than developing the sophisticated and complex understandings

required for the application of new learning. Interestingly enough, I encountered the exact opposite in one of my first graduate courses at Kent State University.

During my master's program course work in the School of Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum Studies, my perception of reading began to change as a result of taking a graduate course called *Theories and Practices in Teaching Reading.* As a student in the course, I became immersed in a model of teaching reading that was completely different than I had ever experienced before. This course drastically changed my perception of reading and the teaching of reading. In every class the instructor would start the class by reading aloud an award-winning picture book and continue by implementing and discussing interactive strategies that connected with the book. What this instructor did at the beginning of each class enhanced my curiosity, raised my imagination, and actually engaged me and all of the other students in the reading process with picture books.

Based on this class, my first impression of picture books is nothing like my perception now. This change in perception was the impetus for developing and implementing this dissertation research. Specifically, this experience helped me focus on the power and potential of picture books, not only for young children, but also for older readers like adolescents.

This vignette was the impetus for this dissertation research. This research attempts to explore students' experience when picture books are used as tools to support inquiry in an eighth-grade English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. It will shed light on the power and potential of picture books to support inquiry in an ELA classroom.

Introduction

This study is a basic interpretive qualitative design that invites middle-grade students to read and respond to high-quality picture books and use them as tools to support their own inquiry on a particular topic.

This study is strongly influenced by many educators and literacy theorists, particularly John Dewey and Jerome Harste, who both advocated learning through inquiry. They believed that students learn best by "doing" and experiencing. Education as inquiry is based on the belief that learning is a process of actively constructing knowledge, rather than passively receiving it. It involves questioning, exploring, and reflecting, allowing students to connect new information to their existing knowledge and experiences." (Harste, 2001, p. 1) However, in most parts of the world, including my home country of Iran, teaching methods are mostly teacher-centered and lack students' active involvement and engagement. One way that teachers can help students to move from passive learners to active learners is by supporting student inquiry with picture books.

Inquiry is a student-centered approach in learning that was first introduced by philosopher and educator John Dewey. He advocated learning through experience. Through inquiry, students develop a meaningful question, individually and/or collaboratively collect and analyze data, and creatively present their findings. In this approach, "the child's own instincts and powers furnish the material and give the starting point for all education. With this idea in mind, the teacher becomes a partner in the learning process, guiding students to independently discover meaning within the subject area." (Dewey, 1902, p. 17)

High-quality picture books are valuable tools to support inquiry. They encourage students of all ages and levels to explore, interpret, express, write, and share using multiple forms of

representation (Carr, et al., 2001). They include illustrations and written language that work together to create a meaningful text. They are invaluable teaching tools for learning at all grade levels, including middle grades.

Picture books are valuable for several reasons. They help students develop their literacy skills including reading and writing and provide engaging illustrations that support the text and facilitate student reading comprehension. Moreover, picture books help students develop visual literacy. Galda and Short (1993) note, "Picture books offer a unique opportunity for children to develop visual literacy because they are able to return to the visual images in the books to explore, reflect, and critique those images" (p. 506). In addition, picture books are effective not only with native language learners but also with second language learners, struggling readers, and students with special needs (Henry & Simpson, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Inquiry is important. It is important because learning through inquiry can benefit a wide range of students at all levels. Second language learners, students with reading disabilities, and those who are at risk for dropping out of school benefit from learning through inquiry (Todd, et al., 2005). Inquiry "sparks interest and creativity and brings the school learning to life" (Kuhlthau, et al., 2015, p. 8). Inquiry is also important across the curriculum. In science, the term "inquiry" is often used to refer to the scientific method. In mathematics, the term is used to refer to mathematical investigations. One problem, however, is that "inquiry" is a term and a practice not often used in the ELA classroom.

There is an extensive body of research on picture books. These research studies indicate that picture books can be used for multiple purposes, including reading comprehension, writing,

and vocabulary acquisition. Much less research, however, has been conducted on picture books being used as tools to support student inquiry. This is another problem.

Lastly, picture books have been traditionally used to teach reading in the elementary grades. However, picture books are not often used in the upper grades with older students to teach content area material. This is yet another problem.

This dissertation reflects my personal interest in and curiosity about picture books and inquiry. It addresses the problems above by asking the following question:

What lessons were learned about teaching and learning when students used picturebooks to support their own inquiry in an 8th grade ELA classroom?

In the following section, I describe the theoretical framework used in this dissertation research.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a complex theoretical framework. This framework involves different but interconnected or interrelated theories of learning, reading, and reading response (see Figure 1). In terms of learning, this framework is influenced by constructivism, a theory of learning advocated by the work of John Dewey. It is also influenced by social constructivism, a theory of learning promoted by the work of Vygotsky. This framework is also grounded in psycholinguistic theories of reading, particularly the theories articulated by Frank Smith and Ken Goodman, as well as the socio-psycholinguistic theories of reading promoted by Jerome Harste. Finally, this framework is driven by the transactional reader-response theory of Louise Rosenblatt.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Constructivist Views of Learning

John Dewey. One of the major curriculum theorists who supported the constructivist theory of learning was John Dewey. Constructivists argue that individuals learn best by engaging in the learning process. This theory of learning values students as active members of the classroom.

Students' out-of-school experience is often free and broad, while their in-school experience is often structured and pre-determined. This learning experience lacks engagement and curiosity. Dewey (1902) encouraged curriculum makers and teachers to let students explore,

discover, and construct knowledge through inquiry. The inquiry is a learning approach that invites students to think, hypothesize, analyze, and reflect on their learning process.

One way to support student inquiry is by using high-quality picture books as tools that offer valuable opportunities to students. John Dewey believed that students should be active members in a classroom and that they need to take ownership of their learning. He argued that learners should be at the center of learning and the curriculum. Dewey (1902) noted that classrooms are like laboratories that help students to actively engage in inquiry and construct meaning.

Social Constructivist View of Learning

Lev Vygotsky. While constructivists support individual learning and development, social constructivists promote learning through social interaction. The Russian scholar Lev Vygotsky was one of the first social learning theorists. Vygotsky's theory of learning contends that learning happens through social interaction. According to Vygotsky (1978), children's learning begins long before they go to school. In other words, children have their own understanding of their surroundings long before the formal education begins.

Vygotsky's most famous theory is called *Zone of Proximal Development*, a term that defines the appropriate task complexity level for children. He argued that an assessment of children's development should consider two levels: the actual developmental level and the potential developmental level. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the difference between the child's actual development level and the potential developmental level. Vygotsky (1978) stated that, "the zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are

currently in an embryonic state" (p. 33). In the ZPD, a child learns best through expert guidance and support.

Psycholinguistic View of Reading

Frank Smith and Ken Goodman. Many theorists have influenced the field of reading. Among the most influential theorists are Frank Smith and Ken Goodman, both of whom take a psycholinguistic view of reading.

Three of Smith's most important ideas are that reading is a natural process, readers use more nonvisual than visual information, and reading involves the reader having a theory of reading in their heads.

According to Smith (1985), reading is a natural process, a process that teachers really do not need to teach. Children who are capable of using and understanding the language are in fact capable of learning to read as well. The resistance starts when they "don't want to read, cannot make sense of it, or find the price of learning too high" (Smith, 1985, p. 9). Reading problems are a sign of language problems. For Smith, reading, like language learning, is a natural, ongoing process. In reading, students should be encouraged to bring personal meaning to a text instead of discovering the meaning hidden in the text. "Readers must bring meaning—deep structure—to what they read, employing their prior knowledge of the topic and of the language of the text" (Smith, 1985, p. 71). In addition, Smith suggested that the meaning should be constructed between the reader and text.

Smith also introduces the importance of nonvisual information (prior knowledge) in the reading process. It means that the more information and prior knowledge the reader has about a text, the less visual information is needed. Contrary, the less information the reader has, the more visual information is needed (Smith, 1985).

Third, Smith argues that readers must have what he calls a "theory." A theory is the knowledge in our head that includes our prior personal experience. Smith (1985) noted, "Basically what we know about the world is a summary of our experience in the world, and specific memories that cannot be related to our summary, to our general rules, will make little sense to us" (p. 74). This statement suggests that there can be more than one interpretation for a text, depending on the different "theories" of each reader.

The next psycholinguistic theorist of reading to be discussed here is Ken Goodman, who advocated the whole-language approach toward learning. In a whole-language classroom, subjects are not isolated; instead, they are integrated and interrelated. Whole language is a student-centered approach to learning. Teachers are co-learners who learn and support students.

One of Goodman's most important ideas is that all children are capable of learning when they are provided with familiar information. In the same manner, students' learning across content areas can improve when they are provided with texts that are familiar and engaging.

Goodman also focused on students' active engagement in the learning process. Goodman (1989) suggested that "this does not minimize the importance of content; rather, it represents the belief that content can only be understood and seriously studied when learners are actively involved and interested in learning, are participating in deciding what will be learned, and are relating what they are learning to what they already know" (p. 114).

The third idea introduced by him is the fact that each reader brings a personal meaning to the text (Goodman, 1996). Individuals often construct meaning differently; they create a meaning in their head, a unique personal meaning. Considering this, it is almost impossible that two readers could create the same meaning for a text (Goodman, 1996). This process requires readers and writers to communicate. The meaning-making process is like a conversation between two

people who communicate through sounds, letters, emotions, and their personal theories. Generally, readers should be able to relate their experiences and prior knowledge to the text in order to make sense of it; otherwise, the text turns into few meaningless words on a paper. According to Goodman (1996), reading comprehension is a combination of the reader's predictions, inferences, and prior experiences.

In sum, both Frank Smith and Ken Goodman supported a psycholinguistic view of reading. Their seminal works influenced the field of reading research, including this current dissertation.

Social Constructivist View of Reading

Jerome Harste. Jerome Harste is a leading literacy theorist and the proponent of a social constructivist view of reading. He also is a major reading theorist who supports inquiry, particularly the use of picture books as tools to support student inquiry. Harste (2014) believed that inquiry-based classrooms provide opportunities for students to explore, hypothesize, and re-hypothesize in order to make new meaning. "What I want to see in curriculum is lots and lots of opportunities for students to explore their own inquiry question using reading, writing, and other sign systems as tools and toys for learning" (p. 93). In addition, Harste introduced a process called "transmediation." This means that students move across sign systems to create new meanings. This process involves moving from language to art, or art to language, and it helps students shape new ideas. According to Harste (2014) there are multiple forms of representations, such as fine art, music, and dance.

Reader Response Theory

Louise Rosenblatt. Louise Rosenblatt also influenced the field of reading by introducing a transactional reader response theory of reading. According to Rosenblatt (2005), reading is like

a face-to-face conversation in which the reader and the text transact ideas to construct a personal meaning. "The reader focuses attention on and transacts with an element in the environment namely the signs on the page, the text" (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 6). During the transactional process, physical factors such as stress, working memory, and visual information also affect the meaning making process; therefore, meaning is differently constructed for individuals. Rosenblatt (2005) stated, "every reading act is an event, or a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular pattern of signs, a text, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context" (7).

This theory suggests that the meaning does not need to be discovered by the reader; instead, it is personally constructed through the transaction between the reader, the text, and the context. The transaction involves readers' past and present experiences, situation, and feelings.

In the transactional theory, the reader's stance or "purpose" is a critical element that directly impacts the meaning-making process. According to Rosenblatt, there are two major stances in the reading: efferent and aesthetic. In efferent reading, the reader's primary goal is to carry away some kind of information from the text, while reader's attention in aesthetic reading is focused on what happens during the actual reading. If a text is being read aesthetically, the readers try to connect their personal feelings and insights into the text. "In aesthetic reading the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 25).

Identifying the reading purpose before engaging in the reading process helps readers to ask the right questions. However, many texts, including picture books, can be read for both purposes.

These integrated learning and reading theories suggest that individuals construct their understanding of the world through an active interaction with the world around them. Learners

construct knowledge through active engagement and based on their prior experiences and knowledge. The inquiry-based learning model is a form of active learning which allows individuals to actively interact with the world around them and investigate problems and questions.

Definition of Terms

Several key terms are used throughout this dissertation study. The following terms are defined within the context of this study:

Picturebooks: multimodal text with a strong connection between language and illustrations

Inquiry: Inquiry is an approach to learning that gives students an opportunity to question, investigate, and grow as an inquirer.

Theoretical framework: A conceptual foundation or structure that guides the investigation.

Summary

This chapter started with a vignette to describe the impetus for this dissertation research. It continued with an introduction to the inquiry process and a discussion of the use of picture books as tools to support inquiry in an eighth-grade ELA Classroom. Then, it identified the statement of the problem that makes this investigation significant and valuable. It ended with a discussion of the theoretical framework that shapes this investigation.

In the next chapter, I provide a review of the literature on inquiry and how picture books can be used at all grade levels and across content areas.

CHAPTER II

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature on inquiry and how picture books can be used as tools at all grade levels and across content area. It begins with an introduction to inquiry and its importance in the classroom. Next, it discusses textbooks as curriculum materials that hinder rather than help students engage in inquiry. Then, as an alternative to textbooks, it provides an introduction to picture books and discusses how they can support student learning across grade levels and content areas. Then, it provides an overview of the use of picture books for reading comprehension, models for writing, and reading support for second language learners. This chapter ends with a short summary and a brief introduction to Chapter III.

Introduction to Inquiry

The purpose of this study is to understand students' experience when picture books are used as tools to support their inquiry in an eighth-grade ELA Classroom. The word *inquiry* is central to this study.

Considering the importance of testing in today's educational system, teachers are pressured to implement instructional strategies that work toward test achievement. These instructional strategies neither deepen students' understanding nor engage students in the learning process. Students need engaging instructional strategies as well as opportunities to ask questions, investigate, explore, and think for themselves. One such strategy is supporting student inquiry.

Inquiry is an approach to learning that gives students an opportunity to question, investigate, and grow as an inquirer. "Involving students in inquiry investigations provides students opportunities to generate their own questions about everyday phenomena, design ways

to collect data, use creative thinking to make inferences about their data, and propose possible explanations of the phenomena" (Morrison & Young, 2008, pp. 204–205).

Inquiry helps students participate in lifelong learning, as well as both inside and outside school. In the inquiry-based approach, students and teachers individually and collaboratively develop research questions, use multiple sources to collect data, and present their findings in multiple and creative ways (Harste, Short, and Burke, 1988). In the inquiry process, students "share information in all stages of the evolution to "experthood" getting feedback, support and purpose for continued work as learners" (Murray, et al., 2004, p. 33).

Picture books can be used as tools to support the inquiry process. In many ways, picture books provide opportunities for students to go beyond the content of a text, make personal and meaningful connections, and explore and create new meanings. "Through these experiences, students engage in meaning making by evaluating information, connecting ideas across sources, comparing and contrasting information, and reflecting on meaning" (Vacca & Vacca, 2008, p. 378).

Inquiry invites students to use multiple resources to collect information and deepen their understanding of a topic across the curriculum. Inquiry is not about "simply answering questions and getting the right answers; it engages interests, and challenges students to connect their world with curriculum" (Kuhlthau, et al., 2007, p. 4). One way to support inquiry is by extending beyond a single text and incorporating a text sets of picture books.

Text sets include multiple related texts that are connected by a common theme or idea. These texts "cover a range of difficulty levels and genres, appealing to specific interests while making information accessible to all" (Murray, et al., 2004, p. 34). They also provide multiple perspectives for students and support inquiry.

Text sets of picture books can take students to different places with the help of rich language, descriptive illustrations, and narrative design (Vacca & Vacca, 2008). "They provide depth, considerate and accurate information, material at a variety of reading levels, and motivation for learning" (Vacca & Vacca, 2008, p. 383).

Limitations of Textbooks

Regardless of grade level, language, and school systems, textbooks are hardly invisible. Textbooks, including leveled books, are the primary teaching resources in the classroom and are usually used for extracting information. Standardized tests and time restrictions obligate teachers to mostly rely on a single textbook to meet the curriculum requirements.

While textbooks are the most common sources for students, they lack connections to students' lives and experiences (Fresch & Harkins, 2009). A textbook written by an individual might not satisfy students' individual needs. Relying on one textbook to teach about the content subject may sometimes result in unengaged group of students (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004). Students coming from different backgrounds and cultures are often unable to make a connection to text, and this can result in a lack of interest in reading.

Textbooks are filled with charts, diagrams, texts, and activities and they are designed to teach about content area subjects (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004). It goes without saying that textbooks are published to teach students about content subjects; however, the important question is whether they actually offer students comprehensible input. Informational textbooks filled with facts may lack the aesthetic elements that help students to increase their imagination and encourage them to go beyond the text in order to create a personal meaning.

It is surprising to see how students at the same grade level read at different reading level and how teachers expect the same outcome across the grade level. Struggling readers along with

second language learners often experience difficulties in understanding complicated subjects. Thus, a gap between what is called reluctant and good readers exists. This gap expands as students move to upper grade levels. Picture books, however, let students make personal connections by allowing them to pose questions, reflect, and share their understanding with others.

However, there are several issues around using picture books for adolescents. Older students often have a negative attitude towards picture books. They believe that picture books are not sophisticated and appropriate for their age. In addition to students' negative perceptions, often educators and administrators do not consider picture books as a part of a legitimate curricula (Beckman & Diamond, 1984).

In the following sections, I provide a review of the literature dealing with the use of picture books across grade levels and content areas.

The Use of Picture Books to Support Student Learning

The picture book has multiple definitions. In this study, the picture book is operationally defined as a multimodal text with a strong connection between language and illustrations. In a picture book, there is a strong relationship between written language and illustration, a relationship that enable readers not only to read the text but also to read the pictures. Picture books often have around 32 pages with illustrations on almost every page. Most importantly, the text and illustrations collaborate to help readers create personal meaning (Giorgis & Hartman, 2000).

The picture book is a powerful instructional tool. It "has the potential to act as a magnifying glass that enlarges and enhances the reader's personal interactions with a subject" (Vacca & Vacca, 2005, p. 161). Many scholars believe that picture books have the power and

potential to support student learning and enhance their understanding (Albright, 2002; Murphy, 2009). They are also powerful for second language learners and struggling readers (Carr, et al., 2001).

Lastly, picture books are effective tools to support inquiry. They can support Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by offering opportunities to students to actively participate in inquiry projects. Picture books can support inquiry by improving students' higher-order thinking skills. Moreover, they invite students to make connections between content-area subjects and help them build background knowledge that is essential for understanding content area subjects (Massey, 2015).

Power and Potential of Picture Books in the Middle Grades Classroom

Picture books are traditionally used in the elementary grades, but this study investigates their power and potential in the middle grades classroom.

Developing an integrated curriculum that challenges students and supports their inquiry can be a complicated task for teachers. One challenge is the significant change in student needs from elementary to the middle grades. Middle-grade students think and behave differently; therefore, their interests and needs are different. One way to address their needs is to use picture books as tools to support their inquiry. Through inquiry, students will be able to participate in activities that encourage them to go beyond the ordinary classroom, challenge them to think critically, explore, and create new meanings.

There are many ways that picture books can support student inquiry in the middle grade classroom. One of the important characteristics of picture books is their length. Charles and Charles (2004) note that "completing long reading assignments" is one of the reasons why

secondary students are disengaged (p. 40). Picture books, however, allow students to read and reflect on a whole book.

Picture books are mostly published for young children; however, in recent years, contemporary picture books are receiving more attention in the middle grades and high schools (Olness, 2007). Recently, picture books have been designed to address complex topics that are often inappropriate for younger kids (Lott, 2001). They offer multiple perspectives at all ages and levels, and they help students to have in-depth understandings of the world around them (Murphy, 2009). Although picture books are often short texts with colorful and engaging illustrations, they can also address sensitive topics that are too complicated for younger kids and more appropriate for students in the middle grades (Pearson, 2005).

In contemporary picture books, the text and illustrations can work together to address sensitive topics. Today, there are many picture books that address a variety of sensitive and controversial topics including violence, immigration, war, bullying, physical abuse, and drug abuse (Lightsey, et al., 2006).

Picture books are not only engaging, but they also help struggling students in learning complex content subjects. Students, regardless of their grade level and background knowledge, can find picture books appealing and use them as tools to support and facilitate their learning. Struggling readers who read below their grade level and second language learners who have language barriers can benefit from picture books. Picture books allow these students to read and comprehend in a safe environment, and this results in increased confidence and improved reading experience (Beckman & Diamond, 1984; Kane, 2007). Ciecierski and Bintz (2015) state, "The connection-making that picture books create so easily and so profusely may increase diffident or recalcitrant students' motivation to learn, as well" (p. 19). Overall, picture books are

powerful tools at all grade levels and can be used in multiple ways in the middle grades classroom.

Picture Books and Reading Aloud in the Middle Grades

Reading picture books aloud offers wonderful opportunities for teachers to support student comprehension and learning. Reading aloud is one of the main strategies that teachers can use with both young and adult readers. Teacher read-alouds can enhance middle-grade students' motivation and engagement (Albright & Ariail, 2005). They also can be used to teach content area material and help students make connections with and across content area subjects (Alvermann & Phelps, 1998). Also, teacher read-alouds allow struggling readers to interact with the teacher and peers, and this interaction improves their comprehension (Ivey, 2002).

Research studies indicate that middle-school students have fond memories of teachers reading aloud and find it motivating (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Livaudais, 1985). Similarly, Beers (1998) suggests that secondary struggling readers find read-alouds one of the most engaging instructional strategies.

Lastly, reading aloud has an important role in student literacy development. It can increase students' engagement and involvement, and can encourage them to read independently (Fox, 2013). Reading aloud can include both visual and aural components, both of which are essential for effective literacy experiences (Fox, 2013).

Picture Books and Literacy in the Middle-Grades Classroom

Middle-grade students are frequently being tested on their reading skills and abilities. Teachers are looking for strategies and resources to increase students' achievement scores, especially in literacy. Literacy development is more than just the ability to pronounce letters; it also includes understanding and being able to share and discuss multiple perspectives. Reading

lessons should support "activities that will allow students to authentically investigate and explore the connections between literacy and content area material" (Massey, 2015, p. 46). Picture books provide students with context clues that can enhance reading comprehension. Picture books can enhance student's comprehension by taking advantage of their curiosity and imagination (Massey, 2015).

Moreover, picture books provide effective writing models for students in the middle-grades classroom. Picture books have well-structured sentences, rich vocabulary words, and short texts which benefit struggling writers. "Struggling readers or students who lack prior knowledge of the topic may find picture books useful references as they write reports, journals, or their own books modeled after a picture book" (Fresch & Harkins, 2009, p. 11). Picture books include rich language that encourages students to also use rich and descriptive language in their own writing.

Picture Books and Visual Learners

Picture books can support visual learners (Carr, et al, 2001). Visuals, or illustrations, play an important role in students' lives; therefore, the combination of visuals and text in picture books is appealing to older students who are constantly in touch with technologies, games, and social media. The powerful role of visuals in today's world (Neal & Moore, 1992), enhances the ability of picture-book illustrations to convey information. Moreover, research studies have shown that illustrations and illustrated books create a positive attitude towards reading among all students (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003).

Detailed and engaging illustrations support visual learners and provide visual clues for comprehension. According to O'Neil (2011), the color, shape, and size of illustrations help readers to make sense of the text while increasing their imagination and curiosity.

Picture Books and Second Language Learners in the Middle-Grades Classroom

There is an increase in the number of second language learners entering both public and private schools in the US.. Learning a second language, adapting to an unfamiliar culture, and competing with native speakers can be a frustrating journey. English language learners (ESL) at all levels need extra support. Picture books are important for ESL learners, in that they can support the learning of important language skills. Picture books are visually engaging, culturally relevant, and personally meaningful (Bintz & Chaghervand, 2023). "Picturebooks are very special books, for they are authentic in every way- they words)if they exist, for some picturebooks are wordless) have not been abridged or altered for language learning purposes and the illustrations are created by illustrators who use their art creatively with neither a care for, nor an interest in, the confines of language learning" (Mourao, 2016. P.2) Picture books provide comprehensible input for second language learners and let them connect their prior experience to the text. "The information in the text includes more than just vocabulary, it involves syntax, flow of language, intonation, pronunciation, and genre" (Moeller & Meyer, 1995, p. 34). In addition, culturally familiar texts, rich vocabulary words, short texts, and clear illustrations help ESL students to constantly construct meaning and build their literacy skills.

Lastly, picture books create a safe zone for English language learners to participate in an ongoing learning experience. The "visual-verbal connection" or the act of associating pictures with text supports second language learners' needs and builds their confidence (Henry & Simpson, 2001, p. 1). Illustrations in picture books help students, particularly second language learners, to comprehend (Wood & Tinajero, 2002).

Picture Books across the Curriculum in the Middle-Grades Classroom

Creating an engaging and exploratory curriculum is critical at all levels, but especially in the middle grades classroom (Erb, 2005). Although textbooks are the primary educational resources for students, picture books can be effective instructional tools in an integrated curriculum, adding in-depth knowledge, creativity, and engagement to students' learning experience. Massey (2015) stated, "Carefully selected picture books that match the Common Core State Standards are fundamental resources to enhance the curriculum and present alternative vehicles of acquiring the content objectives while engaging the student with narrative text and illustrations" (49). Also, Vacca and Vacca (2008) state, "Instructional practices involving the use of trade books [including picture books]in content areas help to extend and enrich the curriculum" (p. 376). Moreover, reading a "concept-related" picture book can activate students' background knowledge while enhancing their engagement and curiosity across the curriculum (Irvin, 1990).

Picture Books as an Overall Tool for Learning

Overall, picture books are effective tools for learning at all levels. They are effective in the middle grades classroom for several reasons. Picture books are effective because they include short texts, simple language, and rich vocabulary that help middle-grade students focus on a single topic but yet analyze it through different perspectives. "Reading picture books in secondary courses increases motivation, understanding of concepts, and aesthetic appreciation, and provides easier material for less able readers" (Carr et al., 2001, p.146).

In addition, picture books can push student thinking, increase their curiosity, and stimulate their imagination by encouraging them to explore and ask focused inquiry questions. Maxwell (1996) suggested that picture books support students' ability to analyze and conduct meaningful research projects. Vacca and Vacca (2002) stated, "When teachers use textbooks and

trade books (picture books) in tandem, they help learners think critically about content" (p. 40). Similarly, Benedict and Carlisle (1992) used picture books with older learners to actively engage them in "philosophical thinking" and noted that students found picture books to be "an easy place to think" (p. 58).

Finally, picture books can be used as way-in books to introduce complex topics across the curriculum. Way-in books are high quality, and sometimes award-winning, texts that teachers can use to introduce topics that students have little to no interest in at the time (Bintz, 2011). They also provide good models of narrative and expository writing, for conducting research, doing inquiry, and writing reports (Freeman, 1991). Way-in books are excellent resources to actively engage students in the inquiry process.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature on inquiry and how picture books can be used as tools at all grade levels and across content areas to support learning and promote inquiry. It included a review of the professional literature on the multiple dimensions of picture books and the multiple ways picture books can be used as tools to support student inquiry across the curriculum in the middle grade classroom.

The next chapter introduces and discusses the research methodology used in this dissertation research.

CHAPTER III

This chapter will describe the methodology of the current study. It begins with a description of the study's purpose. Next, it provides an introduction to the nature of basic interpretive qualitative design, followed by a rationale for selecting this methodology. Then, it identifies procedures for field entry, introduces the research site, and describes participants in the study. Next, it identifies data sources and describes data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and efforts to establish trustworthiness. It ends with a discussion of ethical considerations.

The purpose of this dissertation research is to understand students' experience when picture books are used as tools to support inquiry on a particular topic or theme in an eighth-grade ELA classroom. The topic or theme was selected by the classroom teacher based on Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for eighth grade, as well as specific Ohio state content standards for eighth-grade ELA classrooms. Ultimately, the aim of this investigation is to gain deep insights into and understandings of students' experience when picture books are used to support inquiry.

Basic Interpretive Qualitative Design

This dissertation study is based on a basic interpretative qualitative design. In general, this qualitative design seeks to understand how participants make sense of a situation or experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study involves multiple data sources. These sources will include two semi-structured interviews, persistent and prolonged classroom observations and field notes, and students' written reflections.

The role of researcher in a basic interpretive qualitative design is multi-faceted. "Qualitative researchers might be interested in uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon for

those involved by understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2011, p. 5). In a basic interpretive qualitative study, the researcher is actively involved in the data gathering process in a natural setting. Basically, in this design, the researcher is the main data-gathering tool. The primary role of the researcher is one of the main components in a qualitative research design.

In a qualitative study, data analysis is an ongoing process. In basic interpretive qualitative research, data analysis is an inductive process in which a researcher "goes back and forth between the themes and the database until the researcher establishes a comprehensive set of themes" (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). "Qualitative data analysis is conducted concurrently with gathering data, making interpretations, and writing reports" (Creswell, 2007, as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 184).

There are several characteristics of a basic interpretive qualitative design (see Table 1, adapted from Creswell, 2019).

Table 1

Characteristics of Basic Interpretative Qualitative Design

Characteristics of Qualitative Research	Present Study
Natural Settings	Classroom
Researcher as Key Instrument	Observation, Researcher's journal
Multiple Source of Data	Teacher's Interview/ Students' artifacts and written reflection/Classroom Observation
Inductive data analysis	5-step inductive analysis

Trustworthiness	Researcher's journal/peer reviewing/ member-check/Triangulation
Emergent Design	Broad research question/ inductive data analysis

These characteristics are further defined below:

Natural Settings: In a qualitative study, the researcher collects data in natural settings. A natural setting is a field where the researcher interprets participants' experience and is able to have face-to-face conversation.

Researcher as Key Instrument: In qualitative research, the researcher is the main data-gathering tool. The qualitative researcher collects data through qualitative methods including interview, observation, etc.

Multiple Sources of Data: In qualitative research, the researcher collects multiple forms of data (interview, observation, artifacts, etc.) The main reason for using multiple sources of data is to increase trustworthiness.

Inductive Data Analysis: In qualitative research, an inductive data analysis procedure is used. In inductive analysis, the researcher moves back and forth between interpretations of data to find emerging themes and then places them into bigger categories.

Trustworthiness: In qualitative research, the researcher uses multiple sources of data to develop trustworthiness. To increase trustworthiness, the researcher uses different methods such as triangulation, peer review, and member checking.

Emergent Design: A qualitative researcher uses an emergent design. An emergent design enables the researcher to ask open-ended questions and modify the research process when needed.

Rationale for Selecting Research Methodology

There are many methodologies for conducting research (Duke & Mallette, 2011). The methodology used in this study is a basic interpretive qualitative design. There are several reasons for selecting and using this methodology. One reason is that the methodology is a good fit for the research question. This study asks the following research question: What are students' experiences when picture books are used to support inquiry?

This question is qualitative in nature. It requires interpretation, not experimentation. It is a question that involves the collection of data in a natural setting. In this case it is an eighth-grade ELA classroom. Moreover, it is a question that involves the researcher as a key instrument. Specifically, it calls on the researcher to collect data from multiple sources and to interpret these data. These sources can include classroom observation, semi-structured informal interviews, field notes, student artifacts, student written reflections, and a researcher's journal. This question also requires inductive, rather than deductive, data analysis. Finally, this question requires trustworthiness in the collection and analysis of multiple sources of data, including peer review, member check, and triangulation. In essence, a basic interpretive qualitative design is most appropriate, and therefore was selected as the methodology because it best meets the requirements for this study.

Overview of Picture Book Study

This dissertation research investigates the use of a picture-book study as a tool to support student inquiry in an eighth-grade ELA classroom. Providing an overview of this inquiry tool,

this section includes a brief description of the purpose of the picture book study, curriculum topics and resources, specifically picture books, used in the study, directions for completing a picture book study, and the function of the Literature Response Cube.

Purpose of Picture Book Study

In this study, the picture book was an instructional tool to support student inquiry. Here, it will be used to support the inquiry of students in an eighth-grade ELA classroom. Specifically, it will be used as a tool to engage students in an inquiry process in which they use picture books to generate meaningful inquiry questions on a particular topic. Students will be invited to use multiple sources to collect and analyze data in order to answer their inquiry questions. As a culminating experience, they will represent and share their research findings using multiple forms of representation.

Selection and Criteria of Picture Books

In this study the entire class of students were provided with at least 60 picture books on the same topic. The topic or theme was selected by the classroom teacher based on Common Core State Standards (CCSS), as well as specific Ohio state content standards for an eighth-grade ELA classroom. Multiple criteria were developed by the researcher for selecting these books. These criteria included:

- All books are picture books;
- Books are high-quality and preferably award-winning;
- Books contain rich and descriptive language;
- Books contain engaging illustrations connected to text;
- Books reflect strong story elements;
- Books use clear and authentic writing;

- Books contain accurate information (Farris & Fuhler, 1994).

Collectively, these criteria describe picture books that have multiple layers of meaning, encourage readers to go beyond the text, and support inquiry. According to Farris and Fuhler (1994), illustration, authentic information and text, appropriate language, and a clear difference between fact and opinion should be considered when choosing a picture book for the middle grades classroom.

Moreover, the length and appearance of picture books were also considered when selecting picture books. In general, the picture books in this study are around 32 pages in length and include engaging text and descriptive illustrations. These picture book features invite students to participate in group discussions and collaboratively create meaning (Bainbridge & Pantaleo, 2001).

The Literature Response Cube

A Literature Response Cube (LRC) is an instructional tool to support student inquiry (see Appendix A). It consists of four separate yet interrelated cubes. The four cubes include:

What did you learn from this book? The purpose of this question is to build student knowledge around a particular topic. This question invites students to think and reflect on their understanding. It also helps them monitor their learning.

What surprised you? The purpose of this question is to invite students to go beyond the text and ask more questions about the topic. This question increases students' curiosity and engages them in the inquiry process.

What connection, if any, can you make between the story and another book, person, or experience? The question allows students to think, discuss, and reflect on a text. By answering

this question, students will be able to make connections between text sets and their personal experiences.

What questions do you have about the topic? This particular question invites students to formally begin the inquiry project. The purpose of this question is to help students develop their inquiry question on a particular topic.

Directions for Completing a Picture Book Study

A multi-step set of directions will be used for students to complete the picture book study. These directions include:

Step 1: With a partner, students will browse, select, and read at least two picture books on a particular topic;

Step 2: With their partner, students will complete the LRC for each picture book;

Step 3: Focusing on the fourth cube, students will post their inquiry questions on the class "Question" board;

Step 4: Each pair will select one inquiry question from the board and use the question as the basis for their inquiry project;

Step 5: Students will collect data using multiple data sources, including internet and library resources, additional picture books, etc.

Step 6: Each pair will use creative ways to represent their findings

Step 7: Each student will individually reflect on the whole experience with written responses to reflection questions.

Field Entry and Field Exit, Research Site, and Participants

This section describes field entry and field exit. Specifically, it discusses researcher activities for field entry and field exit as well as providing a timeline for formal data collection, including dates, purposes, data sources, and data collected.

Field Entry

The classroom teacher is one of my classmates and she kindly invited me to collect data in her classroom. In order to build rapport with students, I visited Jessica's classroom on September 19, 2019. On this visit, I introduced myself and spent some time with her students. I also explained my research project and stated that I would come back to their classroom to conduct a picture book study to support their inquiry. In addition, on October 27, 2019, I met with Jessica in person, and we shared our ideas and talked about the methods, procedures, and timing of the study.

The following (Table 2) is the timeline for this dissertation research. It is bracketed from field entry to field exit.

Table 2

Timeline for Formal Data Collection

Date	Purpose	Rationale	Data Source	Forms of Data Collected	Connection to Research Question
3/9	Begin data collection *To refamiliarize students with the purpose of the study *To demonstrate and discuss with students the picture book study,	This day will be the first day I will be formally in the field. I have not met with students for some time, so I wanted to refamiliarize the study and myself. I will demonstrate the picture book study before I	Researcher Classroom Students	Researcher Field Notes based on Classroom Observations (focus on students) Researcher Reflective Journaling (focus on self)	Field notes based on classroom observations, researcher journaling, and student reflections are data that will indicate to what extent students understand purpose of the study, the picture book study format, and the use of picture books to complete the picture book study.

				Student written reflections	
	using picture books *To invite student reflections	invite students to experience it for themselves. I will invite student written reflections on the experience to support student understanding of the picture book study.			
3/10	Student engagement with the picture book study *Students in pairs *Students browse books *Select, read, and discuss 1 paired text *Students collaborate and complete 1 literature response cube (LRC) for each book	This engagement begins the research study and the inquiry process. It allows students to work in pairs, browse and self-select a paired text, and collaborate with each other to complete a literature response cube for each book.	Researcher Students Teacher	Researcher Field Notes Classroom Teacher Written Reflection Student literature cubes	Field notes based on classroom observations, and student literature cubes are data that will produce written responses to paired text, and identify student research questions that is the beginning of the inquiry process. Teacher written reflections will reflect teacher observations student inquiry process, e.g. engagement of students, student collaboration, and enjoyment of paired text.
3/11	Student engagement with picture book study *Students use LRC to develop and share research questions with class *Students select one question to conduct inquiry project.	This engagement invites students to continue the inquiry process by selecting an inquiry question	Researcher Students Teacher	Researcher Field Notes Classroom Teacher Written Reflection Updated final student literature cubes Poster of Student Inquiry Questions	Field notes based on classroom observations, researcher journaling, poster of students questions, and updated, final literature cubes are data that will produce written responses to paired text, and indicate student research questions that is continuing the inquiry process. Teacher written reflections will reflect ongoing

				teacher observations student inquiry process.
3/12	Student engagement with picture book study *Students use multiple sources to collect data for research question	This engagement invites students to continue the inquiry process by collecting data	Researcher Students Teacher	Researcher Field Notes Based on Classroom observation Classroom Teacher Written Reflection	Field notes based on classroom observations, researcher journaling, and teacher written reflection indicate student engagement in the data collection process. Teacher written reflections will reflect ongoing teacher observations student inquiry process.
3/13	Student engagement with picture book study *Students use multiple sources to collect data for research question	This engagement invites students to continue the inquiry process by using multiple sources for data collection	Researcher Students Teacher	Researcher Field Notes Classroom observation Classroom Teacher Written Reflection	Field notes based on classroom observations, researcher journaling, and teacher written reflection indicate student engagement in the data collection process. Teacher written reflections will reflect ongoing teacher observations student inquiry process.
3/14	Student engagement with picture book study *Students represent findings in creative ways	This engagement invites students to continue the inquiry process by creatively represent their findings	Researcher Students Teacher	Researcher Field Notes Classroom observation Classroom Teacher Written Reflection	Field notes based on classroom observations, researcher journaling, and teacher written reflection indicate data sources and student engagement in the process of representing their findings Teacher written reflections will reflect ongoing teacher observations student inquiry process.
3/15	Student engagement with picture book study *Students will keep working on their outcome	This engagement invites students to continue the inquiry process by creatively represent their findings	Researcher Students Teacher	Researcher Field Notes Classroom observation	Field notes based on classroom observations, researcher journaling, and teacher written reflection indicate data sources and student engagement in the

				Pictures of their outcome Classroom Teacher Written reflection	process of process of representing their findings Teacher written reflections will reflect ongoing teacher observations student inquiry process.
3/16	Student engagement with picture book study *Students share their findings with class in creative ways *Students write reflections on the whole experience	This engagement invites students to continue the inquiry process by sharing their findings with the class, and writing reflections on the whole experience.	Researcher Students Teacher	Researcher Field Notes Classroom Teacher Informal, Semi-structured, Oral Interview Student written reflections	Field notes based on classroom observations, researcher journaling, and students written reflection indicate students experience in the inquiry process. Teacher oral interview will add another perspective to data collection as well as her reflection on the picture book study and inquiry process.

The Impact of Covid on Data Collection

   This dissertation study was originally planned in an eighth-grade ELA classroom.

However, after spending 3 sessions in the classroom the school went into complete lockdown

due to the global pandemic. As a result of the lockdown, this project and the data collection

process was continued remotely. Since the classroom teacher and I were not able to conduct

observations, we decided to create a Google Form for students to record their thought process as

they collect and analyze data (See Appendix D). In addition, students were invited to complete

the inquiry process either individually or collaboratively; however, they were not able to use the

60 picture books that were originally provided for them.

Research Site

   According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research adopts an interpretive and

naturalistic perspective, where researchers study phenomena in their real-life environments,

aiming to understand and interpret them through the meanings individuals assign. This investigation took place in an eighth-grade ELA classroom at the Champion K-8 School located in the western part of the state of Ohio. The Champion Elementary/Middle School, situated at 5976 Mahoning Avenue Northwest in Warren, Trumbull County, spans 126,956 square feet. Opened in 2018, it accommodates 1,010 students from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade and serves a rural community. The teacher is one of my doctoral classmates, and she allowed me to conduct my dissertation study in her classroom**.**

Participants

People who are voluntarily involved in conducting research are called participants. To select participants, a researcher often centers the research question and attempts to choose those who can best help them to answer the research question. Sampling can be random or strategic, depending on the research question and limitation.

A total of 22 eighth-grade English Language Arts students, including 9 girls and 13 boys, participated in this basic interpretative qualitative study. Students are already familiar with picture books, as the teacher has already been using them for different classroom projects. The teacher is a Language Arts teacher and one of my classmates who is pursuing her PhD as well as teaching full time for more than 15 years. She is also one of the data sources.

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Methods

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Data collection strategies in a qualitative study include but are not limited to observations, interviews, and the collection of artifacts (Creswell, 2007). These methods enable the researcher to better interpret and make sense of participants' experience. Moreover, having multiple sets of data ultimately increases the credibility and trustworthiness of a study (Saldana, 2011).

Data Sources

In this study, data collection comprised semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B), classroom observations, teacher reflections, and student written reflections (see Appendix C). Data analysis procedures focused on noting and representing recurring patterns in the data, and they included methods that establish trustworthiness, like member checks, peer reviews, and so on.

Data Collection

A large "text set" of picture books was collected and used in this study. A text set is a collection of books that are related by topic, theme, genre, etc. In this case the text set was based on a topic consistent with Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for eighth grade, as well as with specific Ohio state content standards for eighth-grade ELA classrooms.

Working in pairs, students browsed, selected, and then read at least two picture books from the text set. Then, they individually completed a "Literature Response Cube" (see Appendix A) handout for each book and discussed their responses with their partner. Next, students developed and posted their research questions on Padlet, so all the students could see the range of questions. Students in pairs or individually selected their favorite inquiry question based on their interests. As part of the inquiry, students were invited to read additional picture books, use Internet resources, interview people, conduct research at the library, and so on. As a culminating experience, each pair or individual decided on a creative way to represent their findings. In addition, students individually shared their written reflections on the whole experience.

Another data collection method used in this qualitative study was the persistent observation of students' engagement, collaborations, and inquiry process. The main purpose of observation is to take a closer look at participants' reactions, attitudes, and interactions in a

natural setting (Saldana, 2011). Qualitative observation lets the researcher take field notes while observing participants' behaviors, activities and the actual research site (Creswell, 2009). During the observation, new perspectives may be created and even the research question may change due to an unexpected event. Observing students while they are actively engaged in the picture book study provided thick description for my interpretations and improved the trustworthiness of the study.

Moreover, in a qualitative study a researcher often conducts a formal or informal face-to-face interview with open-ended questions to let the participant talk about personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts. The teacher's viewpoint is another data source that will be used to answer the research question. To add another perspective to the study I decided to conduct a semi-structured interview to include teacher's observations, experiences, and viewpoints on the whole process. In addition, the teacher provided me with a daily written reflection at the end of each day.

Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis involved a multi-stage process.

Stage 1: I organized the data by preparing my notes, transcribing the interviews, and sorting artifacts and written reflections.

Stage 2: I read through the transcripts, field notes, and students' responses to get the general and holistic view of the data. What are they trying to say? What is the general theme? There was not any coding, highlighting, or note taking involved, just simply reading and thinking.

Stage 3: I read it again and began to look for preliminary potential recurring topics existing in the data. In this stage, I tried to talk to myself, ask questions, and record my thoughts

by taking notes. According to Rubin & Rubin (2011), "relying on memory, rather than grounding work in a careful examination of a written and meticulously coded transcript, could bias your results" (p. 190).

Stage 4: I read it again for the third time and started to code the recurring topics that emerged from my data. I eventually moved forward with coding while highlighting the recurring topics.

Stage 5: I put similar codes in bigger categories and developed the main themes that were similar between participants. Throughout all these steps, I kept a researcher journal to reflect on my initial thoughts on the data.

The following table (Table 3) demonstrates the decision-making process and the rationale involved behind each decision.

Table 3

Multi-Stage Inductive Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis	Rationale
Gathering and organizing the data	To organize all the data and prepare them for the inductive data analysis. This stage involves transcribing the interview, organizing the field notes, and gathering all the collected artifacts. Organizing data help the researcher to stay organized and focused.
Reviewing the data	This stage helps me to not only stay focus but also to get the general sense of the data. I can understand my participants' tone and it will prepare me for the next step.
Reading, taking notes, asking questions	This stage allows me to look for a deeper meaning while memoing (recording reflective notes) and asking questions.
Coding/Highlighting	This step gives me an opportunity to be more detailed in finding emerging and recurring themes amongst participants.

Categories	Finally, I should be able to put my codes in bigger categories and prepare them for the final interpretation.

Establishing Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is a way that "an inquirer can persuade her readers that the findings are worth paying attention to and worth taking account of" (p. 290). For the purpose of validity and reliability, I used multiple strategies, including peer reviewing, a researcher's journal, member checking, and thick description. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), research reliability "refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (p. 119). In conducting a qualitative study, a researcher studies human experience and attempts to make meaning of those experiences.

Throughout this investigation, I attempted to use multiple strategies to ensure that the study is trustworthy. I combined multiple strategies, such as triangulation, peer debriefing, and memoing. "Qualitative validity means that the researchers check for the accuracy of findings by employing certain procedures" (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). Trustworthiness ensures that the findings are accurate from the perspectives of the researcher, participants, and readers (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For the purpose of trustworthiness, I implemented the following strategies to strengthen the accuracy of findings:

Triangulation

This process includes using different data sources by collecting multiple data sets to build accurate themes and categories (Creswell, 2009). Triangulating multiple data sources will increase the trustworthiness. For this purpose, I collected multiple data using different sources (teacher's interview, classroom observation, and students' written reflection).

Thick Description

Using thick description will "transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experience" (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Adding thick and rich description like participants' direct quotations or drawings improves the study's accuracy. In this qualitative study, I included participants' written reflections.

Member Checking

This process calls on participants to help determine the accuracy of the researcher's findings and interpretations. After interviewing the teacher and transcribing and analyzing the data, I emailed my notes and interpretations to the teacher to make sure that we were both on the right track.

Peer debriefing

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that peer reviewers help you to keep your honesty in research by challenging you and asking questions regarding the rationale behind your interpretations. Peer debriefing increases the accuracy and trustworthiness of the study by adding an outsider viewpoint on the findings. For this strategy, I asked one of my PhD classmates to read through my interpretations, ask questions, and assess the accuracy of my findings.

Acknowledging and Controlling for Bias

Saldana (2011) notes that, as a researcher, your "autobiography and identity—life experiences, knowledge, training, emotions, values, attitudes, beliefs, gender, ethnicity, and so forth—influence and affect how you navigate through the enterprise and approach other important elements, such as the relationship between you and your participants and the analysis of your data" (p. 22). As I mentioned earlier, I kept a journal including my initial thoughts, preliminary themes, and interpretations. Merriam (1988) believes that "clarifying researcher bias

from the outset of the study is important so that the reader understand the researcher's position and any biases or assumptions that impact inquiry" (as cited in Creswell, 2007).

To become aware of the possible impact of my biases and prior experiences on the research process particularly, data analysis, I decided to be more reflective by recording my thoughts and interpretations along with the rationale for each decision. In this regard, Patton (2015) also states, "For better or worse, the trustworthiness of the data is tied directly to the trustworthiness of those who collect and analyze the data and their demonstrated competence" (p. 705).

Ethics

Generally, research ethics should protect individuals' rights, privacy, and confidentiality in a research study. A researcher should keep the standards and follow the rules when visiting an educational setting such as school. Since the current investigation has been designed to collect data in a classroom in which participants are under the age of 18, I was obligated to obtain permission from The Institutional Review Board (IRB) and to provide the school's principal and the students' parents with documentation and detailed consent forms. Jacobs and Cassell (1987) note, "A code is concerned with aspirations as well as avoidances, it represents our desire and attempt to respect the rights of others, fulfill obligations, avoid harm and augment benefits to those we interact with" (2).

Considering the crucial role of ethics in qualitative research, I provided my participants with detailed consent forms along with all the explanations regarding the topic and the procedures. The forms noted that their participation was completely voluntary and their personal information such as their names will be kept in a pass-worded computer (Creswell, 2009). Also, for the purpose of confidentiality, pseudonyms were used.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the methodology that has been used in the current investigation. This investigation is designed as basic interpretive qualitative research and includes qualitative methods. Multiple data sources including semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, students' artifacts, and written reflection were implemented. Data analysis was an inductive process including five steps (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, for the purpose of trustworthiness, multiple strategies, such as triangulation, peer debriefing, thick description, and member checking, were used.

CHAPTER IV:

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and summarize major findings from an interpretive analysis of the collected data. It begins with an overview and description of the purpose for this research study. Then, it describes the major findings from the analysis of students' thought processes throughout the inquiry process. Next, it discusses major findings from students' written reflections. Then, it continues by sharing the major findings from the analysis of teacher interviews. It ends with the researcher's classroom observation and an introduction to chapter V.

Table 4. Total Student Data Collected

Groups	Total Students Enrolled in Classroom S=Student	Total Students Returned Signed Consent Forms	Total Students Participated in Research Project N = 17	Total Literature Response Cubes (LRC) Collected	Total Inquiry Questions from LRC-Cube 4	Total Student Journals	Total Student Final Inquiry Projects I=Individual G=Group	Total Student Written Reflections
G1	S1	✓	✓	xx	xx	1	I	1
	S2	x	x			xx	xx	xx
G2	S3	✓	✓	2	3	1	I	1
	S4	✓	✓			1	1	1
G3	S5	✓	✓	2	3	1	1	1
	S6	✓	✓			1	1	1
G4	S7	✓	✓	2	5	1	1	1
	S8	✓	✓			1	1	1
G5	S9	✓	✓	2	5	1		1
	S10	✓	✓			1	G	1
G6	S11	x	x			xx	xx	xx
	S12	x	x	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx
G7	S13	✓	✓			1	I	1
	S14	x	x	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx
G8	S15	✓	✓			1		1
	S16	x	x	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx

G9	S17	✓	✓			1		1
	S18	✓	✓	2	2	1	G	1
G10	S19	✓	✓		1	1		1
	S20	✓	✓	3		1	G	**xx**
G11	S21	✓	✓			1		1
	S22	✓	✓	2	2	1	G	1
Total	22	17	17	15	21	17	12 (I=8 and G=4)	17

Note: A total of 22 students were enrolled in this class. All 22 students were invited to participate in this research study. Although all the students participated in regular classroom instruction and activities, only 17 students were included as participants because 5 students did not return signed consent forms.
x = Students did not return signed consent forms
xx = Data were not collected from designated pair of students or individual student

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation study was to describe students' experience when picture books are used as tools to support inquiry in an eighth-grade ELA classroom. This study was a basic interpretive qualitative design that invited middle-grade students to read and respond to high-quality picture books and use them as tools to support their own inquiry on a particular topic (Greek Mythology).

Analysis of Students' Thinking Process

As part of this project, students were invited to individually record and document their thinking process in a Google Form that was originally created by the classroom teacher. This document was designed to serve multiple purposes. First, it allowed Jennifer to ensure individual accountability, particularly for those who worked in pairs at home due to the Covid19 lockdown. Second, it allowed me to get some understanding about students' thinking process as they chose their inquiry questions and used multiple sources to answer their questions. A total of 17 Google

Forms were collected. This section describes major findings from the analysis of students'

thinking process.

The analysis of students' thinking process as they developed their inquiry questions

indicated that there were two factors involved in generating those questions: personal interests,

and curiosity.

Personal Interests/Curiosity

Findings indicated that personal interests inspired students to generate their inquiry

questions. For instance, one student said,

"I was interested in this while reading about the constellations when we started this

project when we were still in school."

Students' emphasis on personal interests determined how important it is to have freedom

in generating an inquiry question. Similarly, another student noted,

"I had been really interested in Greek Mythology for a while and had known a lot about

the basics of Mythology. One thing I had not known a lot about was the Titans and I had wanted

to do more research about them."

Findings also indicated that students' curiosity inspired them to generate their inquiry

questions. For instance, two students said,

"I chose this because… most of the stars and constellations we see are from Greek

Mythology and I would like to know who they are and how they got there."

"I chose this because I'm working with Callisto and we are curious where her name

comes from."

These statements suggest that inquiry allowed students' interests and curiosity to lead the

way. Overall, students' final inquiry questions were created based on their interests and/or

curiosity. According to students, some of the questions were generated based on their interests. Likewise, some indicated that they were willing to know more and learn about new topics they had never had a chance to learn about.

Moreover, the analysis of students' thinking process throughout the inquiry process and data collection indicated that each source helped students in a certain way; however, findings across student responses indicated that each source provided students with either new or background information or confirmed what they already knew.

New/Background Information

Findings indicated that students learned new information throughout the inquiry process. One student said,

"Most of the information in this article was new information that helped me answer my question by showing the main differences between Greek and Roman mythology."

This statement suggested that students were able to further their knowledge about their inquiry topic by using multiple sources. Another student said,

"This research provided me with some facts that weren't really talked about on other sources and gave me more hidden information about Jason."

These statements determined the importance of having multiple sources for data collection when doing an inquiry project.

Moreover, data analysis indicated that students were able to build their background knowledge by using multiple sources. One student noted,

"This research provides the background knowledge that I need to know about Jason, and his story. I didn't really know anything about Jason so this was all new information."

Confirming Information

Findings indicated that students were able to confirm the information they already knew throughout the research process. One student said,

"These sources confirmed what I learned because they were all repetitive. That is a good thing though because it means that my information must be reliable."

This statement suggests that using multiple sources allowed students not only to learn new information but to confirm the information they already knew. Similarly, two students noted,

"This source confirmed my knowledge of a couple of Zeus's siblings, but most of the information I didn't know. It gave me lots of information for my inquiry question."

"The source had confirmed many things that I had already known."

Overall, findings indicated that using multiple sources throughout the research process was beneficial for several reasons. First, it was beneficial because it helped students to learn new information about their inquiry question. Second, it confirmed the information they already knew about the topic they were learning about.

Analysis of Students' Written Reflections

This section presents findings from an interpretive analysis of data collected from student written reflections of the entire inquiry project. Findings represent recurring patterns in the data. These reflections were written responses to seven open-ended questions (see Appendix). Together, these questions reflected the research questions and each question focused on a major component of the project.

Question 1

What are some of the most important things you have learned about the inquiry process [not about findings about Greek Mythology] that you didn't know before?

Data analysis indicated one major findings:

Inquiry is a Generative, Unpredictable, and Reflective Process

Students indicated that one inquiry question often leads to another question (therefore generative), and the whole process is unpredictable ("weird"), often appearing without notice. One student stated:

> "I learned that, during the inquiry process, sometimes answers to one question can lead to even more questions."

Another student characterized the question process as "weird" by stating:

> "You don't know where the question will pop up. Overall, I suppose I mainly realized that it was a weird process that can start from something completely unrelated and lead to more questions that lead to more research about something completely different!"

> Students also commented that the inquiry process supported reflection. One student stated:

> "I learned that inquiry process has a lot of reflection and going back to review what you learned."

Students also stated that the inquiry process helped them to infer and reflect on their own learning. One student stated:

> "Some things I learned about the inquiry process were how sometimes you have to take the information that is available and infer. Sometimes the information isn't straight forward, and you must think outside of the box."

Question 2 [Part 1]

In the picture book study project, how did the Literature Response Cube (LRC) help you with the inquiry process?

Data analysis indicated two major findings from this question: the LRC is a tool to "lock-in" information, and it sparks personal curiosity.

The LRC is a Tool to Lock-in Information

By "lock-in," students indicated several interrelated benefits about the LRC. The LRC helped them to "lock in" the information by making it understandable, meaningful, and memorable. One student stated,

> "The cube helped with the inquiry process because it helps me lock in what you
>
> learned after reading the book."

Another student stated,

> "Normally when I read a book, I don't really think about what I am reading. The
>
> literature response cube helped me to actually think about what I was thinking
>
> while reading the book. It helped me to place my thoughts on the paper and
>
> understand what I read better."

Similarly, two other students added,

> "The literature response cube helped me remember what the picture book that I
>
> read was all about."
>
> "The literature cube helped with the inquiry process because it made me focus on
>
> the details that I should be gaining from reading the book."

In addition, the LRC helped them to "lock in" the information by making it easier for them to understand, organize, and remember their thoughts around a specific topic. One student stated,

> "These cubes helped me break down the information that I learned into separate
>
> categories."

The Literature Response Cube Sparks Curiosity

Students also indicated that the LRC helped spark their curiosity, which, in turn, helped them learn about new topics and increase their understanding of the texts. Students stated,

> "The literature response cube helped me with the inquiry process by introducing me to topics I haven't heard of and making me think about what I learned and what I wanted to know."

> "The literary cube response helped with the inquiry process, because it sparked curiosity in smaller questions based off the topic of Greek mythology."

> "It helped me by furthering my questions of the basic topics I was researching about. It led me to think about constellations, starting from a completely different research question."

In sum, these findings indicated that the LRC positively influenced and helped students in their inquiry process. It helped them "lock in" what they read and learned and provided a tool to read a text, analyze it, and develop meaningful questions. It also helped them establish a clear purpose and focus during the reading process. Finally, the LCR sparked student curiosity about new topics and concepts.

Question 2 [Part 2]

Ms. Jennifer and I want to add another cube or two. What question do you think we should use for each cube? Why?

Students suggested a wide range of questions for an additional cube to the LCR. Data analysis indicated three major findings from this question: connection questions, reflection questions, and personal interest questions.

Connection Questions

On the LRC, students generated inquiry questions that would allow readers to go beyond the text and make meaningful connections to prior previous experiences. A sample of these types of questions include:

"Did any of the book remind you of anything?

"What else does this picture book make you think about?

"What do you already know about this topic?"

Reflection Questions

Students generated questions that would invite readers to reflect after reading the entire text. A sample of these types of questions include:

"Who was your favorite character? Why?"

"What were you disappointed by?"

"What do you think the Greeks thoughts and meaning behind this story/tale were?"

One of the students provided a rationale by stating,

"I think those questions are helpful because they leave the reader thinking throughout the story while reading."

Similarly, another student noted,

"It gives the reader a chance to look back to this paper and they can use this it in their research if they decide to use the topic they read about."

Reflection questions encourage the readers to actively engage in and reflect on the whole reading process.

Personal Interest Questions

Students also generated questions that would help readers develop personal interest questions. A sample of these types of questions include:

"What interest you?"

"What made you pick this book?"

"Would you like to know more about this?"

"What made you decide to pick this book?"

Some students also provided a rationale for their suggestion. One said,

"Learning what the reasoning behind you picking that topic would help you to understand what interests you have about Greek Mythology."

Another said,

"This question because it would give the reader something to continue researching and learning."

In sum, students suggested questions that: 1) invited them to use their background knowledge and help them make meaningful connections between the text and their personal experience, 2) invited them to think throughout the whole reading process and reflect on the text, and 3) helped them to find the topics they are interested in and develop their inquiry questions accordingly.

Question 3

What was your most favorite part of this inquiry process? What was your least favorite?

Students identified a variety of favorite and least favorite parts of the inquiry process. Data analysis indicated two major findings about most favorite parts: reading and learning from personal interest and creating a final project.

Reading and Learning About Personal Interest

Students stated that a favorite part of the inquiry process was reading and learning about topics of personal interest. Two students stated,

"I liked learning about one thing I have been interested in for a while which was

the titans."

"My favorite part of the inquiry process was learning more about a topic that I

was interested in without a lot of work required along with it."

Creating a Final Project

Students stated that another favorite part of the inquiry process was creating a final

project. It provided them with a rewarding opportunity to creatively represent and share their

findings. One student said,

"My favorite part of the inquiry process was putting together all of my

information in a slideshow because it feels rewarding seeing what you've

created."

Similarly, two other students indicated,

"My favorite part about the inquiry project was the process of making the slides for the

final project."

"My favorite part of the inquiry process was actually putting my research into the

document and making it an inquiry project."

Data analysis of this question also indicated two major findings about least favorite parts

of the project: first, some students found research to be a long and boring process, and second,

students felt they had limited access to authentic and reliable source materials.

Researching is a Long and Boring Process

Students stated that a least favorite part of the inquiry process was that researching is a

long and boring process. Two students stated,

"My least favorite part was the research because it can take a long time and it can

be repetitive."

"My least favorite part was actually researching things to put in my notes, because

some of the websites that displayed the information, I needed were boring to

read."

They found research long and boring primarily because it required reading multiple

sources to find accurate information and many of these sources were boring. Another

student indicated,

"My least favorite part was the researching for information because it was the

most boring part."

Having Limited Access to Authentic and Reliable Source Materials

The majority of students stated that another least favorite part of the inquiry process was

having limited access to authentic and reliable sources. In particular, they experienced much

difficulty finding reliable information to answer their inquiry questions. One student stated,

"My least favorite part was not being able to find information on one of my topics

in my research question."

Students also worried about using unreliable information to answer their inquiry question. For

instance, one of the students said,

"My least favorite part was having to check multiple sources to make sure I'm not

giving false facts."

Finally, while not a pattern, one student stated that his least favorite part of the inquiry process

was that he ended up with more inquiry questions.

"My least favorite part was the amount of questions I had afterward!"

This finding matched one of the major findings from an analysis of the first question, namely, that students experienced inquiry as a generative process in which one question often leads to other questions.

Question 4

If you had the chance to do the picture book study project again, what would you like to do that we didn't do this time?

Students suggested a wide range of things they would like to do if they had a chance to do the picture book study again. Data analysis indicated two major findings across student responses: broader topics/questions, more picture books/sources.

Broader Topics/Questions

Data analysis indicated that students were interested in exploring broader topics for their inquiry project. Stated differently, students showed interest in the topics that were personally meaningful to them. In this regard, one of the students stated,

"If we were able to pick a topic, then (this will sound boring) real-world issues! I'm assuming this topic interest eighth graders more, but issues actually going on is something we need to learn about. More education about things happening now and less about things that don't really involve our current situations."

This statement suggests that this student is interested in learning about the topics that are more related to his/her life outside the classroom. Although Greek Mythology was an interesting topic, findings indicated that students would have been more interested in doing an inquiry project on a topic of their interest. For example, another student noted,

"If I had a chance to do this project again, I would like to be able to expand on other topics."

Similarly, another student indicated,

"I would like to do a different topic. I would like to research about some other topic to further my understanding on other topics."

While it was not a pattern, some students showed interest in pursuing multiple inquiry questions. For the current study, students were able to choose one inquiry question; however, a few were interested in researching more than one question. For instance, one said,

"I would like to research more than one question. I really liked learning about how the Greek gods and goddesses are related, so if I had the chance to do the project again, I would want to research more than one question."

These responses suggest that students, if given an opportunity to do the picture book study again, would like to explore broader issues rather than focusing on one specific topic or question.

More Picture Books/Sources

Picture books were also identified as one of the recurring patterns across student responses. Findings indicated that if students were given an opportunity to do the picture book study again, they would prefer to have access to more picture books, particularly before developing their inquiry questions. For instance, one student said,

"I would like to read a third book so we can have more curiosity and want to learn about a topic we read about."

According to students, reading more picture books could introduce a wide range of interesting topics and ideas to be used in their inquiry projects. For instance, one of the students explained,

"If I had the chance to do the picture book study project again, I would have everyone read 3 or 4 books, instead of 2. I would have everyone read 2 books, then pick a research question because I didn't use any information from the books I read, because my topic was different than what I read about. After they picked their research question, I would have everyone read books about their research topic."

Another student also indicated,

"It would have been nice to be able to read even more picture books in order to find more interesting subjects."

Overall, if students had a chance to do the inquiry project again, they would prefer to research broader topics, particularly topics they are interested in and that are more relevant to their real lives. Moreover, they suggested that having access to more picture books would be extremely helpful in increasing their curiosity and developing their inquiry question.

Question 5

Based on our picture book study project, what do you see are some differences and some similarities between the inquiry process and the research process?

Students identified a variety of differences and similarities between the inquiry process and the research process. Data analysis indicated two major differences between the inquiry and research process: inquiry is a simpler, shorter, and less structured process, and inquiry is a reflective process.

Inquiry is a Simpler, Shorter, and Less Structured Process

According to students, there are several differences between an inquiry process and a research process. One of these differences is that the inquiry process is simpler, less structured, and shorter process than a research process. Inquiry is simpler for several reasons. First, unlike a

research process, which requires a lot of attention to formatting and structure, an inquiry process encourages students to focus on the whole process as an experience.

Second, inquiry is simpler because it does not require a lot of formal writing. Instead of writing a formal essay or research paper, in this inquiry project students were invited to creatively use multiple forms of representation to show their findings. For example, one of the students indicated,

"Inquiry projects are less serious than research projects and require less attention to detail and MLA formatting. Research projects require large amounts of research, each properly formatted in the same way to create a bibliography."

Another student said,

"The inquiry process is more informal researching and resolving curiosity while the research process is much more formal research to increase knowledge."

In general, an inquiry process is believed to be a simpler process because it starts with curiosity, continues with less formal researching, and ends with more creative final product.

Inquiry is a Reflective Process

Moreover, students realized that an inquiry process requires much more than regular note taking. In fact, an inquiry process requires constant reflection. According to one of the students,

"Some difference and similarities I see are that instead of just writing notes, you have to answer questions like connection questions, and what surprised you."

The picture book study and especially the LRC pushed students' thinking by posing meaningful questions and encouraging them to reflect on the learning process. Another student said,

"The inquiry process has more reflection to it, as you review what you learned more that in the research process."

Not only did asking meaningful questions such as "what surprised you" or "what connection could you make between the book you read and your personal experience" help students to develop their inquiry questions, but they also provided a clear reading purpose. In order for students to respond to these questions and develop their inquiry questions, they needed to analyze, review, and reflect on the reading materials.

Findings across student written responses also indicated several similarities between an inquiry process and a research process: both processes require a lot of research, and they both end with a final project.

Both Processes Require a Lot of Research

In order for students to collect information and answer either their inquiry or research question, they needed to use multiple data sources. The majority of students shared that researching is one similarity between the two processes. One student stated,

"They were similar in the way of having to search for information from different sources."

Similarly, two others said,

"The research part of the inquiry process is similar to the research portion of the research process."

"Some similarities are they both require some research."

Both End with a Final Project

The majority of students also noted that both inquiry and a research project end with a final product. In this dissertation study, participants were given multiple options to represent

their findings. Similarly, when doing a research project, students are asked to represent their findings in certain ways depending on the nature of the project, the requirements, and the teacher. Although each process has its own way of representing findings, they both end with some kind of final product. One of the students indicated that,

"They both are represented somehow."

Another said,

"They both start with a question, then research, then representing your research."

Overall, students identified a wide variety of differences and similarities between an inquiry process and a research process. They are different because inquiry is a simpler process that requires constant reflection, yet they are similar because they both require a lot of research and they both end with some kind of final project.

Question 6

Out of all the options available for you to represent your findings, what option did you choose, and why did you choose it?

As the final step of the inquiry project, students were asked to creatively represent their findings. Surprisingly, 16 out 17 students chose Google Slides to represent their individual and group projects. The findings indicated that students preferred Google Slides for several reasons. First, it was a simple and easy option for students to represent their findings, specifically because it provided students with a platform to represent a lot of information. Two students indicated,

"We chose a slideshow to represent our findings because we wanted to talk about multiple gods and goddesses, and we thought that a family tree would be too crammed. We wanted a simple way to show a lot of information."

"I chose a slide show, because I knew that there was quite a lot of information to display with my topic, so I needed a platform that allowed me to write."

Second, students chose Google Slides because of their familiarity with its structure and format. It seems that Google Slides has been used more frequently than other options, such as posters, digital picture books, and video, for other class projects. Therefore, students felt comfortable choosing the same option for their inquiry project as well. One of the students noted,

"We choose a slideshow because we make slideshows quite often for school, so we are experienced, unlike making a poster."

Another indicated,

"I chose a Google slide to represent my research, because it is easy to use, and I have used it in the past for many other projects."

Overall, students preferred the Google Slides to represent their inquiry findings. Students' prior experience and constant interactions with Slides encouraged them to pick this option over everything else. They indicated that it was an easy option and that they have been using it for other class projects, so they were familiar with its structure and formatting. In addition, this option enabled them to work with their partners at home and to delete, add, and edit the information.

Question 7

How have you changed as a learner based on this whole experience?

Students shared a variety of written responses. On the one hand, some claimed that this project changed them as a learner because the whole inquiry process encouraged them to be active learners rather than being passive ones. One of the students indicated,

"I have changed as a learner based on this whole experience because I now understand the importance of continuing to ask questions and think about how what I'm learning, and how it helps to answer my question, as I complete my research and project." Similarly, another student noted,

"I have changed as a learner now because I will now try to write and make more information and questions when taking notes, instead of just doing notes."

Stated differently, the inquiry process invited students to ask more purposeful questions and reflect on their learning process. In addition, the findings across student written responses indicated that the inquiry process pushed students' thinking and encouraged them to become more aware of their learning process. It also invited them to take a moment to think, analyze, and reflect on the whole process as an inquirer. For instance, one student indicated,

"I have begun to pay more attention to what I am reading and what I am thinking as I read."

On the other hand, however, others argued that the inquiry process had not changed them except giving them another way to do their research. One student said,

"I have changed as a learner based on the experience by understanding a new way to approach researching a topic."

In sum, some students changed as a learner. They went beyond the books, thought about what they read, analyzed it, and made connections and inferences. This whole process helped students to be more active in their learning process.

Major Findings from Analysis of Teacher's Interview Data

Two informal interviews were conducted with the classroom teacher (Jennifer). The purpose of the interview was to share her reflections on the whole inquiry process. The first interview consisted of

five open-ended written questions and was created as a Google Form. The purpose of the second

interview was the same as the first, but in a different format. It was conducted as a semi-structured,

follow-up interview via zoom, lasting approximately 45 minutes. This section uses three categories to

describe and summarize major findings from the analysis of both teacher interviews. These categories

include teacher tensions, disappointments and surprises, and lessons learned.

Teacher Tensions

In general, the word *tension* is commonly defined as mental or emotional strain. In this

research project, tension was operationally defined as pressure (obligation). From a teacher's

perspective, Jennifer felt tensions about the inquiry process from three primary sources: students,

parents, and the school district.

In response to interview questions, Jennifer identified student grading as a major tension

in doing an inquiry project. When she was asked to talk about her purpose for grading this

inquiry project, she shared that the constant urge to give a grade to each part of the inquiry

project to help her students stay motivated was a major tension. She stated,

"Grades drive them! I don't know how it was for you in school, but in the

American education system, it's all about grades."

Part of this tension involved students who were willing to complete a task "only" when a

grade was involved. She stated,

"It's so much a part of their lives if you don't give them a grade sometimes, they

are like, then why am I doing this?"

Students' emphasis on grades often determines how much time and energy they are

willing to put into their learning. Jennifer said,

"There are some kids who you know it's like what do I have to do to get an A and

other kids that don't care so much about the A are just like what do I have to do to

pass and that's how they then set up how much time and effort they put into

things that they do."

Jennifer decided to grade the inquiry project because she felt grades held students

accountable. She stated,

"I try to always have individual accountability, especially when they're working

with groups."

Lastly, there were other tensions involved in teaching the inquiry process. For instance,

Jennifer identified parents and the school district as sources of tension. Both require teachers to

give at least one, or preferably two, grades per week. She said,

"We have to have at least one, preferably two grades per week to keep them

updated and to keep their parents updated. That's a district. Policy!"

Disappointments/Surprises

In addition to tensions, Jennifer expressed disappointments and surprises in teaching the

inquiry project. In terms of disappointments, Jennifer was disappointed by the quality of

students' final projects. She expected students to be more creative in representing their final

inquiry projects given the freedom they were given to represent their findings in personally

creative and meaningful ways. In fact, students were given multiple options to choose from to

creatively represent their findings, yet most of them chose Google Slides. She stated,

"I was disappointed in their final projects. A couple of them did slideshows that

ultimately were just a black screen with some words on it and that goes against

everything they've ever learned about what a slideshow is."

Jennifer believed that there were several reasons why students chose Google Slides over all other options. One important reason was learning location. That is, the inquiry process started in the classroom but, due to Covid 19, it continued at home.

"All the things were out of my control that if we were in school and maybe control is not the right word, but I wasn't able to offer them guidance in the process and for me inquiry is all about the process and we were able to start the process together and then it became just a matter of them doing it."

She believed that the unexpected lockdown directly impacted student's final inquiry projects. She believed that the in-class interaction and "formative" feedback could positively impact students' decisions about how to more creatively represent their findings.

"If we had been in class, with access to their partners, a variety of materials, and opportunity for in-class formative feedback, I think we would have seen more creativity in the final projects."

Specifically, she believed that face-to-face interactions in the classroom when doing the inquiry project, and the emphasis on providing supportive feedback throughout the inquiry process were factors.

In terms of surprises, Jennifer was surprised at how students were actively and meaningfully engaged throughout the whole inquiry process. She believed that because students were given an opportunity to follow their curiosity and interests, they invested and learned more. She stated,

"Their genuine interest made the rest of the study engaging for them and motivated them."

"I will say I was impressed with the level of genuine engagement and curiosity

from the students as they read the picture books and posed inquiry questions in

class."

This statement emphasized the importance of students' personal interests and curiosity

throughout the inquiry process.

Lessons Learned

Jennifer learned several important lessons about teaching from an inquiry perspective.

One of the most important lessons involved control. Specifically, she learned that to teach from

an inquiry perspective means that she had to let go of her control and let student curiosity lead

the way. She stated,

"I learned to let go of my personal agenda as the teacher and let the students'

curiosity lead the way. Their interest in their questions boosted their motivation to

learn."

At the same time, Jennifer learned that teaching from an inquiry perspective has its challenges,

and one of them is letting go of teacher control.

"In terms of challenge, I think it's just a matter of letting go of control a little bit."

She continued by saying,

"I'm ok with not being the expert, in fact some of these kids might know more

than I do. It's just a matter of being willing to let it be messy and to admit that you don't

know all the answers."

Jennifer also learned the power and potential of personal interest in learning. It

was student personal interest that kept them actively engaged and personally motivated

throughout the whole inquiry process.

"I learned that the students enjoyed inquiry. I did a pretty large research project

before this. They made comparisons about inquiry being easier and less strict.

They also had freedom to choose their topics and writing genres with their

research, but I think they meant they had less official documentation to worry

about when doing an inquiry."

Still another lesson is that Jennifer learned about the importance of classroom

management when teaching an inquiry project. She noted,

"I don't think that you can have poor classroom management all year long and

then in April or May be like oh! we're going to do inquiry now and just expect

students be on task when your attention is focused elsewhere."

She noticed that it is critical for teachers to build strong relationships and establish clear

expectations all year long to be able to successfully start and finish an inquiry project.

Finally, Jennifer re-learned, more than newly learned, about the value of using picture books

with her middle school students.

"I use picture books with my students regularly and this study just reinforced the

value of using picture books with older readers. They are complex texts that

appeal to readers of all ages and are great ways to rather quickly hook students

into a topic or area of learning."

In sum, data analysis of both teacher interviews indicated several major findings. First,

from a teacher perspective, findings indicated several tensions around teaching an inquiry

project. Jennifer shared that grades drive everything and that she feels the urge to grade every

project to keep students motivated. Findings also indicated that Jennifer was disappointed at the

lack of creativity in the students' final projects but was surprised at students' engagement

throughout the whole inquiry process. Moreover, Jennifer learned several important lessons from doing an inquiry project in her classroom. She learned that her students enjoyed the inquiry process mainly because they were able to let their personal interests and curiosity lead the way. She also learned an important lesson about teaching from an inquiry perspective. She learned to let go of her control and allow student's curiosity to lead the way.

Classroom Observation

As it was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, global pandemic caused many limitations, and it restricted the amount of classroom observation that could be done by teacher and researcher. Since the majority of data collection was done remotely, the time spent in the classroom was limited to 3 sessions.

Researcher and Teacher Observation

The formal data collection began on March 9, 2020, at 10:42 am. The teacher started the class by introducing the inquiry project, including its purpose, format, and procedure. Next, she asked me to introduce the Literature Response Cube. Then, as a warm up activity, Jennifer invited students to share their background knowledge about Greek Mythology. Students took turns and shared their responses while Jennifer distributed "Mount Olympus Basketball" scripts for staging reader's theater performance. This picture book was used to engage students with the topic of Greek Mythology. Students picked their favorite characters, took turns, and acted them out. Finally, students were invited to form groups of two. The class ended at 11:25 am.

The inquiry project continued on March 10. The teacher started the class with pairing students while I placed the picture books around the classroom. Then students in pairs browsed, selected, and read at least two picture books and completed the Literature

Response Cube for each book. As I walked around the classroom, I noticed that some groups read silently while others took turns reading aloud to their partners. I also noticed that most of the groups were developing meaningful conversations about the books and their characters. Stated differently, students were actively engaged in the inquiry process, particularly when completing the LRC.

Similarly, the classroom teacher was asked to record her observations. Throughout her observation, she noticed that students were engaged in the inquiry process. She said,

"Students worked well, appeared engaged with the stories they chose, and worked well to complete the Literature Cube."

After 20 minutes, students were asked to individually or in pairs post their inquiry questions on a virtual wall called "Padlet." I was surprised at the engagement level and most importantly the large number of questions that were developed and posted on Padlet. As they were posting their questions on the wall, some tried to answer their classmate's inquiry questions. One student asked:

"Why are there so many Greek Gods?" This question was followed by a discussion; some tried to answer the question from their knowledge and some used Google to answer it.

To sum up, students were engaged in meaningful and active conversations about the book they read and about their inquiry questions in particular. They critiqued encouraged, and answered each other's inquiry questions.

Summary of Findings

After reading through the transcripts and reflections, I began to collapse the data into recurring patterns and eventually was able to identify major themes. Data analysis indicated multiple recurring themes, including the power and potential of picture books, inquiry as a reflective process, the important role of personal interest and curiosity, the significance of reflection, and finally, the tension and hesitation experienced during inquiry.

In sum, data analysis indicated several major findings including but not limited to 1) Inquiry as a generative, ongoing, and unpredictable process, 2) The power and importance of student personal interests in inquiry, 3) The power and potential of picture books in doing inquiry, and 4) the Literature Response Cube as an inquiry-based, instructional tool. These major findings and their curricular and instructional implications will be discussed in chapter V.

CHAPTER V

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the major findings identified in Chapter 4, describe the curricular and instructional implications of these major findings, discuss their implications for assessment, and identify inquiry questions for future research. It begins with an overview of the purpose for this research study. Next, it briefly revisits major findings that were identified and described in Chapter IV. These major findings will be discussed under the four categories listed at the end of Chapter IV: 1) Inquiry as a generative, ongoing, and unpredictable process, 2) The power and importance of students' personal interests in inquiry, 3) The power and potential of picture books in doing inquiry, and 4) the Literature Response Cube as an inquiry-based, instructional tool. Then, it will describe the curricular, instructional, and assessment implications of these major findings, identify important inquiry questions for future research, and discuss the limitations of the study.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation study was to investigate the use of the picture book as a curricular resource and instructional tool to support student inquiry in an eighth-grade ELA classroom and to describe students' experiences in an inquiry-based classroom. The research methodology of the study was a basic interpretive qualitative design. The study invited middle-grade students to read and respond to a text set of high-quality picture books on the topic of Greek Mythology and use their readings and responses as the impetus to develop their own inquiry questions and conduct their own inquiry project based on a particular topic in Greek Mythology.

Major Finding #1: Inquiry as a Generative, Ongoing, and Unpredictable Process

This major finding has multiple dimensions. These dimensions include inquiry as a generative/ongoing process, and inquiry as an unpredictable process.

Inquiry as a Generative/Ongoing Process

Inquiry is by nature a generative process. It is generative because it has the potential to generate new ideas, knowledge, and insights. Historically, this is not a new finding. John Dewey (1910), for instance, believed that inquiry naturally brings uncertainty and that a question can often generate new questions throughout the inquiry process (Short, 2009). This nature can lead to uncertainty. Both children and adults learn through inquiry inside and outside of school. They engage in a variety of experiences until something significant sparks their curiosity. The curiosity compels them to wonder and ask questions and reach beyond, and as a result, they construct new meanings and experiences.

In this study, the classroom was the site for student inquiry. One major finding from this study, based on the analysis of student written reflections, was that inquiry was used by students as a generative process. Students used one inquiry question to generate many other inquiry questions. Interestingly enough, for some students generating inquiry questions was thoughtful, even exciting. For instance, one student stated, "I learned that during the inquiry process, sometimes answers to one question can lead to even more questions." For others, however, this generative/ongoing process was uncomfortable and even frustrating, because the process created uncertainty, rather than preferred certainty.

In this study, student uncertainty was not a surprising or new finding. Historically, uncertainty has been an important aspect of meaningful learning. According to John Dewey (1902), when learners are faced with uncertainties, they are motivated to reach beyond. More recently, Short (2009) posited, "Inquiry is a stance that combines uncertainty and invitation" (p.

12). This stance invites learners to embrace uncertainty, not be discomforted by it. Uncertainty allows invites learners to engage in self-initiated activities, think, ask questions, and—most importantly—go beyond their current understanding to form new experiences and insights (Short, 2009).

Inquiry as an unpredictable process

Another dimension to this major finding is inquiry as an unpredictable process. Teachers are often viewed as the "expert" in the classroom. On the contrary, in an inquiry-based classroom, teachers and students learn simultaneously and collaboratively. This common belief could be intimidating at times and prevent teachers from implementing inquiry-based teaching in their classroom. Teachers may feel unprepared or pressured to facilitate an open-ended investigation. This may cause teachers to feel out of control (Uno, 1997). According to Jennifer, "In terms of challenge, I think it's just a matter of letting go of control a little bit." Traditionally, in teacher-centered classrooms, the teachers don't have to deal with an unexpected question or result; they know what to expect. However, engaging students in an open-ended inquiry investigation requires confidence, flexibility, and an open mind.

Curricular Implications

In addition to multiple dimensions, this major finding has important implications for curriculum. Inquiry has multiple definitions. One common definition focuses on asking a better question and developing an effective research plan. This approach usually leads to a teacher-driven classroom. To keep everything under control, educators including Jennifer prefer to pose the problem and have students engage in the research process (guided inquiry). However, for students to fully experience a meaningful inquiry, they should be the ones posing a problem significant to their lives, not us (Short, 2009).

Curriculum as inquiry requires students to solve a problem as well as pose one. Inquiry goes beyond learning new information on specific topics; it is a search for the *why* behind new information (Short, 2009). "Inquiry is a collaborative process of connecting to and reaching beyond current understandings to explore tensions significant to learners," (Short, 2009, p. 12). Curriculum as inquiry calls for learning both inside and outside of school. Inquiry as a curriculum invites learners to construct meaning around a concept rather than a topic.

Contrary to the common belief that the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) would result in a national curriculum, the development of curriculum is the responsibility of the teachers (Beach, et al., 2015). Therefore, we teachers need to look at the CCSS with a critical lens and develop a curriculum that is relevant to our students' particular needs and interests. Laura Darolia (2015) noted that she had to work with three versions of curricula: "Mandated curriculum is imposed by the district office; paper curriculum is the is the script or guide that accompanies curricular resources; and real curriculum includes the interests, questions, and passions of students" (as cited in Vasquez, 2003, p.19). In her 2015 study, she investigated the effects of a policy change and its impact on student performance such as test score and academic success.

Most importantly, knowing that inquiry is generative by nature, educators should develop a flexible curriculum that includes resources, timelines, and activities based on students' interests. Not having a step-by-step instruction can be intimidating and often confusing for both students and teachers. However, "they need to see confusion as a valid and often important part of the learning process" (Murdoch, 2015, p. 36). Inviting uncertainty allows us to create a culture of questioning and curiosity. Creating an environment that encourages learners to ask questions

and build knowledge through open exploration and discussions can lead to a meaningful learning experience.

Despite the value of inquiry-based teaching, the implications of this approach can be challenging and occasionally intimidating for both students and teachers. As Jennifer, the classroom teacher explained, "Grades drive them! I don't know how it was for you in school, but in the American education system, it's all about grades." It goes without saying that high-stakes exams at the state and national levels and the urge to prepare students for tests can bring challenges to inquiry-based teaching (Trautmann, et al., 2004). For their part, students may experience difficulty and discomfort in handling the open-enedness of an inquiry investigation, as it usually requires students to go beyond the classroom and often doesn't include step-by-step guidelines from the teacher. Stated differently, it requires a higher level of student engagement compared to other approaches in teaching and learning.

Another implication is that the curriculum should support the development of inquiry skills. Students need opportunities to learn how to ask meaningful open-ended questions, form hypotheses, collect data, and draw conclusions. This can be done by asking a simple question and encouraging open discussion that allows for open exploration. A flexible curriculum can help students develop their own inquiries and encourage them to creatively represent their findings.

Still another implication is to encourage parent involvement. As noted in Chapter IV, parents' expectations were a recurring theme in my interview with Jennifer. That involvement was limited to or focused on assessment. In a curriculum-as-inquiry model, parent involvement is different. Involving parents in their children's work and learning experience can create a learning opportunity that goes significantly beyond assessment. In fact, it goes beyond the

classroom and school. Encouraging parents' involvement and engagement in their children's learning journey can directly impact student success (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Instructional Implications

In addition to curriculum, there are several instructional implications when inquiry is viewed as a generative and unpredictable process.

First, a flexible lesson plan allows educators to support the unpredictable nature of inquiry. Educators need to adjust their instructional practices to accommodate students' interests and inquiries.

Second, effective questioning strategies need to be a part of the instructional plan. There are several ways that educators can create a culture of questioning and curiosity in the classroom. They can

- Provoke and model a curious disposition throughout the day,
- Value and work with children's questions and build their questioning skills and knowledge,
- Use sophisticated, thoughtful questioning/dialogue techniques in the classroom, and
- Plan learning experiences around questions. (Murdoch, 2015, p. 56)

In addition, creating a safe and supportive learning environment allows students to take risks by exploring new topics and asking open-ended questions. Group collaboration and open discussion are some effective ways to create a nurturing learning environment.

Major Finding #2: Power of Student Interest in an Inquiry Classroom

Data analysis indicated that personal interest played a key role in the students' engagement and motivation level throughout the inquiry process. When students were asked to

share their favorite part of the inquiry process, one of the recurring responses indicated that they enjoyed reading and learning about topics of personal interest. Interest promotes learning and is a must for student success (Pressley, et al., 1992). Given the opportunity to develop a question and work on a topic that is connected and relevant to learners' personal interests, students are more likely to engage and invest in the learning process.

Interest can deepen comprehension and increase memory and cognitive engagement. It can spark motivation as well. "Motivation for learning is not external but a force internal to the learners. It is the result of the natural learning process being functionally intact" (Short & Burke, 1989, p. 195). Motivation is an essential factor for active and meaningful learning; students cannot learn unless they are motivated. "Motivation is therefore an essential pre-requisite and co-requisite for learning" (Palmer, 2009, p.147).

Curricular Implications

There are several curriculum implications when personal interest plays a vital role in the students' engagement and motivation level throughout the inquiry process.

Interest sparks motivation. Motivation is one of the essential factors for meaningful learning. However, motivation cannot guarantee meaningful learning by itself. For meaningful learning to happen, appropriate instructional strategies, reliable resources, and an inviting environment should be provided.

There are multiple ways for educators to provoke curiosity and implement students' interest in the curriculum. One way is to create an environment that inspires curiosity. Creating a safe community where students can express their thoughts freely can positively impact the learning experience. Setting classroom goals, establishing regular meetings, sharing who we are,

and playing games that support collaboration are some effective strategies for creating an inviting learning space (Murdoch, 2015).

As educators, we need to move from "How do I teach inquiry?" to "How do people inquire?" (Short, 2009). Once we realize that inquiry is a natural way of learning, then we can create an inviting learning environment that values uncertainty and endless wonders by encouraging students to go across personal, collaborative, and guided inquiries.

Finally, implementing strategies such as surveys or open discussions can also provide information on student personal interest.

Instructional Implications

In addition to curriculum, there are several instructional implications when personal interest plays a vital role in the students' engagement and motivation level throughout the inquiry process. Students' interest in an inquiry-based classroom can directly influence the teaching and learning process. Teachers might adopt these strategies: 1) Creating personalized learning experience, 2) Incorporating multiple instructional strategies, and 3) Creating a positive learning environment.

Developing a lesson plan that is relevant to students' interest can significantly increase their engagement in the learning process: students are more likely to stay motivated and engaged when the content is relevant to their interests. Recognizing students' interests and incorporating them into the lesson plan can create a learning experience that is not only connected to the real world but is also personalized.

In addition, learning about our students' different learning styles allows us to incorporate multiple teaching strategies to meet their individual needs. Using online resources, technologies, and educational apps helps make learning more interesting.

Last but not least, creating a safe, positive classroom environment where students diverse interests and learning styles are recognized and valued can increase students' engagement. In this kind of environment, students' different perspectives are welcomed, and valued, their interests are incorporated into the curriculum and daily instructional strategies, and—most importantly— they have the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging.

Overall, recognizing and incorporating students' interests in the classroom and curriculum can increase their motivation and engagement.

Major Finding #3: The Power and Potential of Picture Books in an Inquiry-Based Classroom

In this study, picture books were used to spark students' interest and ultimately help them develop an inquiry question. Data analysis indicated that picture books have the power and potential to support an inquiry process. Research studies have shown that they can significantly increase student interest and motivation (Moses et al., 2016; Wendt et al., 2018).

Picture books are powerful educational tools for teaching diverse content across all levels. Picture books are accessible yet sophisticated and complex. They are short and can be fully read in one sitting. "Picture books are seen to enable diverse students, including those with English as an additional language and with literacy difficulties, to better engage with inquiry themes" (Oberman, 2023, p. 13).

Moreover, they can be used for different purposes. "As invitations and destinations, they orientate the inquiries. As provocations and touchstone texts, they provide a shared imagined space to explore ideas and experiences. As mentor text, models and resources, they provide tools for the learning content" (Oberman, 2023, p. 2).

As an invitation, picture books can be used to spark curiosity and as a starting point into the inquiry (Moses et al., 2016). Picture book read-alouds can provoke meaningful discussions and critical thinking among secondary level students (Giorgis, 1999). As a destination, picture books can be used to communicate the final product of an inquiry project (Gannon, 2017). In Gannon's (2017) research study, secondary students created their own picture books as part of their inquiries. Picture books can also be used as provocations and touchstone texts. They can be used to provoke creative thought and encourage critical thinking and reflection (Copenhaver-Johnson et al., 2007; Leland et al., 2018).

Picture books can also be used as resources and aid into an inquiry (Moses et al., 2016; Premont et al., 2017). Similarly, pictures books were used as one of the resources in this dissertation study. The illustrations in high-quality picture books can support students' understanding, reasoning, and cognition when doing inquiry. Their complexity encourages creative thinking, allowing for open discussions and different perspectives.

Overall, picture books have the potential to frame and orientate inquiries, support reflection and discussion with real-life applications and build emotional and cognitive engagement" (Oberman, 2023, p. 16).

Curricular Implications

There are several implications when picture books are used as curricular resources and instructional tools to support inquiry in a middle-school classroom.

Most importantly, middle-school educators should resist the conflation of picture books with children's books. While children's literature is usually incorporated into the curriculum of the early years, picture books can be implemented across all levels.

Picture books are high-quality texts with meaningful illustrations that have the power to simplify complex concepts. Since they cover various themes and concepts, implementing them in the classroom allows educators to meet individual needs and interests.

In addition, they can be used to help students develop inquiry questions. Picture books are wonderful tools to spark interest and curiosity and to support students' inquiry across all levels. Stated differently, they are an effective instructional tool to encourage students to ask questions and investigate further.

Overall, incorporating picture books in the middle school classroom allows students to develop critical thinking skills, support social and emotional development, and create a rich learning environment.

Instructional Implications

In addition to curricular implications, there are several instructional implications when picture books are used as curricular resource and instructional tool to support inquiry in a middle school classroom. Using picture books in middle school can increase motivation and engagement, develop critical thinking, and encourage collaboration.

The connection between meaningful illustrations and rich narrative has the potential to increase students' engagement and motivation. The relationship between text and illustration allows readers to respond to the text they read and as a result make personal meanings and connections.

Another implication is that picture books can help develop critical thinking skills and can be used to introduce complex topics across content areas. Picture books often cover a wide range of topics that require higher-order thinking skills and encourage readers to go beyond the classroom to respond to the text.

Yet another implication is that picture books can be used to encourage collaboration and communication in middle school. Using picture books creates multiple opportunities for students to engage in group activities, collaborative projects, and peer interactions.

Picture books are valuable instructional tools that offer a wide range of educational opportunities. By incorporating these high-quality and award-winning texts in middle school, educators can create a fun, engaging learning environment that promotes collaboration, critical thinking, and, most importantly, open inquiry.

Major Finding #4: The Literature Response Cube as a Reader-Response Instructional Tool

The Literature Response Cube is a reader-response instructional tool that has the potential to 1) help students think and reflect on their learning; 2) invite students to go beyond the text and ask more questions about the topic; 3) allow students to think, discuss, and reflect on a text; and 4) help students develop their inquiry question on a particular topic.

In this study, the Literature Response Cube was used to provide an opportunity for students to engage in active reading. Data analysis indicated that this tool helped students "lock in" information as well as sparking their interest to develop their inquiry question. In addition, it invited students to read with a purpose, remember and analyze information, and, most importantly, reflect on the text. Each cube enabled students to engage in a meaningful conversation with a peer, create meaning, share interpretations and ultimately develop inquiry questions.

Previous research studies have addressed the advantages of implementing a reader response approach within the educational setting. Responding in writing helps readers explore and extend their understanding of the text they have read (Kletzien & Hushion, 1992). It also

allows readers to go back to their ideas, reflect, and revise (Berthoff, 1987). Discussion after reading allows readers to reflect, raise questions, and negotiate meaning (Noll, 1994). This approach encourages students to become more reflective and make personal connections, as well as enabling them to move to higher level of thinking while achieving a deeper understanding of the text they have read (Spiegel, 1998).

Those who use a reader-response approach construct meaning through mutual interaction between themselves and the text. "The process of developing responses facilitates active and meaningful reading and increases emotional and intellectual participation in the text, which ultimately provides learners with better comprehension and awareness of the text" (Mart, 2019, p. 78).

Overall, responding to literature goes beyond responding to a set of questions, it is a transaction between the text and the reader depending on the stance they are taking (Rosenblatt, 1978). In reader-response theory, meaning is not discovered but constructed, and there can be multiple interpretations for a text depending on the readers' background and culture. Responding to a text can spark curiosity, help learners deepen their comprehension, and create meaning.

Curricular Implications

Incorporating a reader response approach in the classroom has several curricular implications.

First, the curriculum should provide a wide range of genres to allow for open discussions and multiple interpretations. But the important question is, Who gets to decide what is read in the classroom? The teachers or the students? In order for students to connect with a text, respond, and develop an inquiry question, it's critical to invite them to select a text based on their personal interests.

Second, using a reader-response instructional tool requires a flexible curriculum. A curriculum needs to evolve in response to students' interests and responses to the text. The adaptable curriculum will provide multiple opportunities for students to engage in interactive class discussions and reflective activities that promote critical thinking.

Moreover, knowing that students may and will have different responses to a text, the curriculum should allow multiple forms of representation. Reader-response theory promotes flexibility and focuses on personal engagement; therefore, educators are encouraged to create an adaptable and inclusive curriculum.

Instructional Implications

In addition to curricular implications, there are several instructional implications when a reader-response instructional tool is used in the classroom, including promoting critical thinking and allowing diverse perspectives.

Reader-response theory invites students to actively engage with texts and reflect on their reading process by responding to them. Using a reader-response strategy promotes critical thinking skills by encouraging students to wonder, analyze, and evaluate the text.

Another implication is that this approach values diverse perspectives and interpretations. Using strategies that encourage students to reflect on the text they read and make personal meaning can create a safe learning environment where students are valued and feel comfortable sharing their unique understanding. In this kind of environment, students are able to bring their background and experience into the classroom and create a personalized learning experience.

Assessment Implications

The following discusses the implications for assessment. While assessment was not a focus of this research study, the major findings discussed here not only have implications for

curriculum and instruction, but also for assessment. The relationship between assessment and inquiry is messy and plagued by barriers. Here I describe implications for assessment and ways to overcome barriers.

Teachers and parents often equate assessment with grading, but inquiry is difficult to assess, much less grade. When open inquiry is implemented in classrooms, students are usually given freedom to not only choose their inquiry questions but also to choose a way to creatively represent their findings. Therefore, incorporating step-by-step directions and giving grades can be challenging (Busching, 1998).

That being said, there are multiple ways to overcome barriers to the implementation of inquiry. Working with students to create a qualitative rubric can provide clear expectations for both the teacher and students. A rubric is a guide for both the students and teacher. "If students participate in the creation of rubrics, they are more likely to use this tool as if it belonged to their learning process" (Fraile, et al., 2017, p. 70). The qualitative rubric helps teachers to assess students' involvement in the inquiry process, as well as their critical thinking and formulating meaningful open-ended inquiry question.

"Co-creating rubrics could benefit self-regulation and performance rather than just using the same rubrics and, in longer interventions, could also enhance self-efficacy and students' perceptions about the use of rubrics" (Fraile, et al., 2017, p. 70). Having a realistic timeline and a qualitative rubric with clear expectations and purpose can lower the tension around an open-ended inquiry process. When students set personal goals and are able to monitor their performance based on the rubrics they co-created, they can self-regulate and improve their academic achievement (Panadero, et al., 2016). The qualitative rubric encourages students to

show their best effort while helping the instructor not only to have a clear rationale for grading but also to teach (Busching, 1998).

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to describe student experiences in an inquiry-based classroom when picture books are used as a curricular resource and instructional tool to support this process. The research methodology of the study was a basic interpretive qualitative design, and it invited middle grade students to read and respond to a text set of high-quality picture books on the topic of Greek Mythology and use their readings and responses as the impetus to develop their own inquiry questions.

Data analysis revealed several important findings, which were discussed under four major categories: 1) Inquiry as a generative and unpredictable process, 2) The power and importance of student personal interests in inquiry, 3) The power and potential of picture books in an inquiry-based classroom, and 4) The Literature Response Cube as a reader-response instructional tool. Although this study has produced valuable information about inquiry, its true nature, and the tensions related to its implementation in the classroom, there may be some limitations in this study.

These major findings validate the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 1. These theories prioritize students as active participants in the classroom, urging educators to facilitate exploration, discovery, and the construction of meaning through inquiry. Furthermore, these theories advocate for students to contribute their own personal interpretations of texts rather than passively receiving meaning. It is believed that inquiry-based classrooms create opportunities for students to investigate, hypothesize, and revise hypotheses to generate new understandings. This

perspective posits that meaning is not simply uncovered by the reader; rather, it is individually constructed through the dynamic interaction between the reader, the text, and the context.

Limitations

This dissertation study was originally planned before the Covid 19 pandemic. Due to the school's shutdown in March 2020, a major part of the data collection had to change. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge several limitations that have influenced the data collection process and students' overall experience.
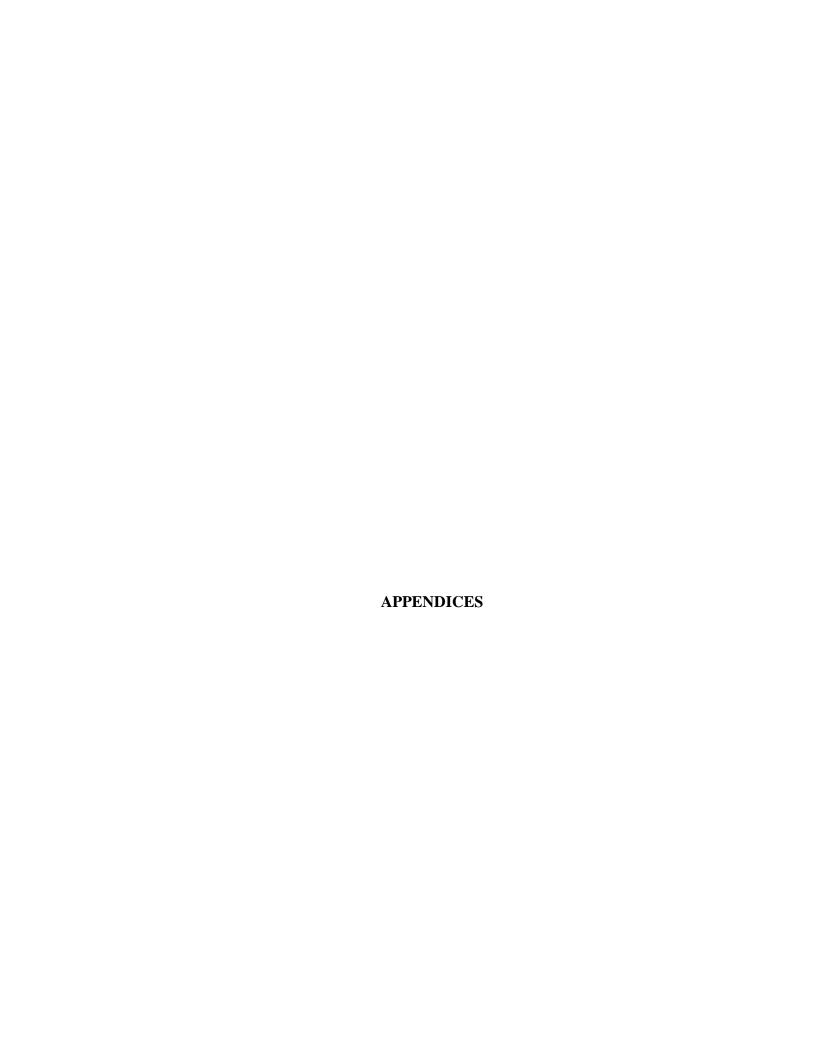
The study aimed to describe students' experience when picture books are used to support their inquiry process. Originally, a text set of 60 award winning picture books were provided for students to use. The students, working in pairs, were asked to walk around the classroom and choose at least two picture books based on their interests. These award-winning picture books were used to spark curiosity and help them develop their inquiry questions. Although all the participants had the opportunity to read and reflect on the text and develop their inquiry questions, they were not able to use the books as one of their data collection sources due to the pandemic.
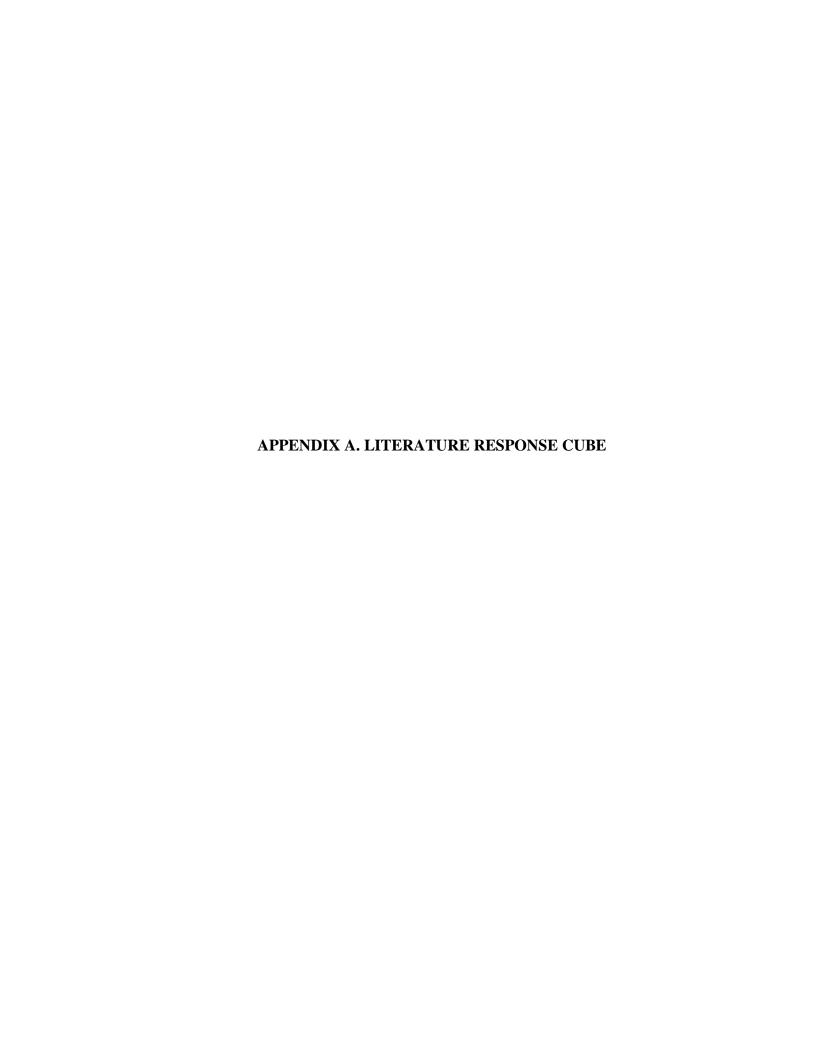
As a result of this change, the inquiry process and data collection were completed online. However, the participants had the opportunity to virtually collaborate with their partner and use available data sources including the public library, YouTube, and so on.

Inquiry Questions for Future Research

Considering the limitations of this study, there are several possibilities for future studies in this field, including describing students' experience when picture books are used as curricular resource and instructional tool to support the inquiry process in the classroom, exploring the

importance of students' diverse interests when doing inquiry, and investigating teachers'

perspectives on open inquiry.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. LITERATURE RESPONSE CUBE

Appendix A. Literature Response Cube

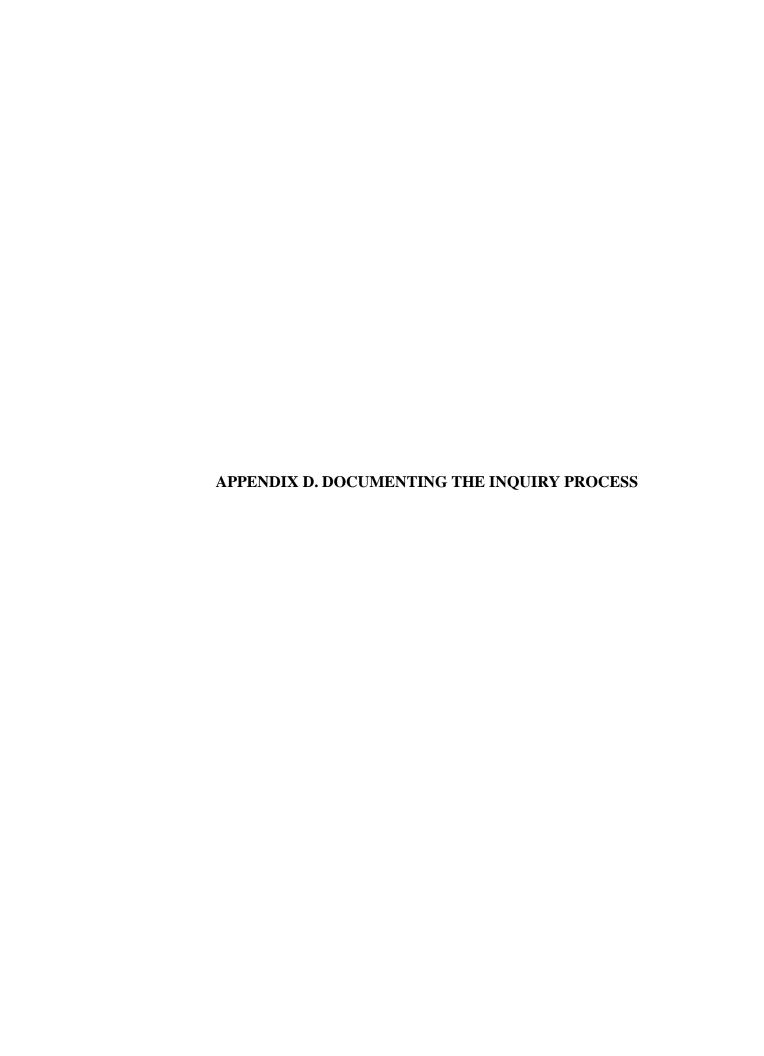| **[Topic]**	
Book Title:	
What did you learn from this book?	**What surprised you?**
What connections, if any, can you make between the story and another book, person, or experience?	**What questions do you have about [topic]?**

APPENDIX B. TEACHER INTERVIEW

Appendix B. Teacher Interview

1. What are some things that really surprised you from participating in this study?

2. What are some things you learned about the inquiry process?

3. I know you already use picture books with your students but what are some things you learned about using picture books to support students' inquiry?

4. Based on students' written reflection what are some things you learned about the inquiry process?

5. Based on students' research project, what are some things you learned about inquiry from student projects?

APPENDIX C. STUDENTS' FINAL REFLECTION

Appendix C. Student Final Reflection

1. What are some of the most important things you have learned about the inquiry process [not about findings about Greek Mythology] that you didn't know before?

2. In the picture book study project, how did the literature response cube (LRC) help you with the inquiry process? Ms. Jennifer and I want to add another cube or two. What question do you think we should use for each cube? Why?

3. What was your most favorite part of this inquiry process? What was your least favorite?

4. If you had the chance to do the picture book study project again, what would you like to do that we didn't do this time?

5. Based on our picture book study project, what do you see are some differences and some similarities between the inquiry process and the research process?

6. Out of all the options available for you to represent your findings, what option did you choose, and why did you choose it?

7. How have you changed as a learner based on this whole experience?

APPENDIX D. DOCUMENTING THE INQUIRY PROCESS

Appendix D. Documenting the Inquiry Process

Greek Mythology Inquiry: Documenting the Inquiry Process

Instructions: Fill in the table below as you choose and explore a Greek Mythology inquiry question.

1. Choose a research question that you would like to learn more about from our Padlet.
2. Research your question using at least 3 different sources. Use this resource sheet as a starting point, though you are not limited to the resources provided here.
3. Create an MLA bibliography citation for each source and take notes in your own words. Use column 3 to document your inquiry process.

The Research Question I chose:		I chose this because…
Research Notes		
Bibliographic Info/MLA Citation	**NOTES (In my own words)**	**My Thinking as I research…**
Journal: What did you learn about your research question? Discuss both: the information you discovered and your learning process (100 words minimum)		
Looking Ahead: Next week we will take what you have learned and turn it into a digital project!		

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