

A CASE STUDY OF CROSS-CULTURAL AND CROSS-AGE
ONLINE LITERATURE DISCUSSION

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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DECEMBER 2008

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A CASE STUDY OF CROSS-CULTURAL AND CROSS-AGE
ONLINE LITERATURE DISCUSSION

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DEDICATION

This dissertation study is dedicated to my family. My husband, Yu-hsi Chen, supported me throughout my program of study by taking care of our two children and my parents. Without his patience and understanding, I would have never been able to pursue this great dream in my life. My two children, Henry and Andy, grew up into teens during the past years while I could not always be there for them. They have become fine young men who bring pride to their parents. Their daily online chats with me encouraged and sustained me, and their growing love for English reading and writing inspired me. I am also thankful for my parents. They cultivated within me the passion for knowledge. Their love, guidance, and help enabled me to focus on my studies.

This dissertation study is also dedicated to my advisor, Dr. Carol Gilles, who guided and supported me not only as an insightful instructor in my academic field but also as a loving godmother in life situations. I admire her enthusiasm for research and education and I appreciate her kindness and love toward an international student. Her encouragement and insightful comments made this dissertation possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Four years ago when I applied for the doctoral program, I had a vague idea that I would like to work on something about reading and also about technology. Through the endless discussions with my advisor, Dr. Carol Gilles, it became clear to me that using technology to enrich students' reading and writing experiences was most fascinating to me. By learning from Dr. Gilles, I saw the merits of literature discussion, the power of student communication, the significance of multicultural literature, and the spirit of teaching students as whole beings. With her consistent encouragement, I built confidence in myself as a researcher. The guidance and support she provided for me helped me glide through all the hardships that an international student might have encountered academically and socially throughout the program.

I am also indebted to the other committee members who have positively influenced my studies. Dr. Roy Fox inspired me in many ways with his benevolence toward humans and his innovative, unique views and critiques; Dr. Elizabeth Baker helped expand my understanding of the new technology and strengthened my passion for qualitative research; Dr. Richard Robinson broadened my conceptions of literacy and inspired me with his dedication to writing; and Dr. Donna Strickland led me to see blogging in a more sophisticated light and to explore it from a researcher's eyes.

I also appreciate the friendship of my fellow graduate students. They provided encouragement, helpful comments, and invaluable resources throughout the coursework and dissertation process. I thank Hong Li, Yang Guo, and Hui-Yun Chen for their sisterhood, and Shannon Cuff, Deborah Holland, Amy Lannin, Juanita Willingham, and many others for their help and friendship.

I am particularly grateful for the participation of Jean Dickinson and Yu-chien Lin, the instructors involved in this dissertation study. Their dedication to the study made this dissertation possible. I admire their passion for education and appreciate their incomparable kindness to me. Jean wrote her response as an appendix to this research report. I treasure and will never forget our friendship.

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A CASE STUDY OF CROSS-CULTURAL AND CROSS-AGE ONLINE LITERATURE DISCUSSION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to investigate the nature of students' reading and writing experiences and the social contexts when students are involved in a cross-cultural and cross-age online literature discussion activity. From late September 2007 through late May 2008, twenty-two students (nine fifth graders from the U.S. and thirteen tenth graders from Taiwan) used blogs to post responses to literature. Multiple sources of data were analyzed by using the constant comparative method and through critical discourse lens. The findings suggest that students gained deeper understandings of another culture and the texts. They also developed more critical thinking as they were reading about thought-provoking, multicultural picture books and interacted with people of a different culture. The instructors' supports and scaffolding helped contribute to that growth. The social contexts formed within the student groups as well as on the blogs came into play when students participated in the blogging activity. Pedagogical recommendations include creating a supportive and encouraging learning community, providing idea-sharing opportunities for students to respond about and from literature, and using the blog wisely to motivate students to read, write, and think.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

How This Study Began

In 2004 I began regularly integrating the Internet-based instructions into my EFL (English as a Foreign Language) curriculum when I was teaching at a girls' senior high school in Taiwan. I began this integration when the school brought to each classroom an Internet-connected computer and an overhead-projector connected to the classroom computer. In the following two years, I asked my students to consistently post their discussions with one another their reading responses on the class website. Meanwhile, my students completed numerous sentence pattern practices and countless vocabulary and grammar tests for the preparation of the college entrance examination. Whenever they had the chance to read an authentic literary work, they complained that it was frustrating since they had to look up every unfamiliar word. They seldom wrote. When they did write the two-paragraph essays required in the English test of the college entrance, it was a torture to both them and to me. They suffered since they were intimidated by writing and I anguished as I corrected all their mechanical errors. My students commented that they liked the online discussions because it gave them more chances to practice English composition, to see other peoples' reading reflection, and to "feel they were college students." However, at the same time, they said that using the computer was too time-consuming. Accordingly, I asked myself the questions: "Why am I doing this?" and "Is there any way to make it better?"

I became aware that students' literacy experiences had to be meaningful enough for them to really learn, and the Internet-based integration had to be essential enough so that students could be motivated to engage. With that initial awareness in mind, I came

to the U.S. to pursue a Ph.D. so that I could learn more about literacy and conduct research.

During the past three years of my doctoral program, I have confirmed my beliefs that students need to learn in authentic and meaningful ways, and that the Internet offers an alternative, motivating medium for students to learn. Meanwhile, as an International student, I have paid particular attention to multicultural understandings and global communication since I see that it is essential to include these areas in school learning in order to prepare our students for this modern world. I learned the importance of cultivating multi-culturalism within our students (Applah & Gates, 1996; Hoffman & Pearson, 2000; Tway, 1989) and the significance of helping our students “to recognize the diversity that defines this society, learn to respect it, and see it in a positive light” (Bishop, 1997, p. 3). Literacy teachers have to provide a curriculum that not only “offers varying perspectives, different ways of viewing the same or similar phenomena” (Bishop, 1997, p. 5), but also assures “subsequent iteration” which can help change attitudes (Norton, 2005, p. 2). I have realized that in nations of diversity, students should be offered multicultural texts constantly, and if a cross-cultural interaction follows the reading up, the result will be especially beneficial.

Two years ago, I started to ponder the significance of building cross-cultural understandings in literacy classrooms by using the Internet as a communication tool. Through my extensive readings, I found that a great deal of classroom research had been conducted to involve students in communications via the Internet with people from other countries and from different age groups (Armstrong & Retterer, 2004; Hanna & de Nooy, 2003; Korycinski, 2001; Lu, Gilles, & Zhang, 2005; Ware & Kramsch, 2005).

Classroom teachers have even explored the communication between the American students and the Taiwanese students (Chen, 2006; Liaw, 2003). The studies of web-based learning as well as global-wide conversations inspired me. I recognized the significance of conducting related research to add further understanding to the vast body of knowledge. As a literacy education researcher, I particularly saw the importance of creating literacy programs to engage students in cross-cultural interactions.

Significance of the Study

We learn a language to communicate. When employing language to communicate, we construct meaning and thoughts (Barnes, 1992; Goodman, 1982a, 1982b; Vygotsky, 1962), and we also learn about the world (Dewey, 2005; Freire, 1970/2006; Halliday, 1973). This study adds to that knowledge by taking a close look at what happened in specific literacy events and by identifying and describing the reading, writing, and online communication experiences of the students involved. In this case the two groups were nine American fifth graders (three males and six females) and thirteen Taiwanese tenth graders (all females). All the participants volunteered to take part in the online literature discussion activity.

Many researchers have explored the benefits of literature discussions, the significance of students' critical thinking, and the importance to appreciate diverse cultures. And a great deal of research has been conducted to examine online peer communications and the integration of the Internet into the reading and writing curriculum. More specifically, educators have begun to notice the advantages of using a recently most popular Internet medium, the web log, in classroom practices.

The emergence of the Internet as an important new information and

communication tool demands that “educators think in new ways about what it means to become literate and how to provide effective literacy instruction for their students” (Karchmer, Mallette, Kara-Soteriou, & Leu, 2005, p. vi). Since “blogging has emerged as one of the most popular forms of online discourse” (Bloch, 2007), and the statistics show that 19% of online youth aged 12-17 have created their own blog and 38% of all online teens say they read blogs (Lanhart & Madden, 2005), corresponding research about the potential application of blogs in education is essential. Studies have examined the pedagogical implications of the weblog. For example, researchers investigate using personal blogs to motivate reading (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006; Huffaker, 2005; Krashen, 2007) and to encourage writing (Armstrong & Retterer, 2004; Richardson & Mancabelli, 2001), integrating blogging into ESL (English as a Second Language) courses (Bloch, 2007; Campbell, 2003; Duber, 2002; Johnson, 2004), supporting collaborative learning with blogs (Luca & McLoughlin, 2005; Oravec, 2003), and expanding students’ learning experiences via blogging (Dastbaz, Flynn & Clipsham, 2005; Luca & McLoughlin, 2005). However, few attempts to date have explored how blogs can be integrated into peer literature discussions. Only a small number of researchers have explored using blogs to discuss literature.

For example, Krause (2005) had his college students create their own blogs and use them to post responses to specific questions he asked about assigned readings. This teaching practice turned out to be effective use of blogs with his students. Krause realized that he did not have to carry students’ notebooks around. His students could include direct links to materials they found relevant to their entries, so were they able to read and comment on each others' entries. However, in his findings, Krause did not

report how his students benefited in terms of their reading experiences when posting and discussing their responses on the blogs.

West's (2008) discussion on using blogs to post reading responses went further by exploring the roles that students adopted in this activity. West invited her eleventh-grade students to create their own literature-response blogs. Then she examined students' blog entries by employing critical discourse analysis methods. She identified "serious literature students" and "Web-literate communicators" roles that her students played in the events (p. 596). The role of "serious literature students" helped students accomplish such tasks as "evaluating characters, defending theories, and describing the process by which they read" (p. 587). Meanwhile, the roles of "web-literate communicators" caused students to abandon almost all basic rules of English usage (p. 597), as students were using "what they know of other discourses to generate new ideas about literature and new ways of communicating their ideas to their peers" (p. 597). West's study points to an important direction: investigating the implications of the blog in literature discussion.

In her unpublished dissertation study, Franklin-Matkowski (2007) examined ninth-graders' blogging about books. Students used the blogs, set particularly for this activity, to post their thinking as they read classic thought-provoking novels, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1988). The classroom teacher posted on the blog explanations to the students of the focus for each class period (p. 95), while the students read independently and posted on the blogs at their own pace. Then Franklin-Matkowski analyzed students' blog entries for "writing, specifically fluency and voice, levels of comprehension, and thinking" (p. ix). She particularly explored the correlations between blogging and students' writing, blogging and literature responses, and blogging and students'

thinking. Franklin-Matkowski's study confirms the positive influence of blogging on students' writing and thinking.

As seen above, several researchers have studied the implication of blogging in literature discussions. They realized that the blog is an alternative tool to involve students in literature responses, and that it has positive effects on students' writing. However, there is still a need of further investigation about students' reading experiences, writing experiences, and social contexts when the blog is used as a tool to facilitate students' discussions of literary works.

Moreover, as blogs enable conversations across time and space boundaries, it is beneficial to examine how blogging can be used to engage students in cross-cultural literature discussions. The blog also allows conversations among people of different ages. Some literacy classrooms have used multiage grouping to engage students in literature-based instructions. Teachers have acknowledged the advantages of the multiage setting, such as the support provided by group members (Coatney, 2003; Geist, 2004; McCarthy, Corman, & Adair, 1996; Sigely, n.d.). Examining the blog's application in cross-age literature discussion expands the current body of knowledge. Few researchers of literature discussion have conducted an investigation in this online cross-cultural and cross-age area. This study will provide an in-depth analysis and will make valuable suggestions for potential educational implications.

The Pilot Study

In the school year 2006, I conducted a pilot study to explore students' reading and writing experiences when two groups of students were invited to voluntarily participate in a literature blogging activity. One group consisted of five educationally advanced,

ethnically diverse 5th grade students (four girls and one boy), from a Midwestern U.S. city. The other group included ten 10th grade young women who were learning English as another language at a prestigious girls' high school in Taiwan. The students were asked to read selected picture books and then to post their responses on the blog created specifically for the purpose of the study. I used the constant comparative method to analyze students' blog entries and transcribed interviews in order to gain explicit understanding of the nature of this interactive cross-cultural literature discussion activity.

In the pilot study I witnessed that the communication with people of different cultures and writing for a real audience made learning meaningful and authentic. I also observed that reading the literature inspired the students to think critically and to make connections to their lives and the world. In addition, I perceived that the web-log environment allowed the students more time and flexibility for thinking and responding. However, hindrances occurred as well. In addition to the technical difficulties (such as the difference in school year calendars), the non-native English speaking participants showed hesitation in English online conversations when no literacy support was provided. Also, misunderstandings caused by culture differences occurred from time to time. One group of students used a certain expression while the other interpreted it in a different way. (For example, the Taiwanese students asked the American students about their blood types so that they could see the implication of the latter's personalities, while the American students thought it was a question asked in a doctor's clinic only). In addition, in the pilot study, the participants were mostly elite students, which made it difficult to tell whether they were motivated by the nature of the literacy practices I designed or

whether they were self-motivated and somehow would naturally perform well. All these insights led me to a stronger design for my current students.

In this research, I made necessary modifications to the research design. I had voluntary American participants whose reading and writing capabilities were diverse. I created a whole-class blog (besides the two small group blogs) and set up a getting-to-know-you phase so that the students from both countries could learn more about each other through free chat. I kept constant and regular contacts with the Taiwanese instructor so that she could help monitor the Taiwanese students' participation. The Taiwanese students received sufficient support from me (via frequent emails and Instant Messages) and their instructor (by means of face-to-face small group discussions). Based on the findings gained from my pilot study, I asked more sophisticated and insightful questions in this research.

The Research Questions

My research questions stemmed from the insights I gained from previous teaching experiences, the understandings I gained throughout the doctoral program, and the findings from my pilot study. The research was guided by the following broad question:

What is the nature of students' reading and writing experiences when they are involved in a cross-cultural and cross-age online literature discussion activity?

The following sub-questions provided possible avenues to gain that understanding:

1. What is the nature of the social context of this activity?
2. What are the characteristics of students' online discussions in this social context?
3. What are the students' experiences and attitudes toward reading multicultural picture books and picture books with social-justice themes?

By answering these questions, I expect to attain further understandings of how blogging can be integrated into the literature discussion activity and what students' experiences and attitudes toward such a literacy experience are. Accordingly, I intend to make applicable pedagogical suggestions to literacy educators, researchers, and policy makers.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frame that I build this study on is the sociocultural stance, which contends that language is social and herein human societies and their individual members are mutually constitutive (Wells & Claxton, 2002, p. 3). Theorists, including Dewey (2005) and Vygotsky (1962, 1978), and later theorists, such as Wertsch (1995), Rogoff (1995), and Cole (1998), emphasize that children learn in social environments and through social interactions. Accordingly, educational researchers examine peer collaborative learning strategies and practices, including cross-age communication (Austin, 2000; Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002).

The substantive theoretical framework of my study examines three areas: response to literature, critical literacy, and new literacies (with a focus on the blogs). Reading theorists, such as Rosenblatt (1978/1994), Bleich (1975), Fish (1980), Holland (1980), and Iser (1980), share a concern with how readers make meaning from their experience with texts. Readers' reading experiences are the focus when different approaches, such as cultural, social, structuralist, and phenomenological, are adopted. As literacy educators acknowledge the importance of providing students with opportunities to respond to literature, they employ talking and writing to encourage and enhance students' reading experiences. Barnes (1992), Wells (2001), and Halliday (1973) are the important figures who inform talk/oracy theories. Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, &

Rosen (1975), Elbow (1973/1998), and later Bean (2001) emphasize the importance of involving students in expressive writing, while Anderson & Rubano (1991) advocate poetic discourse response.

The second substantive theoretical framework of my study consists of critical literacy. Dewey (2005) believes that “a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder” (p. 115). Freire (1970/2006) stresses the importance of humanizing the oppressed; he believes that the effective way to achieve that goal is through “problem-posing education” (Gadotti, 1994, p. 52). Freire, along with other influential critical literacy theorists, such as Luke & Freebody (1999), Shor (1997), and Giroux (1987), leads literacy educators to ponder the value of teaching students about social awareness and diversity and to question their knowledge and experiences. They have created curriculum through which students learn to read the word as well as the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

I also build my research on the theories of New Literacies. With the prevalence of the Internet many literacy educators consider it indispensable to engage students in online reading and writing so that students can be fully literate (Baker, 2001; Karchmer, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Leu, Leu, & Coiro, 2004a). One novel medium for online communication, the blog, is particularly receiving increasing attention. Educators have utilized the blog in their classroom practices in various ways because of its particular characteristics, such as providing a learning environment without time and geographic boundaries, inviting peer collaboration and encouraging extended reading and writing.

Methodological Procedures

This research is situated within a constructivist paradigm of inquiry which embraces the idea of multiple realities and maintains that researcher and participants co-construct meanings of experiences (Creswell, 2007, pp. 18- 21; Hatch, 2002). Qualitative inquiry methodology guided this study, and a case study was conducted to gain in-depth understandings. This cross-cultural and cross-age investigation of on-line literature discussion lasted approximately nine months. Late September 2007 to late October 2007 was the getting-to-know-you phase, and from November 2007 to May 2008 data collection followed. Students read thought-provoking picture books, usually with multicultural themes or about social issues, and then posted their discussions on the group blogs which were particularly created for the study. Altogether 22 students (nine fifth graders from the U.S. and thirteen tenth graders from Taiwan) continued participating throughout the whole study.

I collected multiple sources of data, including students' blog entries, my observational field notes, my reflection blog entries, students' initial surveys, students' self-evaluation forms, group and individual final interviews, informal communication with both instructors and students, and recorded book discussions. Then I borrowed the constant comparative method to code the multiple sources of data. During the process of coding, I realized that social interaction played a dominant role in the study. Based on my findings, I conducted a second layer of coding by employing critical discourse analysis methods. I also examined closely four focus students' (Lydia, I-mei, Mary, and Chen-na, all pseudonyms) experiences to gain more thorough and in-depth understandings of the study. Two of the students remained committed learners while the

other two either quit or chose not to participate enthusiastically. Major themes emerged after inductive analyses and close examinations. Finally, I employed certain measures to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the study. I carefully considered credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Limitations

Due to the nature of my study, certain limitations emerged. First, I was the data gathering instrument of the inquiry. A concern of bias and subjectivity was inevitable. Also I was closer culturally to the Taiwanese group. However, credibility steps were taken so that although values could play a significant part in inquiry, I did my best to “expose and explicate them” and to “take them into account to whatever extent” I could (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 186). Secondly, my inquiry is an intrinsic case study, through which I intended to learn about this particular case more than seeking general understandings and insights to a big question as an instrumental case study does (Stake, 1995, p. 3). However, I took transferability steps so that other researchers could still make transferability judgments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 217). Thirdly, the timeframe of this inquiry allowed me a limited amount of time to conduct my study. Different school year calendars were a challenge when I expected to collect more data. Nevertheless, a redundancy of data was achieved as the coding of the blog entries posted toward the end of the project showed repeated patterns. Fourthly, due to the geographical limitation, field observations in Taiwan were not feasible. Nonetheless, I endeavored to make two field observations and maintained informal communications with both the Taiwanese students and the instructor. I used a digital recorder to provide supplementary information about the Taiwanese students’ group discussions. Finally, as with any online

learning model, self-regulation was a decisive factor for learning success. This inquiry was not a required class within the school curriculum; therefore students' active and regular engagement required significant self-motivation. Also due to some other factors, such as activity conflicts, transportation difficulties, and school workload, the number of participating students dwindled by the end of the study, as 30 were recruited and 22 remained. (See page 11.)

Organizations of the Study

This study is broken into five chapters. Chapter One gives an introduction to the study, including background to the research, the significance of the study, the theoretical framework, the methodological procedures and the limitations. Chapter Two is a comprehensive review of literature pertinent to the study, including socio-cultural perspective in learning, response to literature, critical literacy, and new literacies (with a focus on the blogs). Chapter Three provides a thorough look at the methodological procedures taken. It consists of the guiding questions, the context of the study, data collection and data analysis techniques, and the trustworthiness of the study. Chapter Four includes the results based on the data analysis of my research questions. Chapter Five begins by giving a summary of the study and the findings, and then outlines discussions and recommendations for pedagogical implications and future studies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The questions that guided this qualitative research concern the nature of reading and writing experiences in an online setting, the web-log, when two cross-cultural and cross-age groups of students were involved in literature discussions. I posed the following three sub-questions:

1. What is the nature of the social context of this activity?
2. What are the characteristics of students' online discussions in this social context?
3. What are the students' experiences and attitudes toward reading multicultural picture books and picture books with social-justice themes?

The review of the literature reflects the foundations which influence the research: socio-cultural perspectives in learning, responses to literature, critical literacy, and new literacies (with a focus on the blogs). The first area, the socio-cultural perspective in learning, begins with an introduction to the theorists and then describes related research. It includes an examination of the pedagogical implications. This area provides a theoretical lens with which to view subsequent sections of the review of literature. The second area, response to literature, starts with a discussion of the reader response theory. Then it goes on to describe two different kinds of literature responses implicated in literacy curriculum, namely, talking and writing. A particular section is provided to illustrate the theory of student talk, while another section provides a discussion of the theory of expressive writing. The second area continues with the related studies on using talking and writing to respond to literature. The third area introduces critical literacy theory and its pedagogical implications. The final area discusses the basic concepts of New Literacies and its one particular pedagogical strategy, blogging.

Socio-Cultural Perspective in Learning

As Mercer (2002) acknowledges, “A sociocultural perspective helps us appreciate the reciprocal relationship between individual thinking and the collective intellectual activities of groups” (p. 145). In this section, I discuss the theorists who contribute to the development of the socio-cultural perspective in learning, and then I describe the related studies. Following that, I examine the research on the pedagogical implications of socio-cultural learning.

Theorists

Socio-cultural theorists emphasize that learning occurs when the child learns from others in social contexts and during social exchange. Additionally, “the actual means of social interaction (language, gesture) are appropriated by the individual (internalised and transformed) to form the intramental tools for thinking, problem-solving, remembering, and so on” (Wertsch, 1985, as cited in Renshaw, 1992). Reading theorists help me build beliefs and knowledge of socio-cultural perspective in learning. The following recognizes the two great theorists who inform learning theories from socio-cultural perspective: John Dewey and L.S. Vygotsky.

John Dewey (1859-1952), the American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer is regarded as the foremost educator of his day. His concepts about liberal and progressive democracy have had a great impact on education in America and the world in the Twentieth Century. His statement that “education is a social process” (2005, p. 115) is particularly inspiring to today’s educators.

In his book, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, first published in 1916, Dewey (2005) examines the function of education.

First he indicates that education is a necessity of life, especially (in the broadest sense) the means of the social continuity of life (p. 3). Society exists through a process of transmission (of interests, purposes, information, skill and practices, etc.) from the constituent members to the immature members. The transmission occurs by means of communication (p. 3); thus, communication becomes important. Dewey writes, “Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common” (p. 5). Therefore, according to Dewey, “education consists primarily in transmission through communication” and communication is “a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common sense” (p. 11).

Next, Dewey discusses the social function of education. He argues that the development of the immature human being does not occur by direct transportation of knowledge or training; rather, it takes place through “the intermediary of the environment” (p. 26). For example, what a human being does and what he can do depend on “the expectations, demands, approvals, and condemnations of others” (p. 14). Dewey writes, “social environment forms the mental and emotional disposition of behavior in individuals by engaging them in activities that arouse and strengthen certain impulses, that have certain purposes and entail certain consequence” (p. 19). Accordingly, the school, as a special social environment, must function sufficiently in the following three aspects: 1) simplifying and ordering the features present in the complicated existing environment; 2) purifying the features by “weeding out what is undesirable” (p. 25); and 3) balancing the various elements in the existing social environment (p. 26). Only by

doing these can we assure that adequate resources of the complex society have been transmitted to the young learners.

Dewey sees that “education is a social process” (p. 115). In his view, education is “a freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims” (p. 115). He opposes the idea of training or “telling and being told” (p. 46). Rather, he argues that the process of education should be “an active and constructive process” (p. 46), and that “every individual has grown up, and always must grow up, in a social medium” (p. 344). Accordingly, language should be used in a more vital and fruitful way by means of “having its normal connection with shared activities” (p. 46). In other words, Dewey values cooperative or joint school activity. He considers that men “wanted closer union with their fellows so that they might influence one another more effectively and might combine their respective actions for mutual aims” (p. 343). The educational implication is that through “social intercourse,” or through sharing in the activities, one learns “the embodied beliefs” and eventually and gradually acquires a mind of one’s own (p. 344).

Dewey’s emphasis on the social process of education provides the foundation of socio-cultural perspective in learning. Another important figure that contributes as equally is L.S. Vygotsky. Born in 1896, Vygotsky, the Soviet psychologist, wrote more than 180 works (Blank, 1990) during his brief 48 years of life (1896-1934). His works were not known to the West until 1958 when they started to be translated into English. Since then Vygotsky has figured prominently in American psychology. Moreover, linguists and educators have been drawn towards Vygotsky's works, seeing in them “a superior understanding of the relationship between the educator and the educated”

(Blunden, n.d.). His theories concerning inner speech, internalization, and the Zone of Proximal Development are most relevant to my study.

Vygotsky (1962) observes that language development has three stages: external speech, egocentric speech, and inner speech. External speech is speech for others while inner speech is for oneself. The former is “the turning of thought into words” and is “materialization and objectification,” and the latter goes through a reversed process--it turns into inward thought (2002, p. 29). One stage of development preceding inner speech is egocentric speech, which is “the transitional form between external and internal speech” (1978, p. 27). Vygotsky comes to the conclusion “that inner speech develops through a slow accumulation of functional and structural changes, that it branches off from the child’s external speech simultaneously with the differentiation of the social and the egocentric functions of speech, and finally that the speech structures mastered by the child become the basic structures of his thinking” (1962, p. 94).

Internalization is one of Vygotsky’s concepts that lead to a sociocultural approach. In Vygotsky’s (1978) view, internalization is the “internal reconstruction of an external operation” (p. 57), and it consists of a series of transformation: 1) An operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally. 2) An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one. Here Vygotsky explains, “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological)” (p. 57). 3) The transformation of an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one is the result of a long series of developmental events (p. 57).

Vygotsky's idea of child development also contributes to the initiation of sociocultural research. Vygotsky (1978) rejects the previous three theoretical positions of development and learning in children, which include: child development is independent of learning (p. 79); learning is development (p. 80); learning and development influences each other (p. 81). Instead, Vygotsky describes a new and exceptionally important concept: the Zone of Proximal Development.

According to Vygotsky (1978), "the state of a child's mental development can be determined only by clarifying its two levels: the actual developmental level and the zone of proximal development" (p. 87). The zone of proximal development is the distance between the actual developmental level and the level of potential development. With assistance or guidance from teachers or more capable peers, children will be able to accomplish a task that they cannot do alone. In that sense, the zone of proximal development is like the "buds" or "flowers" of development rather than the "fruits" of development (p. 86). Based on this conception, Vygotsky stresses:

Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent development achievement (p. 90).

Related Studies

Later researchers continue to expand socio-cultural learning theories. In the book, *Sociocultural Studies in Mind*, Wertsch, del Rio, and Alvarez (1995) state that the goal of a sociocultural approach is "to explicate the relationships between human action, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, historical situations in which this action

occurs, on the other” (p. 11). They cite Bruner’s view of culture and indicate that “we should take the perspective that ‘culture and the quest for meaning within culture are the proper causes of human action’” (p. 5). Wertsch (1995) furthers this argument by pointing out that action is not carried out by either the individual or by society alone. He writes that “an account of action cannot be derived from the study of mental functioning or sociocultural setting in isolation. Instead, action provides a context within which the individual and society are understood as interrelated moments” (p. 60).

Rogoff (1995) presents a sociocultural approach focusing variously on personal, interpersonal, and community/institutional aspects of the activity. She draws on the metaphors of apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation to explain the three different planes of focus in socio-cultural activity. The metaphor of apprenticeship “focuses attention on the specific nature of the activity involved, as well as on its relation to practices and institutions of the community in which it occurs” (p. 142). The concept of guided participation refers to “the processes and systems of involvement between people as they communicate and coordinate efforts while participating in culturally valued activity” (p. 142). And the concept of participatory appropriation indicates “the process by which individuals transform their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their own participation,” and they accordingly “become prepared to engage in subsequent similar activities” (p. 150). In short, Rogoff’s view of socio-cultural analysis requires “considering how individuals, groups, and communities transform as they together constitute and are constituted by sociocultural activity” (p. 161).

Pedagogical Implications

Plenty of research has been conducted to examine the application of the sociocultural approach in education. Many of them focus on the peer collaboration in learning. For example, Gipps (2002) discusses assessment as an interactive, dynamic, and collaborative activity; Mercer (2002) searches how to use language effectively as a tool for thinking collaboratively; Jennings & Di (1996) investigate the collaborative learning strategies in literature study group. The following are more detailed descriptions of several studies that I find relevant to my inquiry.

In a recent study, Socol (2007), an elementary principal, conducted a literature study group with her staff teachers, as she was unsatisfied with the “technical-basics approach” (p. 617) that her staff was using with their fourth and fifth-grade students. The teachers experienced in person the process of “reading novels, recording big ideas during their discussions, and really talking about their reading” (p. 617). They hence came to realize the importance of engaging their students in authentic reading and peer talking, and they applied that understanding to their classroom practices. Socol’s staff teachers commented at the end of the project: “We needed that social interaction to get the most out of our reading, to solidify and push our thinking, to question what we had read, and to implement new practices” (p. 619).

Wilkinson and Silliman (2001) in their discussion on classroom language and literacy learning recognize the importance of viewing learning as both socially-based and integrated. They write, “Learning is a social activity -- interpersonal behaviors are the basis for new conceptual understandings” (para. 4). They see that in literature discussion “students’ prior levels of knowledge and motivation determine how much learning will

occur, and the content of learning depends on the quantity and quality of social interactions around learning topics” (Classrooms as Social, para. 2).

Some researchers carried out studies by using Vygotskian perspective as their research lens. For example, inspired by Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, in her study McMahon (1996) proposes that either the teacher or some other students must be the knowledgeable other so that temporary and adjustable support is provided to the learner. In addition, the learner must be willing to try and the teacher must “provide a scaffold that narrows the task sufficiently for the learner” (p. 61). McMahon runs a Book Club program in an elementary classroom, in which the learners respond to books of literature through both large and small group discussions. McMahon observes that Vygotsky’s concept of internalization occurs in the process of discussions. She concludes that “the more opportunities learners have to interact with others through language, the greater the number of occasions for feedback, leading to reconsideration of their thinking” (p. 74).

In their research article, Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) also examine Vygotsky’s concept of zone of proximal development. Moreover, they look closely at Vygotsky’s important concept of *perezhivanie*. It describes “the affective processes through which interactions in the ZPD are individually perceived, appropriated and represented by the participants” (p. 49). Mahn and John-Steiner believe that “the emotional aspect of language and the importance of human connections in social interaction” are both central to the concept of *perezhivanie* and need further development” (p. 50). To explain that belief, Mahn and John-Steiner present a study Mahn conducted investigating the journal dialogues among Mahn’s high school and university ESL students and himself. Through

this study, Mahn realizes that his ESL students gained self-confidence and achieved self-discovery as they were encouraged to write freely in this authentic communication activity, meanwhile they developed relationship with the instructor (p. 54). Mahn and John-Steiner conclude that part of a dynamic ZPD is “providing the metalanguage that relates to the processes of learning, including the affective processes, and not focusing solely on the skills” (p. 58).

Basing his study on Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development and Piaget-inspired research, Tudge (1990) examines the effects of collaboration between peers. He records and analyzes the targeted students’ thinking levels on the pre and pro tests and finds out that the intervention of working with a more competent partner did not necessarily guarantee the elevation of the targeted students’ thinking levels. Tudge notices that other factors involved in the processes of interaction have to be paid attention to as well. A major factor that comes into play is the more competent peer’s confidence. Tudge argues:

To talk simply about cognitive conflict, or about providing information within a child’s zone of proximal development, is insufficient. It may be adequate when the more competent child of a pairing is also more confident, as when a conserver is paired with a nonconserver or when a child who knows how to solve some problem in math is assigned to act as a teacher of another child who does not (p. 167).

Tudge also provides suggestions by other researchers to illuminate various factors that may matter, such as “the age of the collaborators (older children being more skilled at verbal interaction),” “the extent of engagement in the task,” “the degree of equality of

relationship,” “degree of mutual involvement,” “motivation,” and “shared meaning” (p. 168).

Summary of Socio-Cultural Perspective in Learning

In this section, I discuss socio-cultural perspective in learning, which is the theoretical lens guiding my study. Dewey (2005), Vygotsky (1962, 1978), and later theorists, such as Wertsch (1995), Rogoff (1995), and Cole (1998), explicate the social function of education. They emphasize that children learn in social environments and through social interactions. Their theories lead researchers to recognize that a child’s development cannot be understood by a study of individual only but “we must also examine the external social world in which that individual life has developed” (de Valenzuela, n.d. para. 1). Studies based on sociocultural understandings have been conducted. Educational researchers examine peer collaborative learning strategies and practices, cross-age communication included (Austin, 2000; Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002). My understandings of socio-cultural perspective gained from the literature form the base stone of the theoretical framework for this study. They also lead me to ask questions about the nature of social learning when two cross-age groups of students were engaged in a collaborative learning activity. The findings add to a vast body of knowledge.

Under the big umbrella of socio-cultural perspective, I continued examining three substantive frameworks: response to literature, critical literacy, and New Literacies.

Response to Literature

Not until the late 1960’s did reading theories begin to turn from the traditional, transmissional approach to a transactional one. Literature class time stopped being spent “solely discussing the author’s biography and agenda, the historical and political context

in which the work was written, and the literary elements incorporated within the narrative” (Garber, 1995, p. 7). Readers cease to be “invisible” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). Instead, their role is elevated to “the core of literary experience” (Probst, 1988a, p. 133). Reading theories in reader response are important to my study. Reader response theorists “embrace an extremely wide range of attitudes toward, and assumptions about, the roles of the reader, the text, and the social/cultural context shaping the transaction between the reader and the text” (Beach, 1993, p. 2). Therefore, in the following section, I discuss the reader response theories proposed mainly by Louis Rosenblatt, as well as a brief overview of some other important theorists. I also present a synthesized understanding of the pedagogical implications, namely, talking and writing as responses to literature.

Reader Response Theories

Rosenblatt (1978/1994) notices that in prior reading theories, the individual reader was mentioned but was not given the center of the stage. The reader tended to be treated as “a passive recipient,” rather than an active agent who can carry on his own special and peculiar activities when reading (p. 4). Opposing that conventional concept, Rosenblatt argues that each of the readers is active, “not a blank tape registering a ready-made message” (p. 5). She believes that when readers are reading, they pay attention not only to “what the signs pointed to in their external world, to their referents,” but also to “the images, feelings, attitudes, associations, and ideas that the words and their references evoked in them” (p. 10).

In her book, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* (1978/1994), Rosenblatt uses the term “poem” to refer to “the whole category of aesthetic transactions between readers and texts without implying the greater or lesser ‘poeticity’ of any specific genre” (p. 12). She

argues that the reading process is a “transaction” between the reader and the text. She rejects the attitude of seeing reading as a process of finding the meanings in the text or solely in the reader’s mind. She states, “The finding of meanings involves both the author’s text and what the reader brings to it” (p. 14). The relationship between a reader and a text is never linear. As a result, the reader’s creation of a poem out of a text must be an “active, self-ordering, and self-correcting” process (2005a, p. 28). And the reading of a text is “an event of occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader” (1978/1994, p. 20).

Rosenblatt (1978/1994) also explicitly analyzes the two different kinds of reading processes: efferent and aesthetic reading. However, she argues that there is not an opposition, a dichotomy, but instead “a continuum” between the two stances (p. 184). Rosenblatt does not suggest that “we have the cognitive, the referential, the factual, the analytic, the abstract on the one side and the affective, the emotive, the sensuous, on the other” (p. 184). Rather, she holds that because the reader’s focus of attention and stances during the reading event are different, he may be either more inclined to gaining information after the reading or more concerned about his “lived through” experience during the actual reading event (p. 27). Therefore, there can be “a to-and-fro movement of the attention from one aspect to another of the responses activated by the text” (p. 37).

Rosenblatt (2005b) argues that children’s ability to read aesthetically has not been developed fully since in the past the teaching of literature focused a lot on satisfying the efferent purposes of categorizing the genre, paraphrasing the ‘objective’ meaning, or analyzing the techniques represented by the text (p. 43). In view of this, Rosenblatt proposes that the classroom should be a pleasant and inviting place for aesthetic reading.

She suggests that the texts should “engage as much as possible the child’s already-acquired skills;” “Repeated experiences should precede the theoretical analysis;” and children should be directed to “talk freely about the experience with peers and with the teacher” (p. 44).

Other reading theorists also share a concern with how readers make meaning from their experiences with texts. Beach (1993) lists five perspectives presenting the different lenses that “illuminate particular aspects of the reader/text/context transaction” (p. 8). In the following section, I give a brief review of one theorist in each perspective: Iser--textual theories of response, Probst (as he is a proponent of Rosenblatt, who I discussed earlier)--experiential theories of response, Holland--psychological theories of response, Fish--social theories of response, and Bleich--cultural theories of response.

The German reading critic, Iser (as cited in Freund, 1987), views reading as a process consisting of “an interaction between the structure of the literary work and its recipient” (p. 141). For Iser (1980), when a reader is reading a literary work, it is “far above mere perception of what is written” (p. 54). The reading process actually involves an activation of the reader’s “own faculties” and enables the reader to “recreate the world” the literary work represents (p. 54). Iser calls it “filling in the gaps left by the text itself” (p. 55). The text is described (as cited in Beach, 1993) as “a set of incomplete instructions to be completed by the reader,” and the reader has to apply “knowledge of text conventions” to fill in the gaps (p. 20). Iser (1980) writes:

For this reason, one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities;

as he reads he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. In this very act the dynamics of reading are revealed (p. 55).

Beach (1993) describes Iser as adopting a “textual” perspective because he focuses “primarily on readers’ application of knowledge of text conventions to infer meaning” (p. 17). On the other hand, some theorists are “primarily interested in describing readers’ processes of engagement and involvement in composing their own ‘envisionments’” (Beach, 1993, p. 49). Rosenblatt is central to these “experiential theories of response” (Beach, 1993, p. 49). Rosenblatt’s proponent, Probst (1988a), concurs with her conception of the active role of the reader. He indicates that a text is potentially a literary experience—“imaginative, intellectual, and emotional” (p. 22). It invites readers’ participation. Although different readers may also differ in the focus and mode of their reading work, all the reading processes involve the transaction between the reader and the text. He gives the example of reading a poem to further explain his idea. He asserts, “We bring to the text our understanding of the words, our expectations of the behavior of people, our ingrained biases and predilections and from them create the experience that become for us see if this has a comma right here the poem” (1988b, p. 15). Therefore, readers should be encouraged to “attend to their own conceptions, their own experience, bringing the literary work to bear upon their lives and allowing their lives to shed light upon the work” (1992a, p. 60). He concludes that through this kind of reading, readers should be able to gain such literary experiences as knowledge of self, knowledge of others, knowledge of texts, knowledge of contexts, knowledge of processes (of making meaning), and pleasure (1988, 1992a).

Holland (1980) emphasizes even more strongly the role of the reader. He puts “questions of personal identity and self-awareness” as the center of his critical theory (Tompkins, 1980, p. xix). Hence, Beach (1993) categorizes him as “the leading advocate” of psychological theories (p. 94). Holland demonstrates four elements involved in the reading process: text, unity, self, and identity. He explains the relationship among these four as “unity is to identity as text is to self” (1980, p. 121). Holland stresses identity. Beach highlights Holland’s notion by pointing out that “in reformulating their subconscious experience into a conscious understanding of fantasy themes, readers are applying their own unique personality or ‘identity style’” (p. 95). Interpretation of a literary text is actually “a function of identity” (Holland, 1980, p. 123). Holland concludes, “All of us, as we read, use the literacy work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves” (p. 124).

Fish (1980) proposes the idea of “interpretive community” (p. 171). He defines it this way:

Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around (p. 171).

As Fish’s notion of the interpretive community embodies the social perspective of response theories, Beach (1993) categorizes Fish as social theorist. According to Beach, social theorists focus on “readers’ cognitive or subconscious processes and how those processes vary according to both unique individual personality and developmental level

(p. 6). Beach (1993) writes that “for Fish, the meaning of any reader/text transaction is a function of the interpretive strategies and conventions adopted by readers as members of a particular interpretive community” (p. 106). In other words, readers share certain strategies and conventions valued by the group, while the meaning of the reader/text transaction is created due to the interpretive communities. Fish (1980) states that the interpretive communities “are responsible for the shape of the readers’ activities and for the texts those activities produce” (p. 332).

Fish’s notion of reader response theories focuses on specific social contexts, while Bleich argues that “readers’ responses reflect their membership in the competing cultural communities” (Beach, 1993, p. 132). Cultural theorists, such as Bleich, hold that understanding the meaning of response “requires an understanding of the ideological stances inherent in these cultural and historical forces” (Beach, 1993, p. 127). In his book, *Subjective Criticism*, Bleich outlines a model for literary engagement. As Mailloux (1979) suggests, Bleich’s model progresses from subjective response, to resymbolization, to negotiation resulting in validated knowledge” (p. 211). In the third stage of Bleich’s model, “individual interpretations are negotiated within communities and new knowledge is produced” (Mailloux, 1979, p. 211). Moreover, Bleich’s subjective criticism “assumes that each person’s most urgent motivations are to understand himself, and that the simplest path to this understanding is awareness of one’s own language system as the agency of consciousness and self-direction” (Galenbeck, 1979, p. 793).

Talk and Response to Literature

Rosenblatt’s work of response criticism “has suggested a great deal about the methods of teaching both reading and writing appropriate for the literature program

(Probst, 1992a, p. 62). Some researchers explore the role of the teacher in eliciting children's responses to literature, and they study different facets of those responses (Holland, Hungerford, & Ernst, 1993). Others conduct classroom research to examine students' meaning making processes when reader response is encouraged (Karolides, 1992; Nelms, 1988). Theorists have proposed diverse strategies for teachers to engage students in literature response. Among them, literature discussion has been of significant importance. In the following discussion I describe the theory of student talk and its application in the literacy curriculum and group literature discussions.

Theory of Student Talk

The theorists, Douglas Barnes, Gordon Wells, and M.A.K. Halliday contribute to the theory of student talk. As one of the most eloquent proponents of oral language as an educational tool, Barnes receives attention for advocating student talk in the classroom. He claims that talk is a key factor in all school learning and “issues a strong call away from the transmissional model and provides a means to reflect upon classroom dynamics, unearth the hidden curriculum, and help students take charge of their learning” (Mancuso & Colangelo, 1991, p. 88).

In the book, *From Communication to Curriculum*, Barnes (1992) demonstrates his conception of language as an agent of learning by closely examining four groups of students' talk when they were assigned three tasks: carrying out a physics experiment, appreciating a poem, and discussing an event in history. The four groups of students talked with their group members while collaboratively completing the assignments. During their talk, Barnes observed that meaningful learning occurred when the students adopted an open approach to the tasks.

By “open approach” Barnes means that children ask questions of one another that “invite surmise and discussion” (p. 67). When the open approach is adopted, collaborative social relationships are formed, in which children “make use of one another’s contributions by extending or modifying them” (p. 67). Compared to a closed approach to tasks, a pattern in which children “seldom express disagreement with one another’s opinions”, and “the questions and answers are ritualized,” (p. 68), an open approach results in more quality of discussion—and therefore more quality of learning (p. 71).

Barnes further elaborates on the factors which contribute to the formation of an open approach. They are (in addition to the ability of children) the nature of the task, children’s familiarity with the subject matter, their confidence in themselves, and their sense of what is expected of them. Barnes concludes that all these factors are under the influence of the teacher (p. 71). It is because teachers are the primary figures that provide the appropriate curriculum to make it possible for students to transform “school knowledge” into “action knowledge” (p. 82).

By “school knowledge” Barnes (1992) means the knowledge presented by others—usually teachers. “Action knowledge” refers to students’ “assimilation of knowledge to their own purpose” (p. 82). Students need to incorporate school knowledge into their views of the world, to use parts of it to cope with the experiences of living, and then school knowledge becomes action knowledge (p. 81). Barnes maintains that “talk and writing are of great importance here, because they provide means of testing out school knowledge against the action knowledge” (p. 82). Barnes concurs with Sapir, Vygotsky, and Bruner by noting that “through language we both receive a meaningful world from

others, and at the same time make meanings by re-interpreting that world to our own ends” (p. 101). The process starts when students attempt to say things clearly to others; then they progressively learn to build other people’s viewpoints into their own, thus they see their knowledge (or perception) as “hypothetical” and “open to change;” eventually the “decentration” necessitates insight into students’ understanding of the world (p. 90). In this way school knowledge becomes action knowledge.

Barnes also examines the two different uses of language in the classroom. “Exploratory talk” (p. 108) is an improvised talk, through which students shape knowledge for themselves by rearranging their thoughts. On the other hand, presentational talk is the final draft language, a contrast to exploratory. It seeks to exclude “detours and dead-ends of thinking” but focus on presenting a “finished, well-shaped, and polished article” (p. 108). Barnes holds that the students’ awareness of the audience will determine which language mode they tend to use when talking. When students sense that they are talking in a more threatening relationship or to a more authoritative figure, they tend to present rather than share (p. 110). Here educators have to be aware that Barnes is not recommending that all talk and writing in the classroom should be exploratory (p. 187). He agrees that both uses of language have their place in education. What he intends to demonstrate is that exploratory talk helps students learn in a different way—that it provides “a set of strategies for interpreting the world and a means of reflecting upon this interpretation” (p. 115). Therefore, exploratory talk achieves a different function from final draft speech.

Similar to Barnes, Wells is devoted to the study of children’s talk and emphasizes that children learn to talk and talk to learn, especially in contexts of collaborative

activities (Wells & Wells, 1984, p. 190). Wells and Wells (1984) realize that schools failed to provide a linguistically rich environment to those believed to be deprived at home. As a matter of fact, quite contrarily, it is at home that children experience collaborative talk (p. 194). This kind of “open-ended, exploratory conversations about the topics and issues that arise from shared activities and interests” are relevant to children’s active drive and enable them to make sense of their experiences and to construct the concepts (p. 196). Several reasons may explain why school fails. The most serious one, as Wells considers, is “a less than whole-hearted belief in the value that pupil’s talk has for their learning” (p. 194). Teachers possess the misconception that if they are not talking (including telling, questioning, and evaluating) they are not doing their job properly (p. 194). They forget that children need to articulate their ideas and connections they make in order for actual learning to take place in the individual mind (p. 195). Therefore, it is essential to provide students with opportunities to talk.

In his article, “Children Talk Their Way into Literacy,” Wells (2003) particularly points out the importance for students to talk about written texts. He argues, “although the written text can stand alone, relatively independent of any particular context of use, particular activities of writing and reading remain enmeshed in a nexus of action, talk and text” (p. 2). In Well’s standpoint, children need multiple opportunities to talk about the text so that they can appropriate the connections between spoken and written messages of meaning. The talk is most likely to be beneficial for learning when it is responsive to children’s current interests and is provided in a way that children are able to be engaged. Joint activities are particularly preferable when children first encounter written texts (p.

8). As a result, Wells concludes his conception of the complementary inter-relationship between action, talk and text by indicating that:

1. Reading and writing are not ends in themselves; rather, they are means of constructing meaning and communicating meaning.
2. Texts do not carry meaning in themselves; rather, they require readers and writers to transact with the written text.
3. Meaning making is an inherently social activity carried out within a community. Such collaboration occurs most naturally and easily through talk about the text (p. 28).

In the book, *Explorations in the Functions of Language* (1973) Halliday identifies seven models of a child's language by the time he comes to school at the age of five--a realization he gained by tape recording his own son from birth to five years old. The first four models, instrumental, regulatory, interactional, and personal models, function to help the child to satisfy physical, emotional and social needs. The next three models are heuristic, imaginative, and representational, all helping the child to come to terms with his environment. Halliday concurs with Bernstein that "the child who does not succeed in the school system may be one who is not using language in the ways required by the school" (p. 10). Therefore, it is essential for educators to make sure that the child's awareness of language is not isolated from his awareness of language functions (p. 12).

In the same book Halliday also emphasizes that language is about meanings. He suggests a functional framework of language, which includes three functions. The first one is the ideational function, by which Halliday refers to as "the expression of cognitive meaning" (p. 97). He maintains that through this function the speaker or writer embodies

in language his experience and also express certain logical relations. This function is both experiential and logical (p. 98). The second one is the interpersonal function. Here, according to Halliday, the speaker uses language to express his comments, his attitudes and evaluations, and also the relationship that he sets up between himself and the listener. Hence, the interpersonal function includes both the expressive and the connotative (p. 98). The third one is the textual function, which is concerned with the creation of text. Halliday names “an operational unit of language” (such as a spoken or written sentence) a text. He writes, “It is through this function that language makes links with itself and with the situation; and discourse becomes possible, because the speaker or writer can produce a text and the listener or reader can recognize one” (p. 99).

Halliday also explores the three facets of language development (1980) which have been important to language and literacy educators. He indicates that the three facets, learning language, learning through language, and learning about language, are not three things that happen separately. Rather, they are three aspects of a single complex process (p. 19). Short (1998) synthesized Halliday’s conceptions of the three aspects. She proposes a literacy model whose goal is to ensure that students are involved in learning highlighting the three opportunities which Halliday identifies. With learning language, Short emphasizes that “children learn to read by reading and by being surrounded by other reader.” Therefore, children should be provided with “extensive experiences with many different kinds of reading materials.” As for learning through language, Short believes that “reading is a way of learning about the world and oneself.” Short advocates that children learn “through dialogue and response to literature and using books to investigate their questions.” With learning about language, Short thinks it involves

“looking at language itself.” That is, children learn to examine “the nature and function of language and literature,” and then they “develop a broad repertoire of reading strategies and gain a knowledge of literacy structures, elements, and genres” (p. 133).

Since talk has been recognized as a powerful way for students to learn, in the following section, I discuss its educational application in literacy curriculum: group literature discussion.

Implications of Group Literature Discussion

In the book, *Cycles of Meanings* (Pierce & Gilles, 1993), teacher-researchers explore how talk can be employed when students respond to literature in a group setting. Gilles (1993) recorded, transcribed, counted, and analyzed the utterances of thirteen junior high school students in their literature discussion sessions. She concurs with Barnes that exploratory talk is “a vehicle to journey into a book” (p. 201). She observed that the students, when retelling and discussing the book they read, made connections between the book and their lives, other people, or other books; discussed the author’s style or purposes; visualized what was happening in the book; and responded to other group members’ comments, which helped them to explore deeper meanings (p. 202). She also noticed that the students gained deep meanings as they hypothesized about the plot, characters, settings, and symbols or by asking each other “hard questions” (p. 202). Gilles labels this interaction a “cycle of meaning,” referring to “the meanings and understandings that individuals and groups create over time as they transact with one another by discussing rich texts” (p. 206). Gilles concludes that students explore meaning collaboratively, either on the spot and or over time, when they use conversation

to journey into books. Meanings are made, returned, and reconsidered when they surface, submerge, and resurface (p. 216).

Teacher-researchers also conduct Literature Circles in their classrooms (Hill, Johnson, & Schlick Noe, 1995; Hill, Schlick Noe, & King, 2003). They share ideas and experiences about creating a climate for discussion, setting daily schedules, choosing books, asking prompting questions, extending reading through writing, arts, and performing, involving parents, and celebrating students' achievement. In essence, literature circles allow students to read and to talk about their chosen books regularly within their peer groups. Students think collaboratively with each other and accomplish reading tasks they may not be able to complete independently (Short, 1995, p. xi). Teachers serve as a facilitator, observer, listener and often a fellow reader, alongside the students (Daniels, 1994). Moreover, integrated with inquiry projects, literature circles have become a powerful medium that invites students to grow into problem-posers as well as problem-solvers (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996, p. 257). Literature circles invite natural discussions and support diverse responses, and eventually promote a love for literature (Owens, 1995, p. 3).

A classroom teacher, Dickinson (1995), also examines talk about picture books in her intermediate classrooms. Dickinson invited her intermediate-aged students to think deeply by reading intriguing picture books to them. Dickinson considers that the picture books are springboards for children's thinking: children are responding to the literature and not necessarily about the literature. Dickinson allowed time—time for thinking and time for responding (p. 9). She noticed that through talking her students gained ideas about character, setting, time, conflict, and resolution (p. 10). She also noticed that the

children's talk about picture books extended to explore and expand what they knew about concepts (p. 11). Meanwhile the children, when talking about their learning, were brought to an understanding of their thinking (p. 12). Dickinson concludes that "through their talk, students learn to make sense of information and arrive at understandings for themselves. As they do so, they learn the value of collaboration with others" (p.13).

In their study, Triplett and Buchanan (2005) examine how book discussion, though not a part of reading instruction in their regular classrooms, engaged young (grade 1-3) struggling readers cognitively, motivationally, and emotionally. The reading teachers in the study used a variety of ways to engage the students in picture talks, predictions, prior knowledge, personal connections, and vocabulary meanings (p. 72). The results show that the students were motivated, since the book talk included their personal interests and through the book talk they built the socio-emotional bonds (p. 73). Their comprehension was evident when they participated in book discussions. One student even commented that "they just did not understand if they did not talk about the text" (p. 73).

In their study, Carrison and Ernst-Slavit (2005) examined five English Language Learners' participation in literature circles in a fourth grade classroom. The instructor chose books with multicultural themes at a variety of reading levels (p. 100). Then the students met in groups and planned their reading goals on a group calendar. The ELL students were afforded the opportunity to read with a buddy or to read along with a recorded book (p. 101). After the first run of the literature circles, Carrison and Ernst-Slavit found that the ELL students who were "previously very quiet during classroom activities and often apprehensive to participate verbally" became much more outspoken

(p. 102). Moreover, the ELL students demonstrated improved attitude toward reading (p. 104), while their Qualitative Reading Inventory II (QRI-II) scores indicated an increase of reading levels (p. 105). Carrison and Ernst-Slavit realized that the use of multicultural literature assisted students in making connections to their own lives and encouraged “a greater appreciation for the diversity of all students” (p. 110). Furthermore, through this collaborative learning, the ELL students enjoyed using authentic language for real purposes, which is especially powerful for ELL students (p.110).

Writing and Response to Literature

In addition to group discussion, educators also advocate writing to respond to literature. In the following section, I discuss theories related to expressive writing, which is important to my study. Then I further my discussion by reviewing the pedagogical implications of writing to respond to literature.

Theory of Expressive Writing

In their book, *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)*, Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen (1975) present a multi-dimensional model of writing to highlight the writing processes. The three major categories they use to demonstrate the writing processes are transactional, expressive, and poetic. Among them, the expressive writing model is particularly useful for my study.

In the book, Britton (et al.) first define expressive language. They write, “Expressive language signals the self, reflects not only the ebb and flow of a speaker’s thought and feeling, but also his assumptions of shared contexts of meaning, and of a relationship of trust with his listener” (p. 10). The speaker is not particularly explicit until he finds that his listener does not understand or accept what has been said. Then

“the demands of the situation will cause the speaker to become more explicit, possibly more formal, and thereby edit out some of the expressive features of his utterance in order to communicate more fully” (p. 11).

Britton (et al.) point out that expressive language represents some overlap between speech and writing. Moreover, it relates to thinking and therefore is considered important as a mode of learning at any stage (p. 11). Britton argues, “It appears to be the means by which the new is tentatively explored, thoughts are half uttered, attitudes half expressed, the rest being left to be picked up by the listener, or reader, who is willing to take the unexpressed on trust” (p. 11). Therefore, the pattern of expressive language is “an utterance that ‘stays close to the speaker’ and hence is fully comprehensible only to the one who knows the speaker and shares.” It is relaxed, intimate, and free (p. 82).

In speaking of the characteristics of expressive writing, Britton (et al.) indicate that “not only is it the mode in which we approach and relate to each other in speech, but it is also the mode in which, generally speaking, we frame the tentative first drafts of new ideas; and the mode in which, in times of family or national crisis, we talk with our own people and attempt to work our way towards some kind of a resolution” (p. 82). The following writing categories presented by Britton (et al.) embody expressive writing:

1. The kind of writing that might be called ‘thinking on paper.’
2. The kind of diary entry that attempts to record and explore the writer’s feelings, mood, opinions preoccupations of the moment.
3. Personal letters written to friends or relations for the purpose of maintaining contact with them.

4. Writing addressed to a limited public audience assumed to share much of the writer's context and many of his values and opinions and interests.
5. Writing, intended or to be read by a public audience, in which the writer chooses to approach his reader as though he were a personal friends. (pp. 89-90).

In their book, Britton (et al.) also point out the importance of sense of audience. They state, "One important dimension of development in writing ability is the growth of a sense of audience, the growth of the ability to make adjustments and choices in writing which take account of the audience for whom the writing is intended" (p. 58). They maintain that in writing the writer has to "represent to himself a context of situation" because there is no "immediate environment" but rather a "universe of discourse" he is entering (p. 61). Because of the sense of the audience, the writer knows what role to play in a certain occasion and is able to differentiate "communicative expectations and situations" (p. 62). However, Britton (et al.) emphasize that teachers should not be the only audience for the student writer, not "the sole arbiter, appraiser, grader and judge of the performance" (p. 64). It is because in that way the writing will become a mere task and only an effort to meet the teacher's requirements.

Elbow is another important educator who values expressive way of writing. In his book, *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow (1973/1998) explicates the concept of freewriting. Elbow thinks that the ultimate principle of freewriting is "never stop for anything" (p. 3). He argues that schooling makes students care too much about getting a paragraph right, and it hinders them from writing on (p. 5). However, Elbow does not imply that freewriting is to ask one to give up careful writing. Quite on the contrary, Elbow argues

that freewriting “helps you pour more attention, focus, and energy into what you write” (p.8).

Elbow discusses the process of writing. He holds that before the writing process not all writers are “lucky enough to find something to say” (p. 13). Usually they felt helpless because “it [writing] obeys inscrutable laws. We are in its power. It is not in ours” (p. 13). Therefore, Elbow objects the conventional understanding of writing as a two-step process—first to figure out meaning and then put it into language. He argues that such a convention originates from the idea of keeping control (p. 14). Elbow puts it this way: “Meaning is not what you start out with but what you end up with. Control, coherence, and knowing your mind are not what you start out with but what you end up with” (p. 15). Elbow suggests thinking of writing as a way to “grow and cook a message” instead of as a way “to transmit a message” (p. 15). Accordingly, writing should involve a great deal of “rambling” and “throwing away” (p. 15). Words should be treated as something that is “potentially able to grow” (p. 24).

Elbow describes the growing process more concretely in four stages:

1. “Start writing and keep writing”: Elbow encourages writers to just go ahead and start writing without worrying about “wrong meanings in the wrong words” (p. 26). He states, “Keep writing till you get to the right meanings in the right words. Only at the end will you know what you are saying” (p. 26).
2. “Chaos and disorientation”: Elbow suggests that writers “write a lot and throw a lot away”. He considers preparation time “a waste of time” (p. 31). Once writers start writing a lot, even though they may feel “lost, baffled, and frustrated”, the overall process is one that eventually will not leave them so helpless (p. 33).

3. “Emerging center of gravity”: This is the turning point when a focus or a theme finally emerges. Elbow indicates that in a piece of writing “you must force yourself to keep getting some center of gravity or summing-up to occur” (p. 36). He lists several ways in which a center of gravity emerged for him, which mostly are about his constant practices and reflections.
4. “Editing”: Elbow suggests that writers hold for this stage until they are able to see what they are “diving at” and “stumbling around.” He argues that editing should be “the last step in the complete growth cycle” (p. 38).
5. “Growing as a developmental process”: Elbow thinks of the writing process as an organically growing process, in which the writers experience an “intensive period of writing and throwing away and writing” (p. 43).

Later researchers such as Bean (2001) also advocates informal, exploratory writing. This kind of writing, exemplified by reading logs, non-stop freewrites, diaries, letters to colleagues, and early drafts of essays, and so on, is “typically unorganized and tentative, moving off in unanticipated directions as new ideas, complications, and questions strike the writer in the process of thinking and creating” (p. 97). Bean argues that the process of exploratory writing, a synonym for expressive writing, freewriting, or unstructured writing (p. 97), drives thinking. Sometimes it “gets transformed into a finished product,” but more frequently, it is “an end in itself” (p. 98). When students are engaged in exploratory writing, they “write for oneself with the intention of stimulating creativity or deepening and focusing thought;” therefore, it causes “intrinsic satisfaction” within the writers (p. 99). Bean lists 25 ideas for incorporating exploratory writing into a course. Among them, he stresses using reading journals (or reading logs) to increase

students' reading comprehensions. According to Bean, a reading log "requires that students write regularly about what they are reading but gives them freedom in choosing what to say" (p. 144). Teachers are more interested in finding out "how a reading affects students on the personal level" (p. 144) instead of their grading on students' writing techniques. As a result, exploratory writing focuses both students and teachers on the process rather than the product of thinking (p. 118).

Related Pedagogical Implications

Murray (1985) argues that "we write to think—to be surprised by what appears on the page; to explore our world with language; to discover meaning that teaches us and that may be worth sharing with others" (p. 3). As expressive writing is considered a powerful thinking tool and an effective medium to respond to literature, many researchers value the implementations of writing in literature study classes and accordingly conduct related inquiries.

Probst (1992b) concurs with many reading response theorists in seeing that reading literature can involve students in more than analysis of texts. He argues that if encouraged, students' literary experiences can lead to "intellectual activity other than analysis, the making and demonstrating of propositions, and thus to writing in forms of other than the argumentative critical essay" (p. 118). Probst proposes three modes of writing to experience literature. They are writing from literature, writing of literature, and writing about literature. By writing from literature, Probst means students, when pursuing their own thoughts, "depart from the literary work" and write about their own lives (p. 119). Writing of literature refers to student writing "imaginative literature of their own" (p. 121). And writing about literature, traditionally emphasized yet still

important, is “explicating texts” (p. 124). Probst believes that the broadening of range of discourse forms students can choose when responding to literature gives students “access to all of these pleasures and to enable them to realize their own potential for understanding and shaping themselves and their worlds” (p. 126).

Atwell (1987) believes that it is crucial to engage students in literary talk. She writes, “With nothing happening before or after the reading, the context in which readers read doesn’t support or extend their interests” (p. 164). Accordingly, she proposes written dialogues between teacher and students and also written dialogues between students and their peers. The student-to-teacher written dialogues provide a way for teacher to be “resourceful and responsive to what the student does” (p. 164). They also create “a special occasion” for students to write and reflect on their reading (p. 165). On the other hand, the student-to-student dialogues, although different from the ways students write to their teacher, are equally beneficial, except that the mechanics are “less careful” while there is “more description of affect” in them (p. 189). In the end, Atwell found that this student-to-student journal writing inspired her students to write more and longer than when she was their sole audience. Her students also asked each other more questions and made more recommendations on reading (p. 190).

Researchers also advocate journal writing in response to literary experience. In their study, Golden and Handloff (1992) implemented a journal writing program in a fifth-grade class and examined closely the students’ journal entries. The results suggest that the reading response journal, written both during and after reading a book with student-choice topics, helps the teacher see “how the text unfolds for the reader” (p. 175). Golden and Handloff write, “The journal not only provides insights into reader response

but offers information about how the child is developing as a reader in terms of reading interests and reading strategies and as a writer who learns to articulate thoughts and feelings for an audience” (p. 184). In addition, both researchers realize that the journal offers children “a means of articulating, exploring, and extending their responses to literature (p. 183).

In a more recent case study, Gammill (2006) employs reading journal to motivate her second grade students to write. She observes that her focus second-grade student began the writing on the journal with sentences like “I like this book” or “It was a good book.” However, as the reading journal became a consistent part of the student’s learning experience, her student became more comfortable expressing thoughts in writing (Writing to Learn section, para. 2). Moreover, the student “moved beyond simply stating the obvious” and was able to make connections with texts without prompting. Gammill thus sees that the familiarity with writing personal responses to his reading suggests that her student “will be more likely to engage in affective reading and mature writing in the future” (Writing to Learn section, para. 2).

Seeing that her undergraduate reluctant ESL writers needed to connect with what they wrote so that writing was meaningful to them, Roman-Perez (2003) began reading *Chicken Soup* stories to the class and having the students write reactions. As reactions to the stories were “authentic writing, far different from the brief and stilted journal entries” that the ESL students used to write for her (p. 311), Roman-Perez was amazed by “the transformation in the students' attitude toward writing and the improvement evident in their writing” (p. 313). The ESL students wrote, without prompting, longer pieces with a much wider range of vocabulary, and they wrote about their emotions and experiences (p. 312). Roman-Perez was content with the result. She commented, “When journal writing

became a way to explore, analyze, and discuss issues important in their own lives, my students became less fearful of writing and began to view it as a tool for articulating their own humanity” (p. 313).

Nevertheless, expressive writing in journal is not the only way to respond to literature. In their book, *Enhancing Aesthetic Reading and Response*, Anderson and Rubano (1991) indicate that articulated reading response also includes poetic discourse response, which, they point out, is what some teachers call “creative writing” (p. 15). Anderson and Rubano explain that poetic discourse is “less concerned with the efficiency of communicating to an audience or accomplishing a task” but “more concerned with the ‘shaping of a verbal object’” (p. 15). The writer takes a role of “spectator” when “presenting a reflection on experience or a picture of that experience” (p. 15). They believe that poetic response is an important way to respond aesthetically to literature; they even argue, “probably the only way to assure an initial aesthetic stance is to require students to respond in poetic discourse” (p. 17). Accordingly, Anderson and Rubano suggest classroom activities to involve students in poetic discourse response.

Summary of Response to Literature

In this area, I have discussed response to literature. I have adopted Rosenblatt’s conception that reading is a transaction among the author, the text, and the reader. The meaning of the texts is created when the reader brings his/her own experiences and reflections to the reading process. I also have given a brief overview of some other reading theorists, such as Iser (textual theorist), Probst (experiential theorist), Holland (psychological theorist), Fish (social theorist), and Bleich (cultural theorist). Literature response theorists acknowledge the importance of providing students with opportunities

to respond to literature, they employ talking and writing to encourage that literary experience.

Barnes (1992), Wells (2001), and Halliday (1973) are the important figures who inform talk theories. They value talk in the classroom, and they see that it provides students a powerful means of learning. Literacy educators have been inspired by the talk theories. They conduct related classroom practices, literature discussions (also called book clubs and literature circles), to help students explore the text as well as their own thinking (Carrison & Ernst-Slavit, 2005; Dickinson, 1995; Hill, Johnson, & Schlick Noe, 1995; Pierce & Gilles, 1993; Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996; Triplett & Buchanan, 2005).

Another effective way to respond to literature is through writing. Theorists such as Britton (1975), Elbow (1973/1998), and later Bean (2001) emphasize the importance of involving students in expressive writing so that they can think on writing. Inspired by the writing theories, educators conduct research to examine the application of students' reading journals. The findings show that students' reading journals provide students an arena to reflect and share their thoughts about the reading (Atwell, 1987; Gammill, 2006; Golden & Handloff, 1992; Probst, 1992b; Roman-Perez, 2003)

Critical Literacy

Expanding on Rosenblatt's reader response theory, many of today's reading educators explore the critical stances from which students read (Garber, 1995; Luke & Freebody, 1999; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). They think that when reader response strategies are utilized to activate "social awareness, social adjustment, social responsibility and personal responsibility," students "think with greater levels of

complexity” (Ismail, 2007, p. 17). In the following section, I discuss critical literacy theories and their pedagogical implications.

Theories

Shor (1997) describes critical literacy as “words rethinking worlds, self dissenting in society” since critical literacy challenges the status quo in order to “discover alternative paths for social and self-development” (Introduction section, para. 2).

Cervetti, Pardales, and Damico (2001) also stress that critical literacy reading is “an act of coming to know the world (as well as the word) and a means to social transformation” (p. 173). They write, “Textual meaning is understood in the context of social, historic, and power relations, not solely as the product or intention of an author” (Critical Literacy Approaches section, para. 1). Although definitions of critical literacy vary (Green, 2001), in the following discussion, I adopt the perspective that the aim of critical literacy is to cultivate students’ critical thinking so that they can question power, knowledge, and experiences in their world, accept different perspectives, become aware of social issues, and carry out actual actions (Freire, 1970/2006; Luke & Freebody, 1997; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

One major theorist that inspires critical literacy theories is Dewey. In his book, *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (2005) defines democracy as “a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 101). Dewey holds that democracy requires each individual to participate “in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own” (p. 101). In the end there will be the breaking down of the barriers of class, race, and national territory so that men will perceive “the full import of their activity” (p. 101).

Two characteristics mark the prevalence of democracy: mutual interests and continuous change in social habit (p. 100). Consequently, education in democracy, in Dewey's standpoint, must give individuals "a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder" (p. 115).

Another primary influence on critical literacy is the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and ex-exile, who taught illiterate Brazilian peasants how to read and write so that they could "participate in the construction of a Brazil where they would be responsible for their own destiny and where colonialism would be overcome" (Gadotti, 1994, p. 15).

In the book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970/2006) presents his observation of the dehumanization in the real world. He perceives that the oppressors employ various schemes, such as conquest, division, manipulation, and cultural invasion, etc. (pp.138-167), to dehumanize the oppressed while the oppressed, confined by their "fear of freedom" (p. 46), are unable to overthrow the status quo. Freire argues that the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed is to "liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" (p. 44). The measure of achieving that goal, as Freire suggests, is to involve reflection and action upon the world "in order to transform it" (p. 51).

Freire uses the term, "*conscientização*" (referring to "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality") (translator's note, p. 35) to manifest that it takes both action and reflection to "name the world" and therefore to exist humanly (p. 88). Gadotti (1994) gives further explanation on Freire's idea of conscientization. He writes,

Conscientization is a word that is used by Freire (and distorted by many people) to show the relationship that should exist between thinking and acting. A person (or better, a group of people) who become conscientized (without forgetting that no one conscientizes anyone else, but that people are conscientized mutually, through their daily work), is able to discover the reason why things are the way they are. The discovery should be accompanied by a transformation action (p. 167).

Gadotti (1994) explicates Freire's concept by indicating that one possible way to educate people in the process of conscientization is through critical dialogue (p. 49). In a vertical dialogue, the person who is educated only needs to listen and obey but is prevented from thinking (p. 50). Nonetheless, Freire (1970/2006) proposes the horizontal dialogue, which requires critical thinking and is also capable of generating critical thinking. He concludes, "Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (p. 93).

With his thesis on the relationship between education and the process of humanization, Freire characterizes two opposing conceptions of education: the banking education and problem-posing education (Gadotti, 1994, p. 52). Banking education suggests that education becomes an act of depositing: The students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat, as if they were the "depositories," while the teachers are like the "depositors," who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 72). Freire objects to this teacher-student contradiction. He proposes that education must occur when both teachers and students have "co-intent on reality," that is, they both unveil the reality, come to know it critically,

and thereby co-recreate the knowledge through common reflection and action (p. 69).

Therefore, Freire suggests problem-posing education, which stops transforming students into receiving objects and regards dialogue as “indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality” (p. 83). In addition, it challenges students to reflect on the problems relating to themselves “in the world and with the world” (p. 81).

In his Introduction to Freire and Macedo’s *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, Giroux (1987) concurs with Gramsci’s conception that literacy is a double-edged sword: It can be “wielded for the purpose of self and social empowerment or for the perpetuation of relations of repression and domination” (p. 2). Giroux argues that literacy should be approached “as a necessary foundation for cultural action for freedom” (p. 7) and should be able to assert men’s and women’s right and responsibility to “reclaim their voice, history, and future” (p. 11). Accordingly, Giroux believes that a critical pedagogy should develop around a politics of difference, which does not celebrate plurality only but rather tries to “dignify plurality through efforts to unify different voices by recalling sufferings and overcoming the conditions which cause them” (p. 21).

Growing up in a Jewish working-class neighborhood, Shor, as a minority reared in a low-income family, experienced the feeling of inferiority in his school years. He learned that “The suit’s word was power and law. Our kid’s word vanished” (1997, p. 3). He thus advocates that words in classrooms should be “nonpartisan” (p. 4) and the “savage inequalities” in this society should be stopped by beginning with a critical literacy curriculum in school (p. 7). He believes in literacy for equity and he holds that the aim of literacy instruction is to “help develop students as critically thinking citizens who use language to question knowledge, experience, and power in society” (p. 8). In his

book, *Empowering Education*, Shor (1992) emphasizes the importance of empowering students. Nonetheless, by empowerment Shor does not mean that students can do whatever they like in the classroom. The learning process, while remaining student-centered, has to be negotiated and requires leadership by the “teacher and mutual teacher-student authority” (p. 16). And the door to empowerment, as Shor argues, is participation. Here, Shor echoes Dewey’s conception that to be a thinking citizen in a democracy, a person has to “take part in making meaning, articulating purposes, carrying out plans, and evaluating results” (p. 18). Shor concludes that not until students experience “lively participation, mutual authority, and meaningful work” can they truly perform and cease to be learners of low motivation (p. 21).

Critical literacy theorists have advocated cultivating students’ critical thinking. Students are encouraged to read from a critical stance. When reading from critical stance, readers “raise questions about whose voices are represented, whose voices are missing and who gains and who loses by the reading of a text,” so that they will not be manipulated by the texts (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, p. 53). Luke and Freebody (1999), two Australian educators, developed the four resources model of reading in order to provide “alternative ways of structuring practices around texts to address new cultural and economic contexts and new forms of practice and identity” (Drawing on History section, para. 10). The four resources model includes:

1. “Code breaker (coding competence),” which means breaking the code of written texts by recognizing and using fundamental features such as spelling and structural conventions;

2. “Meaning maker (semantic competence),” which refers to understanding and composing meaningful texts;
3. “Text user (pragmatic competence),” which means using texts by knowing about and reflecting upon their different cultural and social functions;
4. “Text critic (critical competence),” which is critically analyzing and transforming texts by realizing that texts represent particular points of view while silencing others (Mapping the Dimensions section, para. 4).

Critical literacy emphasizes showing respect and appreciation to multiple perspectives and diverse culture identities. In her essay, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” Pratt (2000) defines the contact zone as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (p. 575). She describes two phenomena of the contact zone. One is called “autoethnographic text,” meaning “a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” (p. 576). The other is referred to as “transculturation,” describing that “members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture” (p. 576). Pratt gives an example of her one multi-culture class, in which the students were asked to read wide-ranged texts standing in specific historical relationships to them. She describes that all the students in the class had the experience of hearing their culture discussed and objectified in ways that brought them the sense of glory as well as the sense of shame. The students experienced the contact zone as a place generating misunderstanding and hurt but also as an arena inspiring “exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom” (p. 586). Literacy activities like this require students “to take critical posture toward their own

language uses as well as the discourses dominating school and society” (Shor, 1997, p. 19). In the end of her essay, Pratt proposes a conception of "safe houses" (p. 586). She concludes that in the pedagogy educators should offer “social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings, temporary protection from legacies of oppression” (p. 586).

Critical literacy educators see the significance of developing critical thinking and cultivating multiple perspectives in reading and writing. They are also aware of the importance of promoting transformation and action. The following section discusses the research and classroom applications.

Pedagogical Implications

In their book, *Reading and Writing for Social Action*, Bomer and Bomer (2001) make explicit suggestions about what and how literacy teachers can teach. They propose that teachers should teach “for social action,” teach “the language of democratic classrooms,” introduce “the practice of cultural critique,” and conduct themselves as “political agents” (pp. 18-19). They self-reflect that many times they have failed to “help students analyze the social and cultural assumptions in texts they read and write or in the world in which they live.” Sometimes they have “not been open enough with students about the political reasons” for their teaching. Sometimes they have not helped students “think about classroom life in terms of democracy.” Often they have not worked enough to encourage students to “respond to social realities or to hand the process of critique and action” over to them (p. 5). Nevertheless, with the guidelines provided in their book,

Bomer and Bomer believe that teachers and students will be more likely to “live together in the midst of difficulty and diversity” (p. 9).

Many literacy teachers conduct critical literature discussions in their classrooms. They choose literacy texts of social justice themes or multicultural perspectives. Their aim is to help students “understand the extent to which their own lives and fates are tightly tied to those of powerless and victimized groups in society” (Banks, 2003). In his classroom research, Hunsberger (2007) echoes Giroux’s idea of empowering the silenced. He became aware that his minority students could not find themselves in those stories he used to read aloud to them. He also acknowledges that often minority students are silenced by the school literacy practices orchestrated by their classroom teachers (p. 422). Hunsberger seeks the “connectedness” of literature to his students (p. 421). He believes that “connectedness-- a stronger link between what children learn and what they live, harnessed in the classroom in order to develop critical consciousness—is accomplished through culturally relevant teaching” (p. 422). When the seventh-grade minority students read *The Black Snowman* (Mendez, 1991), Hunsberger observed that students found the lesson embracing certain realities about poverty that many of them participated in a daily basis, and it provided them with a communal identity (p. 423).

Reading culturally relevant literature empowers students as they are able to see their images and stories represented in the texts. On the other hand, reading literary works that inspire democratic thinking also benefits students. Challenged by Dewey’s notion that democracy should go beyond a noun and should be viewed, instead, as a “civic action and critical inquiry in the daily lives of people” (p. 28), Wolk (2004) conducted a study by reading aloud picture books to deprived urban sixth-grade students.

He perceives that many current picture books are “a forceful resource for exploring issues of democracy” (p. 27). Moreover, “because of their brevity, picture books can be read and discussed in one sitting, bringing simplicity and wholeness to a literacy experience” (p. 27). The contents of such picture books initiated students’ talk about democracy and issues such as racism. As a result, Wolk observed that the students’ voices were heard, “connecting the book to their lives and struggling with complex questions;” moreover, they also spoke about, albeit unknowingly, their own stereotypes and prejudices” (p. 27). Wolk recognizes that we are at a time when democratic ideals are “so often flouted in political rhetoric” (p. 27). Nonetheless, “providing opportunities for children to not only understand more inclusive and creative visions of democracy but to make authentic connections with their lives is a central purpose for engaging in democratic classroom conversation” (p. 31). Wolk concludes that “picture books can be the catalysts for children to make personal connections to democracy as a verb” (p. 31).

In their study, Van Sluys, Legan, Laman, and Lewison (2005), discover that students, when engaged in literature discussions, are not necessarily able to critically examine and approach texts. In a six-week intensive course, Van Sluys (et al.) observed the preservice teachers discuss within a small group about a wide array of social issues texts. They noticed that the students started with text-based responses and were conscious of “doing school right” (p. 18). It took some time for the students to make personal connections, but they did not seem to come up with critical responses. Based on this observation, Van Sluys (et al.) conclude that social issues texts used alone are not enough to move students into a critical stance during discussions. Students will need assigned reading time in class, frequent opportunities over time to engage in dialogues

with others, and teachers' demonstrations of critical practice to make critical thinking happen (p. 20).

Möller (2002) indicates the importance of teachers' roles. She argues that sometimes "active discussions can foster stereotyping, silencing, or other destructive behaviors" (p. 468). For that reason, teachers should participate in different levels in students' discussions about social and personal justice. Sometimes teachers can be attentive listeners when the students do not need them. On other occasions, they should participate as fellow readers. Most importantly, they can participate to provide encouragement for student contributions. This is especially crucial when members risk initiating discussions on areas of social justice that clashes with the majority's viewpoint (p. 471). Moreover, teachers can participate to "clarify unfamiliar events or ways of thinking" (p. 472), and to "support and comfort students who reveal their pain and suffering" (p. 473). Möller realizes that involving her students in critical thinking and discussions helps them "push each other to greater awareness of specific injustices" (p. 474). However, she also sees that at times her students "voice conflicting ideas" and "reveal stereotypical and racist views" (p. 474). She concludes that "students need teacher demonstration, instruction, and support to break out of socialized patterns and their own racist beliefs or discriminatory stereotypes" (p. 476). Teachers must trust the literature, students, and themselves. They especially need to trust themselves enough to risk situations that require "quick decisions" but to offer "no easy answers or even certainty as to the best course of action" (p. 476).

Reading literary texts that inspire critical thinking is a way to involve students to read the word and also to read the world. On the other hand, Greco (1992) believes that

having her senior students participate in the community service is another way to help them read the world. She holds that a community service project that “structures opportunities for students to engage in literacy struggles in the real world” (p. 83). Greco’s students volunteered to read aloud to children in the urban elementary schools and day-care centers. By reading the students’ journal reflections, Greco noticed that her students learned to resolve, through means of their own discovery, the difficulties that they encountered when reading aloud to the children (p. 84). More importantly, by interacting with others in their community, her students “removed social barriers and made crucial decisions that gave them confidence in themselves as effective participants in their community” (p. 83). Greco writes, “Through their involvement, they have begun to form a ‘critical posture’ and discovered in small ways the rewards of civic participation. They have become empowered as citizens who know that they can be active agents of change in their community” (p. 85).

Summary of Critical Literacy

In this section I reviewed critical literacy. Dewey (2005) is one of the main figures that inspire critical literacy theory who believes that education should prepare students for life in this world, and curriculum which equips students with knowledge of democracy is essential. Another important figure, Freire (1970/2006), stresses the importance of humanizing the oppressed and he believes that the effective way to achieve that goal is through problem-posing education. Freire, along with other influential critical literacy theorists, such as Luke and Freebody (1999), Shor (1997), and Giroux (1987), challenges literacy educators to ponder the value of teaching students about social awareness and diversity and the ability to question knowledge and experiences. Related

studies have been conducted and the findings show that through critical discussions of reading texts, teachers can help students analyze the social and cultural assumptions in texts and in the world they live (Bomer & Bomer, 2001; Hunsberger, 2007; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004; Möller, 2002; Wolk, 2004). Consequently, students learn to read the word as well as the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

New Literacies

Some researchers have viewed critical literacy as a new form of literacy. In the following section, I discuss the basic conceptions of New Literacies, which “represent the change occurring as new technologies integrate with literacy” (Franklin-Matkowski, 2007). I particularly focus on one format of New Literacies, the blog, and its implications in literacy education.

Understanding New Literacies

According to the statistics, in 1990, only a few academics had heard of the Internet. Yet in 2005, the total number of adults who had access to the Internet at work or at home reached up to 172 million. Compared to the number in 1997 (46 million), the rate of Internet penetration in households and workplace is rapidly increasing (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005), and it will continue to grow. Never has any new invention “shot from obscurity to global fame” in such a rapid way (Cairncross, 2001, p. 75).

The result of the pervasive and rapid appearance of the Internet is that people’s lives have changed, so have the ways students communicate and learn. Researchers recognize that today’s K-12 students have never experienced a world without computer-based technologies (Alexander & Fox, 2004). The summary report provided by The

Kaiser Family Foundation (2005) shows that American young people (aged eight to eighteen) spend more than twice as much time on the computer in 2005 than they did in 1999, and the proportion of children using the computer more than an hour a day has increased from 15% to 28% during that time (p. 38). In fact, 74% of young people live in homes with Internet access, and 20% of young people have bedrooms containing Internet access (p. 10). Moreover, the same summary reports that 66% of young people use the Internet to engage in instant messaging, 64% to download music, 50% to look for health information online, 48% to listen to the radio through the Internet, 38% to buy something online, and 32% to create a personal Web site or Web page (p. 31). It is apparent that today's young people live a very different kind of life than their adult teachers did.

Understanding that technologies “provide rich and flexible media for representing what students know and what they are learning” (Jonassen, Howland, Moore, & Marra, 2003, p. 11), teachers make efforts to integrate technologies into their instruction. They produce classroom websites to upload newsletters, provide students with external learning links, and create a publishing arena (Baker, 2007). They involve students in diverse Internet projects, such as the Fall Poetry Project, Flat Stanley Project, An Apple Day, and so on. (Karchmer, Mallette, Kara-Soteriou, & Leu, 2005). They also create cross-cultural online communication opportunities for students to learn language as well as culture. For example, Korycinski (2001) registered his students for teacher-monitored email accounts through epals.com, so the students could exchange emails with European students and learn about Europe first hand. Hanna & de Nooy (2003) invited their students of French to post messages on a French electronic forum, the le Monde, so that the students could learn the language and the culture via authentic communication.

Lu, Gilles, and Zhang (2005) involved two groups of pre-service teachers (respectively from the U.S. and China) in cross-cultural conversation and understanding by inviting the students to post on the Blackboard. Zha, Kelly, Park, and Fitzgerald (2006) involved ESL students from seven elementary public schools to discuss in an electronic discussion board hosted on the school system's server. Carico and Logan (2004) used three different mediums (email, discussion board, and the MOO, a real-time online chatting system) to engage their students in book discussion. The Internet, along with other ICTs (Information and Communication Technology), has become a new context for literacy and learning. Furthermore, it has transformed the nature of reading, writing, and communicating (Baker, 2001; Karchmer, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Leu, Leu, & Coiro, 2004a).

Bruce (1997) describes educators' divergent stances toward technology as neutrality, opposition, utilitarian, skeptical, transformational, aesthetic, and transactional. According to Bruce, the educators adopting a transactional stance toward technology don't believe that technology is a separate, autonomous realm serving to distance us from the concrete reality of literacy (p. 302). Neither is technology viewed as an optional add-on to the definition of the form of literacy (p. 303). Rather, technology is "part of the continual reconstruction of literacies" (p. 303). It does not "oppose, replace, enhance, or otherwise stand apart from literacy;" it is part and parcel of literacy (p. 307).

Taking the transactional stance toward literacy, educational researchers see the significant meaning in seeking an understanding of literacy evolution as the Internet technology evolves. Reading and writing with the Internet have been under investigation. Coiro and Dobler (2007) hold that reading an Internet text is more challenging than

reading a printed text, since when reading the former, readers may encounter “distracting advertisements, inconsistent text structures, broken links, and access to an infinite amount of information completely unrelated to their intended reading purposes” (p. 220). As for writing, Karchmer (2001) indicates that computer use among K-12 students has affected writing over the past several years. Students do not necessarily go through the brainstorm, draft, revise, edit (Graves, 1983) procedure when they write with the Internet. Moreover, electronic symbols are used to represent meaning in text.

Several theorists argue that the foundational literacies, although remaining important, will be insufficient if students are to effectively and efficiently utilize the Internet and other ICTs (Coiro, 2003; Kinzer, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Leu, et al., 2004a). They believe that students need to acquire new literacies to be fully considered literate today. New literacies refer to the skills and strategies necessary to read, think critically, and communicate via the Internet (Leu, et al., 2004a). Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, and Gammack (2004b) define new literacies in this fashion:

The new literacies of the Internet and other ICTs include the skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies and contexts that continuously emerge in our world and influence all areas of our personal and professional lives. (p. 1572).

They, along with others, argue that these new literacies allow students to use the Internet and other ICTs to 1) identify important questions, 2) navigate information networks to locate relevant information, 3) critically evaluate information for pertinence and accuracy, 4) synthesize information, and 5) communicate the solutions to others with appropriate

sign systems. They remind teachers that these new literacies, instead of replacing foundational literacies, are actually building upon them (Baker, 2007; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Leu et al., 2004a).

The emergence of the Internet as an important new information and communication tool demands that “educators think in new ways about what it means to become literate and how to provide effective literacy instruction for their students” (Karchmer, Mallette, Kara-Soteriou, & Leu, 2005, p. vi). It is essential that educators form new literacies perspectives and adapt the curriculum so as to prepare students with new literacy skills and strategies in order to enable them to “fully participate in our society and lead productive personal, civic, and work lives” (Leu, et al. 2004a). The following section discusses one popular implementation of New Literacies--the blogs.

The Blogs

The original definition of blogs (shorthand for Web logs) is that they are “personal online journals that serve to capture thoughts and comments and post them to a public Web site for others to read and respond” (EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, Scenario section, 2005, para. 1). I summarize some specific features of blogs here:

1. Entries can include text, hyperlinks, images, or multimedia.
2. Visitors can read postings, submit comments, find blog entries by date, and search the site by keyword.
3. Most blogs allow visitors to subscribe using an RSS feed or another service.
4. Effective blogs tend to be updated on a regular basis.

5. 'Trackback' notifies bloggers when one of their posts is referenced by another blog, making it possible to determine the popularity of a post (EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, 2005, Scenario section, para. 4).
6. Permalinks allow link backs to a single posting in a blog, whereby specific references can be made to comments by bloggers (Brady, 2005).

As researchers point out, blogs became noticeable around the 9/11 tragedy, when many people found the blog a useful means of sharing their thoughts (Brady, 2005).

Therefore, the significance of blogs is that they “engage people in knowledge sharing, reflection, and debate, and they often attract a large and dedicated readership”

(EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, 2005, Why Is It section, para. 1). In addition, blogs can be created and maintained easily. This means that “open discussions can be established almost immediately” (Oravec, 2003, p. 227). It is also economical since free or “low-cost hosting facilities” are provided online (Oravec, 2003, p. 227). As a result, blogs “foster the growth of communities” and allow “far-reaching discussions within the communities” (EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, Why Is It section, para. 2, 2005).

Estimates suggest as many as 50 million people are now blogging (EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, 2005, Where Is It section, para. 1). Furthermore, a recent Pew Internet study reports that 19% of online youth aged 12-17 have created their own blogs. That is approximately four million people. In addition, 38% of all American online teens, or about 8 million young people, say they read blogs (Lanhart & Madden, 2005, Summary of Findings section, para. 2). In view of that, educators have become aware of the great potentials of blogs. A brief overview of the various educators' responses is presented as follows:

1. Blogs offer an environment where learning is not limited to the classroom. It is easy for teachers to implement. Ease-of-use and anytime-anywhere access make blogs an excellent extension for students learning (Huffaker, 2005).
2. Blogs can provide “a forum for discussion that goes beyond coursework to include culture, politics, and other areas of personal exploration.” (EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, 2005, What Are the Implications section, para. 2).
3. Blogs can offer another mechanism for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and acquisition. Students can therefore learn as much from each other as from instructors or textbooks (EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, 2005, p. iii).
4. Constructing blogs “can be of aid in motivating students to write and do research over an extended period of time, giving them a platform from which to analyze the various Internet materials they obtain both independently and in the course of their classroom studies” (Oravec, 2003, p. 225).

A great deal of research has been conducted to explore the application of the blogs in education. The following section discusses the pedagogical implications of using blogs in reading and writing education.

Pedagogical Implications

Educators, through their studies, confirm that blogs promote reading and writing (Franklin, 2006; Huffaker, 2005; Kennedy, 2003; Oravec, 2003). They indicate that blogs serve as publishing tools. Students post their work for others to appreciate, and writing for a real audience motivates them and engages them. In addition, blogs create online communities where students are invited to read and reflect on published work. When posting and commenting, students practice writing. They also revisit the texts and

gain deeper understanding of them. Moreover, blogs encourage further reading since the hyperlinks offered by bloggers can initiate voluntary surfing on the Internet (Krashen, 2007).

Blogging has its downside. Educators are also concerned that the knowledge obtained through the blogs--although it is abundant and widely shared--is no longer secure. They question that often the information is not edited by others except the blogger; thus the information can be immediate yet not authentic (Richardson & Mancabelli, 2001). In addition, educators are alarmed with the incorrect or inappropriate usage of language prevalent on blogs. The spelling errors and short form of words (e.g. lol stands for laugh out loud) are considered by some educators inadequate in terms of the language rules (Weinstock, 2006).

Still, many other educators see the merits of integrating the blog with their curriculum. Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, and Goldstone (2006) indicate that with the availability of Internet-connected computers in schools, classrooms are “the best places for students to acquire the new literacy skills they will need for participation in the workplaces of the 21st century” (p. 716). In view of this, they suggest five ways to bring the Internet into a literature program, which include “1) explore stories on the Web; 2) invite students to become authors on the Web; 3) participate in virtual book clubs; 4) collaborate on Internet projects; 5) add informational websites to [the] study of literature” (p. 717). By virtual book clubs, Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone refer to several forums (such as ePals Book Club, Book Raps, and The Spaghetti Book Club) set up for students to exchange ideas about books on discussion boards. They conclude that when teachers open the door for students to acquire new literacies for reading, writing,

communicating, and collaboration online, they are helping students become “fully literate” in an “information-centered world” (p. 727).

In addition to enhancing reading, the blogs also help support writing. Armstrong and Retterer (2004) investigate using personal blogs to encourage writing. In their study, the researchers invited foreign language learners in Spanish to keep their own weblogs and to participate in a class weblog. In the whole class weblog the students created a mini-novel, with each one student adding details as the story progressed. The goal of creating weblogs was to help the students become better communicators in Spanish. It turned out that 100% of the students reported that they felt more confident in their ability to manipulate verb forms in Spanish, and 69% believed that they wrote more because they could submit their assignments via the Internet. Armstrong and Retterer conclude that the blog served as a tool to provide students with “more context in which to learn the second language.” They write, “If they spent too much time on the technical aspect of the course, then we would have failed in our mission to provide them with an enriching environment in which to learn” (Conclusion section, para. 2).

Bloch (2007) also examines integrating blogging into an L2 composition course. Block assigned his students to post on the class blog. By examining closely one case student’s posting, he realized that while blogging was still a classroom assignment, the implementation of blogging could foster the same kinds of discussions found in the blogosphere (Conclusion section, para. 4). As he allowed students to write in an informal manner without concern for grammatical correctness, the case student, along with his classmates, became bloggers who could contribute to the development of ideas. Block writes, “It is clear that by becoming bloggers, they increased the amount of time they

spent writing, reading, and generating ideas as well as demonstrating a variety of complex rhetorical strategies” (Conclusion section, para. 4). Bloch concludes that for ESL students, whose literacy has been “interrupted,” the use of blogging “can be a valuable pedagogical tool” (Conclusion, para. 4) and should be valued as a “literacy act” (Conclusion section, para. 8).

Two researchers have explored using blogs to discuss literature. West (2008) invited her eleventh-grade students to create their own literature-response blogs. The students read, posted, and commented on their own and each other’s blogs while reading literary works. Then West examined students’ blog entries by employing critical discourse analysis method. She identified two major roles students played in this learning experience: “serious literature students” and “Web-literate communicators” (p. 596). The “serious literature students” role helped students stay “normative” as they reflected all English skills in their entries, such as “evaluating characters, defending theories, and describing the process by which they read” (p. 587). On the other hand, students abandoned almost all basic rules of English usage, being “web-literate communicators” (p. 597). The students, as West noticed, based on their knowledge of “the digital nature of current youth culture,” used “what they know of other discourses to generate new ideas about literature and new ways of communicating their ideas to their peers” (p. 597).

In her unpublished dissertation study, Franklin-Matkowski (2007) examines ninth-graders’ blogging about books. Students used the blogs, set particularly for this activity, to post their thinking as they read classic thought-provoking novels, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1988). The classroom teacher posted on the blog and explained

to the students the focus for each class period (p. 95), while the students read independently and posted on the blogs at their own pace. Then Franklin-Matkowski analyzed students' blog entries for "writing, specifically fluency and voice, levels of comprehension, and thinking" (p. ix). The following are her findings:

The data suggested that students' fluency, voice, and confidence increased.

Students valued collaboration and felt that the blog created community. Students generated their own responses to the literature and made text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections. Students moved toward higher levels of comprehension. In addition, students demonstrated a variety of verbal and visual thinking strategies (p. ix).

Summary of New Literacies

In this section I reviewed the literature of New Literacies. With the prevalence of new technology, the Internet, literacy teachers see an alternative yet important way to involve students in learning and communication. Holding the transactional stance toward the new technology (Bruce, 1997), many literacy educators consider it indispensable to engage students in online reading and writing so that students can be "fully literate" (Leu, et al. 2004a) in the technology-driven society. New Literacies has become a new focus of literacy research (Baker, 2001; Karchmer, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Leu, Leu, & Coiro, 2004a). One novel medium for online communication particularly, the blog, is receiving increasing attention.

Educators have implicated the blog in their classroom practices in various ways because of its particular characteristics, such as providing a learning environment without time and geographic boundaries, inviting peer collaboration, and encouraging extended

reading and writing. Some research has been conducted to examine how the blog promote reading and writing (Armstrong & Retterer, 2004; Bloch, 2007; Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006; Franklin-Matkowski, 2007; West, 2008). Their findings suggest that integrating the blog in the literacy curriculum is promising.

Conclusion

The socio-cultural perspective in learning is the theoretical lens which guided my study. With the understanding that students learn in social environments and through social interactions, I conducted my study by inviting two groups of students to have online conversations with each other. As both groups were involved in literature discussions, reviews on responses to literature are important. In addition to the reader response theories, I discussed two significant ways to respond to literature, talking and writing. Since the students were invited to “write” on the computer, they enjoyed the expressive writing experiences while reflecting on their reading. The findings therefore echoed the prevalent realization that writing enhances and extends reading.

I then reviewed the theory of critical literacy. I discussed studies of classroom practices which engage students in critical thinking of the self, the text, and the world. In my study I employed picture books with themes of multiculturalism and social justice as springboards to invite students’ deep thinking and critical conversations. Students were also offered the opportunity to authentically communicate with people of another culture. The findings add to the vast body of knowledge about the pedagogical implication of critical literacy.

My last area reviewed the literature of New Literacies. I discussed the theories of New Literacies and then I focused on one important pedagogical feature, the blog.

Researchers investigate the implication of blogging in reading instruction (Castek et al., 2006), writing instruction (Armstrong & Retterer, 2004), and ESL instruction (Block, 2007). Much more research is undoubtedly underway to explore the potential benefits of integrating the blogs in the literacy curriculum. Nevertheless, few of them address the use of the blogs in literature discussion. Franklin-Matkowski's (2007) and West's (2008) studies are recent and inspiring. Building on their findings, more questions need to be asked in order to find out more about how the blogs can be used to initiate and support literature response. What are the benefits of using the blogs to serve as the arena for students to conduct literature discussions? What are the limits? What are students' reading and writing experiences in this particular blogosphere? What is the nature of social interaction in this blogging-learning activity? What roles do culture and age factors play? All these questions help guide this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In September 2006 through May 2007, I conducted a pilot study, examining two groups of students' online literature discussions. Seven American fifth graders and ten Taiwanese tenth graders were invited to blog about carefully chosen picture books. In the pilot study I witnessed productive discussions occurring among the students, which helped the students become stronger readers, writers, and more independent thinkers. The students were recommended by their school teachers to take part in the pilot study, and therefore most of them were in the gifted program, not representative for most population of students. In addition, certain technical difficulties occurred. The different school year calendars shortened the time for data collection, and the lack of literacy support from the Taiwan school led to certain students' hesitance to post. I recognized the limits of my pilot study and based on the understandings, I created a new research design.

In September 2007, I began this inquiry by involving a fifth-grade American group and a tenth-grade Taiwanese group in a blogging activity. The purpose of the study was to describe and analyze the nature of the cross-cultural and cross-age online literature discussion. In order to gain in-depth understandings, I conducted a qualitative case study by following four students' literacy and blogging experiences occurring in this context. In this chapter, I will describe the methodological framework and the research questions that guided me throughout the study, the data collection and data analysis I conducted, and the trustworthiness and limitations of the study.

Questions for the Study

My research questions stemmed from the insights I gained from previous teaching experiences, my academic understandings throughout the doctoral program, and the findings from my pilot study. My study was guided by the following broad question:

What is the nature of students' reading and writing experiences when they are involved in a cross-cultural and cross-age online literature discussion activity?

The following sub-questions provided possible avenues to gain that understanding:

1. What is the nature of the social context of this activity?
2. What are the characteristics of students' online discussions in this social context?
3. What are the students' experiences and attitudes toward reading multicultural picture books and picture books with social-justice themes?

With the data I collected from multiple sources, and by using the constant comparative method and critical discourse analysis models, I found answers to the research questions.

Methodological Framework

Creswell (2007) indicates that the procedures for conducting research evolve from a researcher's philosophical and theoretical stances (p. 2). Bogdan & Biklen (2007) also state that the way we look at the world, the assumptions we have about what is important and what makes the world work, guides researchers as their theoretical orientation (p. 24). As a researcher, when asking the ontological question "What is the nature of reality?" I am influenced by the constructivist paradigm. According to Hatch (2002), constructivists assume "a world in which universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality" (p. 15). Therefore, I believe that multiple realities exist and they are inherently unique because "they are

constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points” (p. 15). Epistemologically--when asking such questions as what can be known and what is the relationship of the knower to what is to be known (Hatch, 2002, p. 11)—this study was a co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the participants. The research goal was to co-construct an understanding of how students’ literacy experiences were affected when they were involved in online literature discussions.

The methodology that guided this study of the participants’ experiences with literacy within an online discussion context was based on qualitative research methods. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) offer one definition of qualitative research. They write:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in the natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 3).

As a qualitative researcher, I was guided by certain tenets of qualitative inquiry and acknowledged that they impacted the nature of my study. They are described as follows:

- 1) “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Therefore, my study meditates the

meaning embedded in the participants' experiences through my perceptions.

Accordingly, tacit (intuitive, felt) knowledge in addition to propositional knowledge (knowledge expressible in language form) are used to appreciate the nuances of the multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40).

- 2) Qualitative researchers are the primary instrument for gathering data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). In other words, I believe that the human instrument was capable of grasping and evaluating the meaning of the differential interaction among the research instruments and respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39).
- 3) Qualitative methods of gathering data are used since they are able to “expose more directly the nature of the transaction between investigator and respondent” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40).
- 4) “Qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). The process of my data analysis is inductive rather than deductive, since I believe that the “multiple realities” were to be identified in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40). Therefore, I work “back and forth between the themes and the database” and organize them into “increasingly more abstract units” until they establish “a comprehensive set of themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 38).
- 5) As qualitative research focuses on “process, meaning, and understanding,” the product of my research, accordingly, is “richly descriptive” (Merriam, 1998, p. 8). I give detailed description of my understanding of the phenomenon. I also include the participants' own words and direct citations from documents, such as blog entries and email exchanges, to support the findings.

- 6) In addition, I employ purposive sampling to increase the range of data exposed and to “uncover the multiple realities” as much as possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40).
- 7) The qualitative research design can be emergent. Therefore, in my study, I modify certain elements of design to some extent rather than remain completely constructed as “a priori” (Hatch, 2002, p. 10). I also restate and change the orders of my sub-questions in order to address the research more specifically when obtaining the information. I started by asking the three sub-questions: 1) What are the students’ experiences and attitudes toward reading multicultural picture books and picture books with social-justice themes? 2) What is the nature of the students’ online discussions about those books? 3) What are the characteristics of the social interactions among the students contextualized in this activity? And I modified them to the three sub-questions I listed on the previous page.
- 8) I negotiate the outcome meanings and interpretations with the participants for the purpose of credibility. The negotiation of outcomes was a continuous process that went on “informally” (e.g. as the participants drew inferences from the activity) and “formally” (e.g. as the researcher constructed a final interview) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 213).

I draw from one qualitative research tradition, case study, to conceptualize this inquiry. Stake (1995) defines case study as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Merriam (1998) also indicates that “a case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. She argues that “an

individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community” can all be viewed as a case (p. 19). And she states, “The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (p. 19).

I am particularly interested in seeking an in-depth understanding and detailed examination of “one particular event” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 59), that is, two groups of students (respectively from the U.S. and Taiwan) discussing literature via blogging. Therefore, I conducted my research as a case study. The following characteristics of case study were the guidelines of my inquiry (Creswell, 2007, p. 78-79):

- 1) The focus of my study is developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case.
- 2) The type of problem best studied for design was providing an in-depth understanding of this case.
- 3) The data collection focuses on using multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, blog entries, and informal communications.
- 4) The data analysis strategies emphasize analyzing data through description of the case and themes of the case.
- 5) The written report is developing a detailed analysis of this single case.

My role as a case researcher is an interpreter, who connected her study with known things and found ways to “make those connections comprehensible to others” (Stake, 1995, p. 97). Therefore, a holistic and detailed description (thick description) and analysis of the case is essential. In addition, my role as a case researcher is an evaluator, who knows “the strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures” of her study (Stake, 1995, p. 96). My role as a case researcher is also that of constructivist. The aim of my study is not to ‘discover’ the external reality. Rather, it is, through means such as

interviewing and interpreting, to collaboratively ‘construct’ with my participants a clearer experiential reality and a more sophisticated rational reality—the latter refers to “a universe of integrated interpretations” that can “withstand disciplined skepticism” (Stake, 1995, p. 101).

As a result, this qualitative case study was particularistic (by focusing on a particular event), descriptive (by coming up with an end product which is a “rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study” (p. 29)), and heuristic (with the intention to “illuminate” understanding of the phenomenon under study) (Merriam, 1998, p. 30).

Research Design

Research Settings

The main interaction among the participants occurred on the blog setting created particularly for the purpose of this study. The host of the blog is Blogger.com (<https://www.blogger.com/start>), launched in 1999 and now a branch in Google.com. Blogger.com offers free Internet space for people to “have their own voice on the web” and to organize “the world's information from the personal perspective.” The blog allows asynchronous online activities such as publishing, commenting, and uploading pictures and video clips to share with viewers. A members-only restriction was put on the blog by the administrator (me), so that only participants of the study could post. The students were therefore protected and the data source, namely the blog entries, was also maintained intact. During the getting-to-know-you phase of the study, a whole-class blog was created so that the students could post self-introductions, exchange greetings, and share interests (See Data Collection section for timeline.). As the primary data collection began, the students were divided into two blog groups, and two more blogs were created

accordingly in order to have a smaller number of participants post on each blog. In each blog group, the numbers of the students from the U.S. and in Taiwan were approximately equivalent. Their reading and writing abilities were also taken into consideration so that in each group the numbers of strong and weak learners were remained approximately equal (See Appendix A for the list of participating students). In addition to the blog, the study also involved a school setting in the U.S. and Taiwan. Availability was the main reason that I chose these two schools since I could get easy access to both schools.

The U.S. elementary school is located in a Midwest city, population about 80,000. The city's school district has 19 elementary schools. The elementary school chosen to be the location of the study is a magnet-cut school with a long history (established in 1904) and has a fairly diverse demographic population with a minority population at 23.6 percent of the total 323 in 2007. A special arts fund is used to bring visiting artists and musicians from around the world to the school. Also, because of the school's close proximity to a university and two local colleges, the school has been strongly tied with these higher education institutions. As a result, about a third of the student population is enrolled at parents' requests because of the school's reputation for its integrated curriculum and its relationship with institutions of higher learning. School administrators view the diversity of the school as one of its strengths. A multicultural night has been held yearly to celebrate the school's multiculturalism. In Spring 2008 the school had an assembly on the Lunar New Year Day, and the fifth graders participated in the dragon dance and the play, *Tikki Tikki Tembo*. Overall, the students have been prepared by the school environment to appreciate other cultures.

The school in Taiwan is a municipal girls' high school, located in a metropolitan city in the southern part of the nation, a city population about 1,510,000. The student population was 2,560 in 2006 and the school is ranked number one among all the 19 high schools in the city. Most of the students in the school are advanced learners and perform well academically. The ultimate goal for both the teachers and the students is to help the students gain good grades on the joint college entrance examination so the students can get enrolled in a prestigious university. The school encourages diverse extracurricular activities, yet the emphasis is still on students' academic studies. The students are mostly proficient readers and writers in Chinese. Although English is not their native language, most of them started their English learning at the elementary school level before the English course was offered in junior high school curriculum. Some of them continue spending extra hours in the private language schools, where native speakers of English are hired to teach. Compared to the students in other high schools, on average the students in the school perform better in their English reading and writing. Because of the school's reputation in students' academic performance and English ability, the City Educational Bureau often brings international visitors to the school to demonstrate the current situation in Taiwan's secondary education.

Participating Groups

Two groups of students—one from the Midwest elementary school and the other from the Taiwan high school--were invited to voluntarily participate in this study. The classroom teachers in both schools helped to recruit the participating students. The requirements for participation were basic technological ability (including keyboarding and Internet surfing) and English reading and writing ability. The numbers of

participating students from each school were maintained approximately equivalent (16 from the U.S. and 14 from Taiwan). The American children (eight Caucasians and nine minorities, and eight males and nine females) were in the two fifth grade classes in the school. Five out of sixteen received free or reduced lunch. The Taiwanese students (all females, Chinese ethnicity) were tenth graders, mostly from middle-class families. Among them, two students' parents served on the School Parent Board. (Board members were elected by all the parents usually because of their higher socio-economic status.) I chose this tenth-grade group mainly because of their strong ability to read the books in English and also because I knew their teacher, who was interested in educational research. The Taiwanese students' class was a special second foreign language class. In this class the students were provided the chance to take a selective second foreign language course, either Japanese or French.

Altogether 30 students were invited to participate in the study in the getting-to-know-you phase. One Taiwanese student decided not to continue after the first week of trial; two American students quit participating soon after because of activity conflicts; one American student moved; and one American student could not continue due to transportation difficulties. Therefore, in the second phase when the literature blogging began, the total number of participating students dwindled to 25 (12 on the U.S. side and 13 on the Taiwan side). During the course of the second phase, one more American student dropped out because of an activity conflict. Moreover, because of some social and behavior issues, another two American children stopped participating one month before the end of the data collection (See Chapter Four). In the end, 22 students (nine

American fifth graders, three males and six females; thirteen Taiwanese tenth graders, all females) remained participating throughout the whole study.

The Instructors

Two instructors were involved in the study. Mrs. Dickinson, a former Midwest elementary teacher I worked with for my pilot study, continued helping with the “Taiwan Project” (an unofficial name widely recognized by the teachers and students in the school). Mrs. Dickinson, who received her Master’s degree and Education Specialist degree and started her first year doctoral program in Literacy Education, has had rich experiences conducting classroom literature discussions and has published research concerning literature study. Although retired, Mrs. Dickinson maintained a close relationship with the school, the principal, and the teachers. In addition to helping with the “Taiwan Project,” Mrs. Dickinson volunteered to help a small-group literature study in one of the fifth-grade classes, spending one hour per week with the group. She also helped with some other school events whenever she was needed. In this study, Mrs. Dickinson acted as the instructor. She explained to the students the participation rules and Internet usage regulations. She stated her expectation of them, read aloud the book, and led a discussion about the book. Once the students started to work on the computers, she circled around the computer lab to offer timely assistance and to ensure that the students were on task. Mrs. Dickinson also worked as the liason with parents and the principal. She helped me deliver messages to the parents, and when some unexpected condition occurred, she discussed it with the Principal, the parents, and the students. Most importantly, as a veteran fifth grade teacher, she became my consultant in advising

me on the design of the project and helped me solve the difficulties we encountered when dealing with the students.

Ms. Lin, my former colleague in the Taiwan high school, helped recruit the students in her class to participate in the study. Ms. Lin received her Master's degree in English Education in the normal university in Taiwan. She also spent one year in the U.S. accompanying her husband when he was working on his doctoral program, which helped her gain an understanding of the American culture and the nature of research work. Ms. Lin understands the power of literature and reads aloud picture books to her pre-school daughter frequently. Starting in spring 2008, Ms. Lin began to read aloud chapter books to her class, which is very unusual in current English classroom practices in Taiwan. Although this blogging activity was not integrated into the school curriculum, and only half of her class joined in the project, Ms. Lin tried to maintain it as a regular meeting for the students. She passed the books around to the students, discussed the books with them during their weekly meetings, and reminded them to do the posting after the discussion. At my request, Ms. Lin wrote her reflections on the discussions with her students and sent them to me via email every other week. She also assigned a student as the group leader so that through the group leader she could forward my messages to the whole group. Like Mrs. Dickinson, Ms. Lin also served as the instructor and the message deliverer in the study.

Students in the Case Study

Patton (1990) indicates that purposeful sampling helps “selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 169). He argues that by selecting information-rich cases, the researcher can “learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the

research” (p. 169). Merriam (1998) also states that because the researchers want to “discover, understand, and gain insight,” they must select a sample “from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Therefore, in order to maximize information, to gain most insights about the event, and to best answer my research questions, I chose four individual students as the focus students. Purposefully I chose individual students among those who participated and posted regularly until the very end of the study or almost to the end, so that I could gain a whole picture of the development of the groups as well as the individuals. Following Stake’s (1995) suggestion, instead of making selections based on the consideration that “which students represented the totality?” I chose the students who could help me understand the case most (p. 5). The students’ participation, in terms of how and what they posted on the blogs and their social interactions in the project context, was the specific criteria of selection. And both instructors’ opinions were also taken into consideration. A couple of the focus students were more successful participants than the other two, which helped to give a more balanced view of the students’ participations. As male students took a very small part of the population in this study (altogether three males and 19 females), I did not consider the factor of gender when selecting the students who helped me best understand the case. In presenting the stories of these four specific students’ experiences with and attitudes toward this activity, a thorough and deep understanding of the case is achieved.

Lydia

Lydia (all participating students are given pseudonyms in this report) was a fifth-grade girl in the Midwest elementary school. She is from a middle-class family. Her father is African American and her mother Caucasian. She enjoys reading mystery books

and liked writing funny stories and poems. She has had former experiences with My Space and Webkinz (an online pet website), and she plays the online game, Marapets. She loves her experiences with the Internet. The reason why she voluntarily participated in the project was that she wanted to learn about Taiwan and she thought it would be fun. Lydia attended all the blogging meetings at the computer lab except one time when she was ill. During the 24 meeting times, she posted 25 entries on her group blog, and she commented 62 times on others' postings. On the whole class blog she chatted 21 times (seven postings and 14 replies). When the project came to the end, Lydia thought she had learned by reading the books and also by blogging with the Taiwanese students. The reason I chose Lydia as the focus student in the case was that her behavior at the computer lab was sometimes a concern for the instructor, and her social relationship affected her as well as other people's postings. By examining her closely I gained salient information about the nature of this study.

Mary

Mary was a fifth-grade girl in the Midwest elementary school. She is Caucasian, raised in a middle-class family. Mary was not considered a strong reader or writer in class. However, she said that she enjoyed reading stories about animals and making up stories in her writing, although she did not know what her favorite writing topic was. Mary participated in this project voluntarily because she thought this blogging activity was fun. She had emailing and Googling experiences with the Internet prior to the project. She thought that the Internet was fun but sometimes could be boring. Mary did not get involved in the book blogging activity in a consistent way. She sometimes posted superficial remarks while other times blogged seriously. Six weeks before the project

ended, Mary stopped participating. In total she posted 18 entries on her group blog and commented 8 times on others' postings. On the whole class blog, she did 11 postings and 1 comment. By examining Mary closely, I obtained a more holistic picture of the nature of the program.

I-mei

I-mei was a tenth-grade Taiwanese young lady. She is from a middle-class family. She is a strong learner and has a great interest in learning English. She received private tutoring from a native English speaker after school once a week. Most of the lessons focused on conversations. Although I-mei felt that she did not have too many chances practicing writing, she had just won the third place in a grade-wide English Composition Contest at her school. I-mei had been a Harry Potter fan for years and that motivated her to finish reading the English version of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling, 2007). She enjoyed discussing with people and was interested in learning about other cultures. I-mei was confident using the Internet. She had an Instant Messaging account and did emailing and google searching frequently. During the whole session, she posted seven entries on her group blog and commented 11 times on others' postings. She also chatted 7 times on the whole class blog (four postings and three replies). The reason I chose I-mei as one of the focus students was that she displayed consistent engagement in this project and the total number of her blog entries was on the average of the Taiwan group. Examining her closely made me gain a more holistic understanding of the Taiwan group's experiences with this project.

Chen-na

Chen-na was a tenth-grade Taiwanese young lady. She comes from a middle-class family and remains a top ten student in class in terms of her academic performance and English ability. Chen-na had rich experiences using the Internet, yet she held a cautious attitude as she saw that sometimes people wasted too much time on the Internet. Chen-na enjoys reading English books, since the stories were interesting to her and she could improve her reading skills. She also said that she liked writing in English as she knew she could make progress this way. Chen-na was interested in learning more about other cultures. She thought that could help her expand her horizon. During the course of the project, Chen-na posted on her group blog three times and made four replies. On the whole class blog, she made two postings and eight comments on others' postings. Compared to her peers, Chen-na's participation did not seem as enthusiastic, but her postings were mostly insightful and sophisticated. By examining Chen-na closely, I gained more information about the Taiwanese students' reading, writing, and blogging experiences.

Gaining Entry

The first few steps in gaining entry to the schools had already been accomplished when I conducted the pilot study. Bogdan & Biklen (2007) stress the importance of gaining access to the research site, and they suggest a "low-profile entry" (p. 86). I used to teach at the high school in Taiwan. Before conducting my pilot study, I had conversations with my former colleagues and the principal in the school. Through email and telephone calls, my former colleagues and the principal expressed their willingness to assist me with my study. I also spoke with my friend, Mrs. Dickinson, a very

experienced teacher in the Midwest elementary school. She agreed to help me work with her students. Then with my advisor, Dr. Gilles, I visited the Principal of the Midwest elementary school, who has been Dr. Gilles's acquaintance for many years, and received her permission for me to study in the school. Then I applied to the public school district's Administration Building and received the approval letter stating that they agreed to my data collection in the Midwest elementary school (Appendix B). Shortly after, my inquiry was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Missouri and was approved.

Through Mrs. Dickinson I contacted the new classroom teachers in the school, and they were excited to help. An invitation letter was then sent home to parents (Appendix C). After the students volunteered to participate, I had them and their parents/guardians sign the consent/assent forms to give permission for participation in the study and for my use of the data for future publication (Appendix D). On both consent/assent forms I emphasized that the participation in the study was completely voluntary and that the students could decide to quit anytime without any penalty. I also stressed that all the information about the participants would be confidential and pseudonyms would be used to replace the names of real places and real people. I used easy and plain English in the Youth Assent Form to the students at the Midwest elementary school and used Chinese in the forms to the students and parents in Taiwan.

Research Team

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose to organize the human instrumentation into teams. My research team consisted of my advisor and the two instructors (Mrs. Dickinson and Ms. Lin). The roles of team members primarily were to offer advice on

the study's design and implementation, assist with data collection, and provide suggestions on data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 237). Meetings with team members were scheduled periodically, one-on-one, either in person or via Instant Messaging. During the data collection, both Mrs. Dickinson and Ms. Lin constantly provided their reflections on the fields. During the data analysis, team members provided internal checks so that "triangulating concepts and insights" were developed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 237). I also presented the design of my research and preliminary findings in several Reading Instruction courses at my department and I presented the findings obtained from my pilot study in three national/international conferences. The critique I received from the groups that I spoke to helped me reflect and modify my methodology.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected from November 2007 to May 2008, and multiple sources of data were collected as I attempted to build a holistic in-depth understanding of the research case and to increase the credibility of the findings. However, in order to establish context and profiles of students, and to build rapport and form a community, I conducted a "getting-to-know-you" phase from September 2007 to November 2007. The data collected during this period served to provide background information of the setting and the social norms and therefore helped contextualize the study. A detailed description of the data collection procedure is provided below.

Procedures

I conducted an IRB sanctioned pilot study in school year 2006 when I was doing a class project. From that study I learned that it took time for two groups of students to build a sense of a virtual community. As a result, when the 2007 school year started in

the fall, I contacted the classroom teachers in the two schools (who were not the same teachers as when I conducted the pilot study) and recruited new participating students to form a blog community. This also allowed me and the two instructors to build rapport with the participating students.

Initial contact among the two groups of students started in late September and lasted until November 2007. The students blogged once a week to post their self-introductions, exchange friendly greetings, and share life experiences and interests. The American elementary students gathered in the school computer lab every Thursday after school from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. to do the blogging. A snack time of twenty minutes was scheduled before the blogging activity. In addition to getting to know the students by chatting with them, Mrs. Dickinson and I also used this time to explain about the project, express expectations about the students' behavior, and instruct about Internet etiquette. The Taiwanese students blogged at home by using their home computers. I maintained constant communication with the students via mass emails and individual correspondences with the assigned group leader.

Phase two, the literature-blogging phase, started in late November 2007 and lasted until late May 2008. Primary data collections also took place at the same time. Except for the ten days winter break, the American students continued the regular meetings every Thursday after school. Mrs. Dickinson started reading aloud picture books to the students during the snack time. The picture books were chosen particularly for the purpose of inspiring multicultural perspectives and expanding critical thinking. I discussed with my advisor and both instructors, Mrs. Dickinson and Ms. Lin, about the list of the books and also about the order of students reading them. We revised the list

many times until we were sure that the books we chose would invite deep thinking and were culturally authentic; we also made sure that the order the students read the books helped them approach the texts more successfully. (A list of the picture book titles, authors and illustrators, main themes, and summaries of the stories are provided in Appendix E). Mrs. Dickinson read aloud to the American students and encouraged them to talk about the books within the group. During the first few weeks of the meetings, the students were encouraged to jot down their thoughts in the reading journals so that they could copy later what they wrote on the computers. As time went by, the students were more used to typing their thoughts, thus the journals were put away.

The main activity for the regular Thursday after-school meeting was to blog. Usually the American students had about forty-five minutes to work on the computers. They were expected to remain seated and stay on task. When the students were blogging, Mrs. Dickinson and I circulated around the room to make sure that any technology problem was solved. When we noticed that for some students the conversations were rich, but the posts were simplistic because of their limited typing skills, we also provided them with typing assistance. The students dictated their thoughts and we typed for them. This helped the students to fully express their ideas without being limited by their typing rate. During the Thursday meetings, I took notes in my field notebook. Altogether the American students had 24 blogging sessions in the school's computer lab.

The students in Taiwan received two copies of the picture books for them to take turns reading independently at their leisure time at home. Their teacher, Ms. Lin, met them and talked with them (mostly in Mandarin) about the books during lunch hour as the schedule allowed. Not all of the students were able to take part in the group

discussions with Ms. Lin, since there sometimes were other activity conflicts. (Lunch hour in Taiwan's high school usually last for one hour. During this hour, students are free to do their own activities besides finishing their lunch. Many extracurricular clubs use this period of time to have the club members gather and do activities together.) The students blogged about the books by using their home computers after school, whether or not they participated in the group discussions. I emailed the students regularly to remind them of our weekly task, and I emailed Ms. Lin and did instant messaging with her regularly to check the progress of the activity.

Generally both groups of students spent two weeks reading and blogging about one book. Reading prompts were given in the second week in order to offer more focus. Mrs. Dickinson helped design the open-ended questions. She asked such questions as *“Think about the part in the story where Bouncer says, ‘We will build a great kingdom dedicated to the freedom of mice, and I will be the king!’ What are your ideas?”* The same prompts were emailed to the Taiwanese students to help them expand their thinking about the books as well (See Appendix F for all the reading prompts). Both groups of students were encouraged to post on their group blog their thoughts about the books and leave comments on others' posts on a weekly basis. The whole-class blog, created for the purpose of getting to know each other in the beginning of the study, was kept for the students to further voluntarily post their personal communications with one another. Both American and Taiwanese groups could access the whole-class blog as well as their group blog anytime during the week. However, most of the American students' postings were done during the computer sessions every Thursday while the Taiwanese, with Ms. Lin's constant reminders, did their postings throughout the week.

I gave initial surveys when the primary data collection started. In the surveys I asked questions concerning the students' previous experiences with literature reading, writing, and the Internet to gain background knowledge (Appendix G). The American students filled out the surveys in the school computer lab during their snack time, while the Taiwanese students received the surveys through email and returned them to me when I paid them visits during the winter break.

Although field observation in the Taiwan school setting was not available, I tried to gain some basic understanding by paying the school three visits during the winter break in November 2007 and January 2008, when the Taiwanese students were still having school. I had a chat with the Taiwanese students during my first visit in order to build rapport. Then in the following two visits, I observed two group discussions that Ms. Lin led and took notes when observing. I also informally interviewed Ms. Lin and consulted her opinion about the project and her observations of the students' participation. When the primary data collection started, Ms. Lin digitally recorded her discussions with the students so that I could listen to learn what was happening as field observations were not feasible. Although I did not transcribe as I could not identify individual voices, I took notes when I randomly listened to some of the recorded discussions.

Toward the end of the study, I gave final interviews (Appendix H) to learn more about the students' experiences and reflections regarding to their participation in the study. The interviews with the American students were conducted within small groups of either two or three students. I believed that the small group setting not only was the most natural way for children to communicate with others but also an effective way of minimizing the power differential between the adult researcher and the children being

studied (Eder & Fingerson, 2003, p. 35). The interviews with the Taiwanese students were conducted through either Instant Messaging or long distance calls. As the students were at home talking with me via the Internet or the telephone, I had to give the interview one-on-one instead of within small groups. In order to gain more background knowledge about individual students beforehand, I asked the Taiwanese students to fill out a self-evaluation form and email it back to me prior to the interview. In the form, the Taiwanese students offered such information as what picture books they had read and discussed within the Taiwan group (Appendix I). They also commented on one book from which they felt they had learned most.

The interviews with the students were semi-structured as I remained “open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during interview interactions” (Hatch, 2002, p. 94). Therefore, during the interview process, the students and I engaged in a “joint construction of meaning” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 17) and we were equal partners in the interview conversations (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 16).

The following timeline illustrates the procedure of the data collection.

Table 1.

Timeline for Data Collection

Time	Events	Notes
(Phase I: Getting to Know You)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed with research panel about research design • Contacted Principals and Classroom teachers in both schools • Recruited participating students • Met the students for the first time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 preliminary field observation
September 2007		
October 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students started to post on the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 preliminary field

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> whole-class blog Students read the first book, <i>Whoever You Are</i> to try out the online book discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> observations
(Phase II: Literature Blogging)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students continued to post on the whole-class blog Students read the second book, <i>Island of the Skog</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 field observations
December 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students read the third book, <i>Me and Mr. Mah</i> Visited Taiwan high school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 field observations (1 in Taiwan) U.S. Snow Day U.S. Winter Break
January 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students read the fourth book, <i>Yoon and the Christmas Mitten</i> Gave initial surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 field observations (1 in Taiwan) U.S. school resumed Taiwan Winter Break
February 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students read the fifth book, <i>The Three Questions</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 field observations Taiwan school resumed
March 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students read the six book, <i>The Greatest Power</i> Students read the seventh book, <i>The Big Box</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 field observations U.S. Spring Break
April 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students read the eighth book, <i>The Other Side</i> Students read the ninth book, <i>Henry and the Dragon Kite</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 field observations Began in-depth analysis
May 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students read the tenth book, <i>Feathers and Fools</i> Students read the eleventh book, <i>Terrible Things</i> Gave final interviews Had a celebration party with the American students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 field observations U.S. School ended
(Note) September 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did member checking with the Taiwanese students Had a celebration party with the Taiwanese students 	

Data Sources

Data were collected from many sources, including the following:

1. Blog entries: The students posted comments about the books and commented on others' postings on the group blogs. They also chatted freely with one another on the whole-class blog. I collected all the blog entries for analysis. The Group One Blog had 146 entries, the Group Two Blog 183, and the Whole Class Blog had 108 entries.
2. Field notes from observations in the computer lab: I kept notes of what happened in the computer lab when the American students were gathering for the blogging activity. I took notice of the students' interaction with one another, Mrs. Dickinson's instructions and reading aloud, and the students' oral discussions about the books. In total I did 24 field observations in the American school, plus two more in the Taiwan high school setting.
3. Reflection blog entries: I created a password-protected blog as my research journal to periodically self-reflect and record the procedures and strategies employed in the study, problems I encountered, and new measures I came up with as "additional think pieces" when the study proceeded (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 122). This blog helped me ponder the methods, procedures and evolving analysis. Mrs. Dickinson, being a member of my research team, was invited to join the blog. As the data collection went on and initial data analysis started, Mrs. Dickinson read my blog and responded either on the blog or by emailing to me her insights. In total I posted 29 messages on the reflection blog.
4. Survey questions: I gave the students one survey to gain some background

knowledge about the students' reading, writing, and Internet experiences when the primary data collection began. The survey also led the students to state their motives and expectations of their participation in this activity. Altogether students filled out 26 surveys.

5. Self-evaluation form: I asked the Taiwanese students to fill out the self-evaluation form before I interviewed them. This way I gained background knowledge about what books they had read and discussed with Ms. Lin and the other Taiwanese students. I also asked them to comment on one book that they had learned most from. This prepared them for the following long-distance interview I was going to give them as well. I collected 13 in total.
6. Final interviews: I gave a final reflection interview (digitally recorded and transcribed later) to the students in order to gain in-depth understanding of their experiences with and comments about this activity. I carried out small group interviews with the American students and one-on-one long-distance interviews with the Taiwanese students. Altogether four group interviews and thirteen long-distance individual interviews were conducted.
7. Informal, ongoing communications with the instructors, either verbally or electronically: I saved or took notes of the constant contact I had with Ms. Lin (via email and Instant Messenger) and the talk between Mrs. Dickinson and me (in person or through email). The communications with the two instructors helped me gain a more thorough understanding of the case and also provided me with different perspectives.
8. Informal, ongoing communications with the students, either via the Internet or face

to face: I had chats with the American students before the blogging sessions began when I was waiting for them outside their trailers and when they were having the snacks. I exchanged emails with all the Taiwanese students and encountered several of them from time to time when I logged on the Internet. The informal talks between the students and me helped me gain timely understanding of their reflections about the project. They also provided confirming or disconfirming of my initial understanding gained from the study. The email exchanges with the Taiwanese students amounted to 133, and the instant messages were 14 in total.

9. Recorded book discussions: I used a digital recorder in both school settings to record the book discussions occurring among the instructors and the students. The recorded discussions helped me to contextualize the students' blogging and to gain further understandings of the social norms in both school settings. Altogether 19 discussions were recorded on the U.S. side and six on the Taiwan side.

The following chart illustrates the data collection specified for each preliminary question.

Table 2.

Data Sources used to Answer Each Research Question

Research Question	Data Sources
<p><u>Main Question</u> What is the nature of students' reading and writing experiences when they are involved in a cross-cultural and cross-age online literature discussion activity?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blog entries: Whole Class Blog 108 entries Group One Blog 146 entries Group Two Blog 183 entries • Field notes: 24 observations in the U.S. Two observations in Taiwan • Reflection blog: 29 entries • Survey questions: 26 surveys • Self-evaluation forms: 13 evaluations • Final interviews: Four group interviews

13 individual long-distance interviews

- Informal communications:
135 email exchanges with Mrs. Dickinson
37 email exchanges & 11 Instant Messages with Ms. Lin
138 email exchanges & 15 Instant Messages with the Taiwanese students
- Recorded book discussions:
19 recorded in the U.S.
Five recorded in Taiwan

Sub-Questions

1. What is the nature of the social context of this activity?

- Blog entries
- Field notes
- Reflection blog
- Final interviews
- Informal communications
- Recorded book discussions

2. What are the characteristics of students' online discussions in this social context?

- Blog entries
- Field notes
- Reflection blog
- Survey questions
- Self-evaluation forms
- Final interviews
- Informal communications
- Recorded book discussions

3. What are the students' experiences and attitudes toward reading multicultural picture books and picture books with social-justice themes?

- Blog entries
 - Field notes
 - Reflection blog
 - Final interviews
 - Informal communications
-

Data Analysis

Stake (1995) argues that “there is no particular moment when data analysis begins” (p. 71). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) also suggest that “some analysis must take

place during data collection,” otherwise the data collection would have no direction (p. 160). I started initial analysis as soon as I began collecting data, and the insights I gained therein continued to confirm or disconfirm my working hypotheses. I borrowed the constant comparative techniques from grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to inductively look for patterns and themes across individual pieces of information. Merriam (1998) points out that the constant comparative method “involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences” (p. 18). She further explains, “Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. This dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to seek patterns in the data. These patterns are arranged in relationship to each other in the building of a grounded theory” (p. 18). Therefore, when doing constant comparison, I tried to “see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories” (Hatch, 2002, p 148).

In-depth data analysis began in April 2008 when a great amount of multiple sources of data had been collected. The coding procedure began with reading closely through all the contents of the data collected throughout the study. Then in the initial coding stage I marked the information with texts (words and phrases). This stage allowed me to categorize the information. Since coding is much more than simply giving categories to data, and since it is also about conceptualizing the data, giving categories the potential power to explain and predict (Strauss, 1987), in this stage I identified categories which looked relevant to my theoretical framework and seemed to be important for further examination. Following that stage was the cross coding stage. I examined how the categories were related to each other and used the constant

comparative method to reduce similar categories into a smaller number of highly conceptual sub-categories. I asked about causes and consequences, conditions and interactions, strategies and processes, and looked for categories or concepts that clustered together (Neuman, 2003, p. 322-323). In the final stage, the selective coding stage, the themes emerged. I wrote “a story line” that connected the categories (Creswell, 2007, p. 67). In this way codes were generated from the data and the major themes of my findings emerged.

In my research questions I asked about students’ literacy and blogging experiences and their interaction with one another. Therefore, I paid particular attention to the cognitive strategies and social interaction displayed in students’ blog entries and transcribed interviews when I started coding. In the process of trying to find a lens that helped me code and interpret the data most appropriately, I found that Odell’s (1998) assessing thinking in writing strategy and Barnes and Todd’s (1977) descriptive system for discourse analysis suited my needs most. Barnes’s theory of employing talk as a learning tool has inspired many literacy educators (see Chapter Two), while Odell is representative of other experts on thinking and discourse as he discusses thinking strategies identified in a writer’s work. I coded the data with Odell’s (1998) language (dissonance, selecting, encoding/representing, drawing on prior knowledge, seeing relationships, and considering different perspectives) when examining the thinking strategies used by the students. (A detailed description of Odell’s categories and definitions of the six thinking patterns is provided in Appendix J.) I also borrowed Barnes and Todd’s (1977) descriptive system to look into the discourse moves (such as initiating, contradicting, expanding, and accepting), logical process (such as proposing a

cause, and evaluating), social skills (such as competing and supportive behavior), cognitive strategies (such as raising new questions, setting up hypotheses, and using evidence), and reflexivity (such as monitoring own thought and evaluating own performance). (An explicit list of Barnes and Todd's descriptive system is provided in Appendix K.) Both categories helped analyze the contents of data. More importantly, they allowed reflection on the thinking patterns and sociolinguistic characteristics displayed in the students' language.

As the coding went on, one predominant category stood out. I started to see that social and cultural contexts played a very important role in the blogging activity. The social interactions among the peers in the school settings, on the two cross-culture blogs, and among the instructors and the students all affected how the students were engaged in the blogging activity. In addition, the students' cultural backgrounds and identities also contributed to the shaping of their online languages. I thus realized that a more thorough and critical analysis needed to be conducted in order to understand the nature of the students' blogging. I decided to borrow Gee's (2005) concept of critical discourse analysis to examine the situated meaning, social language, cultural model, and situated identity present in the students' blog entries. I read through the data again and did the second level of coding. This coding investigated the social and cultural contexts by which the students' blogging were formatted and this helped me gain further understanding of the case.

The following table illustrated how the two levels of coding were conducted. The blog entry was posted by Jenny, an American fifth grader who expressed her observation and reflection after reading *Yoon and the Christmas Mitten* (Recorvits, 2006), a picture

book about a Korean girl struggling between the celebration of Christmas and the Korean New Year.

Table 3.

Example of the Two Levels of Coding

Blog Entry Data	First Level Coding (by adopting Barnes and Todd's descriptive system)	Second Level Coding (by adopting Gee's critical discourse analysis model)
<p>Thursday, January 31, 2008</p> <p><u>Illustrations</u></p> <p><i>I illustrations are really detailed and made you think and in the once scene that had her bed made me wonder if her bed was really like that . . .not out in the open but the really high arches. The pictures were realistic but with the materials the artist used it kind of made it like a dream and it was all kind of blurry. It made me think a lot because instead of being from some one else's perspective it was like seeing into Yoon's mind. I that because it made me think about what she was thinking. I think what happened with the illustrations that as Yoon was getting madder the pictures were getting darker and when she was happier the pictures seemed like everything was better . . .when she was angry the pictures had like reddish tinge to them. What stands out to me is that Yoon knew they hang up stockings but she hung up a mitten. She knew they hung up</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting—choosing to discuss illustrations • Encoding—using different fonts and colors to emphasize • Reflecting on reading process • Raising question • Drawing on prior knowledge • Evaluating the skills • Encoding—using metaphors • Monitoring own thought • Connecting the images with own thoughts • Seeing relationships—the effect of the brightness of the colors • Setting up a hypothesis • Seeing contradiction • Evaluating the character's response to the situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situated meaning: Jenny chose to discuss the illustrations in the book, paying close attention to the effects of the illustrations. • Social language: Jenny shared her feelings and opinions with the other students. The content was presentational but the tone was conversational. She also used color/font strategy to attract her reader's attention. • Cultural model: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jenny thought that the illustrations were detailed and appreciated their effects. She did not see that the portray of the characters (with slanted eyes and puff, round faces) was stereotyped. 2. Jenny questioned about the authenticity of the illustration (the bed) by referring to her understanding of what a bed looked like

*stockings by the **fireplace** and she knew she couldn't so she made the best of it and hung the mitten by the edge of her **bed.***

Posted by Jenny at [4:38 PM](#)

- Drawing on everyday knowledge

in her cultural context.

- Situated identity: Jenny was confident in presenting herself as a reader who was able to express interpretation of the text and also as a capable art critic who noticed details and skills.

Trustworthiness

It was essential that certain measures be employed in order to demonstrate the trustworthiness of this qualitative case inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer a set of trustworthiness criteria for the naturalistic paradigm, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (pp. 301-327). I applied these guidelines and wove them throughout the design of the study. I provide a brief chart (adapted from Baker, 1995) below to demonstrate each criteria for trustworthiness, the concerns that generated it, and the methods that addressed it.

Table 4.

Trustworthiness: Corresponding Criteria, Concerns, and Methods

Criteria	Concerns	Methods
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn the culture • Test for misinformation • Build trust • Identify salient elements • Identify crucial atypical events • Research bias • Human instrument frailty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged period of participant observation • Triangulation of sources and methods • Peer debriefing • Negative case analysis • Member check • Constant Comparative Method • Estimations of data collection obtrusiveness

Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide reader with contextual references 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick description
Dependability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodological shifts • Establish redundancy • Pygmalion Effect • Hawthorne Effect • Inquirer sophistication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overlap of data collection methods • Systematicity of observations and data collection • Interrator reliability of transcript content and coding • Estimations of data collection obtrusiveness • Thick descriptions • Expert debriefing
Confirmability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory grounded in data • Clear reasoning for category identification • Accommodate negative evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit trail • Triangulation • Peer debriefing • Expert debriefing • Systematicity of observations and data collection • Member check • Interrator reliability

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest increasing the probability that credible findings will be produced. My background as a teacher in the Taiwan high school and the eight-month pilot study in the Midwest elementary school gave me insights into both school cultures. My engagement in both settings was sufficiently long enough to minimize distortions. When the school year 2007 began, I started a conversation blog for the students in both schools to freely chat with one another. Then in the nine-month inquiry period (from September 2007 to May 2008), I kept constant contact with both groups of students (either in the real world or in the digital world), and made twenty-seven field observations. “Prolonged engagement” and “persistent observation” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 302, 304) ensured that I learned the context, built the trust, and identified and

assessed salient information. Through the ongoing informal communication with my participants, I also tested for misinformation.

As data collection began, I started initial data analysis. I used the constant comparative method to look for patterns or themes emerging across the multiple sources of data. In the process, I identified crucial atypical events and conducted negative case analysis. In addition to writing in my field observational journal, I kept a reflection blog. I reflected on my observations, analyzed the emerging themes, and assessed my working hypotheses. I also remained reflexive so as to address the concern of possible human instrument frailty.

By the end of the data collection, I conducted group interviews to develop a friendly, open, and supportive environment. I also visited the Taiwan high school during the winter break and made acquaintances with the students so that they did not treat me as a stranger. The group interview model and my efforts in making constant interactions with the students (either face-to-face or via the Internet) ensured that we built mutual trust. When receiving my interviews the students did not seek to provide the answers they felt were expected of them; rather, they stated what they actually thought or felt (Eder & Fingerson, 2003, p. 36).

I also used the technique of triangulation to provide “accuracy and alternative explanations” (Stake, 1995, p. 111) in order to make findings and interpretations credible. I adopted three modes of triangulation. The first one was the use of multiple and different sources (blog entries, field notes of observations, reflective research journal blog, informal communications, recorded book discussions, initial surveys, and transcripts of the final interviews). The second one was the use of different methods,

such as observing, interviewing, analyzing artifacts (i.e. the blog entries), and keeping a research journal. The third one was the use of different investigators. I had a research panel consisting of my advisor and the two instructors to provide me with advice on research design and to discuss alternative interpretations with. The expert debriefing with them also helped me to address the concern of researcher bias and data collection obstrusiveness.

Peer debriefing achieved credibility. When conducting the study, I had the chance to talk with my fellow doctoral students about my inquiry. In the Doctoral Seminar Course I was taking, I shared with them my coding strategy and the evolving analysis. I asked them to play the devil's advocates. Their interrogation helped me probe biases, explore meaning, and clarify the basis for interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308).

“Referential adequacy” was established through the digital recording of the interviews and the archive of the blog entries. Therefore the recorded materials provided a kind of benchmark against which later data analysis and interpretations could be tested for adequacy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 313). I also employed member checking to ensure credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out that member checking can be both informal and formal, and it occurs continuously. In the course of the investigation, I checked with the participating students by “playing back” the summary of an interview to the participant who gave it for accuracy and palatability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Furthermore, in September 2008 I visited the Taiwan high school again after I conducted the in-depth data analysis. I did member checking with the participating students by reading a section of my findings to them for alternative language and interpretation

(Stake, 1995, p. 115). In addition, I “played” the interview to another participant to ask for comments (Stake, 1995, p. 314). Doing member checking allowed me to deal with the concern of obtrusiveness.

Transferability

As Creswell (2007) states, having enough information to present an in-depth picture of the case limits the value of case study in terms of generalizability (p. 76). Therefore, I collected a wide tapestry of data, used thick description to establish a solid data base, and strived to provide a detailed, holistic comprehension in the findings. I was aware that a qualitative investigator could “make *no* statements about transferability for his or her findings based solely on data from the studied context alone” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 217). Therefore, I made efforts to provide “the essential judgmental information about the studied context” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 217) with my thick description so that it would be possible for other investigators to make transferability judgments. Accordingly, the question “How can one determine the degree to which the findings of an inquiry may have applicability in other contexts or with other respondents?” was addressed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 218).

Dependability

Dependability addresses the question of replicability: “How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be consistently repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) respondents in the same (or similar) context?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 218). Many of the measures stated above were used to establish dependability, such as collecting multiple sources, overlap of data, conducting systematic observations, giving thick description, and remaining reflexive by keeping a

reflection blog. Redundancy was also established since by the end of the data collection a great amount of data had been collected. In addition, I also adopted the technique of an “audit trail” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318) by including all the recorded materials, such as digitally recorded interviews, interview transcripts, interview guides, lists of interviewees, students’ blog entries, my reflection blog entries about research procedures, lists of categories and hypotheses used while I analyzed the data, and so on. The information provided could be used to confirm that the product was supported by data and was internally coherent.

Peer debriefing and expert debriefing helped address the issue of obtrusiveness, inquirer sophistication, and interrater reliability of transcript content and coding. On the other hand, I dealt with Pygmalion and Hawthorne Effects so no additional training was provided to the participants, nor were they given higher expectations of their performances. All the students performed similarly to their day school learning activities.

Confirmability

I adopted the audit trail to address confirmability, by which I sought to establish that the findings of the inquiry stemmed from the characteristics of the respondents and the context instead of simply from my biases, motivations, interests, and perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1995, p. 218). According to Halpern (as cited in Lincoln and Guba, 1995), the inquirer calls in an auditor to authenticate the amounts of data, which, can include 1) raw data, 2) analysis notes, 3) synthesis products, 4) process notes, 5) materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and 6) instrument development information (pp. 319-320). In this report, I provide such information.

On the other hand, some of my major raw data sources, blog entries and reflection blog, were systematically arranged in nature. Besides that information, I overlapped my data sources and provided a systematic audit trail that also included my field observations and the codes of the interview transcripts. I included a clear rationale for category identification. Peer debriefing helped account for interrater reliability. As themes emerged from the data, instead of existing beforehand, theories were grounded in data. Moreover, some of the measures mentioned earlier (such as peer debriefing, expert debriefing, member checking, triangulation, and self-reflexive and accommodating negative evidence as was perceived in reflection blog) also contributed to address confirmability.

Limitations

Due to the nature of my study, certain limitations emerged:

1. The data gathering instrument of the inquiry was a human researcher. As I believed that human intelligence enabled me to make sense of the actions, intentions, and understandings of those being studied (Hatch, 2002, p. 7), it also left the concern of bias and subjectivity. However, I took credibility steps to address the value-free issue.
2. My inquiry was an intrinsic case study, through which I intended to learn about this particular case more than seeking a general understanding and getting insight to a big question as an instrumental case study does (Stake, 1995, p. 3). However, by giving thick description, I endeavored to provide “the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316).
3. The timeframe of this inquiry allowed me a limited amount of time to conduct my study. As two schools were involved, different school year calendars were a

- challenge when more data was expected to be collected. However, a redundancy of data that showed repeated patterns was achieved as the coding of the blog entries posted toward the end of the project.
4. Due to the geographical limitation, I was not able to observe in the field when the Taiwanese students discussed the books with the instructor. Nonetheless, I endeavored to make two field observations and maintained informal communications with both the students and the instructor. I also required the instructor to digitally record students' discussions in order to provide supplementary information. The Taiwanese students submitted self-evaluation forms which also helped me gain more information about their participation.
 5. As with any online learning model, self-regulation was a decisive factor for learning success. This inquiry was not a required class within the Taiwan school curriculum, and therefore students' active and regular engagement took a lot of self-motivation for the Taiwanese students. Similarly, for the American students, since the project was an after-school activity, the students felt no obligation to continue participating. Also due to some other factors such as activity conflicts and transportation difficulty the numbers of the participating students dwindled in the end of the study.

Summary

This research is situated within a constructivist paradigm of inquiry, which embraces the idea of multiple realities and maintains that researcher and participants co-construct meanings of experiences (Creswell, 2007, pp. 18- 21; Hatch, 2002). Qualitative inquiry methodology guided this study, and the case study was conducted to gain in-depth understandings. During the approximately nine-month course of investigation

(from late September 2007 to late May 2008), cross-cultural and cross-age students were involved in online literature discussion activities. Students read thought-provoking picture books, usually with multicultural themes or about social issues, and then posted their discussions on the group blogs, which were particularly created for the study. A total of 22 students remained as participants throughout the whole study (nine from the U.S. and thirteen from Taiwan).

I collected multiple sources of data, including students' blog entries, my observational field notes, my reflection blog entries, student initial surveys, student self-evaluation forms, group and individual final interviews, informal communication with both instructors and students, and recorded book discussions. Then I borrowed the technique of the constant comparative method to code the multiple sources of data. During the process of coding, I realized that social interaction played a dominant role in the study. I therefore conducted a second layer of coding by employing the critical discourse analysis method. I also examined closely four focus students' experiences to gain more thorough and in-depth understandings of the study. Thereafter, major themes emerged. Finally, I employed certain measures to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the study. I carefully considered credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this study I explored the nature of students' reading and writing experiences when they were involved in a cross-cultural and cross-age online literature discussion activity. I asked the following three sub-questions:

1. What is the nature of the social context of this activity?
2. What are the characteristics of students' online discussions in this social context?
3. What are the students' experiences and attitudes toward reading multicultural picture books and picture books with social-justice themes?

I collected multiple sources of data during the nine-month blogging activity. I employed the constant comparative method when I coded the rich data. As repeated patterns appeared, I realized that the social context played a very important role in this activity. Moreover, how students were positioned socially and culturally affected their participation in this blogging activity. Therefore, when borrowing Odell's (1998) and Barnes and Todd's (1977) categories to analyze the thinking and communication modes displayed in students' postings about books, I also used Gee's (1999) critical discourse lens to examine students' experiences in this activity. Major themes emerged thereafter. In this chapter, I explain in more details the results of my study by answering the three sub research questions I asked throughout the study.

The Nature of the Social Context of this Activity

As learning is a social activity, it was important to examine the social context of this blogging activity. Throughout my study, I realized that the blog provided a social context where the two groups of cross-cultural and cross-age students interacted and exchanged their thoughts and feelings with one another after reading picture books. On

the other hand, the two groups either gathered at the computer lab to blog (the U.S. group) or talked about the books under the instructor's guidance (the Taiwan group). Therefore, the students were also interacting with one another within their own groups. Face-to-face social norms on both sides were also formed under this circumstance. In the following section, I describe the three social contexts shaped in this study: the online community, the U.S. community, and the Taiwan community. Using Gee's concepts of situated identity, I focus particularly on how students viewed their roles situated in the activity and therefore what attitudes they formed regarding this project.

The Online Community

Since the students were involved in online literature discussion, the blogs became arenas where they interacted and shared thoughts. Students developed an online community. This online community was characterized by its welcoming and friendly atmosphere, the students' willingness to share, and their eagerness to learn about each other.

A Welcoming and Friendly Atmosphere

In their first posting entry, all the students expressed their joy about participating in this activity. They greeted one another with excitement, and they anticipated that they would have a wonderful time together. The following are some examples. (The American students are given false English names while the Taiwanese students are given false Chinese names. All the spellings and word usages present in the blog entries are kept in the original form, verbatim, in order to maintain the authenticity of students' writing.)

“Hi guys! I'm Ning-ning. i'm glad to talk to u guys! I hope we can have fun!!:D”

“hello my name is Kang-ling, haha nice to meet you, we'll have a great time, let's do it! :P”

“Well, my name is Ting-ting, and it's soooooooooo great that I can share my feelings with you--across the Pacific Ocean!!!!
Just can't wait anymore!!!!”

“Hey,I'm Sadie,I'm soooooooooooooo lucky to meet you girls,I can't wait to read my blog agin.
;)0:);0”

“hi i'm Percy.my favorit book is Harry Potter.my favorit food is ramon noodles.i reely look forward to chating you guys some more ☺
XDD!”

The beginning greetings set the tone for this project. Students showed enthusiasm in their first postings in getting to know one another, and they looked forward to blogging more in the future. Later, in their following postings, they remained friendly and welcoming. They continued their friendliness by always posting positive feedback like “I agree with you” or “I am thinking the same thing.” Moreover, they never hesitated in encouraging one another if they read a good posting. They gave comments such as “I like your post” and “That was a wonderful post you wrote.” As a result, many of them expressed how much they enjoyed receiving positive feedback from each other. In her interview, Miki, an American girl, told me she could sense that the Taiwan group liked them. She said, “I think they want us to... like... stay, so we can talk to them again. I think they really like us” (personal communication, May 28, 2008). This friendly and welcoming atmosphere became one of the reasons that motivated the students to continue blogging.

Willingness to Share

In addition to being friendly and welcoming, the students were also willing to share with one another their thoughts, passions, and life experiences. In the getting-to-

know-you phase, the students freely chatted about things such as their interests, their favorite bands, sports players, and books. For example, not long after the project began, Paxton, an American fifth grader from Bulgaria, blogged about his passion, Christmas lights:

It's me, Paxton. There are some things I didnot tell you in my previous blog. I am interested in christmas lights ☺ . I love to fix christmas light chains that do not work. I was born in Bulgaria. I speak Bulgarian. I fix christmas light chains like this: first, I check the fuses. If they are blown, I change them. If they still do not work, I hold every light bulb up to the light. If its filament is broken, I change it. I change every bad light bulb until it works. Before I start, I change every broken light bulb, and put together every cut/broken wire (blog entry, October 4, 2007).

His enthusiasm about Christmas lights was positively rewarded by encouraging comments from the students in Taiwan. Out of politeness and also eagerness to make friends, the Taiwanese students replied with interest and support to Paxton's special passion: "maybe,one day you'll become a person like Edison" (blog entry, Hsiao-fang, October 5, 2007).

"ha,ur interest sounds very different~ ㄐㄩ" (blog entry, Chen-na, October 5, 2007).

"I think you are a special person. Most people will throw the broken lights away.Maybe you can make a little money by repairing the lights for others!" (blog entry, Shung-pei, October 11, 2007)

Meanwhile, students in Taiwan also blogged about their passions. Kuei-lan mentioned how she loved Bon Jovi in her posting:

I love ROCK music so bad,and I can't help to tell you about my favorite ROCK BAND-----**BON JOVI**

They ROCK my world!There're the best band in the entire world !! I can't discribe my love to them by words,and I expect they can come to Taiwan to have a concern next year,oh~I think it is worth to die after seeing their concern with my own eyes!! (Kuei-lan, October 3, 2007)

The blog entries above show that students comfortably and enthusiastically shared their passions with one another. Students also were willing to tell one another about events in their daily lives. For example, Jacob casually talked about a new pair of glasses he just bought. He posted, “they are square rectangular shaped glasses. i couldn't see before. now i can see perfectly” (blog entry, October 4, 2007). Sadie in her blog mentioned that she had broken her wrist and just had the cast off (blog entry, October 11, 2007). Kevin told about his foster cousins by posting that they were “kind of good and unkind to me and sometimes I hate talking about them” (blog entry, October 18, 2007). Chieh-ming, after learning that Jacob had seven siblings, posted: “you have so many members at your home that i guess you won't feel bored. not as me, i'm the only child in my family. when i was little sometimes i feel lonely. how lucky you are!!”(blog entry, October 9, 2007). Su-pin even wrote a 463-word long passage to describe how she felt when she finished reading *Harry Potter*. Here is the very beginning of her passage:

After reading the end of "harry potter," i just found the book,my cloth,my cheeks,my eyes were just wet at all .not only because of the end,but because of the story and the deepest meaning inside it.
To other people,"harry potter" may be just a novel,just a course of adventures,exciting,and visionaries;but to me(a girl who love "harry potter" so much),it is more than it.it is a contiguity of courage,wisdom,choices,immolate, and... love (blog entry, October 24, 2007).

As the examples above showed, in this blogging activity the students did not hold back information about themselves. They were willing to share personal writing even at the initial stage of the activity. An online community built on mutual trust was therefore developed among the students.

Eagerness to Learn about Each Other

After the students started to blog, I asked them to fill out surveys inquiring about their reasons for voluntarily participating in this study. Some stated that they appreciated the chance to share opinions with people; others wrote that they expected it to be a fun activity. Nevertheless, all of them answered that they would love to learn about people of another culture. Getting to know people far away was a primary motive for the students to take part in this activity. As a matter of fact, they directly expressed such eagerness in their postings. Here are some examples:

“I'm curious about what do you do in your free time. After all, we live in different cultures. so, please tell me ,ok?” (Shung-pei, blog entry, October 2, 2007)

“Hi my name is Miki and I wan'ted to be in this program so I can meet other people I'am a very nice person that you cold ever meet” (Miki, blog entry, October 4, 2007).

“it's the same reason for me to join this program. cool to meet people across the Pacific Ocean. nice yo meet you” (Chieh-ming, blog entry, October 9, 2007).

In their surveys, most of the Taiwanese students stated that they did not know very much about American culture except for its holidays. They had the general impression that the U.S. is a democratic and multicultural country, and “Americans are quite enthusiastic toward life. They like to eat fast food, cheese, etc.” (Shan-te, personal communication, January 2, 2008). However, the Taiwanese students did not really have a chance to get to know American people in person. Therefore, it was an exciting experience for them. This explained why Shan-te posted in the blog her interests in finding more about the American way of life. She wrote:

Hi, my name is Shan-te. My favorite color is blue, too. I think when I see the blue thing, I feel comfortable, do you? It's very nice to meet you, and I'm interested in

American culture. You can tell me your life in USA, I really wonder what the life is like in America>< (blog entry, October 12, 2007).

On the same day, she made another post in reply to Trisha and expressed how interested she was in learning more about her:

Hello, Trisha. I'm Shan-te. I'm interested in the USA culture and I really wondered what TV programs do you all usually watch. Do you watch cartoons or something, or do you watch any asian films? And you can also tell me your life in the USA, or what do you usually do after class>< (blog entry, October 12, 2007).

The American children also expressed how much they would like to know the people in Taiwan. For most of them, Taiwan was a place they probably had never heard of before the project. In her email, Mrs. Dickinson reminded me of the students' ignorance about Taiwan. She wrote:

Hsiao-Chien - I had a thought last evening. My guess is that most, if not all, of these new 5th graders do not know where Taiwan is located. Also, do you know of any videos or any kind that we could show the Kiddos about Taiwan; it always helps to have some pictures in their heads. Perhaps there is a web site they could visit that would tell them about Taiwan . . . my guess is that they know NOTHING about your country (personal communication, October 1, 2007).

Knowing nothing about Taiwan actually motivated the American children to participate in this project. In the surveys, they explained their reasons for doing the blogging. They wrote sentences like "I want to learn more about tiewan and there cultures" (Alice, personal communication, January 21, 2008). In their postings, they also expressed such an interest. Marvin, an American boy, even posted about his intention to learn the Chinese language. He wrote, "whats your name and how old are you. Can you teach me how to speak in chinese and I will teach you to speak english if you don't know how"

(blog entry, October 11, 2007). Shan-te, the Taiwanese student, responded with enthusiasm:

...and you said that you want to learn Chinese, right! The thing I should tell you is that it's not easy for foreigners to learn Chinese because the pronunciation is very very different. But if you want to learn it, I can teach you some simple one. We say "HELLO" by saying "Ni Hao" This is easy, isn't it. You can greet Chinese people by saying this (blog entry, October 12, 2007).

And he did. Before Marvin left the project due to transportation difficulty, he always greeted me with "Ni Hao" when I went to the school to meet the children.

The U.S. Community

A friendly and welcoming online community was developed as the two groups of students were willing to share thoughts and life experiences with each other and they were eager to learn about each other. On the other hand, a face-to-face community also was developing, but not in such a smooth way. At the computer lab where the American students met every Thursday after school, the social context progressed through several stages until the students finally constructed a learning community together. In the following section, I describe the three stages of the U.S. community formed as time went by: the initial fun-party stage, the midway struggling stage, and the final learning community stage.

Fun-Party Stage

Many of the American students started participating in this project with the anticipation that this would be an unsupervised after-school activity. Five out of thirteen who completed the surveys answered that one of the reasons they joined this activity was that they expected it to be interesting. Several factors contributed to this anticipation. First of all, I conducted the study as an after-school project. Students did not consider it a

they posted, they “talked” in the same way to each other as they did in their classroom trailers and on the playground. Although they rarely used negative words when communicating with the Taiwanese students, I noticed that at times they were rude in their postings to each other, such as calling people “retard”—a language that might be considered acceptable in daily intimate conversations but inappropriate once posted for everyone to see. Talking to the American students about Internet etiquette was therefore included as part of Mrs. Dickinson’s instruction. When the students still did not sense the importance of blogging properly after I talked to them in private, as the blog administrator, I chose to remove some of the posts. I deleted messages that used impolite words to attack people, such as “You are weird. No one cares about you,” or messages that did not carry meanings, such as a message of fifty exclamation marks. When the second phase, the literature blogging, started, students were encouraged to post anything they wanted to on the whole-class blog while discussing the books we read only on their group blog. Personal attacks or meaningless codes were not acceptable. It was not until November when I finally stopped deleting the students’ postings. A couple of students (Percy and Diana) realized that this project was not just an after-school play activity and stopped participating, especially when they had some other after-school activities. Most students remained. However, as several of them (such as Mary, Jacob, and Sam) continued viewing this project as a party instead of a literature discussion activity, they struggled through the next stage.

Struggling Stage

Many American students started taking part in the activity with the intention of knowing people from another country and having fun. As time went by, most of them

also started to recognize the merits of reading the books, and they appreciated discussions about books with people beyond geographic boundaries, a very new experience for them because none of them had had literature discussions in class before. After the Christmas break, our computer sessions resumed in the American public school. I showed the students the video clips I had during my visits in the Taiwan high school. When the American students heard the greetings from the Taiwanese students and saw them on the video, they looked thrilled. They became more aware that they were interacting with real other students, but not just some unknown names. As our reading texts became more thought provoking, the students developed more mutual trust and intimacy with the Taiwanese students, and Mrs. Dickinson and I began to offer some students help with typing since we realized that typing slowed down their thought expressing, students' postings became more insightful.

The first book we read after the Christmas break was *Yoon and the Christmas Mitten* (Recorvits, 2006), a book about a Korean girl torn between her wish to celebrate Christmas and her parents' insistence on valuing the Korean New Year. In their postings, the American students displayed appreciations of the text and curiosity about the world. Paxton asked these relevant questions:

I do not understand why Yoon's mother was so mad at the birds. Most people like birds. I didn't know that they don't celebrate Christmas in Korea. Do you celebrate Christmas in Taiwan? Please leave a comment (blog entry, January 24, 2008).

Mary wrote about the specific part that interested her:

I like the part when Yoon stomped her feet .
I also liked the part when Yoon thoth that Santa brote her a piece of the Nort pool
(blog entry, January 24, 2008)

Lydia related herself to the main character:

i love the book because yoon is so funny!!! and her NOT sperited mom and dad. yoon is the most sperited because she belives in something not alot of people belive in. she is my favoret because she wont stop in what she belives in. (like me!!!!!!) this is my favoret book we read so far!!! (blog entry, January 24, 2008)

Jacob described how certain plot amused him:

i laughed alot wgen yoons mom jumped back ithink she never saw a squirrel before shes was really scared and yoons mom and dad really care about their bushes (blog entry, January 24, 2008).

Sadie saw the growth of the character:

It seems like after Christmas Yoon just went up and started talking without any guidance. She was talking about her culture and the New Year's celebration (blog entry, January 24, 2008).

These blog entries showed that students enjoyed reading the book, and they were responding to the texts as active readers. Nonetheless, although students demonstrated the capability of posting in a more meaningful way than how they did it in the initial fun-party stage, the American group was still struggling because of some social and behavior issues.

Due to their age, the American students were not sophisticated or emotionally mature enough to ignore their disagreements with peers when they came to the computer lab. Most of the time, they carried their anger, grumpiness, or even hurt feelings to the lab. Their routine had been upset, as one of the fifth grade teachers was on maternity leave and the students had a substitute. These substitute teachers might not have attended to the students' conflicts during the school day. As a result, sometimes the students continued in the computer lab the arguments with one another they started during the day. If one student was not happy with the other, she made a scene about it so that everyone at the computer lab would see it. For example, once when a fight between Mary and Sadie became serious, both did not come to the blogging session that day.

Besides social issues like this, the behavior issue of several participating students was also a concern, especially when Mrs. Dickinson was trying to engage the group in literature discussions and when the group was supposed to blog. One particular student who prompted a lot of conversations between Mrs. Dickinson and me was Jacob.

Jacob volunteered to participate in this project because he wanted to talk to people from another country and to have fun (personal communication, January 31, 2007). When he started in this project he was considered a strong reader and writer by his classroom teacher. Throughout the period of time when he was involved in the project, he demonstrated the ability to make insightful comments about books. He posted long entries and he always replied to others' posts. Moreover, compared to his American peers, he was exceptionally good with computer skills. He taught himself how to upload a video file of his friend and his playing with the water to the whole-class blog not long after students started blogging. Generally speaking, Jacob was an enthusiastic blogger, a thoughtful reader, and a good writer. However, Jacob had difficulty with social skills, even though on the survey he wrote that he hoped he could learn better social skills (personal communication, January 31, 2007).

Mrs. Dickinson sensed Jacob's difficulties in paying attention and following rules when she read aloud to the group and when the group was discussing the books. I also noticed how he disturbed the group when everyone was supposed to be focused and blogging. As a capable blogger, Jacob posted quickly and easily, giving him time to disrupt others' business. Meanwhile, he seemed to ignore the regulations we set for this blogging activity. A power struggle developed between Mrs. Dickinson and Jacob as she was trying to lead the students to be on task while he distracted them, perhaps to seek

peer attention. In her email, Mrs. Dickinson expressed her concern. She wrote, “The problem with Jacob is that he is so distracting to some of the others. There are too many in that group that can't/don't ignore when someone else is goofing off” (personal communication, February 19, 2008). In my reflection blog, I also recorded my observation of Jacob’s disturbing behavior. I posted:

.... But he at the same time was making too many noises too. He talked loudly to himself (probably trying to get attention) and when he did his posting, he asked the others to take a look. I can see that he is a pretty good reader, writer, and blogger, but he is just too disturbing. He is doing things in a very loud way. It just occurred to me that he can be my assistant since he is so good at blogging. But then I am cautious about having him walking around. So many other kids would be disturbed by him. Lydia, Miki, Anna, even Paxton. He just has that kind of "power" to affect people who are not so easily to be concentrated (personal notes, March 15, 2008).

Jacob wanted to be the center of the attention, yet he chose a way not accepted by the instructor of the project. His behavior differed from our expectations of the group. Conflict happened since Jacob chose a role greatly divergent from what we wanted to be.

Jacob’s presence at the computer lab disturbed the group, while his postings sometimes also bothered people. In the getting-to-know-you phase, several times I had to remove his replies to people since they contained rude comments. He challenged people and made fun of them in his replies. In the interview I asked the students whether the social interactions with other students in the group affected how they blogged, Kevin answered, “It used to be when Jacob was still in the group. I always kept a worrying

mind that he was going to say something about to make me mad, that made me want to get out of my chair” (personal communication, May 08, 2008). Sadie, another American student I was interviewing at the same time, said after hearing Kevin, “Jacob was just like that” (personal communication, May 08, 2008). Apparently, just like his onsite behavior, Jacob’s blogging had some negative effect on the other students.

If it had just been about Jacob’s discipline, Mrs. Dickinson and I were determined to make appropriate efforts to have that problem solved. However, Jacob was also changing his blog profile and account and consequently caused himself not to be able to log in to the blog. When this happened, I had to create a new account for him and warn him not to change the new account. Jacob did not follow through. He kept “playing smart” as he appeared to be the only “computer savvy” in the group. The same failure-to-log-in situation happened again. Mrs. Dickinson and I saw that Jacob was not taking responsibility for the consequences of his behavior, so we decided not to create another account for him. Jacob stopped participation in March, the midway of the literature blogging phase. I felt regret that we could not keep Jacob, but Mrs. Dickinson reminded me in her email:

If we had time to work with him and talk with him more, that might make a difference, but we have only one hour a week. And he will continue his negative behaviors until someone addresses him-- he is clearly in need of attention (and I think in need of firm guidelines). We can't fix it all in one hour (personal communication, March 08, 2008).

I had to agree that Mrs. Dickinson was right.

Jacob's leaving left a bit of a vacuum for the students since he seemed to have great effects on many of the other students. Small conflicts and power struggles continued to occur from time to time. Furthermore, some of the students battled between taking on the role of engaged learners and that of party-goers. The group struggled to find a new direction. During the process of struggling, some of the students (such as Mary and Sam) quit, and some (such as Alice, Anna, and Sadie) considered quitting. I complained to Mrs. Dickinson in my email that "Jacob's not being there does not seem to me change anything. It just left me more time to notice other kids' problems" (personal communication, April 13, 2008). Mrs. Dickinson replied: "I think it is still possible that Jacob's not being there may have an effect. He was such a major "player" in the dynamics, and it will take awhile for the group to re-establish itself without him" (personal communication, April 13, 2008). The American group struggled to establish a new order and continue strong learning community through this stage.

Learning Community Stage

The social nature of the American group basically went through the fun-party stage, the struggling stage, and finally reached the learning community stage, which began in mid April. The characteristics of this learning community were that the students were always focused and engaged, and they made long and insightful postings. Their relationships with one another, me, and Mrs. Dickinson also improved. During the computer sessions, instead of attending to the students' onsite behaviors, I finally was able to move my attention to the contents of students' discussions and blog entries. I wrote in my notebook when I was at the computer lab:

Q [raised by Mrs. Dickinson]: What do you think about the book?

Kevin: Grandfather Chin made the big kite. The Italian can also do big things even though they don't make the kite.

Lydia: Tony is kind of mean and kind of not mean. → He was trying to protect his bird.

Jenny: He was mean. What the heck he had to step and stomp it all!

Kevin: I can understand why Tony got upset. I had two baby chicks. One of them suffocated... (personal note, April 17, 2008).

The less-committed students had left, and those who remained were the ones who really appreciated the project as it was—an interesting “learning” experience. Mrs. Dickinson continuously and persistently provided scaffolding and other supports, including reading aloud to the students, discussing the books with them, asking them thought-provoking questions, and typing for some of them and talking to them when they were blogging. All these contributed to the development of the learning community. When students were all on task, I could at last sit down and write details in my field notebook. I was happy to see that students had finally formed a learning community.

The Taiwan Community

Unlike the U.S. community, the Taiwan community did not proceed through several distinct stages in terms of their views of this project. The data did not support that they went through many phases in the social context. The social norm was established quickly in the beginning of the project, and it remained almost all the same until the end. For one thing, the instructor, Ms. Lin, guided the group to the formation of the community. For another, the Taiwanese students' past experiences and attitudes toward the task, writing in English, also led to the easy construction of the community.

On the whole, the Taiwanese students viewed the project as an interesting academic learning experience. They appreciated the chance to communicate with native English speakers, which added one more bonus to this learning experience. Therefore, the Taiwan group remained a learning community throughout the whole study. In the following section, I discuss the two factors that helped form this learning community on the Taiwan side: the instructor's guidance and the students' attitudes. By discussing the two factors, I demonstrate the nature of the social context in the Taiwan student-teacher community.

The Instructor's Guidance

Ms. Lin was willing to help me with this study primarily because she was also interested in effective and innovative teaching strategies. Her professional knowledge background, her commitment to her teaching career, and her interests in educational research turned her into a teacher-researcher. She volunteered to have group discussions about the books with the students and to jot down what she noticed during the group discussions, even when I was still hesitant in making such suggestions to her, worrying that I might add too much extra burden for her. Then throughout the whole project, Ms. Lin acted as the leader of the discussions, the message deliverer, the field recorder, and also the instructor and the monitor of the students' engagement. In her email she wrote:

The 2nd mid-term exam will be next Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. I'll ask them to blog next Wednesday right after the exam so that the American kids will be able to read their postings and responses on Thursday of American time. Is it OK? I'm sorry about that again. I should have been pushing them a little bit more (personal communication, November 27, 2007).

For Ms. Lin, this project seemed to be part of her teaching rather than some after-school extra-curriculum activity for the students. Although only half of her class was involved in the project, she made an effort to meet with students regularly to talk about the books and dutifully reminded them to post on a weekly basis. She also had conversations with me whenever they finished talking about one book. This allowed her to reflect on the discussions and also enhanced my understanding of the nature of the group.

Ms. Lin's literature discussions with the students usually went in the directions she guided. Ms. Lin did not expect to become the center of community during the discussions. She told me so in her email:

My part was mainly about point out some interesting words or phrases, explaining some America related customs, things like that. And I also want them to pay attention to some details about the animals' being personified [in the book, *Island of the Skog*] (personal communication, October 29, 2007).

Nonetheless, most students were used to the IRF pattern in the classrooms—the teacher initiates, students respond, and the teacher gives feedback (Johnston, 2004, p. 53). During my two visits to the Taiwan high school, I observed that although students were responsive to one another's ideas and usually were keen to expand on them, they usually waited for Ms. Lin to call their names to speak. The following conversations (translated from Mandarin) took place when Ms. Lin and the students were discussing the book, *Yoon and Christmas Mitten* (Recorvits, 2006). Ms. Lin first asked Kuei-lan to share her opinion since she had not attended the previous group discussion. Kuei-lan expressed her thoughts and Ms. Lin continued leading the discussion:

Ms. Lin: Anyone would like to add more to that? [Pause] Chen-na, you look

like that you have something to share?

Chen-na: I feel that accepting different...we should accept different cultures. Do not be so self-centered culturally and then say that other cultures are...[not finishing the sentence].

Ms. Lin: [looking at Chen-na] So do you think that the father disapproved the Western cultures a little bit?

Chen-na: He seemed to have the Korean ethnocentrism. [Students laughed as they recalled that “ethnocentrism” was a new term they just learned in the Social Studies class.]

I: Korean what?

Chen-na: Ethnocentrism.

Ms. Lin: The Korean people’s pride.

[Pause]

Ms. Lin: Kang-lin, how about you?

Kang-lin: I thought that...her father heard his daughter say, “We are in American and we are Americans.” So he started to think. I think that the father in the beginning was not open enough to face their situations in the U.S. He insisted that they were Koreans and therefore they should preserve all the Korean heritages and traditions. But Yoon was a child so she was able to accept new cultures. “As a dad I should learn from you” [Kang-lin imitated the father’s way of talking and students laughed.]

[Pause]

Ms. Lin: Chia-hua?

Chia-hua: It made sense to me that her father was against celebration of Christmas. They came to the U.S., probably they were not aware of it, but soon gradually their own traditions would be westernized. The globalization was...[Students laughed as this was also a new term they recently learned from the Social Studies class.]... it was that we were integrated into the mainstream cultures instead of integrating them into ours.

Ms. Lin: [looking at the group] So you think that the Western cultures are more powerful.

Several of the students [in unison]: More powerful.

Ms. Lin: So globalization actually is a threat to inferior countries? Do you think so?

Chia-hua: Probably one day the whole world is speaking English.

Kui-lan: But it may just be majority and minority.

Na-la: Right.

Kuei-lan: They were just one family and they moved to the United States. The environment changed. It was just like if Americans move to Taiwan they probably would speak Taiwanese too. [Students laughed.]

Ms. Lin: Then if you were Yoon's mother, Kuei-lan, how were you going to strike the balance? You were a Korean inside but you were holding an American Green Card.

Kuei-lan: I think it is all right to celebrate Christmas, as long as they can remember they are Koreans.

Ms. Lin: So you still think that your own child should know, should appreciate...

Kui-lan: Our own culture. I would tell her stories about our National Father

[author's note: Dr. Sun Yat-sen].

Ms. Lin: Korean National Father?

Kuei-lan: Something like that. [Students laughed.]

In the conversations above, all the four students expressing opinions demonstrated their ability of independent thinking. Nonetheless, they waited for Ms. Lin's cue to initiate their talk. In fact, there were also three other students in the group that day. Expect for nodding, smiling, or making sounds of agreement, they did not speak until Ms. Lin called on them. Ms. Lin was the person who gave the signal for them to talk. Because of this, this pre-blogging activity became an extension of Ms. Lin's classroom practices--although it was a very unusual one, since the students had never experienced any group literature discussion before. Students carried over from their day school the same habits and expectations to the blogging activity. They read the book as required, prepared to share thoughts with the teacher and the group, took turns speaking their opinions when the teacher asked them to, and then they went home to blog. For the Taiwanese students, this project was fun because they could talk to the American children. However, it had always been an academic activity, just like any other activities they were involved in during their school courses. When I asked in the interviews what the Taiwanese students would tell other people about this project, they all gave an answer like this: "It is a book discussion, and we discuss with American kids about picture books" (Hsiao-fang, personal communication, May 16, 2008). "Book discussion" was the definition the Taiwanese students gave to this project from the beginning to the end.

The Students' Attitudes

In addition to Ms. Lin's guidance, whether subconsciously or intentionally, the students' past experiences and their own attitudes also contributed to the formation of the learning community. As the group literature discussion was a totally brand new experience for almost every participating Taiwanese student, writing in English was also a pretty unusual experience. Although students in Taiwan start to learn English as a foreign language at a young age (usually ten years old at public schools), writing is not required in the curriculum. In fact, formal instruction in English writing does not begin until students reach the eighth grade. When students finally learn to write, most of the time they do academic writing only, as the standardized test demands such skill, and writing practices become very product-oriented. Writing for fun or to explore usually is not considered an option in the curriculum. Therefore, English writing is associated with formal learning, and this practice shaped most of the participating Chinese students' attitude toward this task.

Moreover, although Taiwan is a highly westernized country, rarely do students have chances to use English in authentic ways in their daily lives. Students spend a lot of time memorizing the vocabulary, practicing the grammatical drills, and taking numerous tests to see how much knowledge they have learned about this language. Under this circumstance, accordingly, English to most participating Taiwanese students was more like a 'subject' than a 'language.' Writing in English was also more associated with academic learning than with communication. Students enjoyed the opportunities to have conversations with the American children. They also welcomed the project as a learning experience since they could practice their English writing, which most English learners

consider an integrate way to master this subject. Ning-ning in the interview told me that as long as she practiced writing she would progress (personal communication, May 10, 2008), which I believe was a common thought shared by most of the participating Taiwanese students.

The Taiwanese students automatically formed an academic learning community, and therefore they considered English a school subject and writing in English an academic task. They continued with the learning habits and expectations they had in the school day. Moreover, their peers in this project remained their learning pals, as what they were in the daytime classroom. One Taiwanese student, Bei-shan, told me that sometimes she asked her classmates what they posted on the blog. By discussing with them she got ideas for her own posting (personal communication, May 31, 2008). Na-la, another Taiwanese student, also mentioned that after finishing reading a book, the students often talked with one another about the content of the book. They also made such comments as “the illustrations are beautiful” (personal communication, May 19, 2008). Students did not develop another independent group from their class because of this project; they simply extended that learning community to this blogging activity.

Although the Taiwan group remained the same learning community throughout the project, it did not imply that the Taiwanese students did not go through any different stages of action. The experiences of interacting with real people and their sense of audience helped them experience new attitudes. For example, in later sections of this study I discuss how they learned to adopt more informal language in their postings and how, to a certain degree, they started to use English to communicate rather than merely present skills.

Summary

In this study I discussed students' reading and writing experiences when they were involved in a cross-cultural and cross-age online literature discussion activities. I asked the first sub-question, "What is the nature of the social context of this activity?" By closely examining and coding the rich data I collected, I realized that three social contexts were developed throughout the study. They were the shared online community, the U.S. community, and the Taiwan community.

Since the blogs were mainly where the interactions between the two groups took place, an online community was formed. This online community had a welcoming and friendly atmosphere, as its members were excited about participating in this activity and getting to know one another. For the same reasons, the students were willing to share with one another their thoughts, passions, and life experiences. They posted about their interest and things occurring in their daily lives. In the meantime, they showed interests in knowing about the other group as well. They asked questions concerning personal interests and school life, and they even asked to learn each other's languages.

In addition to the online community, in the school settings two face-to-face communities were also shaped. The U.S. community went through three distinct stages throughout the study in terms of their view of the activity. It first began as a "fun party," as most students' expectations of the project were an unsupervised after-school activity. Students played with the computers and posted meaningless messages on the blog in this stage. Then as time went by, many students became more involved in the reading and writing tasks. Nevertheless, the group experienced a struggling stage, since several students were not ready to be engaged learners. Social and behavior issues prevented the

group from becoming a learning community. It was not until the last two months of the data collection period when the group eventually settled down and students turned to be really focused and engaged. Students not ready to be engaged in learning left, but Mrs. Dickinson continuously provided reading and writing support. A learning community was eventually formed.

On the other hand, on the Taiwan side, an academic learning community was formed from the very beginning. Two factors contributed to the natural formation of such a community: the instructor's guidance and the students' past experiences. Beginning with the instructor's guidance, Ms. Lin directed the students' participation in the project to a learning activity. Through her talk about the books with them as well as her monitoring, Ms. Lin helped extend the students' learning behaviors and experiences from the classroom practices into this project. Meanwhile, the students' past experiences and attitudes toward the activity also played a part. They automatically formed a learning community and consequently saw English as more a subject but less a language skill and considered writing in English a form of academic learning.

Although in my study my main task was to find out about students' reading and writing experiences, the different social contexts developing throughout the study were significant. They affected how the students participated in this project and consequently changed their writing and reading experiences. In conclusion, examining the social contexts brought me a deeper understanding of the nature of this blogging activity.

The Characteristics of Students' Online Discussions

In the previous section, I discussed the social context of this online literature discussion activity. The following section answers the second sub research question:

What are the characteristics of students' online discussions in this social context? To answer that question, this section presents first the nature of the two participating groups' online discussions in general. It examines the three roles of the two groups' online discussions (social, cognitive, and language roles) to delineate the general characteristics. Then I discuss two focus students' (Lydia's and I-mei's) specific participation through the lens of critical discourse analysis to indicate a more thorough understanding of the nature of their participation. Moreover, in order to gain a holistic picture of the event, in addition to the two focus students, this section reports another two students' (Mary's and Chen-na's) participation to present them as negative cases.

The Social Role

This part reports the social role of the two cross-cultural and cross-age groups' online discussions. Major findings, including conversational blogging and social relationships, are presented with supportive examples.

Conversational Blogging

In this activity, students were literally asked to "blog" about their reading responses instead of "writing" them down. Although many of the Taiwanese students tended to view this blogging activity an academic event (as reported in the earlier section), still most of the two groups' postings were conversational. I perceived discourse moves (Barnes & Todd, 1977) throughout the blog entries.

For example, students usually started their post entries by greeting the other bloggers. They typed "bye" or "leave me a comment" to finish their posts. Besides that, students used other discourse moves (Barnes & Todd, 1977) as well in their postings, such as initiating, responding and extending or eliciting. In the following example, the

students discussed *The Island of the Skog* (Kellogg, 1993), a story concerning a group of mice who come to a deserted island, encounter an unknown monster, the Skog, and finally realize that it is just another tiny friendly creature:

Hi, it's Me, paxton. I think the point of the story is that you should never judge somebody before you know them. I think the scog is some kind of miniature ant eater. It made me think of kids being mean to each other.

Posted by paxton at [4:48 PM](#) (October 18, 2007)

4 comments:

[Chia-hua](#) said...

Hello, Paxton. I was wondering what exactly Skog is. Is it a skunk?? Skog sounds like skunk.

[October 24, 2007 7:29 AM](#)

[Hsiao-fang](#) said...

I think it's an anteater. It has a long mouth (or a long nose) in the picture. It can help him to dig the ants' hole.

[October 24, 2007 9:03 AM](#)

[Ning-ning](#) said...

i dont really care about what it is. it's cute

[October 26, 2007 10:19 AM](#)

[Lydia](#) said...

i think so to!! Ning-ning you are so cool!

[October 28, 2007 3:11 PM](#)

In this conversation, Paxton, as usual, began his posting by greeting the others and introducing his name. Then he initiated the discussion expressing his assumption of what the Skog might be. He also made an interesting text-life connection. Both Chia-hua and Hsiao-fang responded to this initiation by making their own guesses and bringing in supportive information. On the other hand, Ning-ning, instead of extending that

discussion, changed the direction of the discussion to her personal feeling toward the Skog. Lydia welcomed that new topic by responding in agreement as well as in excitement. Her praise of Ning-ning also displayed the social, supportive behavior she used. This conversation showed that blogging is conversational. Students greeted, initiated, and responded.

Later (on October 26, 2007), another student, Kuie-lan, extended this discussion by providing more information in her blog entry. Kuei-lan posted:

I like this book,it is't very long but fun.And the are amazing,too.But I still don't know what "SKOG" is,I think every one have the same problem as me.From the pictures, it seems like a kind of duckbill!!But it's quite cute.I also like the mice in the story,they're just like us,they'll celebrate some special days,they wear clothes,they can write and they can even ride a boat!If I can have a pet mouse like this, that would be so great.Wish them can live a happy life with the shy Skog on the island forever!

Posted by Kuei-lan at [10:03 AM](#) (October 26, 2007)

This blog entry showed that Kuei-lan picked up the topic on the Skog's identity after reading all the others' opinions. She extended that discussion by providing her observation. In the meantime she also shared with the other two students her appreciation of the cute creatures. Her concluding wish served to bring an end to this conversation, and this act of ending a discussion was also a demonstration of social skills.

As students' blogging is conversational, many social skills were seen in their postings. In addition to supportive behavior, such as expressing agreement, approval, and shared feelings, students helped each other progress through task by asking questions, shifting topics, or ending a discussion. Nonetheless, sometimes they also competed and conflicted (categories adopted from Barnes & Todd, 1977). The following example shows how supportive behavior and "competition for the floor" (Barnes & Todd, 1977, p. 20) occurred in one conversation:

Well...,there are many words I don't understand in the book.But I can realize the meaning by the pictures.Sometimes,we think others are mean and they may hurt ourselves though it is not the truth.And we may protect ourselves in no time.The reason is that we don't have any communications,so we may misunderstand others.We should avoid that happen.

By the way,the pictures in the book are very cute and beautiful. I very like it.

Posted by Shung-pei at [5:50 AM](#) (October 24, 2007)

2 comments:

[Miki](#) said...

Hi Shung-pei I'm Miki, and some times I dont get things either. and some times we cant communicat and we prtect are selfs but I know how you people in Taiwan feels and I feel the same way. and we are across the prificica ocean and we are communicating with eachother and I dont know you and you dont know me and we have different culture but we are getting to know eachother. your friend miki,P.S. send me a post.

[October 25, 2007 5:03 PM](#)

[Lydia](#) said...

we all no that miki!! i know lots of people in taiwan!!

[October 28, 2007 3:03 PM](#)

In this conversation, when Shung-pei expressed difficulty in comprehending the text, being not so strong a reader herself, Miki immediately shared her sympathy. Moreover, Miki furthered Shung-pei's idea that communication was important by indicating they both were involved in a similar communication. In the end, she asked Shung-pei to post back. Throughout her posting, Miki demonstrated support, acceptance, and friendliness. Meanwhile, Lydia's one short, and even harsh, posting simply indicated her intention to compete for the "floor." Her post suggested she wanted to show that Miki was not the only one who had this insight and that she also was communicating with the Taiwanese students. She fought for the floor so that she could direct attention to her as well.

In short, although students were discussing the books they read, the nature of blogging led the discussions into a more conversational format than a formal discussion forum. Students adopted discourse moves, such as initiating, responding, extending, or eliciting, and social skills, such as supportive behavior, competition and conflict, and moves that help the conversation progress, in their postings. As a result, this blogging activity appeared to be conversational rather than a formal academic writing event.

Social Relationships

In the earlier section, I discussed the formation of the three social contexts: the online community, the U.S. community, and the Taiwan community. After examining students' postings, I realized that the social relationship formed in the two personal communities also affected the blogging activity in the virtual community. One noticeable thing, especially with the American students, was that they brought their social relationships from the school setting to the blog setting. For example, if the American students were "buddies" to each other, they commented often on each other's postings, usually with encouragement and appreciation. However, if they did not get along well, or if they teased each other frequently in real life, they tended to do so on the blogs too. In fact, one American student, Anna, kept asking me to move her to another blog group so that she could be with her friends. The daily social relationship was of significant meaning to the American students.

The following are two examples. Kevin indicated on the whole class blog that Jacob was the only friend he knew in the blogging activity. He posted, "I hope you all are having a good time in the project. I don't have many freinds that are on the tiawan project eccept for Jacob and trust me he is a cool kid..." (blog entry, October 11, 2007).

That explained why Kevin always expressed agreement with Jacob's postings and Jacob also appreciated his support. The following conversation is an example, in which Kevin shared Jacob's feeling and Jacob expressed his appreciation:

[Kevin](#) said...

Ha,ha,ha I laged to!!! I also don't belive in santa claus. But I like your post and I agree with you.

[January 24, 2008 4:44 PM](#)

[Jacob](#) said...

thank you very much kevin

[January 24, 2008 4:45 PM](#)

However, the social relationship was not always so harmonious among the American students. Some of them fought or argued a great deal in their daily school life over trivial things and in the blogging interaction that dispute continued. In the following conversation, Lydia posted about her analysis of one character in the book, *Island of the Skog* (Kellogg, 1993). When one of her classmates, Percy, teased her, she fought back right away.

i think these are some ways jenny can prove herself: 1. start something and keep going with it and not quit. 2. listen to other mouses talking. 3. she thinks befor she talks!

Posted by Lydia at [4:47 PM](#) (November 1, 2007)

4 comments:

[Percy](#) said...

ya she acshaly dose think before she talks.unlike somuone!
(italiks!^)

[November 1, 2007 5:02 PM](#)

[Lydia](#) said...

i think you are talking about your talking about your self!

[November 1, 2007 5:04 PM](#)

Percy said...

no bounser!

[November 1, 2007 5:05 PM](#)

Lydia said...

know you

[November 1, 2007 5:05 PM](#)

Like many fifth graders, these two American children both fought and teased on the Internet as they usually did in their day school area. Interestingly, this kind of carried-over social relationship did not happen among the Taiwanese students. In the interviews, none of the Taiwanese students indicated that their social relationship affected or was influenced by this blogging activity. Maturity and age is the main explanation for that situation. The Taiwanese students were mostly sixteen-year-olds while the American students were five years younger. The Taiwanese students appeared to comment more on the American bloggers than on their own peers. Their intention to make new, foreign friends was obvious. One Taiwanese student, Hsiao-fang, commented on her Taiwanese peer's posting that she would like to know her more. Apparently she mistook her as an American student. This misunderstanding was caused because most of the Taiwanese students adopted an English name as their usernames on the blogs. Here is Hsiao-fang's comment to 'Jessica' (Kuei-lan):

[Hsiao-fang](#) said...

They are like people. So, they have different personalities like us. Wish they can get along like family on the peaceful island forever. I like your opinion. Your thoughts are so interesting. Reading your article let me want to talk to you to know you more.

October 29, 2007 9:06 AM

This took place in the beginning of the activity when they were still figuring out who their group bloggers were. One month later, seldom did the Taiwanese students comment to each other, unless they saw a really intriguing post.

The Taiwanese students intended to make new American friends, motivating them to comment more to the American students than to their own peers. Compared to the Taiwanese students, the American students had more online interactions with their own peers. The fact that American students could have synchronous communication at the lab with each other when they were blogging contributed to this situation. Often they commented to each other on the blog, and then, very soon after, they did the same thing face to face. So for the American students, both real conversations and virtual conversations were going on at the same time. The instant gratification prompted them to comment to each other more often than the Taiwanese group did to its peers.

In summary, the social relationships among the American students affected how they got along with each other on the blogs as well. Such a circumstance did not exist in Taiwan group. The Taiwanese students tended to have more interaction with the American students, as they intended to make new, American friends. Their social relationship with each other in the school setting did not play a significant role in the online interaction.

The Cognitive Role

This section reports the cognitive role of the two cross-cultural and cross-age groups' online discussions. My findings are the following: students learned from each

other; the sense of audience helped improved their writing, and their thinking and writing reinforced each other.

Learning from Each Other

As students interacted within the blogs, they had the chances to learn from each other. When reading other people's posts, they either expanded their own thinking or learned about things they did not notice or know before. For example, in a discussion about the main character's Chinese name "Yan" (wild goose) in the book, *Me and Mr. Mah* (Spalding, 2001), Hsiao-fang shared her understanding of the meaning of the word. She posted:

Yan is a kind of birds like the picture on the book. It is free to go anywhere. It can go anywhere it wants. Ian moved to a city. It is far from his father's farm. Just like "Yan", he flew to a far place. I think that's why Mr. Mah called him like that (blog entry, December 11, 2007).

This insightful explanation attracted as many as eight replies from the American students. Among them, Paxton responded, "I never thought of that" while Percy commented, "oh i see" (blog entries, December 13, 2007). Hsiao-fang's prior knowledge of the Chinese character, Yan, helped her American friends learn something new.

Chieh-ming's remark on how she learned by reading other people's blog entries demonstrates this mutual-learning situation. Chieh-ming said (translated from Mandarin),

Most of the time, I agree with other people's ideas. Everyone has his/her own perspective, and there is no absolutely right or wrong. But you can...by reading other people's postings, you can think from a different angle. You can think in a way you have never tried before. When that happens, I feel pleased (personal communication, May 20, 2008).

Since the two groups were diverse in ages and cultures, each group learned different things from the other group. The Taiwanese group learned a more colloquial way to use English, which served as a supplement to the academic English they learned from the textbooks.

In most cases, reading the American students' postings helped the Taiwanese students expand their vocabularies: they learned new words by seeing how these words were used in authentic contexts. Shan-te's comment was a typical response among most Taiwanese students. She said, "I learned some word usage by reading the American children's postings" (personal communication, May 17, 2008). In the following example, the Taiwanese student, I-mei, not only read about the new word, "*snoody*," she also got direction instruction from the American student, Kevin, about the meaning of the word.

Here are their conversations:

I think the Author is trying to say that no matter what you can still have friends. I think the fence was like a border between two friends. I also think that the Author ment to make the mom of the white girl look stuck up and snoody. I think that she looked like that because she saw her neighbor and she wanted to make them look bad. What do you think?

Posted by Kevin at [4:18 PM](#) (April 3, 2008)

1 comment:

[I-mei said...](#)

Wow, you are really good at expressing you thought clearly. And I just learn a new phrase from your artical-"stuck-up". But what does "snoody" mean?

[April 17, 2008 10:55 AM](#)

Kevin replied later:

I ment to explain "snoody" for you and it means that they are nery disrespectful and is dishonest and are very rood.

[April 17, 2008 4:38 PM](#)

Kevin's discussion about the book, *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), unexpectedly brought up a vocabulary lesson about the word *snoody*, and this was something the Taiwanese students could not obtain by memorizing the vocabulary and grammar rules in the textbooks. Although the spelling errors in the American students' postings sometimes confused the Taiwanese students, the Taiwanese students had the experience of reading English in a more informal yet authentic way. They even learned to copy that kind of expression. In her comment to Lydia, Hsiao-fang wrote, "Yeah! It's really cool" (blog entry, October 29, 2008). Compared to her previous postings, this comment appeared very casual. To some extent, by learning from their American peers the Taiwanese students started to use English as a communicative language rather than a solely academic language.

The following is I-mei's response to the American students' writing, which reflected how most Taiwanese students felt:

I love your comment to those character. You're such a wonderful writer. As you know, I'm [a] few years older than you, and I learn English as a foreign language for [a] few years, so I learn while I read your articles. And your subscribings [author's note: writing] is smooth to read! (blog entry, October 30, 2007).

The "smooth" writing is what the Taiwanese students lacked, and they were happy to read that variance in the American students' postings.

On the other hand, the American group benefited as they interacted with people who were more mature and advanced learners. The Taiwanese students acted as tutors to the American children since they were always ready to help. In general, they answered the American students' questions, urged them to think further, and even corrected their spellings. Therefore, the American students felt that the Taiwanese students were there

to help them learn. In the final interview, Anna told me her general impression of the Taiwanese students. She said:

The Taiwan kids ... they really help you with everything you need to know. Like if you kind of don't understand the book, the Taiwan kids and Ms. Lee and Mrs. Dickinson...umm... can help people's questions. Because if you post whatever questions you want to ask the kids in Taiwan, they will respond to your questions. They will leave you comments about what they agree and disagree and tell you why or why not they agree. And that's great (personal communication, May 28, 2008).

Anna's description was authentic. Most of the time, the Taiwanese students were keen in giving answers to the American students' questions. For example, when discussing *The Three Questions* (Muth, 2002), a book about a boy's quest for the important questions in life, Mrs. Dickinson directed the American students' attention to the illustration of the red kite. She asked them to ponder if there was any significant meaning of the red kite as it appeared on almost every page of the book. Paxton raised his question on the blog: "I did not pay very much attention to the pictures. I noticed that there is a red kite in most of the picture. I do not know what it means" (blog entry, February 14, 2008). The Taiwanese student, Hsiao-fang, gave an insightful answer to Paxton's question. She replied, "The red kite may mean that the boy has found the answers to the question. So, he finally felt released. Let his heart fly like a kite" (blog entry, February 20, 2007).

In another conversation, Shung-pei also was enthusiastic to help the American student, Alice, with her question. Here are their postings to each other:

I need a answer why does Emperor Ping want the little children to do all that stuff ??????????

??
??
??

Posted by Alice at [4:27 PM](#) (February 28, 2008)

2 comments:

[Shung-pei](#) said...

Maybe he thinks that children are more creative and they can help him find the answer! I am not sure if it's the answer you want, because the author didn't explain it.

[March 4, 2008 5:54 AM](#)

[Alice](#) said...

Think you for the message

BY: ???????
MYSTERY PERSON

[March 6, 2008 4:34 PM](#)

As it is shown above, the Taiwanese students were enthusiastic in answering the American students' questions, since they were conscious that they were much older than the other group and therefore would naturally act like tutors to them.

In addition to always being ready to give answers, the Taiwanese students at times also encouraged the American students to be on task. This reaction reflected their attitude toward this blogging activity. As I reported earlier, the Taiwanese students formed a learning community from the very beginning of the project, and they always viewed this activity as a learning experience rather than simply a fun club. This led them to hold the same expectation for the American students. In the following example, Mary, an American student, wrote in her 38-colorful-word posting only one brief comment about the book. So Chen-na, a Taiwanese student, gave her a friendly reminder to talk more about the book.

Hi my name is ? but I liked to be called DOG becuse I lov e dogs so mush! what is your favort animal? I liked the book!
p.S next time there will be a mistory!

happy Holloween!

Posted by Mary at [4:59 PM](#) (October 18, 2007)

1 comment:

[Chen-na](#) said...

You love dogs!!!! @ 3 @ "

I love dogs, too.

wait! But...don't u think u should write more about the book?

haha...

[October 23, 2007 8:19 AM](#)

During my visits to the Taiwan school in the winter 2007, several Taiwanese students told me that they expected to read more thoughtful replies from the American children. This explains why occasionally they, like what Chen-na did, had to urge the American students to respond to the books more.

Although the Taiwanese students are not English native speakers, their attitude from their schooling toward English writing was more serious than the American students'. As a result, in addition to encouraging the American students to write more about the books, sometimes they even helped the American students with their writing. Since the American students had difficulty typing, typos were frequent and this led the Taiwanese students to try to help with 'editing.' Spelling correction occurred from time to time. For example, Chia-hua once replied to Alice: "Jenny can stop and 'thank.' Did you mean 'think?'" (blog entry, November 7, 2007). In addition, in the following conversation, Hsiao-fang helped rephrase Miki's idea by summarizing it in a more grammatically acceptable and clearer sentence. Here is Miki's original post:

I thought about the book and I think that you shouldn't judge people because you don't know them and when you get to know them you still shouldn't judge because now they think that you their friend and they want to get to know you oh!!! I like the book!!!!!!!!!!!! (blog entry, October 18, 2007)

Here is Hsiao-fang's reply: "I like the book, too. Never judge anybody whatever you are familiar with her/him. I think it's what you want to say" (blog entry, October 24, 2007).

This example shows that seeing that Miki needed to do more editing, Hsiao-fang just went ahead and did the summary for her.

To summarize what was reported above, the two groups learned from each other as their ideas expanded, and they began to notice things they were not aware of before. Therefore, both groups benefited and learned different things from the other party. The Taiwanese students learned ways to use English, while the American students gained more understanding of the texts. Miki's comment in the final interview served as a great conclusion to this finding. She said, "They don't really understand English, and we are trying to help them understand English. I think they helped us...like...when we don't really get everything...like... they left us a comment. They helped us and they left us a comment" (personal communication, May 28, 2008).

Sense of Audience

In addition to learning from each other as the two groups were interacting online, students also enjoyed corresponding with audiences. For example, when I asked the students what factors helped them become more engaged in the project, many of them answered that reading people's responses to their posts did. And the part they disliked most about the project was that they sometimes did not get responses from people.

Mary's message represented what most of the students felt. She posted:

... thats whats i have to say about this book and nowe you can post me or tell me if you know me or you dont have to tell me eney of that stuff or you dont have to post me ther but i would relly like if you did. Thank you (blog entry, April 3, 2008)

This example shows that students looked forward to receiving comments from the other bloggers. In my reflection blog I also noted such an observation:

One strategy really worked [today]. I told the kids how many replies they received. This really excited them. I will keep doing that. Justin did not post his idea last week (it is a draft still). So he did not get any reply. Therefore he went ahead working on his last week's post right away. I really think this is a good stimulus for them (personal note, March 15, 2008).

Apparently, the authentic communication with real people aroused within the students a strong sense of audience, which greatly motivated them to continue blogging.

In addition, the sense of audience also helped the students improve their writing. The American students did not have many previous keyboarding experiences, neither did we require them to edit spelling and grammar when they blogged. Therefore, the American students' postings appeared to be casual and conversational as there were typing errors and spelling and grammar mistakes. The sense of audience still made a difference when they were blogging. More than once, I observed that the American students proofread their postings before they hit the 'submit' icon on the screen. They cared about what they wrote since they knew a real audience would be reading it soon. Furthermore, they changed the colors and sizes of the fonts of their postings and uploaded images with their passages in order to attract attention. All these activities were to attract their readers to comment.

The sense of audience was also apparent with the Taiwanese students. When I asked them to comment on their own blogging, many of the Taiwanese students indicated that they tried to post something not as complicated in order not to confuse the American children. Kang-lin told me (translated from Mandarin) that she always felt she “was thinking too much.” She said that the American children just posted something “superficial,” and if she posted something too deep, they “might not understand me.” So when she was drafting in her head, she would say to herself, “perhaps not to write about that but to write about this” (personal communication, May 10, 2008). Kang-lin was not the only Taiwanese student who felt this way. Many of her peers shared the same concern that they might post something too complex for the American students to grasp the meaning. Shung-pei’s conversation with me was representative of the Taiwanese students’ opinions:

Shung-pei: Although I am afraid that they may not understand what I wrote, I still hope they can comprehend, and then even exhibit some kind of resonance. Then I will have a sense of achievement.

I: Why were you worried that people might not understand you? Is it because you displayed some deep thinking, or did you have difficulty expressing yourself in this language?

Shung-pei: I am more concerned that the kids do not understand me because what I wrote is too complicated...but actually I think because of both (personal communication, May 21, 2008).

As is shown above, the sense of audience caused the Taiwanese students to pay more attention to both their posting contents and languages. In fact, more than one

Taiwanese student told me that she did spelling check and grammar check before she submitted her passage. Shan-te shared with me her posting procedure (translated from Mandarin): “First of all I drafted in my head what I would like to post. Then after typing, I checked if the sentences went fluently. I also checked the grammars” (personal communication, May 17, 2008). In short, the sense of audience not only had an effect on what the students posted, it also affected how they posted.

In summary, both groups had a keen sense of audience in mind when posting. The American students did some proofreading and used different colors and pictures to attract their readers’ attention. The Taiwanese students, on the other hand, consciously chose the topics they thought their American audience would be interested in reading or would be able to comprehend. Their concerns about if their readers could understand what they were writing also caused them to use spelling and grammar checks.

Thinking and Writing

In describing the relationship between thinking and writing, Elbow (1973/1998) compares the writing process to cooking and indicates that it involves several interactions such as that between words and ideas, and that between the writer and symbols on paper. Moffett (1992) also lists a model of mental growth when writing, including abstracting, egocentricity, ambiguity, naming, chaining, and so on. I chose to adopt Odell’s (1998) categories to code the thinking strategies in the students’ writing since I felt that they most appropriate to my investigation.

In his article, “Accessing Thinking: Glimpsing a Mind at Work,” Odell (1998) indicates that writing is an act of thinking and that it is possible to find the thinking strategies reflected in a completed writing. After examining closely the students’ blog

entries, I realized that the six thinking strategies that Odell listed in his article--including dissonance, selecting, encoding, drawing on prior knowledge, seeing relationships, and considering different perspectives (see Appendix J)--were frequently found in students' posts.

Dissonance. In their blog entries, students mentioned problems, raised questions, and expressed uncertainties. The Taiwanese students sometimes stated that the texts were hard because they did not know all the words in the books. Other times they asked about things that they did not know. For example, in the following posting, Su-pin was curious about racial segregation situation in the U.S. after she read the book, *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001):

this is one of my favorite book.i love its illustration and meaning.
though i am not in america,we have the same problems here in taiwan.i really don't know why there has to be a segregation in our world.i think every one is just the same inside our heart,isn't it?
and i have a question:is there still a segregation in the USA? (blog entry, April 17, 2008)

In her posting, Su-pin wanted to find out more about segregation in the U.S. She made a request for further explanation from the American students.

Similarly, the American students also occasionally expressed difficulty comprehending as they did not get the implied meanings in the texts or the contents were in conflict with their prior knowledge. Anna asked a question like this after reading the Korean girl's struggling between celebrating the Korean New Year and Christmas:

Why does her dad keep on saying we are Korean family when somebody in my classroom said that they celebrate Christmas. And there are two people in my classroom who celebrate the same Christmas like the United States. That's what I don't understand" (blog entry, January 31, 2008).

As is shown above, both groups of students asked questions when they encountered something they had difficulty understanding. Interestingly, the questions

students raised in the beginning of their postings sometimes led them to think further and then eventually helped them to come up with the answers by themselves in the end. For one example, Jenny stated that she did not know the meaning of the red kite in the book, *The Three Questions* (Muth, 2002). She posted:

I don't get the red kite, but the red kite always told us where Nakolia was because you could basically look up the string and Nikolia would be there. (Jenny, blog entry, February 14, 2008)

Jenny told other people that she did not “get” the red kite, but she observed how the kite was inseparable from the main character. She actually was quite conscious of the significance of the red kite.

In another example, Jacob wondered how the old man, Mr. Mah, broke his hip in the book, *Me and Mr. Mah* (Spalding, 2001), but he soon made his own assumption based on his understanding of the interaction between the two main characters, Mr. Mah and Ian:

I'm curious how that mr.mah broke his hip i think he did it on purpose to get ian's attention.if he done that he could of told the truth!!! (blog entry, December 13, 2007)

A question like this was raised simply to reach an answer. When asking questions or expressing uncertainty, students worked on their thoughts while writing. Their effort in trying to find the answers was one powerful thinking strategy.

Selecting. Students included specific information in their writings, such as their observations, “facts” they found in the texts, and their personal experiences, feelings, and memories. For example, when reading the beautifully illustrated book, *Feathers and Fools* (Fox, 2000), Justin was attracted to the watercolor paintings. In his posting about the book, he wrote:

I think the book had good illustrations. I think the artist used good contrast of hot and cold colors. And the brush strokes he uses are kind of smooth in some parts and rough in others. You can see how much detail he puts into the pictures. The animals have eyes, the peacocks have beautiful feathers, the swans have kind of whitish yellow feathers (blog entry, May 1, 2008).

In this posting Justin focused on the illustrations. Although he was not the only student who mentioned the illustrations of the book—there were several other expressions about how they admired the beautiful pictures—he was the first one who specifically analyzed the illustrations. The observation was unique while the analysis was impressive.

Additionally, as they were reading, the texts also prompted the students to share their life experiences. Once Lydia posted about how she saved her cousin from drowning after reading about doing the right thing at the right time in the book, *The Three Questions* (Muth, 2002). I-mei referred to a movie she recently watched in which the main character learned to handle her freedom, just like what the children were taught to do in the book, *The Big Box* (Morrison, 2002). Na-la expressed how she wanted to have a true friend like Mr. Mah did in the book, *Me and Mr. Mah* (Spalding, 2001). A most interesting example was Sadie's posting about the Chinese Lantern Festival. The students read Demi's *The Greatest Power* (2004), a book with extremely rich Chinese elements, symbols, and philosophy. As a result, Sadie was moved to write a 170-word story about the origin of the Chinese Lantern Festival she heard in class, which was a great connection to the book itself. The main part of the story says:

There was a god that lived on a mountain who was angry at the world and a little bird came up one day and he told the bird that he wanted the world on fire by tonight. The little bird warned everyone on the villages in China and they came up with the idea to make red lanterns . . . red, yellow orange to make it look like fire and put a light inside and that night they all went out and they helped them hang the lanterns and the god was so pleased because he thought the bird had caught the world on fire but actually the bird saved them (blog entry, February 28, 2008).

thoughts about the book, *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), in which a black girl and a white girl were separated by a fence but eventually worked together to build friendship beyond the limit of the concrete fence. The following is an excerpt of her post:

... I think that the fence is the guideline between African American people and white people and that the fence was just a guideline like Dr. Martin Luther King said that blacks and whites CAN work things out and live together in the same world together (blog entry, April 3, 2008).

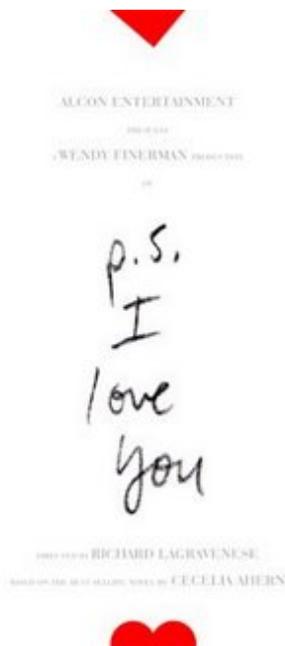
Along with the passage was a news photo of a demonstration group likely from the 1960's, pleading for their legal rights by walking on the streets.



This example showed that Anna used both words and images to present her ideas. Her selection of an image was sophisticated and added more meanings to her text. Since computers are a novelty to many of the American participants, once they learned from me how to upload images, they tended to 'manipulate' the images and employed much visual thinking in their posts.

The Taiwanese students did not use as many varieties of colors or sizes of fonts as the American students did, nor did they upload pictures with their posts since they indicated that it was time consuming sometimes (personal communication, January 20,

2008). Yet they also tried to employ these particular designs of language in their postings whenever they had time or energy to do so. For example, Su-pin highlighted the key words, **TRUE FRIEND**, by capitalized and colorized them in her post about friends (blog entry, May 22, 2008). And she uploaded an image to express her affection for these newly-met American friends in her last saying-goodbye post:



(blog entry, May 27, 2008)

Accordingly, encoding was a special thinking strategy that students used to both emphasize their ideas and attract attentions.

Drawing on prior knowledge. Students referred to ideas they already knew in order to understand something new. This occurred frequently with both the Taiwanese and American students. The following example demonstrates how Chen-na, the Taiwanese student, drew on her background knowledge to analyze the situation the main character, the Skog, encountered in the book, *The Island of the Skog* (Kellogg, 1993):

Skog is afraid that "his" island might be occupied, so he tried to dress up as a horrid monster and scare the mice away. ...Mmm.... I think it just like our society. We often think that the person we don't know would pose threat to us, so we fight

and defend to protect ourselves,..but such behavior would build a cold and high wall between you and the others.

So, instead of fighting and defending, we should open our mind, open our heart to accept new things and new ones in our life (blog entry, October 23, 2007).

Chen-na expressed her thoughts about the island's only inhabitant, the Skog, who tried to disguise himself into a monster to drive away the strange newcomers. Chen-na used her prior knowledge of people's reaction to this sort of situation and reasoned that the Skog's behavior was predictable but avoidable. In her writing, Chen-na demonstrated that she was able to draw on her prior understanding of people and made sense of the character's behavior in the text.

In her posting about the book, *The Big Box* (Morrison, 2002), Lydia, an American student, also demonstrated this thinking strategy. This book tells the story that the parents cage their children in big boxes when they decide that the children are not able to handle their own freedom. Ironically, the parents provide fake things in the boxes--such as a painting of a window with painted blue sky within the window frame-- as a reward for the children. Lydia questioned the story as it contradicted her general understanding of how children in her world lived. Here is her inquiry:

why would they keep giving them things about nature if they say they can't hanndel there freedom???? when they say that they must be wrong in the head!!!!(if you know what i mean) i think this is a wired book because all most all the kids in the world can hanndel there freedom!!! mabey not me sometimes!!! (blog entry, March 20, 2008)

Lydia could not accept the assumption the parents in the text held because her prior knowledge about children was contrary to that assumption. Interestingly enough, she saw that sometimes there would be some exception. Therefore, besides drawing on her prior knowledge, Lydia also displayed a certain degree of self-text connection and reflexivity in her posting.

Seeing relationships. Students mentioned the cause-effect and if...then relationships in their writings. This happened often when students were trying to support their understanding of the themes of the texts. In the following posting, Chia-hua responded to the reading prompt, "How did Yoon's parents' thinking seem to change by the end of the story?" She posted about her observations of the struggle and reconciliation between the Korean parents and their daughter, Yoon:

They were a little too conservative to accept news change, but somehow, their response seemed reasonable. If Yoon took part in all the Christmas celebration instead of Korean traditional activities, gradually, for sure, she'll forget about the original Korean ideas.

The parents changed at last because Yoon tried to communicate with them. Communication is very important. If Yoon didn't talk with her parents, they probably will never understand what their child was thinking about, don't mention accept her ideas (blog entry, January 31, 2008).

In the posting above, Chia-hua showed her understanding of the Korean parents' motive for prohibiting Yoon from celebrating the western holiday because she foresaw what would happen in the future if they did not do so. Then she saw the necessity of communication as she analyzed the cause and effect of the event.

The following example exhibits a similar cause-effect analysis, which occurred when Jenny, an American girl, argued how things would have been different if the current conditions in the book, *The Three Questions* (Muth, 2002), did not exist:

I think that when Nikolia helped Leo it showed that he cared for people and if Nikolia had not stopped to help Leo dig the [hole, the] whole book would never have happened and then he wouldn't have gotten answers to his three questions. If he hadn't helped the Panda might have died and the child might have gotten lost and never found. If he hadn't gone to help the Panda then he never would have known that he had to help find the child and if he hadn't found the child he wouldn't have found the answer to his question. When the author says the last line of the story when he says "That is why we are here,": I think he meant that if we didn't have the answer to these questions then there would be fighting and there

wouldn't be a human race and we wouldn't be here. The answer to these three questions is what keeps the human race going... (blog entry, February 14, 2008).

In this passage, Jenny reasoned explicitly what would have happened if certain circumstances had not been present. It is worthy of note that Jenny, in addition to addressing the cause-effect relationships, also gained an important understanding about life and the world.

Considering different perspectives. Students tried to consider ways in which other people might perceive or respond to an idea or experience. This was particularly true when students evaluated the characters' reactions to situations in the texts. In a previous example, I reported that Sadie pondered in her posting "why all the nature stuff was in the book," *The Big Box* by Morrison, 2002 (blog entry, March 13, 2008). In response to her question, Kang-lin replied:

I think their parents brought them those things about nature because they rather choose things that "they think" are good for their child than letting those kids get out of box to find it themselves. Those adults are just being too protective and refuse to understand what their child really want (blog entry, April 1, 2008).

Kang-lin's response showed that instead of blaming the parents for irrationally taking the children's freedom away she was able to see things from the parents' viewpoint. She realized that the parents acted out of their concern for the children. This capability of seeing things from others' perspective reflects higher-order thinking.

In another example, Paxton analyzed the cause of the fight between the swans and the peacocks in the book *Feathers and Fools* (Fox, 2000). He pointed out that the behaviors of both sides were understandable. Here is his posting:

I think that the swans had a natural reaction. If you heard that your neighbor was going to slaughter you if you did anything to them, you would be afraid. You might prepare something for defence. Or, you might call the police or move out. The swans were afraid. But, they should not have assumed that the peacocks were

actually going to harm them. They should have gone to the peacocks and discussed the matter. They should not have created their own arrows (May 8, 2008).

Paxton felt empathy for the characters in the book. He could understand and accept their points of view. More importantly, he was able to create an alternative and even better perspective. In the second part of his blog entry, he suggested that the characters try to talk to each other instead of resorting to force. This insight implies that Paxton was capable of thinking from various angles and eventually made the wisest decision.

I observed students exhibit various kinds of thinking in their writing. The writing process also helped them to think on paper--or to be more accurate, to think on "computer." When I asked the students to describe their blogging process, many of them indicated that they constructed their thoughts when typing on the computers. For example, Kang-lin pointed out that the more she wrote the more ideas she got. She explained that it was because when she was writing she was contrasting her thinking at the same time. Eventually she (translated from Mandarin) "was able to come up with more ideas" (personal communication, May 10, 2008). Lydia also reflected how the writing itself led her to continue thinking. She described it this way:

Sometimes...umm... I'm just like staring at my screen. All the ideas that popped into my head. I'll start typing and typing and typing. All of a sudden, I got like whole...like two pages long. And then...and once I had them...like oh my gush when did I write these? So it's like I'm like into a complete self. And I don't stop until I...just like to complete stop and I have no more idea (April 24, 2008).

Lydia's statement suggests that writing and thinking occurred simultaneously. She constructed her thoughts when writing without realizing it until she finished writing. Thinking and writing reinforced each other this way.

The Language Role

In the previous sections I discussed the social and cognitive roles of students' online interaction. This section focuses on the language role of this interaction. In order to gain a more thorough understanding of the nature of students' online interaction, this section also reports the focus students' "Discourses" (Gee, 2005), the cultural models and students' social languages and situated identities.

Writing Styles

As I reported earlier, this blogging activity was conversational. Students chatted with one another by greeting in the beginning of their post and saying goodbye in the end. Oftentimes students' blogging, when exploring and discovering, appeared "fragmentary and disorganized, done in private code, like talking to oneself on paper" (Bean, 2001, p. 47). This was particularly true with the American students' postings. Since they had not received much formal training on keyboarding, and since Mrs. Dickinson and I encouraged them to blog voluntarily rather than to write through the process of several drafts, the American students' blogging was actually close to their thinking at that moment. Miki's posting here serves a good example of this expressive writing:

Think the right time to do things is when I have my home work complted and finish. Because that when I have lots of time to help my mom around the house. because like in the book if the boy did not help Leo, then he would not have herd the panda calling from help (blog entry, February 14, 2008).

This conversational style sometimes caused the Taiwanese students to ponder, as they were more used to reading "standard" English. One Taiwanese student, Hsiao-fang,

commented that (translated from Mandarin) Paxton's postings were easier to understand. With some other American children's postings, she said, "Perhaps spellings. They were like... If you pronounce those words, you could understand what they wrote. But if you just read them, you wouldn't be able to know what they were writing" (personal communication, May 16, 2008). Since the American students such as Miki were figuring out their thoughts as they wrote on the computer, their writing was expressive and more colloquial than formal in style. As a result, run-on sentences and spelling errors caused by limited keyboarding skills added to the comprehension difficulty for their Taiwanese peers.

Another prominent characteristic of the American students' expressive and conversational blogging style is that it was more direct and blunt. Once again, their Taiwanese peers noticed this feature. Ning-ning described her observations of the American students' postings. She said (translated from Mandarin):

They usually posted about which character was bad or what a character should have done. It was kind of like...seeing things from the superficial level. It was direct... They were blunt...They wouldn't think it over before speaking. Perhaps because they are still young (personal communication, May 10, 2008).

The Taiwanese students believed that the American students were cute, naïve, and sometimes thought superficially. They just "said whatever coming into their mind" (Chia-hua, personal communication, translated from Mandarin, May 18, 2008). The after-school atmosphere, lack of keyboarding skills, and no requirement for editing from the instructor all affected how the American students posted.

Compared to the American students, the Taiwanese students' writing exhibited more formality. They were more grammatically correct and better organized. Different factors contributed to that difference. For one thing, the Taiwanese students, as I discussed earlier, tended to view English writing as a more academic task than a free chat. Since in their Chinese composition class, these advanced high school students always turned in their final drafts instead of going through the editing process with the Chinese teacher, the Taiwanese students considered posting on the blog as turning in a final draft of an English composition. Also, the Taiwanese students generally were more diligent and remained conscious of their academic performances, since they survived many competitive tests to be finally enrolled in this privileged class. Because of cultural influences, they were concerned that errors or sloppiness might have social consequences. Therefore, they were particularly careful with the mechanics of their writing, concerned that "if I typed it wrong, I might lose face" (Bei-shan, personal communication, May 31, 2008, translated from Mandarin). As a result, their blogging appeared to be more careful in terms of spelling, grammar, and structure than the American students'.

The Taiwanese students sensed how distinct their postings were from the American students'. Chia-hua assumed that age difference could be the reason why the two groups' writing styles were different. She felt that the American students usually posted about one concept in a whole messy blog entry, while the Taiwanese students' postings were more structured, with each individual paragraph focusing on one major point only (personal communication, May 18, 2008). Kui-lan, on the other hand, felt that it was the academic discipline that she and her classmates received that made the difference. Kui-lan said (translated from Mandarin), "They stress more on thoughts. But we are

more uniformly taught that this has to be correct, and we have to learn from this sentence some grammar or some concept, and so on.” (personal communication, May 20, 2008). Chen-na also pointed out that when learning another language like English, they learned from the textbooks, so they did not know how to write in a more informal way (personal communication, June 05, 2008). As a result, the Taiwanese students’ reading responses look more like “presentational speech” than “exploratory speech” (Barnes, 1992). They were conscious of the techniques of their writing. Most of the time they made sure that the spellings and grammar were correct before hitting the submit button on the computer screen.

The American students also noticed that the Taiwanese students’ posts were different from theirs. Kevin said:

I think that they really make sure they post their comment. They actually think about it for a while. Then they write it down. That I think is very unique. And for me, it’s hard for me to do. I start typing and I think a little. I start typing again, and think a little. I don’t think about it before I write it down. See that’s always me. Yeah, I think about the first sentences and keep on going (personal communication, May 8, 2008).

Kevin’s comparison of the two parties’ posting here indicated one fact: the U.S. group posted their first drafts, the expressive writing, and they showed that they constructed thinking when writing; the Taiwan group posted their final drafts, which usually were more accomplished in format and displayed more thinking in content after they edited them on the computer.

The American girl, Sadie, concluded that the differences in writing styles were caused because the Taiwanese students were older and naturally their postings were “more mature” (personal communication, May 8, 2008). Both Kevin and Sadie agreed that the maturity meant posting in more expressive way than simply saying “I agree with you.” Interestingly, the different styles on both sides led to the students to ponder and eventually adjust their own writing. The Taiwanese students tended to write about less serious topics as they were afraid that the American students might not understand some hard issues, while the American students expanded their writing by including more detailed supporting ideas.

Multi-modal Languages

Franklin-Matkowski (2007) noticed in her dissertation study that images played a significant role in blogging. In my inquiry I had the same finding. No sooner did I show the American students how to post images along with their text messages than Googling for the right pictures became the first thing they usually did when they started to work on the computers. Oftentimes an appealing image could successfully attract attention and therefore help the blogger receive comments from others. For example, once Kevin uploaded an image of the Terra Cotta Warrior when he read about the Chinese emperor in the book, *The Greatest Power* (Demi, 2004). I-mei, who had never conversed with Kevin, replied to his post. I-mei wrote:

Hey, I've never talked with you before. I'm I-mei, nice to meet you!
So, do you think that the greatest power in the world IS the force of life? Why and how do you wanted to bring a little of everything?
By the way, the photo attracts me! (blog entry, March 5, 2008).

Although most Taiwanese students stressed that they valued the thinking displayed in the other bloggers' postings more than they valued the images, they did not

deny that they were attracted to the pictures as well. However, with the limited amount of time they could spare for this activity, usually the Taiwanese students did not endeavor to find the right image and upload it to go along with their posts. But once they tried it, the responses from the American students were positive. The following is an image uploaded by Su-pin to match the holiday theme she read about in the book, *Yoon and the Christmas Mitten* (Recorvits, 2006):

.....I LOVE CHRISTMAS.....



She received six comments for that posting. Jacob even stated that “i really like your picture on the blog i agree with you too kind of because of the illustrations!” (blog entry, January 31, 2008).

Therefore, the use of images was powerful. It is worthy of note that students did not randomly find pictures to visually appeal to their readers. Instead, they made efforts to search for images complementing their messages. For example, Paxton posted pictures of three different kinds of locks as he explained that the parents in the book, *The Big Box* (Morrison, 2002), used the locks to make sure their children would not escape. Sadie uploaded an image of two hands holding (one white-skinned and one dark-skinned) when

expressing how she thought segregation was wrong. Justin found a picture with a dragon and a Chinese character, “和,” meaning peace, in it when he blogged about the final reconciliation between the Chinese children and the Italian children in the book, *Henry and the Dragon Kite* (Hall, 2004). As students were reading picture books, they also employed images to extend their ideas. They used visual thinking when they were blogging. The sophisticated selection of the images suggested the students’ thorough understandings of the texts, and it demonstrated the deep thinking sometimes not fully expressed in the students’ verbal messages.

In addition to displaying a different way of thinking by using multi-modal languages such as the images (and various colors and sizes of the fonts as well, as was reported earlier), the students also voluntarily tried multi-genre writing. Sometimes they wrote poetry, and other times they made up dialogues in their postings. Although this variety did not happen very often, students exhibited the potential to try alternate formats other than narrative. In the following example, Su-pin posted about what she thought “the greatest power in the world” was after reading *The Greatest Power* (Demi, 2004). Notice how she used both image and a novel format, poetry, to express her thinking:

[the greatest power in the world](#)



it's taken when we win the
championship

there is great love between us

i thought

the greatest power in the world is

LOVE

it is the greatest power in the world

it make a life begin

make a girl turn into a mother who can give everything,do everything,...

just because LOVE

as we have seen

a mother can die for her children

a father can kill himself for his kids

a teacher can immolate herself for his students.....

the reason they did these is nothing but LOVE

if there is no love

how can a life be continued?

if one is alived but living without love

and then why he exists

love isn't just between humans

it can also be found in the whole universe

a grass's growing is because of the sunshine's love

a flower's beauty is because of the soil's love.....

so i think

great though a life is

LOVE is even more important

Posted by Su-pin at [5:01 AM](#) (March 12, 2008)

For the Taiwanese students, writing poetry was an unusual experience. Seldom had they been taught to do so in their writing class, as that genre was not required for the standardized tests. Accordingly, Su-ping's effort in trying this new form was unique. Furthermore, she uploaded a photo recording her recent life experience, winning the table tennis championship, to supplement her theme, love. Therefore, her blog entry demonstrated not only a text-life connection but also richness in language. Moreover, when analyzing what she wrote in this entry, I realized that Su-ping's thinking moved up and down on the Abstraction Ladder (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). That is, she moved between the abstract and the concrete. Su-ping started with the theme that love was the greatest power in the world. Then she gave specific examples to support her argument. After that, she used questions and a "what if" pattern to further her support. Finally she expanded the definition of love, suggesting Chinese philosophy and philanthropy, and moved back to the abstract theme. The blogging activity helped her try new genres and also helped deepen her thinking.

The American students tried poetry more often than the Taiwanese students did and some of them also tried dialogue. The following blog entry by Jacob is an example:

The book the big brown box was pointless i didnt know the meaning well i think i do.i think the meaning was that the author was trying telling us that every kid or

even the grown people can handle their freedom to some level a good or bad level. the kids were telling the grown people at the end of their punishment that the grown people were controlling the kids freedom not their own! the kids said our freedom is yours now because your controlling it now not us and we should all control our own freedom not the grown people!!! (blog entry, March 13, 2008)

In this passage, Jacob first brought up his uncertainty about the text. As soon as he typed that he began to create meaning from the text. Therefore, Jacob used writing to uncover his thinking. Then, he made up a conversation based on his interpretation of the text. This dialogue vividly expressed how the characters in the book, along with Jacob, felt when their freedom was taken away by the adults.

The following section continues the discussion on the language role of students' online interactions. However, I use a particular lens and study some other "non-language stuff" highlighting specific identities and activities (Gee, 2005, p. 7) in students' online interactions. I examine particular students in this section.

Focus Students' Discourses

In Gee's (2005) *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, he presented the conception of "Discourse." Gee argues that when studying a person's language,

it is not enough to get just the words "right," though that is crucial. It is also necessary to get one's body, clothes, gestures, actions, interactions, symbols, tools, technologies (be they guns or graphs), values, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions "right," as well, and all the "right" places and times (p. 7).

Gee calls all of this "non-language stuff" "Discourse," with a capitalized D. According to Gee, we use language and the "other stuff" to reorganize ourselves and others "as meaning and meaningful in certain way," and in turn we "produce, reproduce, sustain,

and transform” Discourse (p. 7). In my research, I also found that it was essential to study other than students’ written language, the blog entries. I included such discourse roles as the cultural models (at both the school level and the cultural level), students’ social language, and their situated identity to further explore their online interaction.

In Chapter Three I listed the focus students’ background information. In this section I present a close examination of the focus students’ online language and compare and contrast their participation. This in-depth report on the focus students helps illustrate a more detailed and holistic understanding of the nature of students’ language role.

Lydia. Lydia, an American fifth grader, began participating in this project with enthusiasm. She remained zealous throughout the project. Nevertheless, the nature of her participation changed. She started as a “party-goer” and ended up as a committed learner. The following narrative describes how she evolved.

When my project started, Lydia’s prior experiences with the Internet, such as My Space, Webkinz (an online pet website), and online games, misled her to believe that the blogs I set for this study were a fun, online chatting room. As she was not the only American student with that assumption, the situated meaning that Lydia along with many of her American peers brought to this blogging activity was to get to know people in Taiwan and to have fun. Therefore a cultural model of “fun party” was developed within the American group. That cultural model undoubtedly affected how Lydia posted.

Moreover, Lydia’s social relationship in her day school context was oftentimes tense and she enjoyed a certain “reputation” among her peers. That social relationship also influenced how she interacted with the other bloggers. The following is a portion of my conversation with Paxton and Justin during our group interview:

I: Tell me about your postings with Lydia. Sometimes I think you kind of argue with each other.

Justin: She calls him weird when...

Paxton: [cutting in] Oh, she calls me a lot of stuff, kinds of things.

I: Even in the trailer?

Paxton: A lot of, like...umm...and she gets into trouble a lot. And the...like once...I don't know if I can remember...She said something...oh yeah, one of the people... See she did argue with some people from Taiwan. She said so what... She typed "so whatever" and that's rude, and I just told her that and she kind of held that whole stuff to ME.

I: Mmhmm.

Paxton: Yeah.

I: What does that make you feel? Do you consider that as a fight? Or just joking around...umm...with friends?

Justin: Well, I just consider that [to be] "Lydia" (personal communication, May 1, 2008).

Gee (2005) indicated that socially situated identities are mutually co-constructed in everyday conversation. Based on her peers' description above, Lydia had a reputation that was to be always on edge and ready to quarrel with others. By closely observing Lydia, I saw that she was responsive and passionate, yet she seemed to need to learn more appropriate social skills.

In short, Lydia positioned herself in this online community as an outgoing yet imprudent blogger, which reflected what she was really like. Moreover, as the school-

whether it was an eagerness to build relationships or a gush of anger resulting from a dispute with a peer. Consequently, I had to remove some of Lydia's postings in order to save the blogs from becoming an unwelcoming, unrestrained chat room.

Lydia's eagerness to build relationships in a blunt way particularly confused the Taiwanese students. Ning-ning posted thoughtful answers to Mrs. Dickinson's reading prompts about *The Island of the Skog* (Kellogg, 1993). Lydia made this comment: "ha that is all true!!! i know i have said this alot but you are so cool!!!!!" (blog entry, November 1, 2007). And Ning-ning's response was "ha ha! i'm cool? i just said what i wanted to say" (November 4, 2007). The Taiwanese students were not sure about Lydia's reactions to their postings. They were also concerned about her language. When Lydia posted remarks like "I hate you" and "you are weird", the Taiwanese student, Ning-ning, whom Lydia considered to be cool, asked "are u really ok?" (blog entry, October 26, 2007). Lydia replied, "ya i am fine. i have wanted to talk to you for ever!" (October 28, 2007). I believed that comment revealed Lydia's true intention. She worked to attract the attention of the Taiwanese students. Throughout her postings in the beginning of the project she used an inappropriate mode of language to carry out that intention.

As time went by, a learning community was formed on the American side (as is reported in previous section). Since the cultural model within the American group changed, students started to bring a new situated meaning to this online discussion activity. They tended to view this online discussion as a learning experience.

Accordingly, they started to think more deeply and posted more thoughtfully. In her

reflection, Lydia recognized her own change too. She attributed the change to the help from the Taiwanese student, Ning-ning. She said:

And...umm...I think that the first time I went blogged like “what am I supposed to do?” And /?/ like Ning-nig, she like really helped me. And when... when we talked about *The Other Side*, she really got me into it. Because first I thought the book was about black and white who like really didn’t get along. When she talked about it, it was whole like a different thing. It was like more of ... It really made you understand NOW...so before it really actually happens (April 24, 2008).

In the previous section I discussed how learning from each other was one main reason that both groups improved. Lydia’s comment here supports that finding. In this reflection, she described how she was at a loss in the beginning. She had not figured out the right way to blog. Then she learned to see things in a different light as she read others’ (such as Ning-ning’s) posts. She started to think more about the texts. Other factors also contributed to Lydia’s engagement, such as some uncommitted participating students dropping out from the American group as well as Mrs. Dickinson’s persistent guidance. Consequently, Lydia and her American peers became engaged learners. Lydia ceased to position herself as a fun-only blogger in this online project, as she developed a new situated identity.

With this new situated identity and this recently changed cultural model in her group, Lydia’s online language transformed as well. She started to post longer passages, and her responses to the others’ postings became more to the point instead of being merely chatty. A list of the number of words posted by Lydia over time is provided below:

Table 5.

Number of Words Posted by Lydia

<u>Order</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Number of Words</u>
1.	1025	11
2.	1025	28
3.	1028	9
4.	1028	7
5.	1101	28
6.	1101	33
7.	1130	102
8.	0124	56
9.	0124	56
10.	0131	23
11.	0131	68
12.	0207	126
13.	0214	165
14.	0228	109
15.	0306	107
16.	0313	33
17.	0320	64
18.	0403	151
19.	0410	77
20.	0424	420
21.	0508	132
22.	0515	274
23.	0522	187
24.	0527	220

This list shows that Lydia posted shorter passages in her first several entries. The only exception was the 102 word post done on November 30, 2007. In this blog entry, Lydia wrote by addressing Ning-ning particularly. She wrote:

I really think it is a touching too! Who is your favorite? Mine is Mr.Mah! He is very nice! I wonder if he could be that nice too me!! That was a very good book! Do you have a trance later? Is it a girl or a boy? Maybe a girl named Ning-ning should come to America, and ask for a girl named Lydia! (That's me!) I do high steppers. What sport do you do, Ning-ning? I have to go 1 more thing is it boring to be at a all girl school? It would be for me! I mean..... NO BOYS!!!!

Since this posting was a more personal communication with one particular reader, Lydia constructed a longer posting. It also demonstrates how eager Lydia was to connect with her favorite Taiwanese peer blogger, Ning-ning.

Starting from February 7, 2008, when the American group had turned into a learning community, Lydia's posting became longer as well. The only two regressions (the 16th and 17th posts) happened when Lydia learned how to upload images and spent more time searching for pictures than writing. The 19th post appeared a little bit shorter since Lydia used varied colors for every single line in that posting. Changing the colors of the fonts must have taken much time. Aside for these exceptions, Lydia's later postings suggest that she successfully evolved into an engaged learner. This newly acquired identity was truthfully reflected in her online language. A comparison of the shortest post and the longest one can show that as an engaged learner Lydia not only posted more, she also thought more deeply in these responses:

1. The blog entry posted about *Island of the Skog* (Kellogg, 1993) on October 28, 2007, 7 words:

i think the book was so good. did you?

2. The blog entry posted about *Henry and the Kite Dragon* (Hall, 2004) on April 24, 2008, 420 words:

In order to display the details of Lydia's thinking, I listed my coding of the second example entry.

Table 6.

Example of Lydia's Posting and My Coding

Lydia's Posting	My Coding
<p><u>Henry and the kite Dragon.....</u></p>  <p>one thing a thought was bad was when Tony and his friends ripped and shredded all the other kites. They could have just talked to them and said that is my homing pigeon - please stop ⁽¹⁾. But they had to throw rocks and make them mad ⁽²⁾. The reason I think the kids from Chinatown began to respect Tony's prespective becasue if they were him they would want him to stop too ⁽³⁾. When they launched all those kites, they were really trying to say, "Stop" ⁽⁴⁾ because if I kept going over and over again I wouldn't see that they wanted to stop ⁽⁵⁾ and if Tony knew where Grandfather Chin lived he could go up there and say this is my pigeon and they could put something up there to show it was his pigeion ⁽⁶⁾. Even if there were no pigeons the people in Chinatown the kids and grandfather Chin shouldn't be chasing any kinds of bird becasue you could actually scare the bird to death ⁽⁷⁾. I think that the other thing they learned from Grandfaher was to respect different people and to go talk to them and see if everything is OK ⁽⁸⁾. I think when Tony cries it shows another side of him because everyone is afraid of him but he is only protecting his pigeons ⁽⁹⁾. WHEN he begins to cry in front of the kids I think the kids saw the sensitive side of him too ⁽¹⁰⁾. when Grandfather Chin says "Eneryone respects dragons" he was wrong because when Tony and his friends started throwing rocks it shows they don't know anything about Chinese culture and you can't put all the balme on them because they don't know anything about the Chinese culture and they don't know that the dragons are sacred ⁽¹¹⁾. In the part when Tony cries</p>	<p>Using an image to extend understanding of the theme (Image: cards expressing good will)</p> <p>(1) Suggesting an alternative solution</p> <p>(2) Seeing the irrational behavior of the characters</p> <p>(3) Understanding characters' responses to the situation--empathy</p> <p>(4) Interpreting character's move</p> <p>(5) Reasoning the significance of the move</p> <p>(6) Seeing another option</p> <p>(7) Drawing on prior knowledge; Gaining insight</p> <p>(8) Seeing what the characters gain</p> <p>(9) Realizing the implied meaning of an act</p>

instead of getting angry that really surprised me because everyone thinks he a big bad monster thing and when he cries it shows that inside he is just a pup⁽¹²⁾. The reason I think that the author wanted to write stories for kids to kids is because when you write books for kids it can be true or not true stories when you write those stories and you have some of those kids in your town you can start reading and learning more about kids in those other countries⁽¹³⁾. when all the kids were is the park it was a SMART idea for Grandfather Chin to launch the dragon kite, it got the kids distracted so the Chinese kids couldn't start the fight⁽¹⁴⁾.

- (10) Seeing relationships
- (11) Rationalizing characters' behaviors
- (12) Expressing feelings; Describing changed attitude
- (13) Understanding the author's motives
- (14) Evaluating the character's act

Compared to the shortest entry posted in the beginning of the project, in this longest posting, Lydia demonstrated her growth. She paid close attention to the details of the texts, and she gained insights about the characters, including their motives, reactions, and solutions. Although her typing was not very skillful, her language was sophisticated and her statements well-supported. The only one time she expressed emotion was when she was surprised to see how Tony cried over his scared pigeons. No other irrelevant comment was perceived in this entry. Lydia did not try to attract attention by using blunt or exaggerated language, nor was she arguing with anyone else. In this posting, Lydia displayed herself as a confident and knowledgeable student. She focused on the analysis of the text, and she presented her insights in a serious and earnest way. It is also interesting to see how she thought people could get along with one another through peaceful talk (see coding 1 and 2). Lydia occasionally had other arguments with her peers. She also continued to act restlessly, and therefore caused some conflicts between

her and Mrs. Dickinson, who observed that she was “disruptive and incredibly disrespectful” (personal communication, May 9, 2008) or “putting on a show” for other students to watch (personal communication, May 13, 2008). Consequently, we asked Lydia to stay in the hall occasionally and calm herself down before she joined the group. Looking back on how many times she fought with her peers in the early blogs, I feel that her acknowledgement of the power of talk promised a potential improvement for the future.

It is interesting to note that Lydia posted her longest passage right after I interviewed her. During our group interview, I asked her and another student, Jenny, to reflect on their own postings and others’ as well. I also asked her to talk about what she learned from the books. Lydia was given the chance to ponder both her participation in this project and what she had learned so far; she had the opportunity to share how she felt and thought. All this introspection motivated her. I wrote my observation of her later that day in my reflection blog:

I started to interview the kids today. Since Jenny and Lydia were the first two to show up, I just took them with me. The interview really went really well. I was surprised to hear how positive Lydia felt about the project. And all the things she said are like the perfect answers I have expected. I can see that Lydia really has been enjoying doing this. The talk with them really makes me realize them more. And I think the talk does good to them too. Is it because they felt respected or is it because their opinions have been heard? Anyway, I notice that once they were back to the group (Mrs. Dickinson was reading aloud then), they got engaged

right away. Lydia has transformed so much. I really feel happy for her. I don't think she is going to cause any trouble at all (personal note, April 24, 2008).

I perceived that Lydia began to respect herself as a learner and this feeling resulted from Mrs. Dickinson's and my respect and expectations for her. How the Taiwanese students viewed her also contributed to Lydia's new vision of herself. On the blog, she was no longer the "trouble maker," a role her American peers first saw. Rather, she gradually turned into an insightful thought-contributor. I noticed that whatever happened before the blogging session, once Lydia started to type on the computer, she appeared to be engaged and enjoying herself. This blogging activity provided Lydia an opportunity to take a new stance, a stance she did not really try before. She was an engaged learner in the online community, and her postings reflected that.

I-mei. Similar to Lydia, I-mei, a Taiwanese student, remained enthusiastic about the project throughout my study. Nonetheless, as the school-level cultural model and situated meaning I-mei and her Taiwanese peer group developed were different from those of the American group's, I-mei positioned herself distinctly from Lydia.

In the earlier section, I discussed that the Taiwanese group tended to see this blogging activity an academic event, an extension of their school learning rather than a fun extra-curricular activity. Since I-mei and her Taiwanese peers valued this event as an unusual learning experience, they created a particular situated meaning for it, that is, to learn and to expand their horizons. I-mei told me (translated from Mandarin) how her world seemed to be enlarged because of this project.

This is a...my first time to discuss with the children from another country about books on the Internet. From my perspective, I found that the world is getting

bigger. I used to lead a simple life, confined in a little frame, like the school, the cram school, and playing ball. It is always these three places. I repeated these activities day after day. But all of a sudden...well it is a little bit difficult to describe. There is something all of a sudden like I can see some place far far away, and I can discuss with a person, a group of persons about one certain thing, although there is some age difference between us (personal communication, May 18, 2008).

This activity brought I-mei the chance to experience new things different from her daily routines. Her world became bigger and her life experiences enriched. Therefore, I-mei embraced this opportunity. This situated meaning helped I-mei take on a certain identity in this project.

In addition, I-mei had strong motives to participate in this activity. In the long-distance interview, I-mei explained to me what had helped her engage in this project. She said (translated from Mandarin), “I like English and I like to interact with people. I love to discuss with people. These are the factors that have helped me” (personal communication, May 18, 2008). Unlike some foreign language learners, I-mei rarely felt hesitant in expressing herself in English. She even felt proud of being able to do it. I-mei said:

The part I like about this project is that I can use English to communicate with others. My father said that I was childish, but I really feel excited that they can understand my English. And they are so far away (personal communication, May 18, 2008).

Ms. Lin informed me that I-mei was a strong learner in her English class. She was assigned to represent the class attending an English writing contest not long before the project ended and won the third place. Therefore, I-mei's capability of mastering English also helped build her situated identity.

I-mei was a member of a learning community, she enjoyed writing in English and discussing with people, and she valued this project as a unique, eye-opening learning experience. These factors helped I-mei position herself in this blogging activity as a confident and self-motivated learner. Her online language reflected that identity; she appeared to be supportive, engaged, and confident to share.

By closely examining I-mei's blog entries, I found out that I-mei spent more time than most of the students commenting on others' postings. During the eight-month blogging interaction, I-mei made six postings, yet commented eleven times on the others' posts. The average number of words she posted in her comments was 59. The American students usually made short and sometimes superficial replies, such as "I agree with you." The Taiwanese students were more thoughtful in their replies. They either built upon others' ideas or brought up further discussions. However, I-mei's 59-word comment in average was still unusual even when compared with her Taiwanese peers'. This suggests that I-mei was really having conversations with the American students instead of only "presenting" her ideas.

I-mei also demonstrated social skills in her online language—she was encouraging and supportive all the time when she posted. Here are several examples of her opening sentences when she replied to people:

"I love your comment to those character. You're such a wonderful writer"
(October 30, 2008).

“You really have a special way leaving messages” (October 30, 2008)!

“What a story! I have never heard the story before” (March 5, 2008).

“I think your ideas are pretty convincing” (March 11, 2008).

“Wow. I am surprised that you could find that and read the book so closely” (March 11, 2008).

“Wow, you are really good at expressing your thought clearly” (April 17, 2008).

Such a supportive social language suggests I-mei’s zeal in building relationships, which further implies that she was enthusiastically involved in this online interaction.

Moreover, it shows that I-mei was confident enough to give praise and encouragement.

Although the limited amounts of time always hindered the Taiwanese students from getting more involved in this activity, I-mei posted regularly. Once she posted how regretful she was for missing the posting time (before Thursday afternoon, Central time, so that the American students could read them in time). She wrote:

I really have to say sorry first. I was too exhausted this week and ended up going to bed early without getting up on time-and I couldn't believe that I didn't post in time! (blog entry, April 25, 2008).

This post not only shows again that I-mei was enthusiastic in participating in this project. It also tells how self-motivated she was.

Because of her enthusiastic engagement in this project, I-mei also valued other students’ contributions. When I asked her if she replied randomly to other students’ postings, she answered that she chose those who were more engaged. She said, “I chose the content that is more meaningful or that I can share the same feeling with. If he typed something that I do not really understand, then I don’t know what to respond.” The

following is her comment to Kevin when they discussed the book, *Henry and the Dragon Kite* (Hall, 2004).

"the kids have their differences and they are both the same (they both love things in the sky)"

What a cute opinion! By the way, don't you think no matter how old we get, we all have the childish part inside?

I think that it's quite hard for us to be so calm at the very moment when we saw something we value was being hurt, right?

p.s.

I'm running out of my ideas to write my own artical because I am too excited to share my feelings here! (blog entry, April 25, 2008)

I-mei's social language in this posting was supportive and encouraging. Nonetheless, she did not post such encouragement out of politeness only. She earnestly meant it as she received inspiration from Kevin's comment that both groups of children are in some way the same. (See the last sentence of her comment.) For I-mei, the learning experience was valuable, so she devoted herself whole-heartedly to it. She was rewarded in turn by gaining more insights through it. This positive circle helped I-mei to position herself more as an engaged and self-motivated learner.

In addition to being enthusiastic and self-motivated, I-mei was also confident enough to use English to share her opinions and feelings. A close examination of the following blog entry exhibits how relaxed and confident I-mei was when she switched topics freely in her posting, yet she skillfully kept relating to the text all the time. I use this blog entry my coding in the table below to give more explicit ideas of I-mei's moves.

Table 7.

Example of I-mei's Posting and my Coding

I-mei's Posting	My Coding
Thursday, April 17, 2008	(1) Providing a creative title

Across the fence.⁽¹⁾



⁽²⁾

It's another book about segregation. And I like the painting. It really gives me a warm feeling-between the children, who were not influenced by other things⁽³⁾.

And have you noticed that my title is alike our blog's name? The meaning of this book is that breaking the fence between people is something we should do⁽⁴⁾.

I'm going to watch Andrea Bocelli's concert in Taiwan on 4/19. He is blind, but he has a heavenly voice and a kind personality⁽⁵⁾. Well, he can not see, do you think that would make some differences if we can not see each other's appearance but can only know who someone really are⁽⁶⁾?

(2) Using image to supplement text message

(3) Evaluating illustrations

(4) Calling attention to the title; pointing out the theme of the book

(5) Referring to a recent life experience

(6) Asking questions to build text-world connections

In this blog entry, I-mei spoke to her readers, the other bloggers. She asked questions to draw attention to the title and the theme of the book they were reading. Then she asked more questions to encourage them to see how she was making connection with the text. With those questions, she was also pushing her readers to think further. The book *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), that I-mei responded to is about two girls separated from each other because of their skin colors. In the interview, I-mei told me how she came up with the idea of this posting (translated from Mandarin):

I think that it is...I think we can all ponder this: If you cannot see anything, all these have no meanings to you. For example, I remember Dr. Chia-tong Lee wrote a story, "My Blind Professor," in which he wrote about racial discrimination. His advisor is blind. But he [the advisor] acquired the blind at adult years. He could see until he graduated from college. He used to be a very discriminative Caucasian. But after he lost his sights, he found...he could only feel the nature of a person instead of seeing that person's skin color. So I thought of the story. The ending of the story, as I remember it, is that he [Dr. Lee] realized later that...the professor's wife came to pick him up, and the wife was black (personal communication, May 18, 2008).

The transcription showed that I-mei was able to make text-text connections when she read the book, *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001). More than that, she was sympathetic about the issue, and she thought of another example to support her understanding. Then she shared that understanding with the other students in her blog entry. In her posting I-mei displayed that she was a thoughtful learner. More importantly, she was not hesitant in sharing all her knowledge. She brought up these topics and therefore encouraged her readers to ponder as well.

An engaged learner and confident blogger, I-mei still suffered certain kinds of setbacks occasionally. She felt disappointed when she did not receive equally enthusiastic responses from the other students. I-mei said (translated from Mandarin),

I enjoy writing. And I would like to share with others what I am thinking. So I will write hard and earnestly. But like...perhaps my classmates are too busy, or the American children like to read big fonts (chuckling). So sometimes...

sometimes I felt a little bit disappointed that they did not comment a lot on my postings. But I am serious in making people know what I am thinking. They are not so into writing though (personal communication, May 18, 2008).

Another setback that I-mei suffered was that she felt sometimes she could not get rid of the format the Taiwanese students were trained to use when writing a reading response. It is necessary to note the Chinese school-level cultural model here. Since these Taiwanese students were mostly studious and advanced learners in Chinese literacy, when it came to writing responses to books, they “automatically” adopted the structure they learned to compose in Chinese writings. The Chinese term ‘Reading Response’ (*tu shu shin te*) usually implies a certain form of writing. Basically, when Taiwanese students write ‘*tu shu shin te*’ (Reading Response), often they are expected to write about the lessons they learn from the texts. Although learning moral lessons is not the only goal for reading activities, Taiwanese students when reading a text are still expected to gain insights about self, the society, the world, and good virtues. Aesthetic and efferent writings are both important; however, the most important is what one learns. As a result, self-text and text-world connections are highly valued.

Being immersed in that school-level cultural model, I-mei felt that she had to write her reading responses in a certain way. She saw her classmates were doing the same thing. When discussing *The Big Box* (Morrison, 2002), in which the children characters are locked in by their parents as they were thought to fail to handle their freedom, I-mei pointed out that her classmates wrote about the good side of confining one’s freedom. She said that it was because they were writing the Reading Response: “We have to act like we are understanding, partly because we do understand, but also

partly because we intuitively write it that way” (personal communication, May 18, 2008).

The following is the excerpt of I-mei’ discussion about freedom in her “Reading Response” to the book, *The Big Box*:

Do you sometimes feel that adults limit your freedom? I think we get confused when we just don't understand why they do this. I felt depressed once when my parents said I can only study for medical school. That was my most unforgettable experience of being asked to limit my freedom or free.

Why are the adults behaving the way they are? I guess when someone has grown up, he or she might have also experienced something we children can't imagine. It might be hurtful, might be valuable, might be wonderful, might be something they just hope their children to "skip".

Now my parents don't insist that I have to be a doctor in the future anymore. I'm still thinking about it anyway--It's just an interesting thought! So strive for your freedom or free! Whether the freedom to be who you really are or who you you're going to be. But you have to be able to handle it right. How to know if we're handling it right? That's what you're learning at school and in family now! (blog entry, April 3, 2008)

In this excerpt about freedom, I-mei started with a paragraph stressing the shared feeling she had with the other bloggers when her freedom of choice was taken away by her parents. Then in the next paragraph she analyzed why parents would act that way. In the next paragraph she returned to an incident between her and her parents and pointed out that the conflict was resolved. The whole passage appeared to be strong writing. It included shared feelings (social skills), an ability to see things from a different perspective (thinking strategy), and the capability of moving to-and-fro between the abstract (confining freedom) and the concrete (specific personal experience). The last several sentences, however, really show that the message ended up with a life lesson. I-mei encouraged her readers to strive for their freedom, sounding like she had a rich knowledge of it. As she was concerned that her readers might go extreme, she warned them to “handle it right.” According to I-mei, the school and their family would show them how to strive for freedom.

I-mei was engaged and confident in sharing, which echoes what I discussed earlier. She talked about being moderate, a so deeply-rooted Chinese philosophy, and that she has the values of schooling and family, another long-lasting Chinese tradition. The Chinese cultural model was therefore easily seen. In addition, the school-level cultural model she was so used to also drew her back to a fixed frame when presenting her ideas. She ended her writing by giving a life lesson, as all the other Chinese students always do when they write reading responses. Life insights are important; however, occasionally they look boring in style and sound hypocritical in tone. I-mei herself sensed this limitation. We had the following conversation in the interview (translated from Mandarin):

I: So do you think that writing “Reading Response” is bad?

I-mei: Yes, because our perception is limited. If I am reading for leisure, I can think slowly and deeply.

I: What will you talk about then other than “Reading Response?”

I-mei: A lot of things.

Q: And what will you talk about in a “Reading Response?”

E: What I have learned from the book, bla bla bla. And then after I finished writing, I asked myself why I was writing this again? I have been formatted (personal communication, May 18, 2008).

I-mei thought that a “Reading Response” was to offer a lesson she learned from the text, but she actually disliked that she automatically used the format.

In the previous discussions, I examined two focus students, Lydia and I-mei. I analyzed their online languages by looking at how they positioned themselves in their

school-level cultural models and the situated meanings they brought to this activity.

Although quite different from each other, both Lydia and I-mei displayed the ability to learn and to be enthusiastic in participation. In order to present a whole picture of nature of the study, the following paragraphs are about another two students, Mary and Chen-na, whom I chose particularly to contrast with the styles of Lydia and I-mei.

Mary. Mary was an American fifth grader. Like most of the other American students, she voluntarily participated in the project with the expectation that it was “fun and interesting” (personal communication, February 7, 2008). When some other American students started to recognize the value of the learning experience this project provided to them, Mary held on to her view of this activity--a fun event. As a result, she positioned herself in this online discussion activity as a party-goer throughout the study until she finally decided to stop participating.

During her participation in this project, Mary posted on the group blog 18 times, among which five were to chat with people while the other 13 were about the books. Most of her postings about the books were general impressions. She commented on people 12 times. Except for two comments in which she was really sharing her thoughts about the texts, all the others were either having a brief conversation, such as “Thank you for typing me! Bye Lydia” (blog entry, January 24, 2008), or were very superficial, such as “I like your post becus li like it frome Mary” (blog entry, March 13, 2008). Without the instructor’s onsite assistance, Mary did not explore further independently in her posts. This was partly because Mary was not a strong reader or writer. It was also because she was easily distracted when she blogged. Oftentimes Mary appeared to chat with people, abandoning what she was doing when something else attracted her attention.

The following is a brief summary of Mary's monthly postings. I chose one post from each month to present a whole picture of her participation. Under the summary I provide three complete blog entry examples and offer further analyses to better illustrate my understandings.

Table 8.

Summary of Mary's Selective Blog Entries

Time	Book Discussed	Number of Words	Topics Covered
10/25/07	<i>The Island of the Skog</i>	40	Giving general impression of the character
11/29/07	<i>The Island of the Skog</i>	30	Stating that she disliked the book
12/13/07	<i>Me and Mr. Mah</i>	61	Seeing the relationship of the two main characters
01/24/08	<i>Yoon and Christmas Mitten</i>	63	Asking questions; Introducing two incidents she liked
02/28/08	<i>The Greatest Power</i>	53	Stating that she liked the book and would give it to her friend
03/13/08	<i>The Big Box</i>	43	Explaining why she liked the book and disliked a certain part
03/13/08	<i>The Big Box</i>	123	Explaining further why she liked the book; Trying to answer one of the prompts
04/03/08	<i>The Other Side</i>	220	Stating opinions about the characters; Introducing her favorite part Asking for responses; Explaining further her opinions by giving supportive arguments; Inviting responses again

The following are the complete contents of three selective blog entries listed in Table 6 (I kept the original colors of fonts but changed the large sizes of fonts to save pages):

- 1 October 25, 2007, post about *The Island of the Skog*:

Hi my name is Mary we read a book I dont rember the name but it was a good book I liked boncer

but he is a littel mean but he is my favorat cariktor in the book.he was funey.

- 2 January 24, 2008, post about *Yoon and the Christmas Mitten*:

Hi its Mary!

Why did yoons dad not like Christmas?
Why do thay not celabrat Christmas.
santa came and brote her a new dress and a candy cane.
I like the part when Yoon stomed her feet .
I also liked the part when Yoon thoth that Santa brote her a piece of the Nort pool

Sencerly,
Mary
ps. IT IS VAREY COLUD

3. April 3, 2008, post about *The Other Side*:

I like the book becuse it is varey intoresting and i think that thay should be abil to talk and play they should not be seperated and my favorit part is when all of Clovers freinds sit on the fince with Anney that is my favorit part in the book becuse like i said befor they sould not be separateted. Whats your favorit parat in the book you can tell me if you know who i am or you can write me or you dont have to do eney of those thigs at all. if i have not told you why i think that thay sould not be saported I will now. they should not be seperated becuse its MEAN and its not FAIR to the whits and the africin amarcin and they sould just all be friends and stop all the fighting and putting all african amarcins in the bace of the bus and stop all of the fithing like the wor thats what i think and thats whats i have to say about this book and nowe you can post me or tell me if you know me or you dont have to tell me eney of that stuff or you dont have to post me ther but i would relly like if you did. Thank you

\$\$\$\$\$\$Mary\$\$\$\$\$\$MONEY

Examining closely what Mary posted during these different time-periods, one may assume that Mary made progress. In the first example (posted in October), she stated a general impression without going further to explore either the texts or her own reflections. She also forgot the title of the book. However, in the second example (posted in January), she asked questions and shared her feelings. She even referred to specific incidents in the book, which suggested that she was paying attention to the text. However her progress was not always as steady as it shows in these two examples. In February and March she again posted things like “I really like the book because I like the pics and I like ther details and other stuff” (blog entry, February 28, 2008), or “I like the book becuse it rimes and I like rimes they are fun to read!” (blog entry, March 13, 2008). Therefore, what really caused the progress present in her posts was actually whether we provided her with individual, special assistance on the spot, such as repeated reading, prompts, and typing.

When Mrs. Dickinson and I observed the fun-party stage (as described earlier) that the American group was not able to focus on the task as we expected them to, we had to adjust our roles accordingly. Mrs. Dickinson continued to be the instructor, with a firmer attitude, and I started to share part of the teaching responsibilities. As a result, we both provided onsite writing help whenever we found the students needed it. That is how Mrs. Dickinson and I started to try various strategies with Mary. Mrs. Dickinson twice suggested sending the books home with Mary so that she could revisit the texts before we blogged about them again the next time. We were not sure if she did revisit the books, as she was absent during both weeks. Eventually we decided to sit by her and sometimes type for her, and that worked. The third example blog entry I listed above was completed

when Mrs. Dickinson was working with her. The following two excerpts from my reflection blog explained how the instructors' particular attention and assistance helped Mary improve:

1. Observation of Mary on March 13, 2008, when she did the 123 word posting:

Jean let Mary post her poem [on the whole class blog as it was not about the book]. She thought it was a nice way to encourage her. So I helped Mary type so that she could have some time left for her to post the poem. It is a poem about some leaves. Jean asked her to bring the book back home again. I think as we are working so hard on her, it is very optimistic that she will make progress. I kind of conferred with her when I helped her typing. I first mentioned the three big issues that the kids raised and then Jean summarized before the computer session began (Could the children get away? What possibility? What consequence). After Mary gave her answer, I asked her "What does that make you feel?" So we posted her feeling too. I think it will be rewarding to keep working with her.

2. Observation of Mary on April 3, 2008, when she did the 220 word posting:

Mary surprised me today. But I think Jean was doing a really excellent job with her. She encouraged her a lot in the group discussion, assuring her that her opinions were valuable. So once Mary started to work on the computer she had already had a lot of good thoughts to share. Then I complimented her on her long post. She did not even try to look for any pictures to upload. And she did commenting too. These kids are really coming along. But I have to say that on-site assistance was essential.

My reflection blog entries suggest that Mary had the potential to improve as long as we provided constant onsite help. Her longer and more insightful postings also caused the Taiwanese students to comment back from time to time. Nevertheless, I did not notice the fact that Mary had some social issues that hindered her from being engaged. Mrs. Dickinson informed me in her email that Mary and another participating girl, Sadie, had a fight at school. When that happened, “they were so angry with each other that they couldn't/wouldn't get past that” (personal communication, April 17, 2008). The girls brought the social conflict to the project by the girls. As they were fighting with each other, they decided not to come to the computer lab so that they could avoid seeing each other there.

I did not realize the unsteady relationship developing between the two girls. Because I wasn't in their classroom, I expected Mary could improve with Mrs. Dickinson's scaffolding. On April 10, 2008, Mrs. Dickinson was not able to come to the computer lab because of a tornado warning. Since it would be too late to inform the parents, the blogging session was held as usual. Without the presence of Mrs. Dickinson, some less committed learners had more difficulty being on task. Mary, in particular, joked and played around until I had to seriously talk with her. During the whole blogging session, Mary posted one sentence on her group blog: “I like the book because it is itoresting” (blog entry, April 10, 2008). I talked to her in private, and when her mother came to pick her up, I spoke to the mother. I asked Mary if she thought this project was just for fun or also for her to learn something. I reminded her that she needed to be more focused in order to learn. Mary was angry that I spoke with her mother. Furthermore, the talk made Mary realize that this blogging activity was not solely about having fun.

The situated meaning she created for this event was not acceptable, neither was her situated identity approved. Mary posted her last blog entry the next day by using her home computer: “Hi it me MARY I JUST WHATED TO TELL YOU I QUITTE!!!!!!!!!!” Mary stopped participating in the project.

I blamed myself for not handling this situation more wisely and therefore finally have caused either resentment or embarrassment to Mary. A follow-up conversation with Mary about her quitting was not feasible since she avoided both Mrs. Dickinson and me in the hall afterward. It would not have helped to talk to her substitute teacher either. I felt regretful that Mary decided to leave, especially when I was certain of the possibility of her future progress as a learner. However, after closely examining Mary’s online language, I realized that Mary had never positioned herself fully as a learner in this project. She was not self-motivated, and it had to take great effort to make her focus. This situation prevented Mary from being independently engaged in thoughtful discussions. Unless she was willing to evolve along with the other committed learners, her dropping out of the program was unavoidable because the American group was developing into a learning community.

Chen-na. Mary’s case showed that if the students were not ready to be engaged both mentally and physically in the project as an active learner, their performances would reflect that reluctance. Chen-na, a Taiwanese tenth grader, was a different case.

Chen-na remained participating throughout the project, yet she chose to be lukewarm although she might have acted as an engaged, active learner. This resulted from how Chen-na perceived this project along with some other factors that were different from Mary’s reasons. Chen-na expressed that she appreciated the learning

opportunity she had by participating in the project. However, her participation did not demonstrate that enthusiasm for learning. As most of the Taiwanese students valued this learning experience, examining why some of them, such as Chen-na, did not accordingly participate wholeheartedly in the project was important.

Both I-mei and Chen-na were considered strong readers and writers and successful scholars by the instructor, Ms. Lin. Nonetheless, the degrees of their involvement in the project differed. I-mei posted on her group blog seven times and made 11 comments, while Chen-na posted on her group blog three times and made four comments. Compared to I-mei, Chen-na's amount of postings was much less. Ms. Lin suggested (translated from Mandarin):

The students' participation in the book discussion did not reflect their English capability. Like Chen-na, who is always one of the top ten students in class [of 35 students], but she rarely took part in the group discussions. So students like her... I feel that they made it clear that this task was not their priority. Nor was it a requirement. It was something they joined as an extra... like a small club. So she did it only when she had the time. I feel that she was like...that is, she has a ruler in her mind [meaning she has certain criteria to evaluate things]. She knows what is more important...Her study is more important, and the monthly exams are more important. But this activity... she did it when she had the time or when the teacher pushed her to (personal communication, May 30, 2008).

Ms. Lin's comment suggested that for students like Chen-na, who valued their academic performances more than an additional project like this, the situated meaning they brought to this activity would never carry the same weight as that they created for their school

work. They viewed this learning activity an extra learning activity, but not necessarily leading to good grades on tests.

Chen-na tried to justify her not blogging frequently. She told me that the limited amount of time hindered her. She said (translated from Mandarin):

About posting, I felt that sometimes it was too rush. Because we had only two copies of books, but we had so many people. It took time to have the books circled around. So sometimes I did not get the book yet, but suddenly the teacher told us to start posting. So I kind of couldn't make it. So I just rush through the text (personal communication, June 5, 2008).

The limited number of copies added difficulty for the Taiwanese students when they tried to remain on task. Nonetheless, for self-motivated bloggers, like I-mei, this had never been a problem. Later in the interview Chen-na also admitted that the conflict with schoolwork was a concern to her. She said, "Because if I haven't finished my schoolwork, and then the teacher said that we need to post, then I would feel under pressure" (personal communication, June 5, 2008). Chen-na's solution, then, was to complete the minimum tasks as required. She said she felt obliged to post since both the teacher and her classmates would ask her if she had posted. "So I thought then I just finished the reading posting and it would be fine" (personal communication, June 5, 2008).

What I reported above did not imply that Chen-na held a totally negative attitude toward this project. In fact, even though Chen-na seemed to regard this activity a low-priority, she appreciated this learning experience. She commented that reading the books was beneficial for her as she seldom had the chance to do any leisure English reading.

She said, “I do not read many English books, and this project allows me to do so” (personal communication, June 5, 2008). She also reflected that posting on the blogs helped her writing improve, and she was actually able to think as she wrote. Chen-na described it this way, “I had some thoughts before posting. Then when writing, it suddenly occurred to me that I could also add something there” (personal communication, June 5, 2008). However, Chen-na chose to emphasize her school studies and turned this learning activity into a supplement. The situated meaning she gave to the project is that it was an extra learning experience. If she had time for it, she welcomed it; if she did not, she just did the minimum task so that she would not arouse any hard feelings among her teacher and the other group members. That explained why she posted about two books only, although she read most of the 11 books independently. That also clarified why in the following blog entry, she posted her ideas as though she was filling up a testing sheet.

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

[Q&A about the book](#)

Q1: Why did Ping invite children to the palace instead of adults?

I think that is because the emperor is also young, and kids are more creative than adults.

Q2: All the children were competing to be the one chosen to be prime minister. Why were the children working with each other instead of competing with one another?

Two heads are better than one.

Q3: What was the little girl doing when she decided that armies, beauty, and money were not the answer? (Where was she at the time?) Why did the author write that part of the story the way she did?

She's by the pond.

Q4: The author writes 'The nothing in this seed is the space in between where life exists'. What do you think the author means by that statement?

A seed is a begin of a new life .Even a little thing may have an incredible power.

In this posting, even the questions that Chen-na typed were written with more words than her answers. Her extremely brief answer to each question suggested that she was eager to get the task done, instead of doing any deeper thinking or experimenting more in writing.

But Chen-na was capable of thinking deeply and writing with variety. Unlike some not so strong readers or writers, Chen-na's short postings indicated that she was able to comprehend the text and to write insightfully. The following examples demonstrate that capability.

Sunday, January 20, 2008

[yoon](#)

Yoon loves the culture in the US, but her dad kept reminding her that they are Korean family. It made Yoon feel sad, but she still believed in that Santa would come to visit on the night of Xmas eve... Her parents couldn't accept it at first, but then gave in and gave Yoon a beautiful dress as a gift.

((I wonder how many of u guys believe in Santa~ @~@ ?))

And I really love the book(except for the pictures= =)

It reflects the differences between two different cultures and whether people can accept another cultures. Obviously, Yoon's dad can't(at first) and I'm happy that he finally gave in, because they live in America!!! So, it's necessary to know about the American culture and accept it~or it might cause serious problems between two different culture, just like genocide or somethin' else~

In this posting, Chen-na displayed several thinking strategies as recognized by Odell (1998). She first discussed the main character by seeing from the character's point of view—selecting and seeing another perspective, then she asked a text-life connection question (“I wonder how many of u guys believe in Santa”)—indicating dissonance, and she expressed her feelings—selecting. Afterwards, she explored the theme she perceived in the text—selecting. She then expressed her feeling of relief as she saw the conflict was resolved and no bad results would be caused—drawing on prior knowledge and

seeing the cause-effect relationship. Throughout the posting, Chen-na demonstrated strong thinking strategies. Moreover, she employed social skills (asking a life-related question) to engage her readers, and she was ready to share her feelings with them. This example shows that if Chen-na was willing and had time, she could contribute a great deal as an engaged learner and insightful blogger.

Chen-na was able to write with variety. Since writing was not included in the tenth grade curriculum yet, any genre other than narrative present in the blog entries was due to the Taiwanese students' own experiments. Among Chen-na's four postings about the books, once she wrote a poem, shown here:

Saturday, March 1, 2008

[the greatest power](#)

Life is the greatest power~
it really makes the Earth colorful
Life is circulation and never ends as I believe in reincarnation
it's miraculous

And i think that **LOVE** is also the greatest power in the world

love can give us energy
love can change everything
love can make magic

Even if we have fortune
Without love
We won't be happy
and life will be meaningless

In this posting Chen-na experimented another genre, poetry, and she used color scheme to add feeling and emotion to her writing. In the poem, she included metaphors, a self-text connection (her belief in reincarnation), reasoning, and supportive arguments. Again, this example suggests that Chen-na was able to think deeply. However, Chen-na's

situated identity about this project prevented her from participating more. She chose to be an “amateur” learner in this activity. She posted seriously and earnestly only when she could spare time from her schoolwork to do so. Otherwise, she just posted as if she was fulfilling some required duty.

After talking to Chen-na, I found another factor also came into play and affected how and what Chen-na posted. Like many of her Taiwanese peers, when Chen-na posted reading responses in English, she considered it an academic writing task. For that reason, Chen-na was under the same influence of the school-level cultural model that her group developed. An English Reading Response (‘tu shu shin te’) was not considered free chatting. It needed to be done with careful editing. Chen-na told me (translated from Mandarin) she felt that the American students’ writing was more colloquial while she and her Taiwanese peers would “always check carefully every word and see if we spelled the word wrong or missed some grammar.” Chen-na stated her reason for doing so:

I think it is because of our education. Like if we speak Mandarin, like we often write on the Internet something like Mars language. Probably it is because so. But when we are learning another language, we won’t be able to learn those expressions. We just learn from the textbooks (personal communication, June 5, 2008).

English writing to Chen-na had to be academic as she did not know any other way to do it. Moreover, the schooling she received also helped form her concept about reading responses. Chen-na described the Taiwanese students’ postings on the blogs as “neat.” She said, “School teaches us that we need to write composition in that way” (personal communication, June 5, 2008). Because Chen-na believed that an English writing piece

was always a final draft without any grammar and spelling mistakes, writing an English composition was challenging to Chen-na--even though she was considered a successful learner in class. Chen-na expressed, "I also feel that I am not that confident in English writing. I feel that I am not that awesome" (personal communication, June 5, 2008).

Writing in English intimidated Chen-na since she thought it had to be a perfect final draft. The following example was Chen-na's first post about books, in which she discussed our introductory book *Whoever You Are* (Fox, 2001) on the whole-class blog. This posting was almost close to error-free, and it was well organized, by starting with the main theme of the text, proceeding with personal opinions, and then ending with a conclusion sentence.

Friday, October 5, 2007

[whoever you are.\(\(\(by Chen-na\)\)\)](#)

The book said that we are all the same, no matter where you live or which language you speak.

We are all humans, we have feelings, we have emotion~

But in my opinion, I don't think that we are exactly the same. Because we don't live in the same country and have different cultures, use different languages.....

We speak Chinese You speak English

We use chopsticks You use knives and forks

We live in the East You live far away in the West.....

Even if we live in the same place

We still not the same

Everyone is UNIQUE !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Remember, There is no "second you" in the world.

Just Be Yourself~!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

(blog entry, October 5, 2007)

In this posting, Chen-na, like I-mei, appeared to be confined by the "Reading Response" model. She presented a different opinion, which suggested that she was a sophisticated

learner, able to construct her own values by drawing on prior knowledge of the world and referring to the current life experience in which she and her blogging peers were involved. However, in the end she followed the expected format for writing a reading response that her schooling taught her. She wrote “words of wisdom” (“Remember, There is no ‘second you’ in the world”) to enlighten her readers, and she gave a slogan-like concluding sentence to share the life lesson she learned from the text. As stated earlier, Reading Response in Chinese literacy is always about a lesson learned. Chen-na made efforts to meet that criterion, and she succeeded in doing it, although she ended her passage dully. Chen-na also made sure that each paragraph contained one main message only. In fact, when examining it closely, I realized that Chen-na adopted the four steps that Chinese writers always follow when writing an exposition essay: introduction, elucidation of the theme, transition to another viewpoint and summing up. This helped Chen-na’s posting appear well-organized.

Such writing must have been challenging to Chen-na. She had to accomplish multi-tasks in one post, including putting her thoughts into words, following certain formats (such as Reading Response and the four-step essay writing), and making sure that the writing mechanics were correct. In October 2007, during that one month alone, Chen-na made seven postings on the whole-class blog to have conversations with people. After the book discussions on individual group blogs began, during the remaining seven months, she made only three postings on her group blog. Writing English reading responses obviously hindered Chen-na.

In conclusion, I found that students developed different cultural models and gave diverse situated meanings to this activity. All of these factors affected how the students

situated themselves in the project and consequently made a difference to their online languages. The two positive examples, Lydia and I-mei, appeared to be committed learners, although Lydia experienced stages of transformation until she evolved into an engaged learner and I-mei struggled under the influence of her Taiwanese school-level cultural model. The two negative cases, Mary and Chen-na, failed to participate enthusiastically in the project. Mary remained to be a party-goer until she realized that this identity was not acceptable in this project and she had to leave for good; Chen-na submitted sparse postings because she was unwilling to devote time to the project and also felt under pressure about writing English reading responses. Analyzing other elements than students' "language-in-use" and "on site" (Gee, 2005) helped gain a more thorough understanding of students' language role in this inquiry.

Summary

This section answered my second sub-question: What are the characteristics of students' online discussions in this social context? I examined the three roles of the two groups' online discussions, including social, cognitive, and language roles, to find out about the general characteristics. In the social role, I discussed that blogging was conversational, since students used various discourse moves in their postings. The Americans' daily social relationships affected how and what they blogged in the virtual world. The Taiwanese group did not display such a correlation between their social life and blogging task; however, they appeared to be more interested in interacting with the American students than with their own peers.

Then I discussed the cognitive roles of students' online interactions. The findings showed that both groups learned different things from each other as they had the chance

to correspond. The Taiwanese students learned more about English while the American students benefited as they received online “tutoring” from the Taiwanese students. I also showed about how the sense of audience affected students’ blogging. They tended to be more conscious of the contents and formats of their blogging, and they used various techniques to attract attentions. Then I examined the thinking strategies displayed in students’ postings by adopting Odell’s categories (1998). I concluded that students’ writing demonstrated thinking while their writing also facilitated thinking.

Regarding the role of language, I inspected students’ writing styles and the multi-modal languages (both written and visual) they used in their blog entries. The American students tended to be more casual and expressive while the Taiwanese students were more used to presentational speech. Both groups employed visual images to supplement their messages, although the American students used them more. In the second part of the language role, I investigated other discourse elements than students’ language-in-use and on site. I borrowed Gee’s (2005) concept of Discourse to examine how students positioned themselves in the project. Students’ online languages were influenced by their cultural models, situated meanings they created for this project, and their own situated identities. I examined the Discourses of two focus students, Lydia and I-mei. To compare and contrast with the cases of the two focus students, I presented another two students’ Discourses (Mary’s and Chen-na’s) in order to gain a holistic picture of the nature of students’ online languages.

My discussions on the social, cognitive, and language roles of students’ online interaction help to add understanding to the body of knowledge about online interactions. The following section continues with a discussion about students’ experiences and

attitudes toward reading multicultural picture books and picture books with social-justice themes.

Reading Multicultural Picture Books and Picture Books with Social-Justice Themes

In the previous section, I reported the characteristics of students' online discussions. This section answers the third sub-question, "What are the students' experiences and attitudes toward reading multicultural picture books and picture books with social-justice themes?" As the students read eleven books in total throughout the project, I chose the discussions of three books as the focus of my investigation of this question. The three books are *Island of the Skog* (Kellogg, 1993), *The Greatest Power* (Demi, 2004), and *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust* (Bunting, 1999). These three books were discussed by the students respectively in the beginning (October 18, 2007 through November 1, 2007), midway (February 27, 2008 through March 12, 2008), and toward the end of the project (May 15, 2008 through May 27, 2008). Therefore, discussions of these books show the development of students' blogging and also give a whole picture of the students' experiences of reading the texts. However, as students' discussions of the other books oftentimes also provide salient information about students' growth and deep thinking (such as *The Big Box* by Morrison, 2002, and *The Other Side* by Woodson, 2001), I mention them as well.

The findings indicate that students grew in various ways over time. They developed cultural awareness and cultivated deeper critical thinking. The factors helping the growth were the choice of picture books and culturally relevant texts, and the instructors' scaffolding. Factors such as unfinished discussions and limited language and

typing ability also hindered students' further gains from this activity. All the findings are discussed below.

Students' Growth

Students displayed growth in two roles: They became more aware of each other's culture and they tended to think more critically of the contents of the texts.

Development of Cultural Awareness

When we started this project, most American students stated that they did not know anything about Taiwan. Some of them had never heard of it before. When answering the question if they knew anything about Taiwan or the Chinese culture, many American students put "No" in the survey. The Taiwanese students, although seeming to know more about American culture, admitted that their knowledge mostly came from textbook articles or Hollywood movies. Na-la pointed out that she knew a little about Thanksgiving. She wrote, "It's like our Chinese New Year. Family'll get together and thanks for something. I have read it from my school English book" (Na-la, personal communication, January 2, 2008). I-mei wrote in the survey, "I love movies. (I'm in the movies club in the school) Most of information about American culture I know are from Hollywood movies—and that's what I know" (I-mei, January 2, 2008). The students' answers to the survey question indicated that neither group of students had any personal contact or a deep understanding of the other culture.

As time went by, students from both groups had more conversations with each other. The American students also had more regular conversations with me and enjoyed the snacks I brought from Taiwan for them. As a result, the American students learned about the Taiwanese students, their school lives, how they celebrated Christmas and the

Chinese New Year (after their conversation about the book, *Yoon and the Christmas Mitten*, by Recorvits, 2006). They also learned what the Chinese students looked like and sounded like by watching video clips of the Taiwanese students I created during my winter visit in Taiwan. All of these helped the American students build an awareness of the Taiwanese students as real people, living their lives on the other half of the earth. They saw that the other group was similar to them as they all “have the same ideas” and did “almost the same postings” (Lydia, personal communication, April 24, 2008). They realized that what made them different was their culturally-constructed customs. Jenny described how she felt about the Taiwanese students. She said,

They are the same and different because they think of the same as us and everything but they have different culture and everything. So that kind of influences their posts. Just like we are going to talk about “Oh! Christmas! We’re going to get gifts! Santa Claus is coming down.” They learned more about Chinese New Year. Like we don’t like really pay attention to New Year. We go oh you shoot up fireworks, stay up till midnight, watch the ball drop. But in there it’s a very very very big celebration that goes on like four days? (personal communication, July 19, 2008).

The American students such as Jenny realized that the Taiwanese students celebrated the Chinese New Year in a serious way just like they celebrated Christmas. They saw that “their school is different and they wear a uniform” (Miki, personal communication, May 28, 2008). This awareness of the existence of a different group of people made them more conscious of that group’s culture. Reading books with multicultural themes especially enhanced this awareness. Jenny once posted about the

illustration of the bats on the cover page of the book, *The Greatest Power* (Demi, 2004).

She wrote:

I noticed on the cover that when you see the dragons going around in the circle it looks a lot like that symbol that is five bats are connected. I'm not quite sure what the five bats mean but when I saw it it reminded me of that bat symbol because the bats are like in arches like the dragons tails go down like where the bats head and body are. In the gifted program at our school there is a class on bats and that is what I'm taking and that's where I learned about the bat symbols because there are books that have that symbol on it (blog entry, March 6, 2008).

In this posting, Jenny drew on her prior knowledge gained from the gifted program about bats and reminded herself of the bat illustration she saw in the book. She also connected the bats with the dragon symbol, showing that she appreciated the significance of the dragon image in the Chinese culture. Although Jenny did not really know the significant meaning of the five bats in the Chinese culture¹, she was willing and able to see the connection and to suggest the value of them.

Another American student, Miki, also displayed similar appreciation of the Chinese culture when reading *The Greatest Power* (Demi, 2004). She posted:

What I think about the book is that it's very exciting. The thing that impresses most is the parade. Because the parade shows the culture, like with all the signs, especially the Chinese signs. The one on the front of the book, and on every page—the circle. Maybe it is probably the circle of their life (Miki, blog entry, February 28, 2008).

Miki was attracted to the cultural images in the book, and the repeated image of the circle in particular. She made a bold assumption of the meaning of it—the circle of life, as she learned from the text that the greatest power is life. Miki was correct. The circle has significant meanings in the Chinese culture. It symbolizes completeness, as well as the

¹ “Bat” sounds like “happiness” in Chinese pronunciation. The five bats indicate five kinds of happiness, including long life, richness, harmony, good virtue, and peaceful end of life.

circulation of beginning and ending of life. Miki's posting shows that she became mindful of the Chinese culture as she read along and posted throughout the project.

The books we chose for the students to read introduced them to different cultures. When the American students started authentic communications with people of the Chinese culture, the knowledge they learned from books became real. They found out that the other group of people, although living on the other side of the world, thought in similar ways to them. They started to appreciate that group's culture. Most importantly, they acknowledged the value of learning about another culture. Lydia concluded:

Ever since that I've talked to the Taiwanese, Ning-ning, and then I feel that uh...the more I talked to them about the Chinese New Year, the more I get in tact with it. Cause I feel that the more I talked to them about the Chinese New Year, the more I learned. The more I learned the more I get able at school. So that's really good (Lydia, personal communication, April 24, 2008).

The Taiwanese students also expressed appreciation for learning more about the other group's culture. First they were excited that they could have contacts with real people instead of learning about them from the textbooks or the movies. Kang-lin spent one year in the U.S. as an exchange student before she was enrolled in the Taiwan high school. However, she still enjoyed the opportunity to talk to the American fifth graders via this project. She told me (translated from Mandarin) that "it is a very unusual experience" since she had not really talked to American children and "did not know what they were thinking" (personal communication, May 10, 2008).

This conversation with real people helped the Taiwanese students learn about the American culture in a most authentic way. They started to see that the other group

consisted of real people that lived a very different kind of life. For example, once Na-la posted about how she felt when adults restricted her freedom (a response she had after reading the book, *The Big Box*, by Morrison, 2002). Kevin replied to her and shared that feeling by describing how he had to finish some house chores too:

I think the exact same thing!!! My own Mom doesn't give ME enough freedom. I think that because sometimes when I go outside I stay out and when I come in she says " go feed and water the chickens" (blog entry, April 3, 2008).

Na-la in the interview recalled how surprised she was when she read Kevin's posting. She said (translated from Mandarin):

...like Kevin talked about that he had to go back home and feed the chickens. I was laughing out. Such an unexpected answer! It never occurred to me that kids have to go back to feed the chicken. For us, it is always going back home and doing our study (personal communication, May 18, 2008).

Through their interactions about the books, the Taiwanese students learned that life experiences could be so different between these two groups of people. Besides that, they gained an understanding of the other world by reading the books. One vital example is that they saw the racial issues that the Americans faced and made efforts to resolve. In her interview with me, Hsiao-fang shared what she learned about this black and white social justice issue presented in the book *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001):

I saw the discrimination between the black and white. And the teacher [Ms. Lin] here reminded us that discrimination could happen among any races, such as Asians. I felt... I was not sure if there was still this kind of segregation. I wondered why it existed. The article I read said that the law ruled that black people had to give their seats to the white on the bus. I read that in the textbook.

So the book made me see that this was really happening (personal communication, May 16, 2008).

Hsiao-fang posted her feeling on the blog, “I hope the segregation between the White and the black can end one day. They can make friends with each other” (blog entry, April 14, 2008), and Lydia replied, “that did happen, Hsiao-fang!!!!!!” (blog entry, April 17, 2008). Hsiao-fang’s question about the segregation was answered by Lydia. She learned about the other’s society through both reading and discussing.

The Taiwanese students became acquainted with the American students as real people, and they found out about their life experiences and the world they live in. They were also curious how their American friends perceived and accepted them. Bei-shan asked in her posting, “Do you learn something from this book? I am really curious why foreigners like our culture. Do you like our culture?” (blog entry, March 12, 2008). Although the American students did not reply to her questions, they showed interest in the Chinese culture (as described earlier). In conclusion, an awareness of each other’s cultures developed among both groups when they were reading and discussing the books with each other. When Paxton posted the last message on the blog, the images he chose to include demonstrated how much the students had learned about each other and how they appreciated the connections built among them ever since (Note: All the last greetings posted by the students were provided in Appendix L):

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

Bye!

Taiwan



Taiwanese girls



Christmas lights



Hi, it's me, Paxton. I will miss you very much. I have enjoyed typing to you and discussing books very for the past 3/4 year. My favorite book was *The Big Box*.

I love electricity! Posted by paxton at [3:12 PM](#)

Looking back on how much the students knew about each other in the beginning of the project, and how much they came to know (for example, a map of Taiwan and how the Taiwanese young girls looked), I felt amazed and pleased.

Cultivation of More Critical Thinking

In addition to the awareness of the other group's culture, over time students also developed more critical thinking. When they started to post about the book, *Island of the Skog* (Kellogg, 1993), in their very first posts most of them merely paid attention to the

characters. They made statements such as “Bouncer was bossy” and they asked questions about what the Skog was. Some of them acknowledged the main theme of the book. For example, they posted that “You should never judge somebody before you know them” (Paxton, blog entry, October 18, 2007), and “We should open our mind to make friends with new people” (Hsiao-fang, blog entry, October 24, 2007). Most of the postings were general impressions about the book, the plot, and the characters.

As time went by, students read and discussed more about books with social-justice themes. They became more sensitive to social issues and grew into more critical thinkers. The last book they read was Bunting’s *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust* (1999). Anna’s comment on this book demonstrated how students benefited and grew by reading the books we chose for them throughout the project. Anna posted, “don’t know about you but i think this book has opened my eyes about the war and ever thing else” (blog entry, May 22, 2008).

Students’ eyes were opened as they read more and thought more deeply. When discussing the black-and-white illustrated book, *Terrible Things* (Bunting, 1999), students noticed not only the characters, the images, and storyline presented in the pages, they also talked about how justice should be achieved. In general, they posted in ways that demonstrated that they were well cultivated critical thinkers. (Note: The following categories defining critical thinking are adopted from the webpage of *Foundation for Critical Thinking*, Scriven & Paul, 2008).

For example, they raised vital questions, formulating them clearly and precisely.

Anna asked:

why do you think that the baby rabbit was the one that thought big at the end of the book he was the one that said if we just have sick together and was one that

said if we just stick together we could have got out of there? why do you think that the baby rabbit was right and why do you think the rabbit is wrong (blog entry, May 22, 2008)?

By asking such questions, Anna exhibited that she noticed the irony in the story, that is, that the little rabbit was able to see the solution to the problem while the grown-up rabbit failed to come up with any.

Students also gathered and assessed relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively. In the following example, Lydia drew on her prior knowledge and made assumptions about what the animals in the story represented in the real world. She posted:

i think that the animals were kids that the Nazi's and Hitler were after. like : the rabbit were the mentally challenged, and the birds were the Jews, and the porcupines were the disabled (blog entry, May 22, 2008).

Then she continued her discussion by pointing out how the animals could stick together and fight for themselves. She furthered her ideas and made a self-text connection:

I think that what they should have done to keep this from happening was to stand up for what they believe. even if it meant for them to be killed, as long as they felt they did something good, before they went. i would have stood up for my family, friends, and MABEY the people i don't like. what would you have done. Oh ya, the guy named Hitler was the person that started all of this. it was his idea to start the nazis. i really hate him for that! do you? i am glad he is dead, cause if people didn't stop him most of my friends would not be here. but what i thought was wrong was that besides jews, and he rest he also went after blonds with blue eyes. i think that is really bad!..... so do you think that is bad? i hope you do.



PLEASE COMMENT BACK!!!
(blog entry, May 22, 2008).

In this posting, Lydia showed that she was able to learn the lesson from the text. She started with the symbolic meanings of the animals. Then she applied the abstract idea to her own life situation that people should stand up for what they believe. She stated that she would fight against such dehumanization if that happened to her. Later she elaborated on how she hated Hitler for his unfair treatment to the Jews and others by drawing on her understanding of Hitler and the Nazis. Although she confused what Hitler did with that of the Aryan Nations--a hate group whose members believe that “Anglo-Saxons are the Biblical ‘chosen people,’ that non-whites are ‘mud people’ on the level of animals, and that Jews are ‘children of Satan’” (The Nizkor Project, n.d. para. 4), her comment showed her understanding of the irrational, cruel acts of the Nazi followers. In the end she posted an image along with her long passage. With this posting, Lydia showed that she could evaluate the information she gathered from the text and from her prior knowledge and then interpret an abstract idea effectively by reasoning and making connections. The image she uploaded was striking as it vividly presented the dominating power of the Nazis during that era. Both Lydia’s verbal and visual expressions suggested that she comprehended the implied meaning of the text and was able to reason effectively with the abstract concept that people should stand up and fight against such unfair treatment.

Other times students came to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards. In the following example, Kang-lin expressed how she learned the message by reading the prologue to the book. Then she proposed the solution she developed for the characters as well as for the humans. She posted:

I'm not sure what exactly the Terrible Thing is, but it is surely unwelcoming. I saw the short passage in the beginning of the book, and it seemed to say something about Hitler and The Nazis (if it didn't apologize for my mistake.) According to that passage, I think the whole story has something to do with the power that has been held in some certain people and the sufferers during world war II (which are kinda like those animals in the story).

I think those rabbits should be much more well-alert after all those other creatures had been caught away by the terrible thing. It's obvious that they are under danger, but regrettably they didn't take the little rabbit's word seriously and instead they just refused to face it and take action.

Well I think humans do the same thing all the time in real life, there are times when we are confronted by those terrible things. What ever they are, we should be brave enough to face 'em. And the most important part, LISTEN CAREFULLY TO THOSE WHOEVER TRYING TO WARN YOU, their opinion might get you through the tough situation (blog entry, May 22, 2008).

Kang-lin offered a piece of advice in the end of her posting (which was another example of the Taiwanese students' Reading Response style). It indicated that she was aware of the existence of similar situations in the real world, and she was able to suggest a solution for them. The criteria she used to test that solution was her prior knowledge about the world and the human kind. She recognized that the animals' ignorance of the threatening condition was the cause of their consequent suffering; based on that understanding she offered a wise concluding suggestion.

Students also thought open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought. They saw that although the book was about the Holocaust, it did not necessarily only teach about Holocaust. In her posting, Kuei-lan wrote:

The color of the pictures are just black and white, I think it's the way how the author expressed the main idea of the book, the colors mention how serious problem is. But, anyway, it's a child book, so the animals made the problem more fun. It's really a special book! And the picture and the words didn't say correctly what's the terrible thing is, but we already know, do we? It's human ourselves, we are so greedy that we don't care our behavior may hurt others. This is really worth us to think about (blog entry, May 25, 2008).

Kuei-lan was conscious of the effect of the black-and-white illustrations. She also recognized that since the book was aimed for children, the animal characters somewhat made this serious issue lighter. However, she was positive that even though the story was told subtly, the message was explicit and significant for everyone to grasp. Then she expanded her thinking beyond acknowledging the cruel treatment the Nazis enforced on the Jews and claimed that all humans should be blamed if we do not restrict ourselves from hurting other people. Therefore, in this posting, Kuei-lan displayed that she could view things from a wider perspective. She realized that social justice was worthy of note and applied to all human beings.

In summary, as I discussed above, students exhibited the behaviors of critical thinkers. They started reading the texts by looking at the characters only. They ended up raising important questions, assessing relevant information, providing well-reasoned solutions, and remaining open-minded to alternative thinking. They had become more sophisticated bloggers.

Factors that Helped Learning

Several factors helped students learn from the readings and discussions throughout the project, which are listed here:

Picture Books

When I started this project, my research team members (Dr. Gilles and Mrs. Dickinson) helped me decide to choose picture books as the reading materials. Our consideration was that picture books were short and could be read easily in one sitting. In addition, the simplified vocabulary and sentence patterns decreased the challenge that the Taiwanese students might encounter. We were also aware that although the language

in picture books might be easy and simple, the meanings were often deep and thought-provoking. As a result, we provided picture books for the students to read.

The students (the American students in particular) searched for the right images to go along with their text messages. This act might suggest that the students were inspired by the picture books they were reading. Perhaps the picture books set a model for the students when they posted their reading responses. They followed that model and posted images along as well. On the other hand, the specific function of uploading images that the blogs allowed also motivated them to do so. Meanwhile, this act of uploading images could indicate that students displayed the ability of visual thinking.

John-Steiner (1997) indicates that productive thinkers use images to generate new syntheses: their approach to thought is through the visualization of ideas. Arnheim (1969) challenges the assumption that words, not images, are the primary ingredients of thinking. He argues that language does not necessarily precede perception. The American students' postings sometimes show that they used images instead of written language to express their ideas and construct their thinking. For example, when reading about the Chinese emperor and the female future prime minister in *The Greatest Power* (Demi, 2004), Paxton uploaded an image of a Chinese princess without posting any words (see the picture below).

Thursday, February 28, 2008

[chinese princess](#)



This picture attracted the Taiwanese students' attention immediately as it vividly portrayed an ancient Chinese princess. Shung-pei commented, "Hey!The picture look great!The dress is so beautiful.I like it.I think you must be interested in the pictures in the book,right?" (blog entry, March 4, 2008). Hsiao-fang also commented, "That is really like a chinese princess in ancient china" (blog entry, March 6, 2008). This example suggested that visual thinking not only flew along in parallel with the students' verbal thinking (Fox, 2007), it sometimes represented their whole thinking process.

For some less advanced writers, such as Alice, the images especially served to express their thinking. Here are two entries posted by Alice:

Example 1.

Thursday, April 10, 2008

[its alice](#)



this is the girl that made a friend with annie

Posted by Alice at [4:49 PM](#)

Example 2.

Thursday, May 22, 2008

[☺T☺H♥E ☺T☺E♥R☺R☺I♥B☺B☺L3♥E☺T☺H♥I☺N☺G♥](#)

These are the flock of birds when the terrible thing came!



Posted by Alice at [4:40 PM](#)

In the first examples, Alice posted a picture of an African American little girl when reading about how a white girl made friends with a black girl during segregation in the book *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001). One month later, in the second example, she posted a flock of birds after she read the book *Terrible Things* (Bunting, 1999), expressing visually how scared the animals became when the terrible thing approached

(See Appendix E for summaries of the books). In this example, Alice found an image conveying the mysterious, eerie feeling that matched the creatures being murdered for something they did not understand. Compared to the first example, an image resembling the African-American girl in the book, the second example was more abstract and sophisticated as it matched the book better. Both examples showed that sometimes less advanced writers, like Alice, used pictures to add meanings to their blog entries, just like the illustrators do in the picture books. Therefore, illustrations not only might inspire the students as models, they also helped students express and construct their thinking. In the second example above, without using too many words, Alice, though perhaps not able to write sophisticatedly, successfully captured the threatening situation presented in the book. Her thinking was constructed through images rather than a verbal language.

The Taiwanese students especially benefited from the process of making meanings through the use of the pictures. As English is not the Taiwanese students' native language and rarely do they engage in leisure reading in English, reading a whole book in English was challenging. Picture books therefore helped them comprehend better. More than one Taiwanese student stated that the language in the texts was difficult, but the illustrations helped them figure out the meaning. Shung-pei posted, "Well... , there are many words I don't understand in the book. But I can realize the meaning by the pictures" (blog entry, October 24, 2007). I-mei also expressed how she appreciated the illustrations. She wrote, "The skog is a lovely book. While reading it, those lovely pictures made me read it happily and accept the main idea in it easily" (blog entry, October 20, 2007). As the students read picture books, the illustrations, besides

arousing students' aesthetic reflections, served to explicate the texts and to add to the message delivered in the words.

Na-la's statement here concluded how most Taiwanese students benefited because of the pictures. Na-la said (translated from Mandarin):

The illustrations were the first impression I had with a book. Then because I liked the illustrations, I decided that I wanted to read the book in an earnest way (personal communication, May 19, 2008).

When I asked further if the illustrations helped her understanding of the contents, she said, "Yes. I remember the book, *The Big Box*. Its illustrations helped express the meaning of the sentences" (personal communication, May 19, 2008). As the students read picture books, the illustrations, besides arousing students' aesthetic reflections, served to explain the meaning of the texts and to enhance the message delivered in the lines. The choice of picture book powerfully benefited the students.

Culturally Relevant Books

In addition to the illustrations, the culturally relevant stories also helped the students engage. The Taiwanese students especially benefited from the choice of the books. Among the eleven books that students read, three of them were either set in China (*The Greatest Power*) or had a Chinese main character (*Me and Mr. Mah* and *Henry and the Dragon Kite*), and one of them was about the Koreans (*Yoon and the Christmas Mitten*), whose culture is very close to that of the Chinese. Consequently, students felt confident when discussing the books, and they contributed substantially since they were knowledgeable about what was mentioned in the books.

Many of the Taiwanese students expressed how they appreciated the Chinese elements in the texts. Chen-na said (translated from Mandarin):

I feel that if a book has some Chinese elements in it, when I read it, I will be surprised that English books talk about Chinese culture. Like *The Greatest Power*, when I opened the book, the first page was a Chinese character. In the beginning, I could not recognize the word. I was wondering what word it was and I was surprised that I could not recognize it. And then I found out later that it was “forever” (personal communication, June 5, 2008).

Freeman and Freeman (2007) argued that “All readers apply what they know about the world to make sense of what they read” (p. 124). Nonetheless, non-native English speakers “often lack the background needed to make sense of texts written in English because authors of these texts assume their readers all share certain cultural knowledge” (p. 124). Therefore, culturally relevant books are important to English language learners as they allow them “to draw upon what they know as they build reading proficiency in English” (p. 125). The Taiwanese students like Chen-na were thrilled when they read English texts presenting the Chinese images and the Chinese cultural traits. This bridged the gap they felt when reading texts in an unfamiliar language. In the interview Chieh-ming told me that she could understand better the message delivered in the texts, since she felt that she “experienced those or was familiar with that kind of environment” (personal communication, May 20, 2008). Shan-te also related to such culturally-relevant texts. She said that when she read some English texts, she found it difficult to understand because she was “in lack of related cultural background knowledge.” With texts about Chinese culture such as *The Greatest Power*

(Demi, 2004), she felt that it was easy for her to comprehend (personal communication, May 17, 2008).

The Taiwanese students were more confident since they were reading the culturally relevant texts. As a result, they were able to contribute particularly when discussing the books. Kuei-lan told me (in Mandarin) that she purposefully chose those prompts related to Chinese culture to answer since she assumed that the American students did not know so much about it. In the following postings, both Shung-pei and Hsiao-fang also helped the American students by contradicting the content of *The Greatest Power* (Demi, 2004). Shung-pei posted:

After reading the book ,I have some idea. It's not easy for a young emperor to think about the difficult question. Of course ,Sing is also very special to find the answer. But ,in the real Chinese history ,it's impossible for female to be prime ministers ,and Sing is just a little girl!Also,I am curious about the author. I think he must had researched the Chinese traditional artwork. The joss , coins ,building and even the pictures on the clothes are similar to my impression. I think the author may be a Chinese fan! (blog entry, March 4, 2008)

And Hsiao-fang responded,

I agree with the idea. Female was not treated as a man by people in ancient china.Female was demeaned at that time (blog entry, March 6, 2008).

Based on their prior knowledge, both Shung-pei and Hsiao-fang thought that the author's plot about a little girl, who eventually becomes the prime minister, was improbable.

Females would not have been exalted to such a high position in the Chinese history, Shung-pei still appreciated the author's effort to present the Chinese culture with such details. In fact, many of the Taiwanese students indicated that they were impressed with the ancient Chinese technologies illustrated in the book, and they were amazed to see how those technological terms were translated into English.

As they read these books the Taiwanese students' cultural knowledge helped boost their confidence when discussing the books. They appeared more self-assured when expressing their opinions. Moreover, they spontaneously brought into their discussion the Chinese philosophy they had been immersed in through the social customs and schooling they received. For example, Na-la came to realize that the greatest power in the world was life. Here is her posting and the American students' responses. Na-la posted:

About "The Greatest Power"



In this story, through the emperor's question, I realized that the greatest power is come from the life, the meaning of life but the form of strength, knowledge and beauty. Human are liked the lotus' seed, we're now the seeds and when we get married, we'll become the flower and give life to our children, the new seeds Always, the answer is in ourself but we just find answers outside but not in our mind. Anyway, it's fun that I once know that Guan Yu is the money god (blog entry, February, 24, 2008).

In response, Kevin posted, "I agree with you completely" (blog entry, February 28, 2008),

while Sadie commented:

I thought that what you said about when you get married the flower blooms and a new seed begins when you have children was great thinking and I agree to ☺" (blog entry, February 28, 2008).

One important illustration in the book, *The Greatest Power* (Demi, 2004), is the lotus. The little girl, Sing, who came up with the wisest answer to the emperor's question, "What is the greatest power in the world?" once sat by the lotus pond and meditated that question. Apparently, Na-la was inspired by the illustration; therefore in her posting she borrowed that image to support her thinking--that humans are like the lotus's seeds. Probably without realizing it, Na-la infused into her posting the Chinese philosophy that life is like the reproduction of plants and it goes on without stopping. In addition, in many Chinese literary works, females are compared to flowers. Such figurative speech as "buds waiting to bloom" is used to depict teenage girls before they reach physical maturity. When females give birth, they are described as trees producing fruits. All these Chinese ways of thinking were presented in Na-la's posting, and that amazed her American readers. Eventually, Sadie praised Na-la for her great thinking. Furthermore, when Na-la commented that the answer is inside our minds rather than outside us, that is another example of the Chinese way of thinking. As the Chinese proverb goes, "We do not need to seek for the answer by looking around us." The ancient Chinese teaching delivers the message that self-reflection is important. Na-la pointed that out in her posting as well.

Offering the Taiwanese students reading materials presenting images of their people enabled the students to build confidence as well as to be critical. For example, they mentioned how they disliked the illustrations of the Korean girl in the book, *Yoon and the Christmas Mitten* (Recorvits, 2006), as she was portrayed with slanted eyes and a round face. In her posting, Hsiao-fang indicated that "the pictures are a little strange" (blog entry, January 23, 2008), while Na-la told me in the interview that she disliked

people's stereotypes of the Chinese people. Na-la said (translated from the Mandarin), "They draw the Chinese with braids and dressed in red. They are always dressed in red" (personal communication, May 19, 2008). These examples show that culturally relevant texts enabled the Taiwanese students to share their cultural knowledge with their readers and even make critical judgment of the authenticity of the texts.

On the other hand, since the students were reading English texts, and most of them were based on American cultures, the American students apparently related to the books. Among these American culture-based stories, some of them evoked more responses than the others. *The Big Box* (Morrison, 2002) and *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001) are the two significant examples.

When discussing *The Big Box* (Morrison, 2002), a book about personal freedom and individuality, the American students, having been immersed in a democratic culture all their lives, and learning from family lives and school education that they are each an independent individual, appeared to have strong connection to the book. For example, Alice posted on the blog:

I think all children should have freedom!!!!!!!!!!
I think that there parents should be punished for not leting the children not be free and they can't be crazy like all kids could be. And why don't the 3 kids just brake. And why did the parents put the locks on the door when they could climb out of the box!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (blog entry, March 13, 2008).

Besides Alice's strong statement, Lydia told me that she learned a lot by reading the book.

She commented:

Sometimes adults get so intense with everything on regular /?/ they don't really care about the freedom of the kids. So I just talked to them and tried to get more freedom (personal communication, April 24, 2008).

Jenny also reflected on how people perceived freedom. She said:

I used to think that everyone thought that freedom is a right. But I read that book that made me realize that some people think that freedom is a privilege and you have to earn it. I sort of disagree with that (personal communication, April 24, 2008).

The American students were responsive to the issue of freedom. They valued personal freedom, believing that it was a right granted to every individual. They thought that the parents were neglecting how children were naturally while they paid too much attention to some other things, such as disciplines. They pleaded that children should have freedom, and they even took action to win more freedom. (In later section I will report that Anna proposed that the mice in the book, *Island of the Skog* (Kellogg, 1993), should “take turns being president” (blog entry, November 1, 2007)). All these suggest that the American students related to the texts since the concepts of freedom, individuality, and democracy were culturally familiar.

The Taiwanese students cared about the issue of freedom as well. They are young adults, and perhaps are granted more freedom in daily life experiences. When discussing this issue, they did not appear to be as sensitive as the American students did. Earlier I quoted I-mei’s post, which went: “Now my parents don't insist that I have to be a doctor in the future anymore. I'm still thinking about it anyway--It's just an interesting thought!” (blog entry, April 3, 2008). This post reflected I-mei’s attitude that she did not mind taking her family’s opinions into consideration. It was probably because she realized that they could be valuable suggestions, but it could also suggest that she did not insist on personal freedom and choices so much since that action was not part of her culture. The

Chinese culture appreciates collective intelligence and family kinship. The Taiwanese students were aware that sometimes family values and community responsibilities were more important than personal choices. Therefore, their posts did not mention attempts to fight for their freedom.

In addition to individual freedom, another culturally issue relevant to the American students was racism. When discussing *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), a book with the central metaphor of a fence dividing blacks from whites, the African American students in the group responded passionately. They appeared to have more insights to share with others. On average, Miki, an African American, posted one or two times about the books she read and discussed. The following is a table showing how many times she commented to other people when discussing the books.

Table 9.

Numbers of Comments Made by Miki

Title	Number of Comments
<i>The Island of the Skog</i>	3
<i>Me and Mr. Mah</i>	4
<i>Yoon and the Christmas Mitten</i>	1
<i>The Three Questions</i>	2
<i>The Greatest Power</i>	1
<i>The Big Box</i>	1
<i>The Other Side</i>	3
<i>The Terrible Thing</i>	2

By looking at the table above, one can easily see that Miki commented more about the three books, *The Island of the Skog* (Kellogg, 1993), *Me and Mr. Mah* (Spalding, 2001), and *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001). It is understandable that Miki commented three times when people posted about *The Island of the Skog* (Kellogg, 1993). It was the first book that the students read during the book-blogging phase, and Miki's excitement in getting involved was apparent. The four comments Miki made during the discussions about *Me and Mr. Mah* (Spalding, 2001), however, were likely a result of playing on the computer or a mistake due to technology unfamiliarity. Here are three of the comments when people discussed *Me and Mr. Mah*. Notice that they were posted in a row:

[miki](#) said...

I think way Mr.MaH did not accept the tractor because he wan't Ian to keep Memory of his dad. and Mr. MaH's culter is chinese but they was still friends they shared their box's together. and Ian planted the seed that Mr.MaH gave him and Ian gave him a cookie.

hotthing cause I got MONEY \$\$\$\$\$\$\$&\$\$\$\$\$\$\$=MONEY IN THE BANK \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$.

[December 13, 2007 4:40 PM](#)

[miki](#) said...

MR.MaH AND iAN WANTED TO be friends because Ian did not have any friends so mr.mah started teaching him about his culter.

hotthing cause I got MONEY \$\$\$\$\$\$\$&\$\$\$\$\$\$\$=MONEY IN THE BANK \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

[December 13, 2007 4:44 PM](#)

[miki](#) said...

MR.MAH AND IAN shared their box's together. and they both like to garden things and mr.mah shared his chinses culteer with Ian.

hothing cause I got \$\$\$\$\$\$\$&\$\$\$\$\$\$\$=MONEY IN THE

BANK\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ NOW WATCH ME JOCK JOCKIN O0NTHEM
HATERZS MANNN.

[December 13, 2007 4:52 PM](#)

When blogging about books the students usually ‘posted’ their opinions and then ‘commented’ to others’ ideas. On that day Miki did not make any post about the book. Instead, she attached three comments in a row to Shan-te’s post. It was very likely that Miki messed the ‘commenting’ function with the ‘posting’ function. She was likely having fun playing with a new signature she invented that day. Very probably Miki divided her thoughts into three parts—shown by how consistent the three posts were in terms of themes--so that she could keep playing with the new signature.

But Miki’s comments when discussing *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001) were a different story. Here are the three comments she made to people’s postings:

1. The reply to Ning-ning when Ning-ning pointed out the significance of the fence:

I like the last part of your post. Because you told and showed details about how they are going to be friends and the fence is between their friendship (blog entry, April 10, 2008, 5:24 PM).

2. The reply to Hsiao-fang when Hsiao-fang shared that her favorite part was in the end when the two girls became friends:

I think they could have been friends along time ago because their parents did not want them to be friends but one day they became the best of friends (blog entry, April 17, 2008, 5:13 PM).

3. The reply to Kuei-lan when Kuei-lan argued that skin colors did not matter and it was people’s hearts that counted:

you r so right because white or black you are still family. You should not be rude to other people you should treat them the way u want to be treated (blog entry, April 17, 5:10 PM).

Instead of saying superficially “I agree with you,” Miki responded to three different discussion topics by making thoughtful comments. This demonstrated that she was interested in the discussions and that she had many deep thoughts to share. When replying the survey question, “Do you talk about social justice?” Miki answered, “No because I don’t like to” (personal communication, February 7, 2008). The answer may either suggest that Miki was reluctant to fill in a survey, or this was such an unpleasant topic for her to talk about. However, her engagement in discussing the racial issue on the blog actually indicated that she cared and that she was confident sharing her opinions with people.

Another African American girl, Anna, showed strong connections to the text as well. During the two weeks of discussions about *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), Anna made a 260-word long post, while the average length of her post was 96.4 words. The 260-word long post was also the longest among her fifteen posts on the group blog. In this longest post, Anna started with the exclamation, “this book rockssssssssssssssss.” Then she indicated the theme of the book was about segregation. Following that she referred to the details in the books, such as how the two girls looked at each, trying to make eye contact at their first encounter, and how the white-skinned girl dressed fancier than the dark-skinned girl. She took the fence as a “guideline” between the two groups of people, and she followed Martin Luther King’s advice that “blacks and whites CAN work things out and live together in the same world together” (blog entry, April 3, 2008). She also uploaded an image of African Americans marching on the street, holding the signs which said “JOBS FOR ALL NOW” (see earlier discussion in this chapter). The following week, Anna posted another passage about the books. She wrote:

Whenever we look at each other, on that one drawing, they want to say something but Clover's mom was going to say "Don't look at her in the eyes." And Annie's mom is going to say "Look at the eyes." In the picture that Annie's mom is always wearing pretty dress that just came out of the package that they bought. And Clover's dresses have little stains on them. But they are ok to wear because my mom washes them (blog entry, April 10, 2008).

These two entries showed that Anna had rich prior knowledge and real concerns about this black-and-white issue, which caused her to pay attention to the details in the text and to make self-text connections. In her last sentence of the second post, Anna changed her discussion about the dress of the African American girl, Clover, to her own. When she pointed out that in spite of the little stains, her dresses were okay to wear because her mother washed them, I saw a less privileged African American girl holding her self-esteem and pride as a decent human being. Reading culturally relevant stories led Anna to move from the text being merely an object to it telling her own story as what she read was so true to her life.

In short, our culturally relevant books inspired the students to ponder the messages delivered in the texts; they particularly invited the students to reflect on their own lives and the world around them.

Instructors' Scaffolding

Culturally relevant picture books helped students with their reading and discussions. Additionally, the two instructors' scaffolding, including providing the reading prompts and leading the group discussions, also helped enhance students' comprehension and caused them to think further and more critically about the texts.

Mrs. Dickinson provided scaffolding to the American students by reading the books aloud, usually twice in our two weeks' discussion of one book. This repeated reading aloud invited the students to revisit the texts and as a result helped them further

understand them. Sadie posted on the blog after she listened to the book for the second time:

We read the book agin and i loved it even more,the book tough a great message,about not to judje somebody before you meet them.I think at the end of the book Bouncer was still kind of bossy, and Jenny still wanted a peace-full island,I also notised some parts in the book that I didn't hear befor, I felt bad for the Skog because he didn't have any friends and when the mice came he felt scared and he was also scared of the trapps that the mice put out.And if I was the skog I would aso feel scared. But at the end of the storey the skog made friends with the mice (blog entry, October 25, 2007).

This is superior to her first post about the book in the previous week, “I LOVED the book,I think it tought a lesson,The lesson was don't judje people befor you meet them,And you might get to know each other and you might become friends!” (blog entry, October 18, 2007). Sadi’s understanding of the book expanded. She started to notice things she did not pay attention to earlier. While pondering it more she gained more insights and made more connections with the characters.

The Taiwanese students did not listen to the books first; they read the books individually in their leisure time. I provided “long-distance” scaffolding by emailing them Mrs. Dickinson’s reading prompts whenever they started to read a new book. The following blog entry was Na-la’s first reading response to *The Island of the Skog* before she read the emailed prompts:

After reading this books, I really like Skog!! It's little but really cute!^^
The pictures are elegant and the article make me think deeply, though it is just a short story. I think, at first, everyone has equal chance. But when you faced pressures or you want to change your life better, you must have a great of boldness. During the time, you have to face all kinds of problem and must figure it out and carry on. If you do so, then you have succeed. But if you give up, then you just lose the ticket to a rosy and wonderful future. I wish I can do my best and do not give up when I do everything. Then, our life would be more interesting then before. And when you have succeed, you'll feel there is a great achievement in your mind! (blog entry, October 24, 2007)

Na-la displayed sophisticated thinking in this posting. She shared her feelings about the main character, the Skog, and presented the lesson she learned from the text by drawing on prior knowledge and making a self-text connection. The what-lesson-I-learned-from-the-reading report was a particular Reading Response format that most of the Taiwanese students usually shared (as I discussed in earlier section).

Then Na-la read Mrs. Dickinson's prompts, some of which were questions about another main character, Bouncer. Mrs. Dickinson asked:

1. Bouncer wanted to stay and fight for freedom and Jenny wanted to leave and go find a peaceful island. How do you feel about what Bouncer wanted to do and how do you feel about Jenny's suggestion?
2. How did Bouncer become the Captain of the ship?
3. When they learned that they had been sailing toward the North Pole, Bouncer announced that he would quit being the Captain. Why did Bouncer decide to take control again when they reached the Island of the Skog?

The following week, Na-la made another post about the same book:

I think Bouncer wants easy lives and don't want to take an adventure. He always fancies him as a **"great"** leader, but in fact, he just wants to eat the best, use the best and want everyone to respect him. He is like some people in the society and we should avoid being a co-work with them or we may feel angry and want to punch him.....

But I think he led music in the end means he love his companies and I think it also means everyone is in a huge family forever..... (blog entry, October 30, 2007).

In this posting, Na-la again displayed her ability of drawing on prior knowledge and making text-world connections. However this time, she shifted her focus to examine closely another main character, Bouncer. Her reflections and inferences show her deep understanding of him. Mrs. Dickinson's prompts initiated an investigation that Na-la

probably would not have attempted to do before. They helped her consider new perspectives. She started to think further about Bouncer and the Skog which she explored earlier.

In the interview, Na-la told me (translated from Mandarin) that she thought the reading prompts were usually “advanced” and “it took a lot of time to come up with the answers.” When I asked her if she would make efforts to try to answer the questions, she said “Yes.” She explained:

Because if you look at the questions, you will see that they are very advanced. And then I will think, “what if I can find the answers by myself?” I will gain more understandings. Then the book will be something more than a picture book. It will therefore make me learn more. And I will feel happy (personal communication, May 19, 2008).

The Taiwanese students such as Na-la used the prompts as learning tools, which helped them to consider ideas that they had not ventured to explore before. The prompts were “advanced” in the sense that they pointed out for them another perspective to approach the texts.

Discussing the answers to the reading prompts with Mrs. Dickinson also helped the American students to think further and deeper. For example, the same questions I listed above initiated Anna to post the following:

this book has different characters Like Bouncer is bossy. He thinks he knows how to run his own group like village. He doesn't think over his questions before he says it but Jenny, on the other hand, she organizes her thoughts and she doesn't forget what she is saying and she speaks up to Bouncer. Bouncer just wants to get attention but he doesn't want to get blamed if they lost the battle of the big, hairy Skog. Bouncer thinks he is stronger and better than everyone else. They need to have a vote. Bouncer and Jenny should run the village together so they can put their ideas together and then have a debate with the village and every month they

will take turns being President. They should talk about stuff and think before they do it. They could put everyone's ideas in a box and then put the ideas out on the table and try their ideas in order (blog entry, November 1, 2007).

In her posting, Anna responded to Mrs. Dickinson's question and made explicit analyses of the two main characters, Bouncer and Jenny. She used detailed descriptions to compare and contrast them. Moreover, she even suggested another solution, that is, to have the two characters work together to deal with their current obstacle. She brought a democratic means of handling things observed in her world (and perhaps in her classroom as well) to the characters' situation in this book. This suggestion, as I discussed earlier, was culturally appropriate. Such deep thinking was not seen in her first post about the book, which occurred two weeks earlier and was written in one single sentence, "I think i really like the book it is fun to read" (blog entry, October 18, 2007). Anna progressed with Mrs. Dickinson's use of scaffolding.

The group discussion was also beneficial for the Taiwanese students, who had never experienced any group discussion about literary works prior to the project. Therefore, it provided chances for students to listen to others' opinions and to expand their thinking. Moreover, as they were sharing their own ideas with the group, the talk helped them clarify and construct their thoughts. Without the guidance of the instructor, Ms. Lin, the students wouldn't have the chance to meet together and discuss. As a result, students appreciated the value of the group discussion. Kang-lin told me (translated from Mandarin), "Discussion is important, because sometimes I don't really understand, and when listening to others, I can be inspired to think more" (personal communication, May 10, 2008). Another Taiwanese student, Kuei-lan, also described how Ms. Lin facilitated the talk. She said (translated from Mandarin),

When the teacher discussed with us, she would ask each of us questions, which helped us to ponder what the book was trying to tell us. Then sometimes we would share our personal, particular experiences or opinions. I felt that was great. The sharing of experiences was like an extension of the book. Like the book about the Koreans [*Yoon and the Christmas Mitten*, by Recorvits, 2006], one of my classmates has been to the U.S. for one year, so Ms. Lin asked her if she had ever experienced any conflict. She answered no, and said that they all got along very well. And the book about the black child and the white child [*The Other Side*, by Woodson, 2001], it talked about racial discrimination, didn't it? Then the teacher asked those who had traveled abroad to talk about if they had ever seen any racial discrimination, and things like that (personal communication, May 20, 2008).

From Kuei-lan's description, I learned that Ms. Lin directed the Taiwanese students to make self-text and even self-world connections when discussing the books. The students shared their life experiences and therefore learned to meditate the messages delivered in the books. The talk helped them bridge the gap between reading an English text and then writing about it. It was transitional and definitely essential. When occasionally Ms. Lin failed to have the group discussions with the students due to the tight school schedules, it was obvious that the students' posting rate dropped drastically. In case with the book, *Feathers and Fools* (Fox, 2000), seven students claimed that they read the book. However, as Ms. Lin did not lead them through the discussion, none of the Taiwanese students posted about the book. It was probably because the students were too busy with their monthly exam. Some other times when they had another monthly

exams, several of them still managed to post. Very likely Ms. Lin's discussion with the students functioned as a "cue" to the students' posting. If they did not discuss with her, then they did not receive a "signal" to post. Most importantly, they felt insecure to post without group discussion. Na-la's conversation with me explained it so well. In the interview, I asked Na-la how she felt when she posted without going through the group discussion first. She answered (translated from Mandarin), "I might feel that my idea was a little bit bizarre. When reading others' topics and seeing that they were all very similar, I felt that I posted something very strange" (personal communication, May 19, 2008). It seemed that the Taiwanese students needed to make sure what they said about the text was right before posting. In addition, culturally the Chinese people tend to seek agreement with one another instead of wishing to be unique. Na-la's comment here shows that she, and perhaps some other Taiwanese students as well, needed to gain approval from their group before they posted their ideas. Accordingly, the group discussions with Ms. Lin and their classmates helped the students secure confidence in expressing themselves on the blogs.

Factors that Hindered Learning

I discussed in the section above that the culturally relevant picture books and the two instructors' scaffolding helped students learn. Nevertheless, some other factors hindered that learning process: the fact that students were unable to finish a meaningful discussion and that they were restricted by their language ability and typing skills. I provide explanations in the following paragraphs.

Unfinished Discussions

Kuei-lan commented that the drawback of the project was that they were “too far away from the American kids.” When I asked her to explain more, she said, “We were too far away from each other in distance so that we could not get their messages immediately” (personal communication, May 20, 2008). Technology actually shortened the figurative geographical distance between the two groups. However, differences in time still made synchronous communication impossible. The American students posted on a weekly basis instead of getting online anytime. It was therefore difficult for the students to get prompt responses from the other group. Hsiao-fang described how she felt that the American students post massively on the blog all at once. She described it (translated from Mandarin) this way:

I haven't seen them for a whole week and then suddenly I got to see a lot of them. Then I feel very happy. Because I checked the blog every day. It is like nothing happened for a whole week and then suddenly a lot of postings were there. I was happy to see that (personal communication, May 16, 2008).

Since the American students posted altogether at the same time, the sudden increase of the amount of their blog entries was unavoidable. Furthermore, as the American students blogged once a week, the long interval also added the difficulty for both groups to read individual blog entry closely. Often times I observed that the American students chose to read the first couple of postings to read and respond to, rather than scroll down the whole web page and read all the postings made during that week. As a result, some insightful conversation started nicely but ended abruptly since the bloggers did not go back and continue that conversation. For example, when Miki posted about how she was impressed with the illustrations of the parade in *The Greatest Power* (Demi, 2004), Bei-shan responded with these questions, “Do you learn something from

this book? I am really curious why foreigners like our culture. Do you like our culture?” (blog entry, March 12, 2008). But Miki did not see the questions and they were left unanswered. As another example, Bei-shan stated her confusion when she read that Guan Yu was depicted as money god in the book. And Paxton replied, “I did not know that the Chinese have gods. The author probably was not Chinese/Taiwanese” (February 28, 2008). Bei-shan did not comment back so there was no further discussion on the topic of Chinese gods. In either case (Bei-shan asking Miki or Paxton replying to Bei-shan), more mutual understandings toward each other’s cultures likely would have been achieved if further conversations took place. The knowledge that students could gain by reading the books and discussing with one another was somehow restricted since the conversations on the blogs did not continue.

Language Limits/ Typing Limits

Language limits and typing limits were other factors that prevented students from gaining more insights through this project. Since American students speak English, they were not limited. However, the Taiwanese students had to first understand the contents of the book by dealing with the vocabulary. Then, expressing their deep thoughts in another language made the task more challenging. When Ms. Lin discussed with the group in Mandarin, the Taiwanese students were expressive and insightful in their mother tongue. They were willing to share and contribute, showing no sign of being afraid of making mistakes. Nonetheless, when they translated their talk into writing in English, they hesitated. Most of them indicated that they had to do spell checks and grammar checks before uploading their passages. Bei-shan wrote about her response to the book, *The Terrible Things* (Bunting, 1999). In her posting, she mentioned that the animals

were selfish and that it was essential to stay united. Then she asked the other bloggers what they thought. Here is her posting:

In this story , the animals are selfish. That's why when the terrible thing came , they were caught. If they help each other , they wouldn't be caught.
This story tell us that people have to help each other. We live in the same world , so we have to be united. If we don't unite , the war will begin. I don't think that people like the war.I don't like , either.what do you think about this? (blog entry, May 20, 2008)

In this 79 word long blog entry, Bei-shan shared her opinion about the characters and then she stated the lesson she learned from the story. She made a text-world connection, and then right after that she asked for feedback. Generally speaking, this is an adequate blog posting. Personal opinions and the main theme were included, although the quick switch to inviting feedback suggests some degree of insecurity of the blogger, who was eager to have other people's contributions instead of exploring further on her own.

Later, Bei-shan filled in the self-evaluation form I emailed to each individual Taiwanese student. I asked the Taiwanese students to choose one book which impressed them most and stated the reason why. Bei-shan chose *Terrible Things* (Bunting, 1999) and she wrote a passage of 400 Chinese characters. I translated that passage into the following English paragraph:

This book talks about World War II when the Nazis tyrannized the Jews. In the story the Nazis were represented by the terrible things and those animals taken away were the Jews. That little bunny was the people who appealed for attention. However, most people were like that big rabbit, who thought that such a thing would never happen to them. In the end they faced the consequence of their act. Those animals symbolize we human beings. They are very selfish, just like we humans are, and this selfishness caused the Jews to be treated inhumanly.

Eventually they will all eat their own bitter fruits [pay the price]. Back then if the people could have worked together, I think the Nazis would not have been able to do their own way. Recently I have been watching an animation about wars. Therefore, I feel particularly connected to the book. The animation is about two groups of people hating each other. One group despises the other, just like how the Nazis looked down on and hated the Jews. Meanwhile, the other group also dislikes and feels jealous of this one group. Because of the mutual hatred between the two groups, the war broke out and neither side shows any intention to cease it. But in the end people will be the ones who suffer. So I think that we should stand up and speak out bravely if we see any injustice or unreasonable thing happening. This way what happened to the Jews will never occur again.

Obviously when writing in her own language, Bei-shan felt more relaxed. Her thinking expanded and the content became richer. Bei-shan still wrote about the general lesson she learned from the story and she still noted how selfish the animals were. More than that, however, she analyzed the roles of the characters. She also made self-text and text-text connections, besides the text-world connection. She reasoned more before she reached the conclusion. And she used elaborate Chinese sentences to describe the animation she had been watching. Bei-shan demonstrated that she was a great thinker and writer, if she used her native language to communicate.

The younger American students, on the other hand, were limited by their typing skills. A few of them could type at an adequate rate; however, many others needed more keyboarding practices before they could easily and smoothly finish up typing a passage without stumbling on the keyboard. Very often I observed that students who were not

good typists spent a great amount of time trying to find the right keys on the keyboard. Therefore, those students' postings were always short and ended in abrupt ways as they ran out of time in the end. When we started to offer the typing help, their posts became much longer and more insightful, as we took care of the technical part and they could concentrate more on the thinking part. One Taiwanese student, I-mei, was surprised to see how much the American students' posting had changed. She asked me when we were doing the Instant Messaging: "Did students in US change into other ones?" (personal communication, March 11, 2008). I-mei could not recognize the American students' writings and thought that they were different people since there were no spelling errors, and the thinking seemed much more complete.

The American student, Justin, was a very interesting example. Mrs. Dickinson and I always joked about how "perfect" Justin was. He was quiet and attentive when Mrs. Dickinson was reading aloud. He also contributed insightful thoughts in the group discussions. When the students started to work at the computers, he was always engaged and focused, yet when I went back home and read the students' postings, many times I could not find his. At first I thought Justin was spending too much time reading others' posts. I noted down in my reflection blog:

Only Justin was unable to post a new posting. I have no idea what he was doing; whenever I checked on him, he was on task. I guess that I just need to direct him to the right spot right away. I can see that he took some time wandering around to the earlier posts (personal notes, January 24, 2008).

Then I made a guess that he read slowly. I wrote my new findings in the reflection blog:

But Justin again did not type a very long post. But he was on task all the time. I suddenly realized that he may be a slow reader. He was reading through all those comments (personal notes, March 6, 2008).

I finally figured out what was hindering Justin. I noted my realization in my reflection blog:

And I am glad to see Justin again. Mrs. D. joked by saying that Justin and Kevin were saints. But when I started to count the postings, I see that Justin actually has not posted a lot. Then I finally realized what happened. For one thing, he types slowly. Today he finally showed appreciation when I helped him type. He had never asked for this kind of help. But when what he just typed was gone during the process of uploading an image, he let me type for him. For another thing, I think it takes him longer to come up with some good ideas in his writing. Last time I helped him type, but he had not too much to say. He is teachable. It just takes him more time. I am regretful that I haven't realized that earlier. Looking back, I found out that a lot of times he did not post anything about the books. I haven't started to count how many postings each student has done on the "whole class blog." Probably Justin spent most of his time there. Otherwise, I really cannot figure out what he has been doing there all the time when he was so quietly sitting at the computer (personal notes, April 20, 2008).

After repeated "trials and errors," I finally found the real causes of Justin's not posting much: He typed slowly, and it took long for him to construct his thoughts. Therefore, if he had to type by himself, the process of thought construction would be delayed more; consequently there would be no final product. Justin's example suggested that some of

the American students could have performed better in their blogging if they had more developed typing skills.

Summary

This section answered the third sub-question, “What are the students’ experiences and attitudes toward reading multicultural picture books and picture books with social-justice themes?” Findings indicated that students gained deeper understanding of another culture as they were reading about it and interacted with people of that culture. Students also developed more critical thinking when they were encouraged to read the texts as critical thinkers. Moreover, picture books helped understanding and inspired visual thinking, while culturally relevant texts motivated students to read thoughtfully and to respond confidently. The instructors’ scaffoldings through reading prompts and the prior-blogging group discussions all helped students reflect on and make connections to the texts productively. As a result, students were able to learn a great deal throughout the project. Nevertheless, due to certain characteristics of students’ blogging, such as posting massively at one time and blogging at such long intervals as a whole week, thought-provoking discussions did not always occur. Limited language and typing skills were some other factors that hindered students from gaining more as they failed to fully express their appreciation of the texts. In conclusion, students grew and learned over time. Although certain limits existed, they became more critical thinkers after they read and discussed the multicultural picture books and the picture books with social justice themes.

Summary of the Findings

In this chapter I discussed the findings obtained by analyzing the multiple sources of data. I gained the understanding that the social context affected how the students became involved in the blogging activity. A friendly and welcoming online community was formed as the students were willing to share with and eager to learn about one another. In addition, in the U.S. group, face-to-face social norms also played a part, which made a difference to what stances the students took toward the activity. In general, the students went through the fun party stage, the struggling stage, and finally reached a learning community stage. On the other hand, the Taiwanese students, under the influences of the instructor's guidance and their past learning experiences, appeared to be consistent when getting involved in the activity. They viewed blogging a learning experience, and they acted accordingly.

Besides the social context, I also discussed the characteristics of the students' online discussions. I reported that in the social role, students' blogging was conversational and was affected by the social relationship developed among them. In the cognitive role, the two groups of students displayed that they learned from each other, the sense of audience motivated them, and their thinking and writing enhanced each other. As for the language role, I discussed how the two groups' writing styles were different and what multi-modal languages they used. Then I particularly used the lens of critical discourse to analyze four focus students' online discourse. My findings suggest that students' online languages were affected by their cultural models, situated meanings they created for this project, and their own situated identities.

The last part of my findings reports students' experiences and attitudes toward reading multicultural picture books and picture books with social-justice themes. I realized that students grew as they developed more cultural awareness and cultivated more critical thinking. I also saw that culturally relevant picture books and the instructors' scaffolding were beneficial to the students. However, students' discussions were not always sophisticated since they did not elaborate on them or they were hindered by their language or typing abilities.

My findings answered the research questions I raised in the beginning of the study. They also helped me to make pedagogical suggestions to teachers, administrators, and teacher educators in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

Summary of the Study

I conducted a qualitative investigation to explore the nature of a cross-cultural and cross-age online literature discussion project. I asked the research question: “What is the nature of students’ reading and writing experiences when they are involved in a cross-cultural and cross-age online literature discussion activity?” Two groups of students, fifth graders from the U.S. and tenth graders from Taiwan, were invited to voluntarily participate in after-school blogging activities. The data collection lasted eight months, from October 2007 to May 2008. Multiple sources of data were collected, including students’ blog entries, survey answers, interview transcripts, field notes, reflection blog entries, and informal communications. I employed the constant comparative method to analyze the data, while focused a critical discourse lens to particularly examine four focus students’ online discourse. Limitations of the study included a limited amount of time, geographical limitations, and students’ self-regulation issues. Certain measures demonstrated the trustworthiness of the study.

Summary of the Findings

The findings answered the three sub-questions: 1) What is the nature of the social context of this activity? 2) What are the characteristics of students’ online discussions in this social context? 3) What are the students’ experiences and attitudes toward reading multicultural picture books and picture books with social-justice themes? The findings summarized below.

The Nature of the Social Context of This Activity

Three communities were formed throughout the study, including the online community, the U.S. community, and the Taiwan community. The online community was characterized by its welcoming and friendly atmosphere, the students' willingness to share, and their eagerness to learn about each other. The U.S. community progressed through three stages: first a fun-party stage, then a struggling stage, and in the end a learning community stage. The students' expectations of the project and their situated identities, that is, what roles they took in this particular event, affected how they became involved in the project. With the instructor's consistent and positive support and guidance, and with some less committed students ending their participation, the U.S. community eventually developed into a learning community. The culture of the U.S. schooling is different from that of Taiwan. Therefore, the Taiwan community remained a more formal learning community from the beginning to the end of the project. Both the instructor's guidance and the students' past culturally-based experiences helped the Taiwanese students to view this event as a learning opportunity and an extension of their school learning experience. They reacted more seriously when they participated in the activity.

The Characteristics of Students' Online Discussions

By examining the social role of students' online discussions, I found that the online discussions were conversational while both informal expressions and discourse moves (Barnes & Todd, 1977) were seen in the students' posts. Certain social relationships among the students also affected how and what students blogged. The findings of the cognitive role of the online discussions indicate that students learned from

each other: the American students, though hindered by having less typing skills and being younger, expanded their thinking as they learned from the more sophisticated Taiwanese peers, while the Taiwanese students learned to employ the English language in various ways from their American peers. In addition, the students kept a sense of audience, which helped improve their writing. They also demonstrated that their thinking and writing supported each other. I also investigated the role of language in the online discussions. I realized that the two groups of students displayed different writing styles, such as conversational versus academic, and that students used multi-modal languages, such as images and various fonts and colors. A further in-depth analysis of four focus students' online Discourse (Gee, 2005) suggested that students' online discourses were influenced by the cultural models, the situated meanings they created for this project, and their own situated identities in the social contexts. For example, the students who positioned themselves as active learners and viewed this activity a valuable learning experience blogged enthusiastically and insightfully. The students who defined this project a fun-only event or a distraction from their schoolwork engaged differently.

Reading Multicultural Picture Books and Picture Books with Social-Justice Themes

Reading the carefully-chosen picture books with particular themes helped students grow both cognitively and culturally. Students demonstrated a better awareness of the other group's culture and more critical thinking when reading texts that evoked responses to multi-culture and social justice. Certain factors helped the students learn more from the readings and discussions. First, the choice of picture books set a model for students to use visual thinking while the images also helped the students better comprehend the texts. Secondly, the culturally relevant texts motivated the students to

think more about the texts, since they saw that their images and their voices were represented in the books. These texts also helped boost the students' confidence when blogging since they had rich prior knowledge and felt connected to the texts. Thirdly, the instructors' scaffolding contributed to the success of students' learning. Both instructors played the roles of teacher, supervisor, and cheer-leader throughout the project, which encouraged the students to continue their learning actively. However, other factors hindered some students from learning more. For example, students sometimes failed to continue with their insightful discussions since the blogging moved at a fast rate, and the great amount of posts at one time was not easily "digestible." Some other times students' language ability and typing skills limited their expression of thinking. More productive discussions could have been generated. If students were more advanced in their English and their typing, they would have generated more rich discussions.

Discussions and Implications

The data results suggest important implications listed below, including issues concerning social context and identities, blogging about literature, literature response, sense of audience, and students' multiple cognitive tasks.

Social Context and Identities

The social context is always important to students' learning. The study findings demonstrate that the participating students formed communities on the Internet and also in their real physical worlds. Although the learning activity was designed to take place online, regarding students' relationships with one another in the face-to-face communities and the situated meanings, all the participants collaboratively created real life communities and helped each other construct other social contexts on each side (U.S. and

Taiwan). As a result, the social contexts developed in the face-to-face communities and the students' identities situated in these school contexts made a difference in the students' on-line learning.

In this study, the American students' social relationships built from the face-to-face social context were reflected in their online blogging. For example, in the real life if they befriended each other, they continued the intimacy and friendliness in their blog postings. However, some who did not get along well in their daily school lives fought in the blog, either to gain the floor or to gain attention. The Taiwanese students, compared to the American students, were older and therefore more mature in their social skills. Also, the Chinese philosophy holds that harmony in human relationships is essential and that having direct conflict with other people is the last strategy one should ever adopt. As a result, no such distinct differences between being friendly or unfriendly showed in the Taiwanese students' relationship with their peers, whether in the classroom or online. Basically, they remained learning pals to each other; that is, they studied with and sometimes consulted each other (if they needed help with their readings) in and out of the project activity. On both sides, these social relationships among the students helped construct a social context whenever they met together for this blogging activity.

How the students anticipated and were anticipated their involvement in the activity also contributed to the development of the face-to-face social contexts. The American students intended to have fun and learn about another culture when they started participating. They took on the role of "kids who went to an after-school-club." However, such a role differed with the researcher's and the instructor's expectations. We wanted them to learn, and we particularly expected that they would learn in an interesting

and meaningful way. As the researcher and the instructor were also members of this face-to-face community setting, we made efforts to mold the social context perceived in this community into one that met our expectations. We adjusted our roles, turning into more teacher-like figures. And we used both explicit instructions and nonverbal behaviors as contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1976) to change the cultural models formed in this community. We also honored the students as active readers and motivated learners when we worked and talked with them, and we provided them with a supportive learning environment. The American students eventually gained the “sense of agency” (Johnston, 2004) as learners and sophisticated bloggers instead of that of party-goers-- which did not fit expectation of this project. As the U.S. group members modified identities, we worked together to create a new cultural model for this American social context.

The social context in the Taiwan group appeared to be much more well-defined. It carried the same characteristics from the beginning until the end. The students read the books, the instructors guided them through the book talk in both aesthetic and afferent directions (Rosenblatt, 1983), and then the students blogged. Although the setting was outside the classroom, the experiences were an extension of students’ school learning. Therefore, the ways in which students’ positioned identities in this activity resembled the roles they took on as school students, and the social context was similar to that of their classroom. The instructor’s consistent guidance and instructions contributed to the formation of such a cultural model within this group. The Taiwanese students were always ready to learn and to be engaged. They also were more careful with their postings, as they viewed them like the final drafts of their English compositions. They believed

that their postings demonstrated not only their English performance but also their academic capabilities. Consequently, for some Taiwanese students, the posts could result in winning-face or losing-face with their classmates and teacher. Both class-level and culture-level cultural models, as described above, helped the development of the specific social context in the Taiwanese community.

Since “teachers and students create unique academic and social events through a process of mutual engagement and influence” (Weinstein, 1991, p. 518), my findings about the social contexts in this project suggest that teachers and students together should build a supportive and encouraging learning community, so that students will position themselves as engaged learners in the community. Teachers should be aware that with either online learning or classroom learning, any setting (such as the school setting, the computer lab setting, and the classroom setting) can play an important role in students’ learning process. Positive, harmonious peer relationships in the community are also important if students are to achieve successful learning.

Researchers have provided practical strategies to help build learning communities and to develop productive identities. For example, Peterson (1992) suggests that teachers use “a ceremony, ritual, and rite to create a place where students feel they belong” and eventually build a learning community (p. 15). Johnston (2004) points out that children build and try on different identities in classroom interactions, and therefore “teachers’ comments can offer them, and nudge them toward, productive identities” (p. 23). Mehan (1980) advises knowing in what social context one is and accordingly behaving in socially appropriate ways. Teachers need to keep these teaching practices in mind when

conducting their instruction, whether their students are learning in the real classroom or in the virtual world.

Blogging about Literature

When the blog is used to provide an arena for students to share their reading responses to literature, the act of blogging demonstrates the characteristics of both talking and writing. On the one hand, blogging is conversational and casual. When the participating students blogged, their posts read like they were having conversations with one another. They adopted discourse moves (Barnes & Todd, 1977) in their posts; their online language was expressional; they did not always go through the process of multiple editing, as techniques were not considered a required element for blogging. They also felt that it was less stressful than writing on paper since they were “chatting” with people on the Internet. The American students seemed more comfortable and casual about blogging than did the Taiwanese students since they are native speakers of English. Some of the Taiwanese students, owing to their lack of writing experiences, seemed to find blogging somewhat stressful compared to how their American peers felt. However, they still pointed out that blogging was an interesting way to write, and they accordingly were able to loosen up. This was a reaction they could never have generated if they had been writing with paper and pencil, and only to each other.

On the other hand, since the requirement for this blogging activity was to respond to literature, the students were given a more focused task. This caused the students not to treat the blogs as personal blogs where people chatted freely. Instead, the blogging was task-oriented, and therefore I perceived a more formal writing act from time to time. Often students pondered the content of their posts, checked their spellings and grammar,

and used various techniques such as colored fonts and text-related images to enrich their posts. In combination, blogging about literature retains the casual atmosphere that personal blogs usually create, while it motivates students to write in a more serious way other than simply having conversations. It retains the characteristics of both talking (such as spontaneous, informal, and social) and writing (inclusive of delivering messages, constructing thinking, and pondering on word usage and passage structure).

For that reason, one of the advantages of blogging about literature is that it allows students to have spontaneous responses to the literary works they read. Students needed not to be restricted by the techniques of academic writing, and this freed them from the formality and encouraged them to focus solely on their thoughts. In addition, blogging provided a forum for students to share their ideas. This sharing motivated the students to continue writing as they were aware that their audience would read and respond to what they posted. It also helped the students to think further and deeper, since they read postings by other people; therefore they either expanded their own thinking or reconstructed their own ideas. For example, they learned to adopt a different angle to read the book *Terrible Things* (Bunting, 1999) and to appreciate more the idea of fighting against racism when reading people's comments about *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001). As the Internet moves beyond time and geographical boundaries, blogging about literature with people far away and of different cultures is also feasible. This context undoubtedly provided students with opportunities to see things from various perspectives and to listen to different voices when responding to the texts. Students' views of the texts as well as of the world were expanded. Moreover, students who might feel uncomfortable talking about certain topics (for example, in her survey Miki stated that

she did not talk about social justice) might find it easier to write about them when blogging in the anonymity of the computer screens (See Miki's postings in Chapter Four). This protected context allowed students to have richer experiences with the texts and also with the world.

Blogging about literature also revealed certain characteristics of writing. It allows students to think on paper, or more precisely, to think on computer. For example, when the participating students started to write on the blog, they usually began with a vague idea of what they would like to write about. Sometimes, if they did not know what they should write, they simply began by either giving a summary of the story or by writing about their favorite part of the book, whether it was the illustrations or the characters. Nevertheless, as they continued writing, new ideas kept flowing into the posts. Murray (1985) states, "Writing is an act of recording or communicating and much more. Writing is a significant kind of thinking in which the symbols of language assume a purpose of their own and instruct the writer during the composing process" (p. 18). In this sense, the writing itself became a process of making meaning on the computer screens for the students. It led them to continue composing and therefore helped them to keep on creating new ideas.

The implication based on these findings is that the technology (blogging in particular), if used well, can be integrated into language arts curriculums and thus benefits students. New definitions for blogging in literacy classrooms are therefore emerging: The blogs are more than personal journals or publishing tools. Rather, they provide an interactive medium for students to construct, share, and reconstruct their thoughts about the words and the world.

Some practical problems need to be addressed. For example, if students lack typing skills, blogging can hinder their thinking as they may spend too much time trying to find the right keys on the keyboard. If students do not have prior experiences with the Internet, creating a blog account, logging onto the blog, and getting familiar with the blog environment so that students can successfully upload a message can be frustrating experiences. Teachers need to consider questions such as “How many computers will be available to a whole class of students?” “How much time shall be spent on the computers and is the result of learning worthy of that amount of time spent?” and “How can teachers help students to be on task instead of ‘fooling around’ among hundreds and thousands web sites?”

Questions like these should be explored and teachers should be willing to make a judgment before they make the decision to use the blogging in their reading and writing curriculums. Just because technology is available, it does not necessarily mean that teachers have to use it. Teachers should make the wise decisions about when and how to integrate the Internet and blogging in particular into their classroom practices. New literacy researchers argue that the Internet has changed what it means to be literate (Coiro, 2003; Kinzer, 2003; Lankshera and Knobel, 2003; Leu, 1997). Leu (1999) indicates that “the Internet is also developing its own forms of socially-mediated learning, many of which appear to be very promising for classroom instruction” (Change section, para. 2). Literacy teachers should make efforts to find effective and efficient ways to integrate the Internet, the blog included, in their curriculums. We teachers should follow Leu’s insight that “if we are to prepare our students for their tomorrows, we need to embrace the opportunities the Internet provides for new forms of literacy” (New section, para. 1).

On the other hand, teacher educators also need to prepare pre-service teachers so that these future teachers are equipped with sufficient knowledge and strategies to integrate the technology into their instructions. In 2008 NCTE (The National Council of Teachers of English) published The NCTE Definition of 21st Century Literacies. The first requirement for 21st Century readers and writers is to “develop proficiency with the tools of technology” (para. 2). To achieve that goal, pre-service teachers first need to become proficient themselves with technology. Such Internet experiences as the blog, Wiki, podcast, and even Facebook will be beneficial.

As a digital divide still exists in today’s society, curriculum makers should assure that school children have the access to computers and the Internet at school so that disadvantaged groups will not be deprived of the opportunities to participate in the current Information Age and will not lag behind in learning. A minimum of two hours of computer lab weekly is essential, while flexible, independent hours of Internet use should be taken into consideration. Students should be allowed individual access to the school computers during recess hours, independent working hours, and after and before school.

Literature Responses

My findings also led to the understanding that when offered chances and support, students were encouraged to write “about,” “of,” and “from” literature (Probst, 1992b) after they read literary works. In writing “about” literature, the students showed their understanding of the texts. They blogged about the themes of the stories, the implied meanings of certain passages, authors’ word choices and the illustrations enriching the meanings of the texts. When writing “from” literature, the students shared their life experiences as they were prompted to make life-text connections. They blogged about

the lessons they learned by reading the texts and reflected on their own values and perceptions about these worlds around them. In writing “of” literature, the students pursued their own thoughts and created their own literacy works, usually in poetry. For example, the American student, Alice, wrote a poem to compare and contrast the two main characters in the book *Island of the Skog* (Kellogg, 1993). She wrote that one main character was bossy and the other was nice. For another example, the Taiwanese student, Su-pin, posted a poem when pondering on the question, “What is the greatest power in the world?” She reasoned why love was the greatest power in the world and described where she saw the examples of love around her.

With a welcoming and encouraging online environment, as well as sufficient and constant support and scaffolding--such as the reading aloud, the reading prompts, the group discussions, and even the on-site conferences--the students not only responded about literature, they also wrote of literature and wrote from literature. Their reading response blog entries demonstrated that they comprehended the texts, and they thought beyond the texts. They also constructed creative and imaginative writing, as is shown in the examples included in Chapter Four. Reading response theorists such as Rosenblatt (1983) emphasize the essentiality of having students respond to literature aesthetically so that reading is a “lived-through” experience (1978/1994, p. 27). Looking closely at the students’ blog entries, I realized that they were able to respond aesthetically to literature. Our research design directed them to understand the literature as well as to transact with the texts from their own feelings and experiences (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) rather than merely find out about the information in the texts.

Anderson and Rubano (1991) argue that student writing literary texts in response to literary texts “has not generally been explored in the research” (p. 14). During the course of my study, the instructors and I did not particularly encourage the students to respond with literary texts; we only generally required them to respond to the literature on the blogs. As a result, we observed the students interpreting the texts and making connections with the texts; however, seldom did they try creating literary texts as responses. One exception was the poems that students created. The poems were the students’ own experiments, which appeared to be original, creative, and carrying important messages, though they were few in numbers.

Such a finding brings up the question: What if we had encouraged the students to respond to literature with forms other than narrative? The students showed that they were able to respond with poetic forms. They also demonstrated the ability to respond in the pictorial form. For example, they uploaded images to supplement their thinking or from time to time to replace their verbal thinking. The blog allows sharing of images, audio files, and video files, reading responses with both verbal and non-verbal forms, and both interpretive and creative models are actually feasible. When the students were restricted by their keyboarding skills, or, like the Taiwanese students, were concerned about their language usages and therefore felt the blogging was sometimes stressful, an alternative form of response (such as a video clip of acting, a painting inspired by the story, and a made-up episode) could serve to help the students express their feelings, insights, and reflections after reading the texts.

The pedagogical implication is that teachers can make best use of the blog by encouraging students to try all possible and creative ways to construct their reading

responses. The responses to literature do not have to be verbal, neither need they to be narrative. Students' creativity should be the only limit to their responses to literature.

Sense of Audience

Writing for real audiences made students' writing experiences authentic. When they blogged, the sense of audience caused the students to pay more attention to the contents as well as the forms of their writing. For example, the students used various colors and sizes of fonts to emphasize or to attract. They also used codes or images to add meanings to their postings. Sometimes they edited and proofread even though this blogging project did not require revision.

The sense of audience also affected the contents of the postings. As they were having interactions with the Taiwanese students, the American students seemed to attend particularly to the Chinese cultural elements in the texts. They wrote about the Chinese symbols, such as bats, circles, and dragons, in their posts. When they blogged, they also recalled the stories or legends they heard about Chinese cultures or festivals. Since we did not give the students time to do things other than reading the books and then posting about them in the lab, there was no way to find out if the students would want to do any voluntary surfing on the Internet to find out more about the Chinese culture. However, their blog entries showed that they gained more interest in the Chinese cultural elements and appreciated the Chinese way of life more because of the sense of their audience.

In addition, the American students knew that their audiences who posted sophisticated and well-organized passages on the blogs were older than they were. Consequently, the American students expected that they could learn from their Taiwanese peer bloggers. Sometimes they simply went ahead and posted questions about the plots,

the characters, and the development of certain themes in the texts for the Taiwanese students to answer. This helped prompt the Taiwanese students to think more and to initiate more interactions between the two groups.

The Taiwanese students also held a keen sense of audience. The Taiwanese students' audiences were native English speakers. This made them more self-conscious about their English. They were concerned that their English might be hard to understand by their audiences; also they were worried that they might embarrass themselves if they wrote poorly in English. Such self-consciousness undoubtedly caused certain stress to the Taiwanese students, especially those who had not mastered English well. On the other hand, since their audiences were younger than they were, the Taiwanese students thought that it would be too challenging for their American peer bloggers to become involved in some serious discussions. As a result, the Taiwanese students tended to choose "light issues" to blog about. This underestimation of their audiences' ability came from a presumption that age ensured a greater intellectual prowess and that reading responses were mostly knowledge-related. As more serious issues were not explored, there was no way to find out if the American students were not able to enjoy more thought-provoking discussions.

One implication based on these findings is that teachers ought to include authentic writing experiences in their curriculum. When writing for real audiences, students learn in a more meaningful way. Another implication is that teachers should help students build mutual trust and understanding if two different groups of students are to work and learn together. Students should be encouraged to remain in frequent and further contacts with one another. This on-going communication could help eliminate unnecessary

assumptions about each other, and could also provide students with more opportunities to continue to learn from new friends.

With online literature discussions, I suggest that in addition to blogging about the books, students can also be encouraged to chat about personal interests and life experiences. In my study I provided the students a whole-class blog to serve that purpose. However, the participating Taiwanese students were too busy to post on two blogs while the American students who could only post during our lab hours did not have sufficient amount of time to complete so many postings at one sitting. As a result, once we started the book-blogging activity, most students ceased to post on the whole-class blog. The whole-class blog was available for more and further contacts, but the students were not always able to use it. An implication is that future researchers may wish to create explicit designs to ensure that deep and frequent contacts do happen. One Taiwanese student, Chen-na, suggested that we combine the free chatting and talking about books in one blog and that the students have the free choice of whether to discuss the books or simply to chat. She said (translated from Mandarin):

On the same blog we can chat but also write about our reading response. Then when we log on, we feel that we can write whatever we want to. This way we feel less pressured (personal communication, June 5, 2008).

Although reading responses were the task that we required the students to accomplish in this project, I believe that self-choice of topics is always one of the most efficient strategies when English teachers instruct their students in writing. An alternative way is to ask students to post about the books every other week and to chat on the other weeks. A prolonged project of at least one year will also help build more mutual understandings

and trust among the students. Meanwhile, such a prolonged project will allow students extra amount of time for voluntary surfing, so that they can learn more about their readers via independent research. When students increase their interactions with one another both quantitatively and qualitatively, they benefit by learning more from each other. The sense of audience will therefore become a positive aspect to their learning.

Teachers should encourage cross-school and even cross-country correspondences. As literacy teachers are usually loaded with teaching responsibilities, the administrators of schools need to be in charge of the initial communications between schools. When inter-school relationships are established with the help of administrators, literacy teachers will be able to easily implement cross-school correspondences in their curriculum. As a result, students will write not only for their teachers, but also to their peers from other schools. Teacher educators also need to see the essentiality of involving their students in international collaborative projects. Only when pre-service teachers have the experiences of communicating with audiences of another culture can they help their students in the future to build that communication in the future.

Multiple Cognitive Tasks

During the course of this project the students were required to accomplish multiple cognitive tasks. First they needed to comprehend the texts, solving any problems concerning vocabularies and implied meanings. Then they reflected on the texts by drawing upon all their prior knowledge and building on the understandings they learned from the other bloggers. Their values about life and the world were challenged and their perceptions of people, things, and places were transformed. They examined their feelings and made connections to the texts. Afterwards, they were expected to share

all those insights and impressions they constructed with the other bloggers during the reflection stage. In short, the students were involved in multiple cognitive tasks when we asked them to blog about the books. They needed to read, to think, and then to express their thoughts in writing. Therefore, this project benefited the students--they were provided with a great many of opportunities to enrich their readings, to deepen their thinking, and to expand their writing or even to improve their typing.

For the stronger readers and writers, such a project pushed them to work harder and accordingly helped them to progress further. For weaker readers and writers, these tasks combined together could be quite a challenge. The challenge for the Taiwanese students was particularly obvious, since they had to complete one more task, that is, to translate their thinking into a foreign language. For students whose English was sufficient enough to express themselves, this multi-task issue was not such a big problem. However, for those who had less command of English, or were intimidated as they were less confident about their English performances, the multiple tasks really challenged them. For example, Bei-shan could write fluently in Chinese, but wrote briefly in English. Undoubtedly language barriers added difficulty to the multiple tasks for certain students such as the focus student, Mary (See report about her in Chapter Four).

One implication is that more support and scaffolding is essential. In my study, the two instructors and I worked collaboratively to provide the students with constant and sufficient support and scaffolding, including reading aloud, prompts, group discussion, on-site conferences, and typing assistance. The American students benefited from these supports and most of them evolved into engaged learners--although several failed to meet the challenge quickly and decided to stop participating. Most of the Taiwanese students

also benefited and celebrated their accomplishments when the project came to an end. The Taiwanese students were learning English as a foreign language. Since English learners when acquiring a second language (in this case, a foreign language) may suffer from the affective filter (Krashen, 1982 & 1985)--which consists of the variables of motivation, attitude, self-confidence, and anxiety (Gass & Selinker, 2001)--not all the Taiwanese students were fully engaged in the project to the extent I expected. Therefore, particular, extra support is indispensable for English language learners.

As researchers indicate that “second language students develop both academic concepts and English language proficiency most effectively through the development of their first language” (Hubboard & Shorey, 2003, p. 53), it is necessary to value English learners’ usage of their native language (Collier, 1995; Cummins, 1996). The Taiwanese students who voluntarily participated in the project expected to improve their English through this activity. Asking them to blog in Chinese would not necessarily motivate them. Prior-blogging supports, such as group discussions in their native language (which was adopted by Ms. Lin with the Taiwan group), are better strategies. Another suggestion is to encourage the Taiwanese students, as well as all the other English language learning students, to keep practicing by providing them a supportive environment. As long as they feel secure and supported in the learning environment, English language learners will be able to take the risk to write in the target language. Also, when instructing all the students who may feel overwhelmed by the multiple cognitive tasks, the teacher might encourage students to construct non-verbal reading responses. When less mature writers are provided the options to express their thoughts with, for example, images or body movements, they feel less discouraged. As they

realize that it is their thoughts rather than the formats that count, they will eventually evolve into better thinkers and writers

Therefore, policy makers in both countries should be more cautious with second/foreign language paper-and-pencil assessments. When English learners are evaluated by written products only, it deprives them of the chances to display how much they have actually learned. Considering this, I suggest that other means of assessment such as self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and learning portfolio should also be adopted to complement what written tests fail to assess.

Further Research Implications and Questions

I conducted a cross-cultural and cross-age online literature discussion research project, which was not included in either school's curriculum. Since the students met either after school or during recess hours, this project did not carry exactly the same importance as those of regular classroom practices. The students viewed the project as an after-school club event, and their commitment appeared less strong than what they exhibited for their classroom routines. As a result, many extra efforts were made in order to engage the students and to continue the project. For example, I provided snacks as an inducement for the American fifth graders, and I sent more than one hundred emails to the Taiwanese students to keep the conversations on the blogs continuing. The American instructor, Mrs. Dickinson, had to frequently deliver the messages exchanged between the school and me and sometimes between the parents and me, while the Taiwanese instructor, Ms. Lin, was asked to maintain constant online contacts with me via the Instant Messaging. Although the instructors all made strong efforts to keep this project going, oftentimes the motivation and self-regulation of the students remained a concern.

Some students were not fully committed to the activity due to time, their school workload, other interests, and disagreements between classmates (See detailed report in Chapter Four).

However, the fact that this project was not included in the schools' curriculum could also be one of the factors contributing to the success of the project. To begin with, the English reading and writing curricula are planned school-wide in most public schools in Taiwan, and standardized textbooks are usually the main teaching materials most public school teachers are required to adopt. Individual English teachers, such as Ms. Lin, usually do not have many options when designing courses. Ms. Lin has to cover all the materials as scheduled by the school-wide standards so that students can prepare for the monthly exams. So Ms. Lin may encounter difficulties if she tries to integrate an online blogging activity into her regular classroom practices.

However, as more and more school teachers in Taiwan are experimenting with a variety of strategies to best help their students (for example, Ms. Lin is trying reading aloud trade books in her class, and her colleagues have tried involving their students in responding to English texts with plays and practicing English writing by publishing school newspapers, and so on), using blogging to learn English is applicable and feasible in today's public schools in Taiwan. In addition, since blogging created a less threatening atmosphere than other more formal kinds of writing, it will be worthy for the teachers in Taiwan to try to adopt blogging along with or even prior to requiring students to do other more formal writing.

Compared to the teachers in Taiwan, some American public school teachers have more options and flexibility when making their instructional plans. Integrating blogging

about literature into their classroom practices may be easier, because they have fewer restrictions on their time. However, other teachers who use scripted programs may have as much difficulty as did the Taiwanese teachers.

Other factors, such as technology assistance, also need to be taken into consideration in future blogging activities. When Mrs. Dickinson helped the American students blog about the picture books, I was always around to provide the students with technology help. Altogether 16 American students volunteered to participate in the beginning, and the blog host required an email account for each blogger to sign in. Since the school computers would block their email accounts if the students tried to apply at school, I signed up the blog user accounts for them by creating 16 email accounts. Besides that, over time I taught them step-by-step and repeatedly demonstrated how to upload texts and images and how to leave comments. Mrs. Dickinson and I even provided typing help sometimes as the fifth-grade students had not received many keyboarding lessons before. If such a project is to be done in a regular classroom, very likely another computer teacher will need to be on site. That way the literacy teacher does not become overwhelmed with massive simultaneous requests for technical help from the students. This does not suggest that an online project is not applicable in regular literacy classrooms. In fact, teacher-researchers have observed that peer coaching helps students learn with the Internet more easily and successfully (Shasek, 2000; Tokin & Baker, 2005). Students can actually learn to perform well on the Internet, and the blog as well, at a faster pace than their teachers with the assistance of capable peers.

Considering all these issues, the implication for further research is to carry out this literature blogging project in regular classrooms. I believe that it will bring more

insights when this blogging activity becomes a natural part of students' school learning experiences. Students may benefit more since they will be more engaged and focused as these are expected learning activities in their regular school settings. Further questions to explore by using the blogging strategies are:

1. How might students position themselves and be positioned when the Internet experiences occur in their regular classroom settings?
2. What cultural model will be developed in their class?
3. How will the online discussion affect and be influenced by the classroom discussions, and vice versa?
4. To what extent will students' reading and writing experiences change or will they change at all after the integration of a blogging activity?
5. How will students apply the cultural awareness they obtain through such a cross-cultural project to their other studies and even to their daily lives?

As for research methods, I conducted a pilot study before I started this inquiry. However, I gained new understandings from this research. Besides the constant comparative method I used for my pilot study, I used a critical discourse lens to analyze the four individual students' online discourse. This specific lens I adopted brought me to an area I had not expected to explore earlier. I realized that students' situated identities (e.g. a party-goer), cultural models (e.g. writing was formal), and the situated meanings they created for this project (e.g. an extended learning experience) affected how they were involved in this activity. It also fascinated me to see how my own role as a researcher transformed. I had started this project with the intention to remain as a researcher/observer, but midway through data collection I had to take on the role as an

instructor, and finally returned to be a researcher when analyzing the data. In my findings I focused on the students' experiences with this event. However, I became aware that it would be significant to further analyze my experiences through the stances of critical discourse and positioning. It would also be very interesting to compare and contrast this investigation with my pilot study, in which I recruited elite students, and their blogs were deep and critical without needing much help from me or the instructor. I recruited students from the same schools in both studies; however, the results gained from each set of data sources were different. Therefore, I am also pondering such methodological questions: 1) What other findings will I achieve if I go back to my pilot study and compare the information I gained in that event to the information I gained here? 2) When I use the critical discourse lens to analyze my pilot study, what other new themes will emerge? 3) How did the two instructors position themselves and what situated meanings did they create for this event?

All the questions I ask above will help add to the vast body of knowledge and will provide insights for teachers of reading, writing, and English learners when they work on finding the best way to help their students in the 21st Century.

Conclusion

In my study, I asked and answered the questions concerning the nature of cross-cultural and cross-age online literature discussions. I gained insights and provided applicable classroom and research implications. As an educator and researcher, my own views have been expanded and transformed. I see the significance of providing students alternative ways to experience reading and writing and to develop critical thinking. I have strengthened my own belief that social interaction is essential to learning and that

technology works as a powerful medium to motivate that learning. Nonetheless, I am conscious that this investigation is just a beginning. More work needs to be done and further research studies attempted. Such studies are important to promote understanding among the next generation. Technology creates the vehicle for mutual understanding. For these American children Taiwan is now more than just a geography term. For the Taiwanese students America is far more than the stereotype they see on TV. When education provides a means for our students to appreciate cross-cultural communication via technology, the world becomes not only smaller but also more harmonious and therefore more prosperous.

Appendix A: List of Participating Students

Note: The ability described was based on the observations of the classroom teachers in the beginning of the study.

Blog Group One						
Name	Country	Gender	Reading (Eng.)	Writing (Eng.)	Internet Experience	Note
Justin	USA	Male	Strong	Strong	Not rich	
Paxton	USA	Male	Strong	Strong	Not rich	
Lydia	USA	Female	Fair	Fair	Fair	
Percy	USA	Male	Fair	Fair	Not rich	*
Alice	USA	Female	Not strong	Not strong	Not rich	
Miki	USA	Female	Not strong	Not strong	Not rich	
Mary	USA	Female	Not strong	Not strong	Not rich	**
Marvin	USA	Male	Not strong	Not strong	Not rich	*
Shan-te	TW	Female	Strong	Strong	Rich	
Chen-na	TW	Female	Strong	Strong	Rich	
Ning-ning	TW	Female	Fair	Fair	Rich	
Kuei-lan	TW	Female	Fair	Fair	Rich	
Chia-hua	TW	Female	Fair	Fair	Rich	
Hsiao-fang	TW	Female	Fair	Fair	Rich	
Bei-shan	TW	Female	Fair	Fair	Rich	
Shung-pei	TW	Female	Fair	Fair	Rich	

Blog Group Two						
Name	Country	Gender	Reading (Eng.)	Writing (Eng.)	Internet Experience	Note
Jenny	USA	Female	Strong	Strong	Fair	
Kevin	USA	Male	Strong	Strong	Not rich	
Jacob	USA	Male	Strong	Strong	Rich	**
Trisha	USA	Female	Fair	Fair	Not rich	*
Anna	USA	Female	Not strong	Not strong	Not rich	
Sadie	USA	Female	Not strong	Not strong	Not rich	
Sam	USA	Male	Not strong	Not strong	Not rich	*
Diana	USA	Female	Not strong	Not strong	Not rich	*
Kang-lin	TW	Female	Strong	Strong	Rich	
I-mei	TW	Female	Strong	Strong	Rich	
Na-la	TW	Female	Fair	Fair	Rich	
Su-pin	TW	Female	Fair	Fair	Rich	
Ting-ting	TW	Female	Fair	Fair	Rich	
Chieh-ming	TW	Female	Fair	Fair	Rich	

* Participant dropped out because of activity conflicts, moving, or transportation difficulty.

** Participant dropped out because of social or behavior issues.

Appendix B: Permission Letter from the School District



COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Dr. Phyllis A. Chase
Superintendent of Schools

ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

1818 West Worley Street (573) 886-2100

Columbia, Missouri 65203

Fax: (573) 886-2171

Dr. Cheryl Cozette
Assistant Superintendent

September 21, 2006

Ms. Hsiao-chien Lee
701 S. Providence, Apt. 3L
Columbia, MO 65203

Dear Ms. Lee:

Your research proposal entitled "*Reading Picture Books Across the Pacific Ocean*" has been approved. Dr. Teresa VanDover, Lee Elementary School Principal, will serve as your district contact for the study. You may contact Dr. VanDover at 214-3530 regarding details of your study.

Best wishes for success in your research.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Cozette, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent

sk

c: Dr. Teresa VanDover

Appendix C: Invitation Letter to the Parents

Students in the 5th grade class have the opportunity to take part in a project this year that involves “talking” with high school students in Taiwan over the internet. Ms. Hsiao-Chien Lee, a teacher from Taiwan who is completing her doctoral program at the University of Missouri, will use this project for her dissertation research. Hsiao-Chien is in the department of Curriculum and Instruction and is working under the supervision of her advisor, Dr. Carol Gilles.

The project will continue throughout the entire school year. The first weeks will be a “get to know each other” period of time as the 5th graders and the students in Taiwan are communicating through a blog. Hsiao-Chien creates the blog specifically for this study. Only participants can enter the blog, and students do not use their real names. The students in Taiwan are high school students and will translate everything from English.

The students in both countries will read picture books and in turn they will conduct literature discussions on the blog. All students will read the same titles. The books to be discussed have been carefully selected in order to engage students in critical discussions about cultures, cross-cultural understandings, varied perspectives, appreciation of diversity, and issues of social justice.

For the Fall semester, the students will meet with Hsiao-chien on Thursdays after school. Mrs. Dickinson, a 5th grade teacher at Lee last year, will continue to work with Hsiao-Chien and the 5th graders.

Parents will pick up their children at 5:00, either in the Media Center or in front of the school. ***Students planning to stay for the first evening will need parent permission to remain at XXXX School.***

Hsiao-Chien has IRB approval from MU to conduct her research at Lee. Her research project has been approved by the XXXX Public School District and Dr. XXXX. Parents of students interested in taking part will receive additional information detailing the project before being asked to sign the necessary permission forms.

If you have any questions, please contact one of the teachers, or:

Hsiao-Chien Lee, hl6vd@mizzou.edu

Dr. Carol Gilles. gillesc@missouri.edu

Briefly state the purpose of the research:

The purpose of the study is to see how the two different age groups of students of diverse cultural backgrounds interact with each other through online literature discussions. The investigator also intends to find out to what extent this online interaction enhances students' learning about other cultures and to what extent it motivates the students in learning reading and writing.

Please discuss with your child the importance of committing to working with Hsiao-Chien. The 5th graders last year who took part in the pilot study chose to continue their work the second semester, indicating their enthusiasm for the project. Hsiao-Chien facilitated the exchange of photos and video recordings between the two groups of students and the 5th graders looked forward to each session as they received responses from the students in Taiwan.

Mrs. XXXX

Mrs. XXXX

Appendix D-1: Parent Consent Form
(Addressing the American parents)

This consent form is to grant permission for your child _____ to participate in the research project called, "Reading Picture Books across the Pacific Ocean," conducted by Hsiao-chien Lee, a doctoral student from University of Missouri-Columbia. The purpose of this research is to understand students' experiences with and attitudes toward online literature discussions.

I understand the following:

- My child will read inspiring picture books. Then through the Internet my child will discuss the books with a group of high school girl students from Taiwan.
- Every Thursday after school Ms. Lee will help each child work on the computer in the school's media center for about an hour. Each child will post his/her thoughts on the online discussion board and comment on others' posts. The project will last eight months, from October, 2007 to May, 2008.
- My child will be given an initial interview and a final interview. Each interview will last about 15 to 20 minutes. The interviews will be recorded with a digital recorder.
- The possible benefits to my child from this research are the knowledge that the data collected during this study are contributing to literacy education and the chance to share thoughts and learn collaboratively with people of a different culture.
- There are minimal risks and discomforts that may be associated with this research. They include possible uneasiness when my child interacts online with people he/she has never met in person or misunderstanding caused by language barrier or culture differences.
- Participation is voluntary. My child may choose not to participate in this research study or withdraw at any time. My child will NOT be penalized in any way should he/she choose not to participate or withdraw. My child's identity will be kept completely confidential.
- If I have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, I may contact Hsiao-chien Lee at (573) 771-0020 or her instructor, Dr. Carol Gilles at (573) 882-8498. For additional information regarding human participation in research, I may contact the UMC Campus IRB Office at (573) 882-9585.

I hereby give my permission for my child _____ to take part in the research conducted by Hsiao-chien Lee from University of Missouri-Columbia.

Signed _____ Date _____

Appendix D-2: Youth Assent Form
(Addressing the American students)

This assent form is to grant permission for _____ to participate in a research project called, “Reading Picture Books across the Pacific Ocean,” conducted by Hsiao-chien Lee, a doctoral student from University of Missouri-Columbia.

- In this study, you will read picture books assigned by your teacher and then post your after-reading thoughts on the blog. You will receive online comments on your posts from a group of Taiwanese tenth graders. You will also respond to these Taiwanese students’ posts on the blog.
- Every Thursday from 4-5 p.m. you will work at the school’s media center to post and respond online. I will be there helping you with your posting. The project will last about eight months, starting in October, 2007 and ending in May, 2008.
- I will give you one interview in the beginning and one interview at the end of the project. The interviews will last fifteen to twenty minutes. And a digital voice recorder will be used to record the interview.
- The data collected from you during this study will help to the advance of literacy education. Also you will get to know people and learn things about a different culture. It is possible that you may feel a little bit uncomfortable since you are communicating with people you have never met in person. You may be surprised to find out how different cultures these Taiwanese students have. But I myself am from Taiwan and I will help you with any questions you have.
- If you do not wish to be in this study or you decide you do not want to continue after you have started, just tell your teacher or me. You can stop at any time. There will be no penalty or grade lowering. All the information about you will be kept confidential.
- If you think of any questions about this study, you should ask your teacher or me. Or your parent could give me a call at (573) 771-0020 or email me at hl6vd@mizzou.edu so that I can try and answer any questions you may have. Your parents can also contact Campus Institutional Review Board at (573) 882-9585 if they have further question concerning this study.

I hereby give my permission to take part in the research conducted by Hsiao-chien Lee from University of Missouri-Columbia.

Signed _____ Date: _____

Appendix D-3: Parent Consent Form (Addressing the Taiwanese parents)

敬愛的家長您好:

我是目前就讀於美國密蘇里州哥倫比亞大學的博士班研究生,來美之前一直任教於某某高中英文科,我的研究興趣在於融合網路與英語學習,尤其對於如何應用當下流行的[部落格]在英文作品討論上極感興趣。

您的女兒受邀參加我所進行的一項研究計畫,這個研究的目的是在了解網路互動如何輔助及激發學生讀寫英文的興趣,您的女兒將閱讀數本英文繪本(繪本內容由我提供),閱讀完畢後我會提出問題,請您的女兒根據繪本內容和數位來自美國某某州某某市的小學五年級生進行網路討論,這項研究將會需要您的女兒每週在家(或在學校)上網一次,上網時間預估約為三十分鐘到一小時,整個研究將從十月進行到明年五月,遇到學校段考時間會暫停進行,我同時會先寄出一份問卷,再在期末與您的女兒面對面晤談,以便了解您的女兒參與此項研究的心得感想,晤談時我將錄音,問卷的作答時間約為十五到二十分鐘,晤談時間大約一小時。

您的女兒是自願參加這項研究,她可以選擇不參加,也可以中途隨時終止參加,她的課業成績完全不會因此受到影響,她也不會受到任何處罰,同時她的個人資料也會受到完全的保密,參與這項研究計畫將使您的女兒有機會與美國小學生認識及互動討論,尤其可以幫助她閱讀英文作品及以英文書寫讀後心得,但也可能會耽誤她一些讀書時間。我將彙整您的女兒張貼在網路上及填寫在問卷中的文字和晤談的內容一並發表在我的研究報告中,誠摯地期盼您能同意您的女兒參與這項研究,並同意我使用這些資料,如果您有任何有關這項研究的問題,歡迎您隨時以電子郵件和我聯絡,我會盡一切可能回答您的問題,謝謝您的協助!

聯絡訊息:

李筱倩: hl6vd@mizzou.edu

指導教授 Dr. Carol Gilles: gillesc@missouri.edu

IRB: 美國 (573) 882-9585.

李筱倩敬上 97,1,1

我同意我的女兒參與李筱倩女士所進行的英文網路討論研究活動,並同意她使用我的女兒的文字及訪談內容於她的研究報告中。

同意人簽名: _____ 參與子女姓名: _____ 日期: _____

Translation

Dear parents,

I am a doctoral student at University of Missouri-Columbia. Before I came to the USA I taught English at XXXX High School. My research of interest is the integration of technology and literacy. I am especially interested in using blog for literature discussions.

Your daughter has been invited to participate in my online project, which aims to understand students' experiences with and attitudes toward online literature discussions. Your daughter will read several English picture books. Then she will discuss online with several fifth graders in XXXX about the books she has read. Your daughter will have to get online once a week, posting and responding. The estimated time she spends on the Internet will be 30 minutes to one hour per week. This project will start in October and end in next May. Your daughter may stop posting during the mid-term week. I will email your daughter survey questions and give her a face-to-face interview to help me understand your daughter's reflection about the project. She will spend 15 to 20 minutes to answer the survey questions and the interview will take one hour. The interview will be digitally recorded.

Your daughter's participation is voluntary. She can choose not to participate or to stop participating anytime. Her school grades will not be affected; neither will she receive any penalty. Any information about your daughter will be completely confidential. By participating in this project your daughter will have the chance to get to know people from another culture and to write and read in English. There is minimum risk associated with this project, including taking your daughter's time from her study. But she will benefit by reading and writing in English.

I would like your permission to include your child's posts and interview in this project. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project, or if any problems arise, you may contact me through email (hl6vd@mizzou.edu), my advisor, Dr. Carol Gilles (gillesc@missouri.edu) or the UMC Campus IRB Office at (573) 882-9585.

Yours truly,

Hsiao-chien Lee

.....
I agree that my daughter participates in Ms. Hsiao-chien Lee's online discussion project and Ms. Lee's using my daughter's posts and interviews in her research paper.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D-4: Youth Assent Form
(Addressing the Taiwanese students)

親愛的同學你好:

歡迎你參加此項英文網路討論活動,在這項活動中,你將閱讀數本英文繪本(繪本內容由我提供),閱讀完畢後我會提出問題,請你根據閱讀內容,和美國某某州某某市數位五年級的小朋友進行網路討論,這項研究將會需要你每週在家(或在學校)上網一次,上網時間預估約為三十分鐘到一小時,整個研究將從十月進行到明年五月,遇到學校段考時間會暫停進行,我同時會先寄給你一份問卷,再在期末與你面對面晤談,以便了解你參與此項研究的心得感想,晤談時我將錄音,問卷的作答時間約為十五到二十分鐘,晤談時間大約一小時。

這項研究是自願參加性質,你可以選擇不參加,也可以中途隨時終止參加,你的課業成績完全不會因此受到影響,你也不會受到任何處罰,同時你的個人資料也會受到完全的保密,參與這項研究計畫將使你有機會與美國小學生認識及互動討論,尤其可以幫助你閱讀英文作品及以英文書寫讀後心得,對你可能有的影響是這個活動將佔用你一些讀書時間。

我將彙整你張貼在網路上的文字及填寫在問卷中和晤談時的內容,一並發表在我的研究報告中,誠摯地期盼你能同意參加這項活動,並同意我使用這些資料,如果你有任何有關這項研究的問題,歡迎你隨時以電子郵件和我聯絡,我會盡一切可能回答你的問題,謝謝你的協助!

聯絡訊息:

李筱倩: hl6vd@mizzou.edu

指導教授 Dr. Carol Gilles: gillesc@missouri.edu

IRB: 美國 (573) 882-9585.

李筱倩敬上 97,1,1

Translation

Dear students,

Welcome to this English online discussion project. You are going to read several English picture books. After reading the books you will discuss online with several fifth graders in XXXX. I will provide the discussing questions for you to think about. You will need to get online either at school or at home once a week. The estimated time that you spend on the Internet will be 30 minutes to one hour. The project will start from October and end in next May. You can postpone your posting during the mid-term week. I will email you survey questions and give you a face-to face interview to help me understand your reflections about the project. The survey questions will take you 15 to 20 minutes to complete and the face-to-face interview will take one hour. The face-to-face interview will be digitally recorded.

Your participation is voluntary. You can choose not to participate or to stop participating anytime. It will not affect your grades at school; neither will there be any penalty. Any information about you will be confidential. By participating in this project, you will get to know people from another culture. You will also have the chance to read and write in English. The minimal risk of participation is that it may take some of your time from your study. I will collect your posts and Interviews as my research data. I am asking your permission in using all the data that I collect in my research paper. Should you have any questions concerning my project please do not feel hesitant to contact me through email (hl6vd@mizzou.edu). I will try my best to answer any of your questions. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,
Hsiao-chien Lee

I agree to participate in Ms. Hsiao-chien Lee's online discussion project. And I agree her using the data she collects from my posts and interviews and self-evaluation in her research report.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E: Picture Book List

Order	Title/Published Year	Author &Illustrator	Theme
1	<i>Whoever You Are</i> (2001)	M. Fox	Multiculturalism
	This book emphasizes that whatever people’s races are, they are all the same since they cry and laugh for similar reasons and in similar ways.		
2	<i>The Island of the Skog</i> (1993)	S. Kellogg	Perspectives
	A group of mice, when moving to an unknown island, encounter a giant, menacing monster. In the end it turns out that the monster, the Skog, is acting up since it is as terrified of strangers as the mice are.		
3	<i>Me and Mr. Mah</i> (2001)	A.Spalding & J. Wilson	Cross-cultural friendship / Cross-age friendship
	Ian and his mother move to a new neighborhood after she gets divorced. He builds friendship with his neighbor, Mr. Mah, an old Chinese, when both share the same feeling of losing someone they love.		
4	<i>Yoon and the Christmas Mitten</i> (2006)	H. Recorvits & G. Swiatkowska	Christmas/ culture identity / other voice
	Yoon would like to celebrate Christmas as all her classmates do, while her Korean parents maintain that they should celebrate the New Year since it is their tradition. The parents give in at last and hang a gift-loaded mitten for Yoon.		
5	<i>The Three Questions</i> (2002)	J. J. Muth	Values
	Nikolai asks his friends for the answers to three important life questions. He finds out the answers by himself on the journey of his quest.		
6	<i>The Greatest Power</i> (2004)	Demi	Values
	The Chinese Emperor seeks the wisest person to be his prime minister by asking what the greatest power in the world is. A litter girl who comes up with the answer, “life,” wins the title.		
7	<i>The Big Box</i> (2002)	T. Morrison & G. Potter	Voice being silenced

The parents lock their children in big boxes since they believe that the children are unable to handle their freedom. In the end, the children manage to escape.

- 8 *The Other Side* (2001) J. Woodson & E.B. Lewis Cross-cultural friendship

Two little girls (one white-skinned and the other dark-skinned) make friends across the fence separating their houses, even though the adults warn them not to cross the fence.

- 9 *Henry and the Dragon Kite* (2004) B.E.Hall & W. Low Cross-cultural friendship / mutual understanding

A group of Chinese children have a fight with a group of Italian children. The Chinese children finally realize that the Italian children destroy their kites for the reason that the kites scare the Italian boy's pigeons away.

- 10 *Feathers and Fools* (2000) M. Fox & N. Wilton Cross-cultural friendship / War

Swans and peacocks fight with each other as they both think that the other party is hostile to them. When only two young birds were left after a fierce battle, new friendship is started.

- 11 *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust* (1999) E. Bunting & S. Gammell War/ Holocaust

Some terrible things come and take the animals away. No one is cautious enough of the approaching danger until only one little rabbit is left.

Appendix F: Reading Prompts

Title: *Island of the Skog*

1. Bouncer wanted to stay and fight for freedom and Jenny wanted to leave and go find a peaceful island. How do you feel about what Bouncer wanted to do and how do you feel about Jenny's suggestion?
2. How did Bouncer become the Captain of the ship?
3. When they learned that they had been sailing toward the North Pole, Bouncer announced that he would quit being the Captain. Why did Bouncer decide to take control again when they reached the Island of the Skog?
4. Think about the part in the story where Bouncer says, "We will build a great kingdom dedicated to the freedom of mice, and I will be the king!" What are your ideas?
5. At the end of the story, Bouncer tells everyone to line up and they will sing and he will lead music. Why does the author have Bouncer do this at the end of the book?
6. Write your own question about the story. Begin your question with, "Why...?"
7. Here is one question from Jacob: "Why did the mice wear so big costumes?"
8. Another question from Ms. Lee: In some book reviews they started their comments by saying "Jenny and her city-mouse friends searched for a peaceful place to live." Why is Jenny, instead of Bouncer, viewed as the leading character?

Title: *Me and Mr. Mah*

1. What does the author mean when she writes,
 - a. "The yard was a moonscape. . ."
 - b. "Mom tornadoed around the house . . ."
 - c. "I made myself as small as I felt."
 - d. "Mr. Mah's garden was a knee-high jungle."
2. There is a fence separating Ian's yard and Mr. Mah's garden. In what other ways might the fence represent what is happening in Ian's life?
3. What is the first gesture of friendship between Mr. Mah and Ian? What was the SECOND sign that author gives the reader that a friendship is beginning between Mr. Mah and Ian?
4. Why do you think Mr. Mah call Ian "Yan" which means, "wild goose" in Chinese? Why do you think Mr. Mah did not accept the tractor when Ian offered to give it to him?
5. When Ian offers to return the carved ball-within-a-ball near the end of the story, Mr. Mah returns the ball to Ian and then puts Ian's "Get Well" picture in his black box. By doing this, how does Mr. Mah show that he has changed?
6. Why does Ian plant sunflower seeds at the end of the story? How does Ian change by the end of the story?
7. Talk about a time when you experienced the beginning of a new friendship. How did that friendship begin – what happened?

Title: *Yoon and the Christmas Mitten*

1. Do you feel that the author has written a story that is authentic and could really happen to a child from Korea coming to the United States?
How would you find more information to answer this question?

2. How do you feel about the way Yoon's parents responded to the situation?
How did her parents' thinking seem to change by the end of the story?
3. How could Yoon's classmates and teacher have communicated differently with her that would have made the story very different?
Were her classmates and teacher "listening" to Yoon?
4. Once Yoon came back from the holidays and told her teacher and classmates about her New Year's, what changes do you think the teacher and Yoon's class mates will make?
5. What can YOU, as one person, do that would help a student from another country adjust to a classroom in the United States/Taiwan?
6. What did Yoon and her classmates have in common?
What did you see in the video that showed ways that you and the students in Taiwan/the U.S. have things in common?
7. Share your thinking about the illustrations in the book.
(NOT just whether or not you liked them!)
8. You heard the story for the first time a week/a few weeks ago.
What about the story has stayed in your mind? What has the story made you think about?

Title: *The Three Questions*

1. Think of a time when you knew it was the best time to do something. And who was the most important one then? And what was the right thing to do?
2. What does the author mean by the last line in the story, "This is why we are here?"
3. Do you feel that the illustrations help tell the story? If yes, "How?" If not, "Why not?"
4. In what ways did Leo help Nikola? Why do you think it was important that Nikola helped Leo dig?

Title: *The Greatest Power*

1. Why did Ping invite children to the palace instead of adults?
2. All the children were competing to be the one chosen to be prime minister. Why were the children working with each other instead of competing with one another?
3. What was the little girl doing when she decided that armies, beauty, and money were not the answer? (Where was she at the time?) Why did the author write that part of the story the way she did?
4. The author writes 'The nothing in this seed is the space in between where life exists'.
What do you think the author means by that statement?

Title: *The Big Box*

1. Why did the author write this story to sound like poetry?
2. Why are the adults behaving they way they are?
3. Why do they put the children in a box?
4. Why do the adults give the children things that have to do with nature?
5. If the children get out of the box, where are they going to go?
6. What will they do once they have their freedom?
7. Why did the adults think it was necessary to put the children in a box AND put three locks on the door?

8. (To the Taiwanese students) Can you think of any example in your life or other people's life which reminds you of the big box?

Title: *The Other Side*

1. The first line of the story reads, "That summer the fence that stretched through our town seemed bigger." Why does Jacqueline Woodson say "the fence seemed bigger?"
2. Many times when children ask questions the adults will say, "That's just the way it is." What does that answer mean? Why do the adults say that?
3. Near the middle of the book there is a two-page illustration that shows the girls looking at each other between the rails of the fence. What does this picture make you think about? How does this picture connect with the story?
4. A few pages later there is an illustration showing Clover's mom hanging clothes on the line. She is watching the girls sitting on the fence. What thoughts do you think might be going through Clover's mom's mind.
5. On the last page of the story, the author writes, "Someday somebody' going to come along and knock this old fence down." Who do you think might come along and knock this fence down?

Title: *Henry and the Kite Dragon*

1. The kids learned a lot about making kites and flying kites from Grandfather Chin. What other things did they learn from him?
2. After they finished making the dragon kite, Grandfather Chin said that no one would dare to throw rocks at the kite because "Everyone respects dragons." He was wrong and the boys still threw rocks. Why?
3. At the park, Tony cries when he thinks his pigeon is going to get hurt by the kite. Why did the author have Tony cry instead of just getting very angry?
4. When did the kids from Chinatown begin to understand Tony's perspective?
5. Why do you think this author wanted to write a story about kids for other kids to read?
6. What message does this story have for you about decisions you will make in your life – and decisions you might make at Lee School?

Title: *Feathers and Fools*

1. Peacocks and swans are usually considered to be among the most beautiful birds in the world. Why would Mem Fox decide to use beautiful birds to tell her story?
2. It seems that the peacocks are the ones who really started the fighting. How did that happen?
3. Even if the peacocks kind of started of the problem, do the swans have any responsibility in what happened? Why do you think so?
4. At what points in the story could the conflict been resolved before it got so deadly?
5. How did the young birds begin their new relationship with one another?
6. How does this story connect to the other stories we have shared?
7. The illustrations in this book are different from other books we've read. And, the artist used very bright, bold colors. How do the illustrations affect the story?

Title: *Terrible Things*

1. Who (or what) are the "Terrible Things?"
2. What do you think are the "nets" that the Terrible Things used to capture the animals?
3. After a certain kind of animal was taken away, the remaining animals always found a way to excuse their being captured. Why did you think they had to convince themselves that the Terrible Things had a reason to take animals away?
4. What was the "terrible smell?"
5. Will the Little Rabbit find someone to listen?
6. What does the story remind you of?

Appendix G: Beginning Survey Questions
(Changed made in italics to fit Taiwanese students' situation)

1. Tell me about yourself as a reader/writer.
2. Do you enjoy reading? Why or why not?
reading English books
3. What you do usually read?
Tell me one English book that you enjoy most. Why do you like it so much?
4. Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?
writing in English
5. What do you usually write?
Tell me one successful English writing experience you have had.
6. What Internet experiences do you have (email, google search, online discussion, MSN, etc.)?
7. What is your opinion of/attitude to the Internet?
8. What kind of support/guidance do you usually receive when you read and write?
read and write in English
9. Do you know anything about Taiwan? Chinese culture?
the U.S./American culture
10. Do you like to know about different cultures?
11. Why do you participate in this project?
12. What do you feel about this project? What is your expectation?

Do you have any questions?

Appendix H: Semi-Structured Final Interview Questions
(During the interview conversation, sometimes new relevant questions emerged.)

1. What do you tell people (your parents/ friends) about this project?
2. What is the specific part that you like/dislike about this project?
3. Tell me about the picture books that you have read in this project. Have you learned anything? (Think of cultures, values, and different voices, etc.)
4. Talk about blogging about the books. Have you learned anything?
5. Talk about blogging with the people in Taiwan/America, who are older/younger than you and are from a different culture. Have you learned anything?
6. What factors (obstacle/ help) affect your blogging? (Think of the read aloud, the group oral discussion, your relationship with your group members, your writing, and your typing, etc.)
7. Tell me about your own posting and other people's posting? Think of the exact examples. How about your comments?
8. Do you have anything else that you would like to tell me?

Appendix I: Taiwanese Students' Self-Evaluation Form

(Translation is offered in italics.)

請填好下表後放在附件中寄回 Thank you very much!
(Please fill out the following form and email it back to me.)

Blog 使用姓名: <i>(Blog username)</i>			
請在書名後打勾 <i>(Please check in the following boxes.)</i>			
讀過的書 <i>(The books you have read.)</i>		與育倩老師討論過的書 <i>(The books you have discussed with Ms. Lin.)</i>	
Whoever You Are		Whoever You Are	
The Island of the Skog		The Island of the Skog	
Me and Mr. Mah		Me and Mr. Mah	
Yoon and the Christmas Mitten		Yoon and the Christmas Mitten	
The Big Box		The Big Box	
The Three Questions		The Three Questions	
The Greatest Power		The Greatest Power	
The Other Side		The Other Side	
Henry and the Dragon Kite		Henry and the Dragon Kite	
Feathers and Fools		Feathers and Fools	
Terrible Things		Terrible Things	
你覺得收穫最多的一本書是: <i>(Which book has made you learn most?)</i>			
為什麼: <i>(Why?)</i>			

Appendix J: Categories and Descriptions of Odell's Thinking in Writing Strategies
(Adapted by Juanita Willingham, 2006)

1. Dissonance

(a sense that things just don't add up, that our understanding is incomplete, that something is incongruous)

- a. What sort of problems, ambiguities, ironies, questions, uncertainties, or conflicts do students mention (or overlook)?
- b. Do students point out things that surprise or puzzle them?
- c. Do they pose questions?
- d. Do they ever indicate that they are confused, uncertain, or ambivalent about something they have experienced?
- e. Do they comment on ways in which two strongly held beliefs (ideas, values) are inconsistent with each other?
- f. Do they notice ways in which people's actions seem inconsistent with their words?
- g. Do they mention ways in which something conflicts with what they had expected or would have preferred?

2. Selecting

(being able to pay attention to some things, deemphasize others, completely ignore others)

- a. What kinds of information (observations, "facts," personal experiences, feelings, memories) do students include in or exclude from their writing?
- b. When students respond to literature or write personal narratives, do they focus solely on the events that happened, or do they include information about people's thoughts, feelings and motivations?
- c. When they describe, do they look for details that will "show, not tell"?
- d. When they try to write persuasively or informatively, do they include the kind of information that is likely to be appropriate given the knowledge, needs or values of their intended readers?

3. Encoding/Representing

(representing what we selected in a variety of ways -- visual images, music, numbers, written and spoken language -- some way to represent what we're thinking, feeling, observing, remembering, reading)

- a. What sort of language do students use to articulate their ideas (feelings, perceptions, memories)?
- b. When students discuss personal events, do they use relatively abstract, generalized terms, or do they use language that reflects the personal significance of those events?
- c. When students try to think through complicated issues, do they use highly emotional language that might limit their ability to see the complexity of a situation?

- d. Do they ever come up with metaphors that let them take a fresh look at the subject they are considering?
- e. Do they choose words whose connotations are appropriate for their subject matter, audience, and purpose?

4. Drawing on Prior Knowledge

(trying to see how the present situation relates to what we already know)

- a. Do students explicitly refer to things they already know in order to understand something new?
- b. When they read a complicated piece of literature, do students comment on how this piece relates to other texts they have read or movies they have seen?
- c. When they encounter a difficult problem, do they use what they know from comparable problems or from prior schoolwork in order to solve it?
- d. When they are introduced to new concepts in their courses, do students consider ways in which those concepts apply to their personal experience or ways in which they are or are not compatible with what they've learned previously?

5. Seeing Relationships

(asking how one thing causes another, how things are similar or different, how something interacts with its physical or social setting)

- a. What kinds of relationships (cause-effect, time, if...then, similarity, difference) do students mention in their writing?
- b. Do students note when and why things happen?
- c. Do they create hypothetical scenarios, speculating about how one thing might cause or lead up to another?
- d. Do they make distinctions, noticing ways in which something is different from something else?
- e. Do they classify or note similarities?
- f. Do they comment on how things change?
- g. Do they notice ways in which a person or object fits into his/her/its physical surroundings?

6. Considering Different Perspectives

(trying to empathize with another person or asking how someone else's perceptions or interpretations might differ from our own)

- a. To what extent do students try to consider ways in which other people might perceive, interpret, or respond to a given idea, fact, or experience?
- b. Do students consider good news as well as bad, pro as well as con?
- c. Do they try to adopt another's perspective, trying to imagine how, say a character in a story might respond to a particular situation?
- d. Do they try to think of different conclusions that might be drawn from a particular set of data?

- e. Do they put themselves in their reader's place, trying to understand the knowledge, values, or needs with which that reader approaches their writing?
- f. When they disagree with someone, do they consider ways in which that person's views might possibly make sense?

Appendix K: Descriptive System for Content Analysis
(Barnes and Todd, 1977, pp. 20-21)

LEVEL ONE

(i) Discourse Moves

- (a) Initiating
- (b) Extending, Qualifying, Contradicting
- (c) Eliciting—Continue, Expand, Bring in Support Information
- (d) Responding, Accepting

(ii) Logical Process

- (a) Proposes a cause
- (b) Proposes a result
- (c) Expands loosely
- (d) Applies a principle to a case
- (e) Categories
- (f) States conditions under which statement is valid or invalid
- (g) Advances evidence
- (h) Negates
- (i) Evaluates
- (j) Puts alternative view
- (k) Suggest a method
- (l) Restates in different term

LEVEL TWO

(iii) Social Skills

- (a) Progress through task
 - Given questions
 - Shifting topic
 - Ending a discussion
 - Managing manipulator tasks
- (b) Competition and conflict
 - Competition for the floor
 - Contradiction
 - Joking
 - Compelling participation
- (c) Supportive behavior
 - Explicit agreement
 - Naming
 - Reference back
 - Explicit approval of others
 - Expression of shared feeling

(iv) Cognitive Strategies

1. Constructing the question
 - 'Closed' tasks
 - Open tasks
2. Raising new questions
3. Setting up hypotheses

- Beyond the given
- Explicit hypotheses
- 4. Using evidence
 - Anecdote
 - Hypothetical cases
 - Using every-day knowledge
 - Challenging generalities
- 5. Expressing feelings and recreating experience
 - Expressing ethical judgments
 - Shared recreation of literacy experience
- (v) Reflexivity
 - (a) Monitoring own speech and thought
 - own contributions provisional
 - (b) Interrelating alternative viewpoints
 - validity to others
 - more than one possibility
 - finding overarching principles
 - (c) Evaluating own and others' performance
 - (d) Awareness of strategies
 - audience for recording summarizing
 - moving to new topic

Appendix L: Students' Last Postings on the Group Blogs

Group Blog One:

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

HHHHHHH KIDS!!!!!!

It's a pity that we are going to say goodbye. i do really love you guys.

***YOU IMPROVED A LOT!!
You're BRILLIANT!!***

do you think that you improve much more than before?

it's gonna to say goodbye. it's a poor thing you don't have Internet in your house.
i hope we can still communicate in the future.

I'll miss you!

Posted by Ning-ning at [10:36 AM](#)

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

I WILL MISS YOU!!!!



i will miss you so much! have fun doing what ever you do there! i am so glad i did this. I would like to say "thank you" too every one there for SOMETIMES commenting back to me! you guys rock out loud. pleas say hi and thank you to every one that is there for me! please keep posting i can get on at home i would love too keep in touch over the summer even if you don't! i have some advice when you are typing over the summer try too keep it on the topic of what you are doing over the summer!? please tell Mrs.Lee i said thank you so much for this oprtunity. every Thursday i always say "is it time for Tiwan?" i think this has opend so many doors for me, cause i really want to visit Tiwan! if you come to Amarica you should go to Columbia. i know i will cry some time cause i can't talk too you till the summer! please keep in touch, over the summer. i sm counting on you

guys to make my summer the best it can be! NO PRESSURE! i know i will keep in touch, i hope i can count on you guy's!!!!

PLEASE KEEP IN TOUCH

**SINCERLY,
LYDIA XXXX
YOU ROCK!!!!**

Posted by lydia at [3:10 PM](#)

1 comment:

[Ning-ning](#) said...

i'm glad that you can use computer at home. i'll keep in touch with you guys.

[May 28, 2008 10:14 AM](#) 

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

Bye!

Taiwan



Taiwanese girls



Christmas lights



Hi, it's me, Paxton. I will miss you very much. I have enjoyed typing to you and discussing books very for the past 3/4 year. My favorite book was The Big Box.

my real name is XXXX GOODBYE

Posted by Alice at [3:18 PM](#)

Group Blog Two:

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

[♥Goodbye to all my fellow friends in Taiwan.♥](#)

I just want to say that I have had a wonderful time in Taiwan and I will miss you. there are tears in my eyes and I love you. Violets are red violets are blue I will miss you and you love us to. I'am sorry that the year has ended like this I will remeber all of you and I will talk to you in the summer thats if I'am not busy or gone out of town. when I first jion Taiwan I was scread that you would you not like us.♥ I will miss you and I will always love you. ☺ ♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥

Posted by Anna at [3:20 PM](#)

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

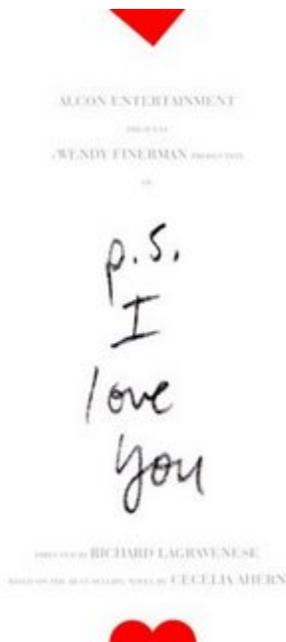
BYE BYE !



Posted by Justin at [3:22 PM](#)

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

TO SAY GOODBYE



*this is the last time
to talk to all you guy
to say goodbye
tears are in my eyes*

*i really do like you
through the Pacific's sky
in your words i can see your minds
no matter our countries or the sides*

*i promise i'll miss you so much
til i have turned to a growing-up
the exterior mine will change
but the memory will always last*

*deep in my heart there is a secret place
belongs to our encounter, belongs to these days*

P.S.

i really don't want to say goodbye
if you can leave any ways to stay in contact
please, give us a chance.....to not finish so quickly
my email xxxx@yahoo.com.tw

Bye.....

Posted by Su-pin at [10:02 AM](#)

1 comment:

[Kevin](#) said...

I'll miss the Taiwan project myself because of all the friends i made.
BYE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

[May 27, 2008 3:27 PM](#)

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

Hello and goodbye

How fast! One year has passed. I didn't even noticed that until my classmate, Na-la, reminded me. Mrs.Lee has mentioned that you guys don't have much oppurtunities using Internet, so it might be a little difficult for you to use MSN chatting. My e-mail address is the same with my MSN. You can send me e-mails--maybe some day you will travle to Taiwan or I'll visit where you're staying! SO MUCH I want to share with you. Movies, tennis, musicour daily lifeLet's contact each other with e-mail first, ok?

Lots of love!

I-mei

Posted by I-mei at [10:49 AM](#)

2 comments:

[Miki](#) said...

bye byei will miss u so much

[May 27, 2008 3:19 PM](#)

[Kevin](#) said...

I think I would start with e-mails to but since this is good-bye i really miss chatting with all of you. What is your MSN?

[May 27, 2008 3:25 PM](#)

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

SO MUCH FUN

*I have had a good time,
but now I must go.
you know it was fun,
but now it is so.*

*I have had so many good times,
just while I was here.*

*we've rock out so many times,
I will miss you, you know I will*

but I must leave now.

for it is a sad day,

bye bye for now

hope to see you again,

just have fun

miss me

and the rest of us

we will be okay

*that was my poem that I gave to all my friends in
Hawaii*

Posted by jenny at [3:16 PM](#)

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

[Saying Good-bye](#)

This is my last blog and I am sad that I have to say bye but all good things must end at some point. I just wanted to say bye and I want to wish you a good summer and that you always remember the Tawain project. I know i always will because of one of the most important things ... signitures of the Tiwain project in america.

Posted by Kevin at [3:17 PM](#)

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

[♥Good Bye♥](#)

I am so sad about not being able to talk to you girls anymore. This is one major thing I will miss that i did this year. The only reason I held back a little from doing this is that i would have to say bye and sadly the time has come to do this. I have spent a lot of time with you girls through the computer. I am truley very upset.

Posted by Sadie at [3:23 PM](#)

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

[time to say bye](#)

I AM AM GOING TO MISS U ALL SO I GOT TO GO BYE BYE

Posted by miki at [3:36 PM](#)

Sunday, June 1, 2008

[My MSN](#)

If you want to contact with me, here's my MSN: xxxx@livemail.tw

Posted by I-meI at [7:50 AM](#)

Appendix M: Mrs. Jean Dickinson's Response

The two years that Hsiao-chien and I worked together as she conducted her pilot study and then her dissertation research provided me an opportunity to observe first hand the research process. Far more important, however, was her invitation to me to collaborate with her in conversations about book selections for the project and in conversations about engaging the 5th graders in talking about the books. Because I was a part of the project and present during the blogging sessions, I observed the 5th graders engaged in communicating with students halfway around the world and I came to realize what an amazing opportunity Hsiao-chien provided these students. Now, as she prepares to return to her family and life in Taiwan, I keep with me all that I learned with her and I treasure the friendship that was a result of the time we spent together.

Hsiao-chien and I were both in Dr. Gillies' multicultural literature class soon after she began her doctoral program at MU. I recall a conversation the two of us had at the end of class one evening. Hsiao-chien was asking me about a particular picture book, the title I can not recall now. I remember her asking me if 5th graders were able to have deep conversations about a particular story. I responded, "Absolutely. I see it happen all the time." It seems the next conversation I had with Hsiao-chien was the two of us having our own deep conversations about the books she would use with students to engage them in critical conversations as part of her pilot study. Hsiao-chien took "my word for it" after class that evening and indeed invited 5th graders and students half-way around the world into conversations about the books they shared.

Hsiao-chien and I continued to discuss her pilot study and the dissertation research and what impact the differences between the two groups of 5th graders had on

her findings for each study. Each time we talked, I found myself retreating into “I wish it could have been,” wishing her pilot study with that particular group of students had been her dissertation research. That was not the reality of the situation, and perhaps what happened instead has given us the best questions and the greatest opportunity for our own learning.

Several key factors were different the year of the pilot study from the following year during the dissertation research. One key factor was the makeup of the participant groups. The students from my classroom who participated in the pilot study were academically strong, in particular in the area of language arts. Two of the students, one boy and one girl, had attended the school since Kindergarten, and their outstanding writing talents had been noted for years prior to their being in my classroom. A third student transferred to the school at the request of her parent and was also an extremely strong reader and writer. All three of these students attended the district’s gifted program. A fourth student left before the end of the year to return home to Korea, but even as a second language learner who had been in the states only two years, the content of his writing showed a depth of thinking and sophistication well beyond what I normally saw in a 5th grader, even among students who have always been in the United States. The remaining two students were also strong academically. Another girl I viewed as having far more reading and writing potential than I normally saw her use in the classroom. The sixth student, although strong, was at least a year younger than the other 5th graders. At the request of her parents, she was placed a “year ahead” when the family arrived from China. Under any circumstance, this was an exceptional group of students.

The second key factor in the differences between the two research groups was the students from my class in the focus study were experiencing literacy activities similar to what Hsiao-chien was asking them to do in “The Taiwan Group.” The books we shared in the classroom were similar and sometimes the same titles the students discussed in the after school blog. My extensive use of picture books in the classroom engaged students in conversations about issues of social justice. I viewed my role as the teacher to that of a facilitator of their discussions and thus follow the students’ thinking. Hsiao chien too chose picture books for her research that would potentially allow students to engage in critical conversations. In order to engage in deep conversations about literature, students need to experience opportunities to talk about the books; they need to know HOW to talk about books. Students need opportunities to explore open-ended conversations after sharing great books. The students participating in the pilot study were experiencing literacy conversations in the classroom that supported their work with Hsiao-chien.

Another factor with the students from my class in the pilot study was the support from their homes for literacy learning. Parents of these students recognized the importance of reading good literature and writing and talking about books. In addition, parents of these students were able and willing to provide afterschool transportation that made it possible for their children to participate in the project.

Prior to Hsiao-chien’s pilot study. I selected the names of students I believed would work well in this kind of literacy activity, students I believed would be cooperative, and students who would benefit from the experience. I also knew some students would not have the option of attending because families could not provide transportation after

school. Given those perimeters, the students participating in the pilot study were indeed a “select” group.

A factor Hsiao-chien and I recognized the following year was how the students viewed me. During the pilot study, I was the classroom teacher, and indeed, still a teacher on staff at the school. Even in the after school situation, students still viewed me as “The Teacher.” By nature of the students in the pilot study, I do not foresee there would ever have been the behavior concerns and issues of disrespect that we encountered with the group of students the following year. The following year I was no longer teaching at the school, and it appeared many of the students did not view me as “A Teacher.”

The differences in the makeup of the participant groups from the first year to the second were huge in just about every way possible: academic abilities, classroom experiences in literacy, family support, and the difference in the role I played from one year to the next. Looking back now, perhaps the Pilot Study was our opportunity to see the ultimate; to see what can be and to see just how far 5th graders can go under ideal circumstances. The second year, the year when the actual dissertation research was conducted, is perhaps a more realistic lens into a representation of 5th graders. Several students in the pilot study were outstanding positive role models and their membership in any classroom or any group would have a profound effect on learning and discussions. There were fewer strong role model in the group the second year, and in fact, several negative role models who for a time seemed to wield a great deal of power over others in the group.

Once Hsiao-chien had plans in place to conduct her dissertation research at the school, the two of us engaged in discussions about how to approach the classroom teachers regarding their students' participation in the study. Both 5th grade teachers were new to the district and teachers that Hsiao-chien and I did not know. Under these circumstances, asking them to select participants seemed problematic. First, it placed a huge responsibility on them, and second, it seemed for various reasons the opportunity to participate needed to be made available to all the 5th graders. Hsiao-chien made arrangements with the teachers to extend the invitation to students in both classes.

Having taught at the school, I knew several of the 5th graders from previous years. I knew with this group there were academic and behavior concerns for at least four of the students who wanted to participate. In addition, the one 5th grade class had a substitute for the last six weeks of the school year and things did not go well in that classroom. On several occasions, students came to the "Taiwan Group" still angry and upset over social conflicts that occurred in the classroom earlier in the day.

Literacy experiences in the classrooms the second year differed from the previous year. Judging by comments from the students and my brief visits in the classrooms, the students participating in the project the second year were not taking part in literature discussions. Students from both classes reported there was no read aloud time during much of the school year. In addition to working with the students in the Taiwan group, I was also meeting with a literature group from the one classroom twice a week for an hour. Again, it was evident from the students' comments that there was not a focus on thinking critically about their reading, or indeed, to reflect at all on their reading.

One student in the Taiwan Group was also in a literature group I was meeting with on Tuesday and Thursday during the second semester. Initially, there was little response to the novels we read, and the comments he made were unrelated to the book and to reading in general. This student attended the district gifted program and was interested—obsessed—with electricity. My first impression was he simply didn't want to be bothered with what I was asking him to do. Over time, I came to realize he had never been asked to think about books in ways I was asking him to think, and indeed simply did not know how to talk about books. I saw huge changes in his responses in the small group just as we were seeing changes in his blogging entries.

Students in the Taiwan Group the second year came from classrooms where literature was used (if and when it was used) for the purpose of teaching district curriculum objectives. Literature was used as a tool to teach an objective as opposed to literature being read for the purpose of sharing great stories and providing opportunities for discussions. An example was a student telling us she was learning about “circular endings” in books. I observed a novel being used to teach “story elements.” And discussions about books that did take place back in the classrooms seemed to focus on goals quite different from Hsiao-chien's invitations to engage in critical conversations.

I thank Hsiao-chien for her invitation to be part of her work and for all that she taught my students and me. I want to think I am also saying thank you for all the 5th graders for whom she provided an amazing learning experience. Thank you Hsiao-chien for a friendship that will continue via the Internet, and now, via SKYPE!

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