EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES: YOUNG CHILDREN’S NOTIONS OF

IDENTITY WITHIN AN IMPLEMENTED COMMUNITY BUILDING UNIT

A Thesis in
Curriculum and Instruction
by
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This dissertation presents an exploratory case study conducted by an elementary teacher interested in ways curriculum and instruction can facilitate student identity development. The researcher was a participant observer within a primary classroom of 16 students, 5-8 years old, during an implementation of a language arts/social studies community-building unit. Attention was given to the dimensions of identity addressed, the manner in which students were guided to reflect on self, and the vehicles provided for self-presentation. Informed by classroom observations, document analysis, and interviews this research builds upon one teacher’s praxis, along with her students’ interactions with the curriculum, to consider possibilities for the construction and implementation of learning experiences that support teachers actively engaging students in explorations of identity. This inquiry led to the proposal of a model for identity curricula that includes a study of balancing identity processes: uniqueness with living in community, continuity with growth and change, and reflexivity with agency.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The movement toward discipline standards of the last two decades has provided positive goals for learning and instruction that encompass a holistic view of children whereby meeting social, emotional, and psychological needs is valued as contributing to the academic success of each child. [The] *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: Expectations of Excellence*, for example, identifies Individual Development and Identity as one of ten thematic strands to guide social studies education program development for all grades. “Examination of various forms of human behavior enhances understandings of the relationships among social norms and emerging personal identities, the social processes that influence identity formation, and the ethical principles underlying individual action” (NCSS, 1994, 24). Many elementary social studies programs continue to include the expanding horizons approach to learning that begins with instruction on self, followed by family, then community, progressing toward learning about the state in which one lives and finally the nation (Barton, 2001; Bickmore, 1999; Haas and Laughlin, 2001). Parker (1991) argues that the influence of the expanding horizons approach (see Figure 1) is so vast that it practically constitutes a national curriculum. Typically the expanding horizons model of instruction guides the scope and sequence of the textbooks, which drive social studies teaching, rather than student centered instruction that allows for the active participation of teachers and students in the construction of curriculum (Finkelstein et. al., 1993).
The purpose of this study was to explore young children’s expressions of identity within an implemented curriculum explicit in its aim to promote self-awareness and positive self-esteem with first and second graders. My curiosity about the relationship between identity development and elementary curricula was spurred by experiences during my professional preparation as an elementary school teacher. Following is a brief description of the professional development experiences that led me to conduct this study inquiring into the relationship between curriculum and instruction and young students’ notions of identity, and provides a glimpse at the “pedagogical intent” I bring to this study (Van Manen, 1990). These experiences occurred over a seven-year period during which I attempted to ignore my strong attraction to the study of identity because it seemed too esoteric, too psychological, too ethereal. Yet, whenever I became agitated about my work as an elementary teacher, it seemed to revolve around the fact that I
believed students were being shuffled through a system that is more intent on molding rather than nurturing their agency in identity development.

My first desire to explore children’s notions of identity came about during my undergraduate field experiences as a pre-service elementary teacher (20 hours per semester, one semester at a school with a population of predominantly Black students, another with predominantly Hispanic students, and a third with predominantly White students). It arose from my realization that at no point in my methods coursework was there a discussion of the human beings I would encounter in my future classrooms. I was allowed to think of them as students at particular developmental stages with predictable patterns of behavior but was never asked to consider their personal lives or how their unique social and emotional experiences influenced their learning and in turn my teaching. I was taught how to label and sort students and how to group and refer them out of my classroom too. My confusion about how to come to know students’ experiences, along with a strong feeling that ignoring those experiences was counterintuitive to meaningful pedagogy, led me to graduate school.

In graduate school, via coursework and readings, I learned about institutional structures of public schooling that work to promote social efficiency and negate individual experience. Structures of schooling, such as socialization practices and the grouping of students, implicitly categorize and stratify students by behavior and academic performance, clearly delineating which types of people are desirable or not desirable in schools. In addition, curriculum and pedagogy driven by facts and skill acquisition without relating to personal experiences also work to remind children and teachers that academic content is what is important in schools above all. I am not claiming that one
aspect is more important than another, rather that both are necessary for meaningful instruction (NAEYC, 1990). Examining school structures through the perspective of educational sociology, I began to see how individuality is limited and “institutional identity” is shaped (Gee, 2001). I read about how norm-referenced testing of very young children is used to ascertain who a learner is and predict what s/he is capable of, such as under the current No Child Left Behind standardized testing mandates. I also learned about how the tracking of students begins at a very young age and limits their access to resources and knowledge throughout their schooling, as well as that “neither in conceptual work, nor in empirical research, nor in the conventional wisdom and discourse of practice does the subjective experience of students … figure in any central way” (Erickson and Shultz, 1992, 466). Although it was inspiring to learn through classes of historical research in curriculum that some educators have attempted and still attempt to acknowledge students’ lives outside of school by integrating their personal experiences into the learning process, it is disheartening that these approaches are often squelched by an adherence to the illusion of measurable knowledge and achievement attained through a transmission model of instruction (Scott, 1991; Woolever & Scott, 1988).

After completing my graduate coursework, I worked for two years as a second grade teacher in one of the nation’s largest school districts before returning to complete my degree. During those two years, I experienced some of the school structures alluded to above first-hand, manifest in benchmark driven classrooms where the focus (mandated by the state) was on tabulating how many times students were exposed to “tested” material and the use of standardized test results to create new categories to label and segregate students. This forced me to reflect on how educators participate, through
curriculum, testing, and behavior modification, in systematically “normalizing” students’
behavior (Slonaker, 2002) and thereby shaping students’ identities for purposes that serve
mass compulsory education systems designed to advance social efficiency. Dewey
(1916) pointed out that social efficiency is interpreted by some as

a doctrine that the business of education is to supply precisely what nature fails to
secure, namely, habituation of an individual to social control, subordination of
natural powers to social rules. … The error is in implying that we must adopt
measures of subordination rather than of utilization to secure efficiency. The
doctrine is rendered adequate when we recognize that social efficiency is attained
not by negative constraint but by positive use of native individual capacities in
occupations having a social meaning (in Hickman and Alexander, 1998, 261).

Amidst the classroom teaching experiences described above, I wondered in what ways
curriculum and instruction could acknowledge the unique beings living in our
classrooms.

Upon returning to graduate school, I realized that my interests in educational
research had not changed very much since my days as an undergraduate. I still asked
myself: *When can I take the time to get to know my students?* *How can I modify my
teaching and the curriculum to meet their social, emotional, psychological, and affective
needs?* *How come we are being told, by government agencies and professional
organizations, to attend to the whole child, but not provided or “allowed” any resources
or time during the school day to do so?*

Serendipitously, as I considered potential research areas, the opportunity arose to
peruse a copy of a primary language arts/social studies curriculum that included a unit on
developing self-awareness. I realized that I had finally encountered the space and
resources in which to explore my “burning questions” (Patton, 2002). What better way to
explore the possibilities of addressing identity in classrooms than to observe an implemented primary unit component that openly focused on facilitating self development? The broader curriculum, first grade to sixth grade, consisted of two units per year and was designed as a conflict resolution program. It was this overarching goal for all the sections within the unit that forced me to situate my own ideology in the reality that although accessing individual identity was my initial focus, seeing how identity issues can be played out in classrooms was actually possible in this context. It would illuminate my limited understanding of the development of identity within a community. Therefore, observing this unit would afford me an opportunity to witness how one class created a discourse regarding negotiating individual identity within a community. The presentation and representation of ideas, language, behaviors, attitudes, perceptions and ways of knowing were created within the intersection of several forces: the district, curriculum document, teacher and students (Gee, 2001).
Chapter 2

Situating a Study of Identity

The major theoretical constructs of self-identity relevant to early elementary education originate in a combination of developmental theories within the field of psychology. The first section of this chapter summarizes the ways in which psychology theorists have informed our current conceptions of identity. The second section includes a discussion of empirical studies relevant to this inquiry and the final section reviews literature that examines the role of identity in social studies curriculum development.

The Evolution of Self-Identity

Key theorists such as James (1892), Baldwin (1895), Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), Erikson (1959) and Piaget (1960) provide significant contributions to theories of identity (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 1999a, 1999b). Terms such as “self”, “identity”, and “self-identity” represent concepts which are necessarily personal, multidimensional, dynamic and fluid; this leads to the existence of multiple definitions, almost as many as there are studies which explore these concepts. It has been noted that most researchers, encountering the lack of consensus of definitions, create yet another new definition for their own particular studies (McCandless & Evans, 1973; Côté, 1996, Osbourne, 1996). To confound issues even further, terms are used interchangeably as well (Alleman and Rosaen, 1991; Harter, 1999b). The piecing together of commonalities in research on self, identity, and self-identity has transpired through an examination of literature on the
processes of self development and identity development in search of common constructs and theorists consistently referred to as providing foundational ideas.

For this chapter, self, identity, and self-identity will be used interchangeably as well; first, because the terms will reflect those used by the authors cited and second, because this researcher believes that they are two labels for the same processes only previously considered distinct because of the age group being referenced, self for birth to preadolescence and identity for adolescence through adulthood. There are several seminal aspects that are integral to the evolution of self-identity that are relevant to the development of curriculum and pedagogy, such as its:

- reflexive nature,
- dependency on perceptions of and interactions with others,
- relationship to cognitive development, as well as,
- development across the life span.

William James (1890, 1892) was among the first psychologists to explore dimensions of the self (McCandless & Evans, 1973, Harter, 1999a). According to James, self includes not only an entity that expresses desires and searches to fulfill needs, but also constitutes an ability to be reflexive, to reflect on its own nature. His identification of these multiple functions motivated him to organize the self into two components: the I-self and the Me-self. The general linguistic explanations that attempt to enhance James' theory include that the I-self can be described as the self as knower, or self as subject, and that the Me-self can be understood as the self as known, or the self as object (Harter, 1983).. In other words, the private self that conducts processes of identity development such as self analysis, weighing others’ self appraisals, making judgments (based on situations and those present) about how to represent oneself, is the I-self. The Me-selves
are the products of the above processes. Anthony De Mello, in *Awareness* (1990), provides a brief exercise to illustrate these two aspects of the self system. He gives his readers a quick task to explore the difference between I and me. He asks the reader to identify and name five characteristics about him or her self. De Mello then states that the entity that proceeded to identify and select the five descriptors to describe themselves is the existential I, and that the Me is the portrait of a person that is painted by the five adjectives shared. It is James' belief that the I can truly never be captured or described empirically, but rather only glimpsed through windows of self representation shared through descriptions of a Me.

For James Baldwin (1895) the self was not composed of two entities but rather existed between two poles, the self and the other or alter as he termed it. Baldwin believed that interactions with and imitations of an “alter” or other create the parameters of the self. The self is in a constant process of exploration, in which characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes are observed and duplicated as a method of experimentation, resulting in decisions of whether or not to adopt these qualities as a “fit”. “An individual’s thinking can be conceived as a continuous dimension…the self is a product of the dialectical relationship between the individual and the environment which permit the individual to incorporate elements which were earlier those of others” (Oppenheimer, 1990, 2). A self that is dependent upon and shaped through relations with an “other” is a seminal element of the developing self-identity literature that was further expanded upon by symbolic interactionists.

Charles Horton Cooley (1902) added to explorations of the self by inquiring into how the I comes to define and redefine the Me and asserts that an individual employs
perceptions of how he or she believes others' view him or her in shaping their self-concept. He named this theory the 'looking glass self' since it describes how an individual develops a sense of self through reflections on interactions with others.

“As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer what we should like them to be, so in imagination we perceive in another’s mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it” (Cooley, 1964, 184).

Furthermore, each person builds their own self-description and self-evaluation by compiling, comparing, contemplating and rationalizing interpretations of how others behave toward them. Children also participate in observational learning whereby they carefully watch the behaviors and consequences of those in their environment and then apply the knowledge gained when choosing behaviors to elicit a particular response (Barnes, 1995). In particular, children learn to behave in certain ways that allow them to receive the attention they desire and therefore portray varied personas depending on who they are with.

Social interactionist George Herbert Mead (1932) enhanced the understanding of Cooley’s theory by positing that there is no self without other. By this he meant that in order for the self to explore its own uniqueness it must have an “other” as a source for comparison. Supporting this postulate, research describes that the self-concept of children entering school is influenced by the increasing number of people their own age with whom to compare themselves to. “While the culture, over many generations, has adapted itself to the child, the child in turn adapts himself to the culture, as when a new kindergartener adjusts to a bewildering new set of experiences called ‘school’” (Miller, 1993, 156). In addition, Mead described that the exploration of self, through the trying
on of varied selves with “much compromise and little commitment, manifests itself in the work of the child, in child’s play” (Deegan, 1999).

Jean Piaget’s studies of children are integral to our current frameworks for developmental psychology. He studied the thinking processes children use to come to understand something and labeled progressive stages according to a child’s mental capacity during a particular span of years. Within the sensori-motor stage, birth – 2 years old, a child begins to understand their own agency in the world and develops deliberate action for desired outcomes. The pre-operational stage, 2-7 years old, is when a child begins to understand that language can be used to represent thoughts or objects. At this stage children are still self-centered and view the world through their own needs and wants. A child begins to think logically, understands the symbols used to represent thoughts and objects, and “can conduct mental actions that are reversible” during the concrete operational stage, ages 7-11 (Huit and Hummel, 2003). In the final stage he delineated, ages 11 and on, Piaget states that people have the ability to think logically and imagine different paths of action and consequence prior to choosing a behavior.

The link between the cognitive and affective domains is highlighted by juxtaposing self-identity literature and Piaget’s stages of development. Piaget’s stages of cognitive development are influential to a discussion of self-identity because of their synergy with the development of the affective domain. The stages of cognitive development can serve as guides to analyze children’s self-representations and changes in self-understanding (Harter, 1999). For example, preschool children’s descriptions of themselves include statements based on concrete, physical attributes and inflated self-esteem, relating to Piaget’s pre-operational stage of development, where he names the
child as egocentric. As children enter school, they interact with peers their own age and make comparisons of themselves through observing their relationship with others. Accordingly, based on their newfound level of operational thinking, their self-esteem decreases and their self-descriptions reflect comparative statements (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 1999; Kwiatkowska, 1990). This decrease is not necessarily a drop into negative self-esteem, yet it is still a decrease from the naturally inflated self-esteem of a young child that within the family is unique, but at school is one of many.

Erikson “held that a main theme of life is the quest for identity” and that “identity is the understanding and acceptance of both the self and one’s society” (italics in original, Miller, 1993, 159). In 1959, when Erikson presented his psychosocial theory of identity development, the prevailing paradigm of child psychology was heavily influenced by Freud’s psychosexual and Piaget’s cognitive theories of universal, age bound, psychological experiences. The framework within Erikson’s theories that is most widely known and applied is his discussion of eight “ages of man” in which he delineates areas of ego concern across the life-span. The eight ages include the following:

- trust vs. mistrust
- autonomy vs. shame and doubt
- initiative vs. guilt
- industry vs. inferiority
- identity vs. identity confusion
- intimacy vs. isolation
- generality vs. stagnation
- integrity vs. despair (Good and Brophy, 1995, 84).

Erikson asserts that the ego concern involved in each stage is vital to the development of a healthy identity. Ego concerns are not permanently settled, and as an individual continues through the ages they revisit ego conflicts and remain affected by them.
throughout their lifetime (Miller, 1993, 170). The stages are parallel continuua and a person can travel along them many times in his or her life. Although within the framework of the eight ages of man “the quest for identity is the undercurrent running through all the stages” (Miller, 1993, 165), Erikson names identity only in the fifth stage, “identity and repudiation vs. identity confusion.” In this stage the individual focuses on integrating the multiple identities explored in childhood into a more coherent identity to be shared with their now larger social circles, a psychosocial change psychologists traditionally associate with adolescence and adulthood. Therefore, prior to the period of adolescence, we have to provide opportunities for young children to explore various identities.

In addition, Erikson provided the field with a psychosocial description of a series of identity crises. Eggen & Kauchak (2001) refer to these crises as “identity explorations” in which all individuals experience events that may highlight the process of constructing a coherent identity. Although his contemporaries were strict stage theorists, Erikson did not assign his stages to particular age groups, nor believe that the stages had to occur in a linear fashion, or were necessarily cumulative. Erikson (1959) described progressing through stages of ego crises as “an unconscious striving for continuity of personal character . . . a criterion for the silent doings of ego synthesis” (Miller, 1993, 159). In other words, as individuals mature they attempt to maintain a sense that they have had certain qualities throughout their lifetime, that these qualities will continue to be part of their identity in the future, and that their multiple qualities fit together to form their personal identity. Therefore, according to Erikson, identity development is a life long process.
Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development is central to my considerations of identity. This theory is foundational to what is considered educational psychology today. However, examination of his writings beyond their description in textbooks, illustrates that Erikson did not view the ego concerns he describes as “ages of man” as compartmentalized or finalized at a particular age. Although Erikson’s theories led to an immense amount of research focusing on children during the period of adolescence, which was interpreted as involving identity confusion and synthesis, fewer studies address childhood and its identity processes. Yet, identity develops from early infancy and is continuously reconstructed throughout our lifetimes (Miller, 1983, 170).

The work of James Paul Gee (2001) provides a bridge between identity theory and educational research by considering how educational practices and social interactions influence the development of four different aspects of identity -- Nature identity, Affinity identity, Institutional identity and Discourse identity (99). Nature identity involves how a person is seen based on characteristics they are born with and cannot change. Affinity identity is represented by the social groups one chooses to be a part of, and practices one takes part in, based upon commonalities with others. Institutional identity is influenced by systems and individuals in power within an organization. Discourse identity is negotiated through language and is fueled by the seeking out of a desired response. Gee states that these perspectives of identity are portrayed by individuals so that they are viewed and treated as a certain “kind of person” (106). For example, as a qualitative interviewer of young children I desired to appear as an approachable and trustworthy kind of person. Therefore I employed a particular Discourse identity by introducing myself as a former primary teacher to students as a whole group as well as during
individual student interviews. In addition, the classroom this study is based upon can be considered an affinity group, in that all students engaged in the same practices and participated as a “community of learners” (107). Gee explains that these identities are shaped and produced in response to self-portrayals in a particular community, namely how one participates or does not participate in a specific social context.

**Relevant Empirical Studies**

Kathy Bickmore’s (1999) case study of how one teacher implemented an issues based unit on conflict in a classroom of fourth and fifth graders was the inspiration for the research design I employed in this study. Presenting students from varied cultural backgrounds with a controversial unit the teacher engaged them in considering, “(1) What is conflict? (2) Sources of conflict: How do conflicts reflect different human needs and perspectives? (3) Managing conflict: What are the consequences of different choices in handling conflict?” fine art, literacy and social studies instruction. Bickmore collaborated with the classroom teacher in collecting data about the entire curriculum process – conception, development, implementation, and student reception. She examined the level at which students engaged in learning, applied their learning to personal experiences, and displayed the ability to comprehend content that traditionally would be considered too advanced for children ages 10-12. Through descriptive vignettes Bickmore illustrates challenges the teacher faced and how she approached resolving them through curricular decision making. The conclusions Bickmore draws are that the classroom environment and culture the teacher created enabled the students to
participate actively in learning about a topic that they could easily relate to personal experiences and their understandings of the world.

Susan Harter’s (1983) review of empirical studies of the self system informed my baseline conceptions of the ways in which students in middle childhood typically represent notions of identity. In her analysis of developmental differences in self-descriptions she explains that most of the research in this area has focused on adolescents and adults. Harter outlines two key studies with children that underscore beliefs integral to this study. In a study of children between the ages of 6 and 9, Guardo and Bohan (1971) used semi-structured interviews to elicit children’s conceptions of their humanness, gender identity, perception as a distinct individual and sense of continuity. The results were that students demonstrated constancy, that they could not be another being, species, or gender. Harter states that this particular study implies that during the concrete operational phase children “crystallize” their sense of self and that further research should be conducted on the processes of crystallization. In addition, Harter points to another study, conducted with children ages 10 – 18, where Montemayor and Eisen (1977) asked participants to respond to the question, “Who am I?”, a method previously used only with adult participants. The researchers concluded that the adolescent participants responded in “abstract and subjective descriptions” while the children “primarily describe[d] themselves in terms of concrete, objective categories such as their address, physical appearance, possessions and play activities” (297).

Damon and Hart (1988) conducted an extensive longitudinal study of 52 children ranging in age from 4-17 over three years in Worcester, Massachusetts. Their focus was on children’s acquisition of “self-understandings” over time which they explored by
using semi-structured clinical interviews that focused on: self-definition, self-evaluation, self in past and future, self-interest, continuity, agency, and distinctiveness. The use of interviews as the central data collection tool is based upon their assertion that “the likely failure of previous self-concept research to document psychological self-knowledge in early childhood reflects data collection techniques that inhibit young children’s expression of psychological aspects of the self” (98). They note that their study, although intended to capture identity conceptions of both the “I” and the “me,” mainly resulted in data on the “me,” the self-as-object, yet they claim they were able to still infer some data about the “I,” the self-as-subject. Damon and Hart constructed, from their own study of self literature as well as this and other studies, a self-understanding development model which included “schemes” such as the physical self, the active self, the social self, and the psychological self for the self-as-object, and agency, continuity, and distinctness for the self-as-subject (83). The results of their study support their description of the evolution of self-understandings from early childhood through late adolescence as progressing based on changing “organizing principles:” categorical identifications, comparative assessments, inter-personal implications, and systematic beliefs and plans (57). Yet in their conclusions they add that “the major focus of a child’s self-statements, whether it be physical, active, social, or psychological, is neither stable over time nor changes in any orderly, sequential manner. Thus ‘self-schemes’ use appears to have none of the developmental implications asserted by previous social-science writings on self-concept” (103).
Locating Identity within Elementary Social Studies Curricula

A child’s identity, “perception of him or her self” (Nelson, 1998, 58), is shaped by symbolic interactions ranging from messages received about one’s identity, to one’s active construction of identity. A child first learns about his/her individual characteristics, and the meanings behind them, from family members. The influence of teachers and peers become increasingly important and provide varied sources of information regarding the type of person a child is when their social circle expands to include school (Shapiro, 1999).

Locating identity within early elementary curriculum is a challenging task; Scott (1991) explains:

For many reasons, there is far less research on affective processes than on cognitive processes. The first of these is the difficulty of observing affective processes. … Second, affective processes are viewed as less important to schooling than cognitive processes, for which the link to achievement outcomes is more direct. Therefore, curricular objectives rarely include affective processes as specific outcomes, … As a consequence, little research is available (357).

My examination of literature on early childhood and elementary social studies curricula centered on detecting an explicit study of self. I use the term “self” here because most educational psychologists, curriculum developers and researchers, reserve the term “self” for children between birth and adolescence, and “identity” for adolescence and adulthood (Côté, 1996, 132). Elementary social studies textbooks as well as history of social studies curriculum texts referenced categorical studies of self (hair or eye color, gender, etc.) and evidence of efforts to shape identity through imitation, observation, and appraisals of self. In addition, mentions of the terms “self” and “identity” were consistently couched in nationalistic overtones. Before the 1930s, grades 1-4 were rarely
considered in the development of social studies curricular content. These grades were considered only as a preparatory period for formal education in the social sciences and civics education. This was partly due to the fact that most teachers of the elementary grades were under-prepared in the social sciences; a factor still relevant today (Marker and Mehlinger, 1992; Parker 1991). This was also the case because young children were, and still are, mistakenly envisioned to be lacking the skills to tackle such topics (Rice in Atwood, 1986, 9). When curricular aims for the elementary grades were discussed, national identity was the primary focus, as evidenced by the National Education Association’s Reports of 1894 and 1916 and the American Historical Association’s Curriculum Report of 1909. In the report of 1916, the content for the early grades was described simply as providing children with “an impression of primitive life and an appreciation of the public holidays” (Committee of Eight, in Nelson, 1994, 76).

The selection of instructional content for the early grades has not varied greatly since the work of the Committee of Eight. Lengel and Superka (1982) found that the observance of seasons, holidays, and the birthdays of American heroes is still a main focus of primary social studies (Marker and Mehlinger, 1992, 836). National identity, presented through a celebratory history approach, was “taught,” or indoctrinated, through the uncritical study of historical figures, national holidays and current events (Lybarger in Shaver 1991, 3).

Between the 1930s and the 1950s, Hanna developed the expanding horizons curriculum, which theoretically takes into account individual student development in its design. This curricular sequence is still predominant in today’s elementary curriculum and is clearly utilized as the main conceptual framework in elementary social studies.
textbooks and classrooms (Barton, 2001; Haas and Laughlin, 2001, Parker, 1991); unfortunately, “it is not because the pattern is well-grounded in research documenting its effectiveness” (Ehman and Hahn, 1989 in Marker and Mehlinger, 1992, 833). This model defines the sequence of curricular topics as evolving from a student’s expanding areas of interest and concern from one schoolyear to the next. In early elementary social studies curricula it includes units of study such as self, school, community and home in kindergarten, families in first grade, and neighborhoods in second grade (Parker, 1991, 67). At the kindergarten level only phenotype, or categorical and concrete descriptions of self, are addressed in textbooks and curricula.

In her analysis of social studies in early childhood curriculum, Sunal (1993) provides the National Council of the Social Studies’ (1983) definition as a reference point:

“The social studies can be defined as an area of the curriculum that derives goals from the nature of citizenship in a democratic society and links to other societies, draws content from the social sciences and other disciplines, and reflects personal, social, and cultural experiences of students” (emphasis mine, in Spodek, 1993, 176).

In her discussion, Sunal reiterates that all the social sciences inform early childhood curriculum but only mentions the following disciplines in her literature review: history, geography, economics and political science. The mention of psychology as a discipline within social studies, without clarification or practical examples for elementary curriculum, is not uncommon (NCSS, 1989; Nelson, 1998; Thomas in Farris, 2001). The processes by which students come to define themselves are not addressed. Sunal (1993) goes on to describe how an important element of early childhood social studies is the development of social competence and morality through social interactions, or
socialization. “Social interaction often requires one to accept restrictions imposed by society while trying to satisfy personal needs and desires;” this definition of socialization reflects an explicit effort to mold identity (177).

Marker and Mehlinger (1992) identify three eras of social studies curricula, after the progressive movement of the early 1900s, as influential to the evolution of social studies curricula: the new social studies, the affective movement and the Back to Basics movement. The new social studies is typically described as the period when funding became available from the federal government to redesign school curricula. “The perceived threat from the Soviet Union, highlighted by the launching of Sputnik in 1957, led American politicians and academic leaders to seek improvement in all aspects of the elementary and secondary curriculum” (Marker and Mehlinger, 1992, 839; Slobodin, 1977). Social studies was reenvisioned as an opportunity for students to practice the social sciences, to learn the ‘structures’ of disciplines, and to have access to a variety of real-life sources to activate and apply their learning. Jerome Bruner is credited with the concept of discipline ‘structures’ and with the philosophy that any concept can be taught to a child so long as “it is taught with an intellectually honest method” (Pagano, 1987, 87). Although this concept is contradictory to the then current deficit model of children’s abilities, it also can be seen as potentially misleading people to believe that within curriculum and instruction, the child is secondary to the content. During this particular period in the development of primary social studies curricula, “History, geography, economics, sociology, and political science became the guideposts for social studies instruction” (Nelson, 1998, 31).
The affective movement was born out of a reaction to the assassinations of powerful and liberal political figures in the 1960s (Marker and Mehlinger, 1992). “It no longer seemed important to promote the ‘structure’ of academic disciplines; overcoming racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, and national chauvinism, were more critical than whipping communism” (839). In addition, courses were designed to encourage self analysis of assumptions, values, and beliefs. The process of understanding personal needs and fears was seen as benefiting the larger community, therefore validating the examination of the development of identity as worthy of consideration as content material. This opportunity for self reflection was confounded by many of the same questions we ask today: What values? Whose values? Civic values or personal values (Chapin and Messick, 1992)? Can you teach values? How? These types of questions consistently stir up controversy and require deliberation. Here was another opportunity for self to be acknowledged in curriculum but lack of consensus regarding sanctioned values was viewed as a weakness and de-legitimated the social studies (Marker and Mehlinger, 1992, 839).

As in our current educational-political environment, the 1980s conservative leaders used “statistic scare tactics” to incite the redesign of public school curricula. The release of the “A Nation at Risk” report roused suspicions that schools were not effective learning sites by pointing to data regarding students who were not able to identify basic geographical locations and answer questions regarding current political leaders on standardized tests. Leming (1998) states that Back to Basics, “is more concerned with cultivating mainstream American values than with assisting students to develop their own value systems (Marker and Mehlinger, 1992, 840). “Specialized focus on geography,
history, economics, and American government and civics” returned (Nelson, 1998, 32).
The Back to Basics movement once again promulgated the idea that there was a specific
and bound knowledge base to be learned that existed outside of students’ personal lives
and if facts are memorized correctly then the entire nation could rest easy.

With the advent of character and moral education, the identity of the child became
a more overt focus for curriculum. Yet, these curricula focus more on shaping identity
than recognizing identity or providing spaces for identity exploration. Scott (1991), in
her review of literature relating the affective domain to social studies education, points to
Kohlberg’s stages of moral reasoning as the framework used by curriculum developers.
She posits that moral and character education are designed to assist the learner in
acquiring sanctioned behaviors and attitudes. Conflicts arise because children learn best
by experiencing; if they are learning about fairness in an unfair environment, then clearly
students will not see an increase in their moral development. And we must ask critical
questions again: What character traits? What common morality? Who decides? The
reason social studies curricula has consistently emphasized stories about lives to be
imitated (biographies) and lives to be emulated (national heroes) is because we have
neglected to acknowledge our students’ agency in constructing knowledge and
constructing their own identities. As long as educational researchers remain focused on
measuring the retention of isolated skills and facts versus creating a paradigm of child
development that views the relationship between cognition, affect and behavior as
synergistic, student agency in identity development will not be taken into account by
curriculum developers.
In 1988, the National Council for the Social Studies published a report entitled:
Social Studies for Early Childhood and Elementary School Children: Preparing for the 21st Century. In this report many allusions are made to issues of identity but with an assumption that these issues and the pedagogy to engage students in understanding them are self-evident; “A planned K-12 social studies program directs and focuses … natural characteristics to help children understand and function in their personal and social worlds” (NCSS, 1988, 2). One of the phrases used frequently in this document is “self-directed citizen.” Possibly, self-directed refers to behaving in a desired manner without prompting or immediate reward. However, how can one be self-directed without a developed sense of self? Or is it that a child will become self-directed once they have been properly socialized in school?

Interestingly, under the heading, “Goals for early childhood/elementary social studies that no other subject in the elementary curriculum can achieve,” NCSS (1988) describes, “although not uniquely in social studies, children can achieve a positive self-concept within the context of understanding the similarities and differences of people. Children need to understand that they are unique in themselves but share many similar feelings and concerns with other children. They need to understand how as individuals they can contribute to society. [In addition] “social studies provides a sense of history, a sense of existence in the past as well as the present, a feeling of being in history” (3).

The Curriculum Task Force of the National Commission on Social Studies published a document entitled Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century (1989) to provide a brief discussion of social science disciplines and what they have to offer to social studies programs. This publication does not provide information on
psychology as a social science discipline to be studied directly in the early grades and only references ways that psychology enhances social studies purposes, “in the development of self knowledge; in the understanding of behaviors both individually and within the sociocultural context.” What it does depict clearly, through a detailed scope and sequence for K-12 programs, is the reality that psychology is only directly taught in high school elective courses (65).

In 1994, the NCSS published curriculum standards for social studies program development, in which personal identity goals were listed with equal standing as national identity goals. “Given that the focus of the social studies includes civic competence, the expectation is that quality implementation of these standards will improve the quality of each student’s life both as an individual and as a member of the many social communities within which each lives” (1994, xviii). Although supporting the development of individual identities through social studies education is acknowledged in the statement above, counteracting factors that consistently limit elementary social studies instruction still loom ahead. Parker (1991) describes factors such as poor professional development, school resources largely allocated to the subjects of literacy and numeracy, and high stakes testing as “realities that mitigate the teaching of any social studies” (65).

Considering the curriculum trends dating back to the turn of the last century discussed thus far, what would make identity legitimate subject matter in the social studies a reality? Why would anyone change the game plan in elementary classrooms from the familiar, textbook matched, sans controversy, status quo (Parker, 1991)? NCSS (1994) states, “Students should be helped to construct a personal perspective that enables them to explore emerging events and persistent or recurring issues, considering
implications for self, family, and the whole national and world community” (7). The question is: how?

In social studies instruction teachers and curriculum developers have the potential for great influence, we have the responsibility to teach people about themselves, and the world around them. How information is presented is as instrumental as the content itself. If schools continue to ignore the personal lives of children then the pedagogical challenges of students not finding school work relevant to their own lives will continue to abound. How can you make personal connections to content when you don’t know your students as individuals?

Instead of using our knowledge about humans in the past and present as a way to clarify our perceptions of ourselves and the world around us, formal education has emphasized the importance of simply memorizing pieces of this knowledge “as an end in itself rather than a vehicle for understanding” (Nelson, 1998, 24). I question the role I can take in this process as a teacher, and a powerful “other” for my students. I believe that the study of identity in schools, as a process versus an outcome (Bosma and Kunnen, 2001, xiii), is valuable for both teacher and student. I am searching for sanctioned ways to explore this process with my students as an elementary teacher. In search of how to acknowledge students as central to curricular decision making, I faced the process of grasping at notions of identity via a dissertation study.

"We need to understand that social studies curriculum planning is inherently controversial. Social studies involve many hot topics that are hot precisely because people care deeply about them: values, religion, loyalty, patriotism, authority, peace, property, privacy, justice, capitalism and socialism, business and labor, ethnic and national identities" (Parker, 1991, 61).
Chapter 3

Fishing for Notions of Identity

In this chapter I present the theoretical framework and research questions that guided the design of this study and subsequently the data collection and analysis methods. The context, which consists of the school district, curriculum document, and classroom setting, are described. In addition, I discuss issues regarding two elements of this qualitative inquiry: the researcher as primary instrument and participants as co-researchers.

Theoretical Framework

Delineating a theoretical framework is an interesting process; the only way I have come to determine this framework is by listening to my responses to the following two questions. What is knowledge? What is real? Patton (2002) describes the assumptions declared by answering these questions as constituting one’s theoretical framework or worldview. For the purposes of qualitative research, he adds more questions to assist in the development of a framework that explains why a study takes a certain shape as well. “What do we believe about the nature of knowledge? ... How do we know what we know? ... How should we study the world? ... What is worth knowing? ... What questions should we ask? ... How do we personally engage in inquiry?” (italics in original, Patton, 2002, 134).
Epistemology was something I did not consider until I read postmodernist writings that discussed the social construction of knowledge and the varied forms of cultural reproduction. Once I considered the idea that knowledge was not static, but evolving and shaped through various methods including institutions such as school, I could no longer see my work as a teacher in a simplistic manner. What began happening was that I reflected on my own beliefs and assumptions about what is worth knowing; at first it had been a focus on what others deemed as necessary to learn in order to enter into certain circles I wanted to be a part of. It evolved into a belief in seeking and constructing knowledge for self-actualization (NAEYC, 1990) to inform my work as an educator as well as to help me understand others and the world around me. I felt that students should have the opportunity to inquire into their own personal and family histories in order to understand their positionality in society, not to accept it but to understand it. The two disciplines that encompass this worldview are psychology and sociology. It is not that I believe that those are the only important subjects to learn, it is that I believe that those are two ways of looking at the world that individuals can benefit from – to understand oneself and to understand what it means to live with other individuals. Gaining a grasp on the concept of knowledge as a construction included an inquiry into sites of knowledge production, which for my work as a teacher necessitated focusing on two main sites, home and school, and inquiry into the modes of knowledge production and reproduction, which included mainly social interaction (NAEYC, 1990) among peers and between students and teachers.

Ontological questions have been extremely challenging for me to articulate because I have come to believe that objectivity does not exist. As humans, we interpret
the world for ourselves and each other through language and behavior, and once an experience is interpreted, it has been altered. I can only imagine that an interpretationless experience exists but its communication to another person would immediately be filtered through the speaker’s perception and the listener’s mind, therefore altered at least twice.

I believe that our understandings and beliefs about what young children are capable of discussing and understanding are products of specific times, perspectives, and research tools (Elkind, 1998). That said, I believe that through my professional development I have been able to see that the power of the individual teacher is great in terms of presenting epistemological and ontological issues to children, especially in relation to their own emerging identities. It is this power that I wish to inform with my study. As a practicing teacher, my understanding of a teacher’s power has grown to include a desire to understand the process of curriculum development as well, and how curricula and pedagogy may limit or expand the boundaries of what is knowledge and what is real.

**Research Questions**

Stating the questions that guide a qualitative study, “requires you to both identify your ignorance and to critically challenge your assumptions” (Maxwell, 1996, 53). The following research questions arose from my belief that children’s identities are shaped by many factors, especially one which cannot be ignored any longer – experiences in school.

**Overarching research question**

What notions of identity do young children express within a community building social studies unit?
This overarching research question illustrates my desire to hear, directly from young students, how they describe themselves. Do they identify gender first? Do they identify their cultural heritage? Will they, and if so in what way, express notions of industry vs. inferiority (Erikson, in Good and Brophy, 1995)?

Sub questions

What concepts of identity are addressed within this unit?

In what ways are notions of identity represented within this unit?

Which instructional experiences elicit expressions of identity for young children within this unit?

The subquestions exemplify my understanding that the children’s expressions that I had accessed were not created in a vacuum. The school, teacher, classroom, curriculum, and myself as the researcher are all factoring into each child’s self-expressions and in order to understand their expressions it is important to understand part of the context under which they are shaped. Another influential context and set of significant others which are not a directly a part of this study are, of course, the home and family. They do have an influence however, in that families work together on assignments sent home for homework.

Research Design

This research employed a single case study approach to seek a representation of young children’s notions of identity facilitated through social studies instruction, which in this case is the “I Am Special” component of the “Living in harmony: Building our
school community” (2000) unit. I was interested in what ways identity development can be addressed within an elementary classroom setting; I was not looking solely for identity expressions, but also for the relationship, if any, between students’ expressions of identity and particular curricular and pedagogical events. Yin (1994) states that a case study is an “inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”(13). One way that I could attempt to capture these relationships was to be a participant-observer in a classroom that was exploring concepts of identity already. In order to gather rich details and become enmeshed in the case, I chose to explore one classroom during the time period that the unit was allotted according to the school district’s curricular calendar.

Creswell (1998) and Yin (1994), in their descriptions of case study research, explain that there are multiple categories used to describe case study research that depend on the researcher’s intent and focus for the study. My intent is to add to the research base regarding young students’ conceptions of identity and the possibilities for curricular development in that area; therefore, my study was what Cresswell and Yin would call an exploratory case study. In addition, I did not address every aspect of this curricular unit, but rather only those that surround the expression, representation, and elicitation of identity expressions, thus my study focused on “embedded” issues within this particular case rather than a holistic representation of the unit (Yin, 1994, 18).
Research context

School District

There are three elements that encompass the context of this study: the school district, the curriculum document as well as the classroom and teacher. This case study was conducted in a rural, northeastern public school district, which I will call Merrymount School District (MSD). The school district is located near a large land grant university. There are 10 elementary schools, 2 middle schools and 1 high school. The population it serves is predominantly Caucasian and middle class.

In MSD, classroom teachers, curriculum support teachers, media specialists, and university faculty come together to develop integrated language arts and social studies curricula that are literature based and acknowledge the teacher as a professional who works as a curriculum developer on a daily basis. The unit designers supported teachers in their roles as pedagogical decision makers, thus teachers guide the scope and sequence of this unit within their own classrooms.

“At first glance this unit may seem overwhelming and appear to include far more lessons and activities than anyone could possibly do… The writing team is very aware of these initial concerns and wants each classroom teacher to please remember that this is a unit of many choices with many resources to support the choices. It is up to each teacher to select lessons and activities most appropriate for the individual needs and interests of his/her students” (emphasis in original, MSD, 2000, 1.2).

Recently, this group implemented a community building unit in the early primary grades, which includes a foundational section focusing on increasing self awareness and the development of a positive self-image, entitled “I Am Special.”
Curriculum

The tenets of the curriculum that relate to this study are expressed within the rationale included at the beginning of the curriculum document. It is here that the curriculum writers express that it would be impossible to try “to teach children all that there is to know. What we can do effectively is to help children gain skills that will be meaningful and useful as they grow older” (MSD, 2000, 1.5). The writers emphasize that the combination of reinforcing the connection between home and school, learning through quality children’s literature, having discussions regarding differences and similarities while modeling respect, and approaching curriculum topics through music are all important components of this curriculum and make it unique (MSD, 2000, 1.6).

The particular unit that is the focus of this study begins with the following statements “adapted from Self-Esteem: A Classroom Affair by Michele and Craig Borba”:

Society once viewed children as blank slates with few worthwhile qualities. But years of research and reason have proven this perception false. We now know that even very young children have complex and sophisticated cognitive and emotional capabilities.

Research has revealed that children begin to mold their self-images at a very young age and that positive successful experiences enhance the formation of a positive self-image in the early years.

Each of us has an inner picture of “self” which defines us as persons. This inner picture, or self-image, affects and is affected by how other people see us and influences how we act and think.

Children must value themselves before they can relate positively to one another and can value each other in a way that promotes self esteem. The outcomes, lessons and activities in this section of the unit are designed to help children recognize their own uniqueness and find out more about themselves and others - - their physical characteristics, their likes, dislikes and their feelings (4.1).
The above statements illustrate the district’s constructivist assumptions about young children and the learning process, as well as acknowledge the role of school in providing experiences that shape student self-image. This curriculum document works as an element of context for this study in that the classroom teacher draws from the resources it provides to implement the unit, although it is important to restate that she was at liberty to add any lessons and organize learning as she saw fit for her class.

I met to discuss potential sites for my study with the current and incoming district curriculum specialists as well as the lead teacher for the development of this particular curriculum who at the time worked as an educational specialist and traveled to schools to assist teachers with implementing this particular curriculum. During this meeting I asked general questions about the implementation of the unit so that I could plan accordingly. I was informed that the district had a policy that no research could take place in either the first or the last months of the school year. Therefore, although the unit began on September 3rd, the first day that I could enter the site as a researcher would be October 1st and the tentative date the unit was scheduled to end was November 8th, allowing for a total of six weeks of data collection. In this discussion, the lead curriculum writer explained that the district placed “great importance on identity [development] every year” and that she believed that if you do not have a sense of belonging as a student, learning is not possible. She also explained that the units build on one another, introducing concepts in the early grades, allowing for practice and reinforcement in the middle grades, and mastery, defined as “integrated skills into everyday life and play,” in high school (field notes, 6/4/02). We also discussed the research protocols for the district which included
my meeting with the assistant superintendent who, if agreeable to the study, would then present my research proposal to the school board.

**Classroom and Teacher**

The selection of the case, or classroom, through purposeful chain sampling (Patton 2002 & 1990), was based on finding a teacher who was familiar with the implementation of the unit, ran a student centered classroom, was considered an exemplary early childhood/elementary social studies educator, was willing to participate in qualitative research, and interested in issues of identity development. The intent of this study was to seek out students’ expressions of identity within a fertile learning environment that was supportive of students’ exploration of identity constructs (Zins et al 2004).

The classroom that was selected was a multiage, first and second grade classroom, with most of the second graders looped, or remaining with the same teacher, from first grade. The teacher was described by the curriculum specialists and lead curriculum writer, as exemplary, as running a democratic classroom, and as someone who would see the value, and enjoy participating in, classroom based research. Access to the site was facilitated by the curriculum specialist who approached the teacher to see if she was interested and then put us in communication with one another.

My first contact with the teacher, Mrs. Soleil (a pseudonym), was via a phone conversation where she shared that she had taught four years in one state, six years in another and that this was her second year at Merrymount School District. Although she had already been briefed by district personnel, I explained my research plans and she enthusiastically agreed to participate. She shared that 8 students had looped from first to
second grade with her, there were a few new second graders, there were an equal number of first and second grade students in this combination classroom, and that her goal was for this class to become a community where no students would feel that she favored one over another. She was considering implementing a buddy system to address her desire for all in her class to feel that they belonged. We discussed some initial logistics for my visits which included no observations between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. Monday through Wednesday (field notes, 6/12/02). She agreed to meet with me once the school year began to set up a schedule for my visits and to review interview protocols and consent/assent forms (see Appendix A).

**Researcher as Primary Instrument**

In qualitative research the researcher an explicit participant in the research. Although this makes sense and seems natural, my modernist upbringing, as a default, caused me to feel insecure about “limitations” of this type of research. The assumption of researcher as primary instrument brings to mind concepts such as “tainted data,” “novice researcher,” and “small sample size” when contemplating issues of validity and reliability. The concepts I identify as troublesome are also the same elements that attract me to this type of research. This means that I have had to see that my own beliefs, assumptions and biases are meaningful components of the study. Fortunately, Van Manen’s words reminded me that “in our efforts to make sense of our lived experiences with theories and hypothesizing frameworks we are forgetting that it is living human beings who bring schemata and frameworks into being and not the reverse” (1990, 45).
As the primary instrument of data collection, I had to consider that my identity could create common ground with others who may benefit from this research and with those who are participants in the research. In discussing the problematic areas that may be caused by this aspect of qualitative research, Walsh et al (1993) describe the invariant age difference between the researcher and the researched as a limitation to note.

To [this] we will add the centrality of the relationship between the researcher and the research to the research process. The meanings sought in inquiry are understood only through dialogue and negotiation between the researcher and the research. Further, researchers have the responsibility to be sensitive to the inequities of power that exist between them and those with whom they are working, for example, between university scholar and school district practitioner, or between adult and child (Walsh et al, in Spodek, 1993, 464).

However, having worked as an elementary school teacher with children at the early primary level, I see this aspect as a benefit. I see it as a lens that could possibly provide the element of intent a child’s contribution in this research. By this I mean, that a child participant may decide that s/he would like to assist me in conducting this study by providing their perspective because I can help others in their position to learn this material as well. During the interviews, not only were the students responding to my questions but we were also exchanging stories. I felt that if I explained I had been a second grade teacher that it would create a sense of comfort since they were familiar with the “type of person” a teacher is.

I practiced introducing myself to the class and prepared these brief notes. I believed these statements would help me connect with students in order to gain their interest in conversing with me. I chose to represent the following traits in hopes that I would gain trust and access to their thinking.

-Genevieve
I also decided to bring in the yearbook from my previous position as a second grade teacher so that the children could see that indeed I had been a teacher myself with children close to their age. Mrs. Soleil gave me an opportunity to introduce myself that first day and also had the students pass the yearbook around, opened to the page with my class, so everyone had a chance to look at the picture.

**Participants as co-researchers**

Participants, a total of seventeen (17), included one (1) adult, female, classroom teacher and sixteen (16) child participants: seven (7) boys, nine (9) girls; seven (7) 1st graders, nine (9) 2nd graders; six (6) six-year-olds, eight (8) seven-year-olds, two (2) eight-year-olds. All participants in this study were Caucasian and for the most part middle class. As an educator, a sanctioned opportunity to spend time interacting with, observing, and interviewing children is a welcome addition to my professional development. In addition, this approach to research has as a foundation the notion that children are valuable contributors to curricular and pedagogical research and not just passive participants. This assumption resonates with my own professional experiences
with young children. Children naturally reflect and mediate their experiences; if given the opportunity, they will share their insights and experience with someone they believe is genuinely interested.

Perhaps the most obvious goal of qualitative research with children is to get to know them and better see the world through their eyes. On a deeper level, this style of research additionally assumes that minors are knowledgeable about their worlds, that these worlds are special and noteworthy, and that we as adults can benefit by viewing the world through their hearts and minds (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988, 12).

In addition, the notion of participants as co-researchers is refreshing for research with young children, who are typically perceived as incapable of abstract thought. I believed that through observing children in the classroom and interviewing them individually, I would be able to ascertain certain elements of their identity. My choice to not use an instrument such as a self-concept scale or survey was based on the idea that I wanted the students to be able to be spontaneous in their self-descriptions and not to be led into one concept or another, based on the terms I chose to use as a researcher or the instrument employed. All participants have been given pseudonyms.

Data Collection

This case study involved the collection of videotaped classroom observations, documents that included student journal entries and handouts completed for the unit, as well as individual interviews of participants and the teacher. Data collection was guided by the research questions (Patton, 1990; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I selected the following data collection methods because I believed that “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers
the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education” (Merriam, 1988, 3).

Classroom Observations

Collection of classroom observation data took place during social studies instruction over approximately six weeks. Instruction was videotaped on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 1:45 and 2:40 p.m. Classroom observations provided the data to shape descriptive vignettes of learning moments. The purpose of the classroom observations was to become aware of the context in which the documents and personal statements made during interviews came about (Merriam, 1988, 116), to situate them and discover forces that may have influenced their creation. Classroom observations were videotaped. In order to reduce distractions and attention to the video camera, the researcher sat with students and participated in lessons with them.

Personal Documents

Document analysis of the actual curriculum binder and student work was used to enhance interpretations of student understandings of issues of identity and curricular directions (McCarthey, 2001; Swaim, 2002; Merriam 1998). The binder that includes unit theme rationale, lessons, book synopses, and list of resources was provided to the researcher by the district’s curriculum specialist. Before the completion of the unit, student documents were collected and photocopied and then returned to student folders or
in the case of journals, returned to each participant’s literacy basket. Handouts that were photocopied were those that corresponded with lessons observed. The paraprofessional in the classroom assisted with the photocopying of student documents. Certain documents that included student artwork were taken off the premises to be photocopied in color and then returned to student folders.

The document analysis aided in situating and contextualizing students’ reception and experience of curriculum goals regarding issues of identity. Documents collected included personal documents such as: journal entries, assignments, written reflections, and “all about me” books. Personal documents are highly subjective, which in other studies could prove problematic, but in this study exploring subjectivity using these types of documents was extremely beneficial. Another valuable element that these particular documents provided was that they were not created for the purpose of this research, but were a regular component of the child’s classroom experience, and therefore unobtrusive. Merriam (1998) distinguishes the use of documents as sources of data by stating, “One of the greatest advantages in using documentary material is its stability. Unlike interviewing and observation, the investigator does not alter what is being studied by his or her presence” (108). Although in data analysis, I do employ my subjectivity in the interpretation of these documents.

Individual Interviews

Students were interviewed during the literacy block which took place daily between 9:30 and 10:50 a.m. The interviews took place over a month, between 10/8/02
and 11/08/02. The literacy block included four 20 minutes segments where the children would rotate to centers around the room for 20 minute segments. There was a reading center with the classroom teacher, a skills practice center with the paraprofessional, a writing center that involved students working at their desks, and an independent reading center. I had arranged with the teacher to interview students during their independent center time or writing center time, and always gave students the option to join me or work at their center. Interviews focused on students’ reflections pertaining to learning experiences within the unit as well as their emerging discussions regarding their identity as invoked by these learning experiences as well. They were audio-taped and took place in various locations around the classroom.

The interview structure for students was modified for young children from Seidman’s (1998) qualitative interview series. The main modifications, other than to adjust interview protocol to include child-friendly vocabulary, were the length of the interviews and the quantity of interviews. Seidman recommends 90 minutes for each interview in a series of three for adults (1998, 14); for this study, involving children ages 5-8, the time for each interview was limited to 10 minutes. The time limit was based on working within the literacy block segments and from my experiences as a classroom teacher of young students. In addition, due to time constraints, each student was only interviewed twice. The focus of the first interview was to allow the participant to present introductions into his or her life history; the second was to allow for a description of his/her experience of lessons and assignments in the unit and to elicit the participant’s meaning making of these experiences. Semi-structured interviews that include open ended questions are important because they allow the participant to provide his/her
vocabulary regarding his/her own experience, rather than aligning or limiting descriptions and expressions to the vocabulary provided by the interviewer. The protocol for the semi-structured student interviews can be found in Appendix B.

Teacher Interviews

Two formal teacher interviews were conducted at the beginning and end of the unit implementation. Multiple informal interviews took place during the class’ art period or her planning period. Teacher interviews were also semi-structured and focused on curricular decision-making in regard to representations of identity in the unit and reflections on students’ experiences throughout the unit. These interviews were used to grasp at the context for classroom observations and background for particular circumstances that may have occurred during a lesson, as well as to provide a vehicle for continued communication between teacher and researcher. For the second interview the teacher was given a copy of the interview questions beforehand, at her request, so that she would feel better prepared to answer questions from her notes. The interview protocols for the teacher are located in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative study is not a linear process; it involves many layers of interaction with and reflection on the data. Searching for a plan that allowed for internal validity as well as naturalistic emergence of themes from the data was quite
challenging. What I have assembled here is a conglomeration of multiple perspectives on how I “read” this qualitative data tempered by the fact that I, as the researcher, am the primary instrument of data analysis as well. Therefore, although there are many ways that one can assemble and sift through data, I chose methods of data analysis that best fit the situation to facilitate my understanding of how to make sense of others’ words and stay organized too. Below, I describe my data analysis strategies for each data collection method.

The two main sources of data that were used to identify themes to respond to the first, overarching research question -- What notions of identity do young children express within a community building social studies unit? -- were individual interviews and personal documents. The data from classroom observations and teacher interviews was used to respond to the last three research questions, or sub questions, which explore in what ways the context informed students’ expressions of identity. Formal data analysis did not begin until after all data was collected. Although many researchers encourage data analysis to begin along with data collection, due to time constraints I elected to proceed as Seidman (1991) suggested and not engage in any in-depth analysis while collecting data.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were video taped and data gathered was recorded in a four column matrix that had teacher behaviors and relevant quotes along with student behaviors and relevant quotes in columns that corresponded to each research subquestion.
In addition there was a column for running commentary on the context, or environment, the lesson was taking place in. Straight transcription of videos was my first attempt at organizing this data, but this method did not assist me in understanding what my research questions asked for, which was the relationship between what concepts of identity were addressed, how they were represented or elicited along with the ways in which students responded. This multi-column matrix allowed me to visually perceive the connections between teacher behaviors and comments and student behaviors and comments. Please refer to the table at the end on the following page as an example.
Table 1: Video Analysis Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context descriptions</th>
<th>Notions of identity addressed</th>
<th>How is identity represented?</th>
<th>What instructional experiences elicited student expressions of identity?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>brightly lit classroom</td>
<td>discussion of story board – Díal a Memory - homework was sent home to be completed by child and family</td>
<td>significant events = something special</td>
<td>students shared favorite experiences (check sheets for circled memories)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>four clusters of five desks in middle of the room</td>
<td>CONTINUITY AND CHANGE OVER TIME?</td>
<td>personal connections</td>
<td>Chloe - learned to walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>large rug area</td>
<td>GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT?</td>
<td>teacher shares her best memory of being five – Disney world – as an example of something special</td>
<td>Noah - learned to ride 2 wheeler (teacher gives vocabulary of “accomplishment” – learning to do something)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baby photo contest pictures on bulletin board</td>
<td>read aloud – When Frank was Four – this story talks about their (kids in a play group) significant events during each age</td>
<td>literature connections</td>
<td>Hayden - trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>each child had their book box on their desk</td>
<td>discusses: when kids are babies they… but as you get older…</td>
<td>reads with enthusiasm, sense of humor, relates personal experiences to story events- when my brother was a baby he unrolled the toilet paper all over the house!</td>
<td>Dylan - Disney world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>independent work but also children conferring with one another</td>
<td>circle time – asks students to share favorite memory and WHY they chose it</td>
<td>makes connections between book events and specific children – “when Ana was four her pony arrived on Christmas morning – that would be what Taylor and Isabelle would want right?</td>
<td>Logan - Disney world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library/reading nook area</td>
<td>teacher feedback for each response</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hannah - trip to Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher table</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Riley - fell asleep in snow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>para table</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“kind of a unique memory, different from the ones we’ve heard before”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low sink area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Isabelle - learn to read, puppy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer (2) area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hailey - visit twin towers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>materials accessible to all kids</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Alexis – “I am glad you weren’t in it when the attack happened”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Taylor - spell my name backwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alexis - I got my dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Connor - swimming in the ocean</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal Documents

Student documents were photocopied and were analyzed with the same process as stated above for individual interviews. Initially, they were also organized by participant. I created matrices to represent the data in displays that aided in deeper analysis of relationships among themes and between themes and the context (Miles and Huberman, 1984) in addition to between themes and instructional activities, which provided the basis for my responses to the research subquestions. These matrices consisted of simple tables where the rows and columns represented different data sources and individual participants, respectively. Please refer to the table below as an example.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Story Board</th>
<th>I Message fill in the blank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td></td>
<td>I feel_____ when ____ because ____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>1: I start to walk on my Birthday 2: My first time at disney World 3: I had my first haircut 4: I went to Preschool Art 5: I started Kindergarten 6: I joined Brownies 7: I started piano</td>
<td>I need ____ to stop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel happy when (somebody) help me up because I am (crossed out &quot;need&quot;) like having fren's (friends). I feel mad when sumnwuh (someone) teases (teases) me because I dot like it. I feel excited when I win a game. I feel sad when noone pas (pays) atachin (attention)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>(not obtained)</td>
<td>I feel happy when I get a new toy (new toy) because it is ixsiding (exciting) I need to feel happy when I get them [drew a picture at the bottom of two people one as herself and one as a giver of gifts, she says &quot;thank you&quot; for three toys drawn, the other says her name, and &quot;your welkam (welcome)&quot;, there are also two drawings, one big and one small, of heart with zigzag line down middle and an arrow through]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>(all drawings: 1: child crawling 2: child, plane flying overhead 3: child walking, holding hands with an older person 4: child swimming 5: child holding a baby 6: child releasing a butterfly 7: a room - desk, door)</td>
<td>I feel happy when my frens pla weth (friends play with) me because we hav fun. I need to hav frans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual Interviews

The individual student interviews were transcribed and their analysis proceeded in the following steps as outlined by Bogdan & Biklen (1992), Rubin & Rubin (1995) and Goetz and LeCompte (1984, in Merriam, 1988). First, I transcribed all interview data into written text form, in a numbered format to make data readily accessible and to ease in locating original contextual cues for specific comments. I read the transcripts and noted comments regarding what students were referring to if it was not clear. Secondly, I organized the interviews by participant, which aided me in the process of analyzing comments by participant. Then I re-read the data while listening to the audio tapes to get a sense of the types of expressions students shared and began to build preliminary categories of what I “heard” from the data and noted it in my researcher’s journal. Goetz and LeCompte (1984, in Merriam, 1988) recommend keeping a “running list of themes” as one reads through the data (131). These themes later became titles for sets of quotes that were grouped together under a set of common characteristics. In order to capture the initial analyses, I used the process of note taking in the margins of the transcripts as well as sorting comments in a word processing document by category, indicating which transcript, page number and line number the information originated from which later was assembled and re-assembled as I attempted to group comments/quotes into meaningful themes. Rubin & Rubin (1995) recommend that when initial themes or even memorable quotes have been selected, that the data should be revisited and re-read in search of more concepts in the form of a “pair, the mate, or the opposite of the concept you have just discovered” (230) and new index cards created for those. After gathering my index cards
with written quotes and my running list of themes, I began the process of arranging the
cards by larger themes.

Teacher interviews were also transcribed, read over, annotated, and then re-read
while listening to the audio tapes; notes from these processes were recorded in my
researcher’s journal. Transcripts were analyzed using the themes from the students’
responses as a net to ascertain the teacher’s reflections on the themes that emerged from
the student data, in order to look for connections or disconnections between her
pedagogical practices and students’ experience of curriculum.
Chapter 4

Exploring Notions of Identity

One of the initial questions that led me to conduct this study was “How do young children choose to identify themselves?” I imagined that students would use varied ways to describe the “kind of [people]” they are and I was curious about what self-descriptors they would share with me (Gee, 2001). Often, social studies textbooks and curricula that address the topic of “self” ask children to consider their physical appearance, gender, etc. as identifying factors. It is my belief that young children are capable of transcending simplistic self-representations and are able to provide self-narratives with more depth that provide clues to their inner selves.

Based on the analysis of lessons observed, student documents, as well as individual interviews with students and the classroom teacher, three aspects of identity emerged as areas of emphasis in this implementation of the I Am Special unit. These aspects of identity include: growth and change over time, uniqueness, and living as an individual within a community. In this chapter I will examine the learning experiences I witnessed as a participant observer in Mrs. Soleil’s class with a focus on the relationship between curriculum and instruction and students’ notions of identity as expressed through their self-representations. For each aspect of identity, I provide descriptive vignettes in chronological order, followed by my analysis of notions of identity addressed, the manner in which these notions were represented to children, and finally a discussion of what particular curricular and pedagogical experiences elicited students’ expressions of identity.
Growth and Change over Time

*When Frank Was Four* by Allison Lester

Mrs. Soleil gathered the students on the rug. She began by reviewing the purpose of the homework assignment from the night before. She asked if someone could remind her of the task they had been asked to complete. A letter had been sent home explaining that, with their parents’ assistance, students were assigned to “write and/or draw something special that happened for each year in his or her life” on a Dial a Memory handout (MSD, 2000, 4.52).

There was a brief discussion during which Chloe stated that the term “significant,” which was used in the handout for parents, was synonymous with the phrase “special to you.”
and the teacher concurred. Mrs. Soleil shared her own “significant moment” from the age of five to introduce the read-aloud and explain how the lesson would proceed:

“Wow, I remember when I was 5--and I noticed this came up in some of your memories, that was the first time I ever got to go to Disney World. So that is, like, my best memory of being 5. And you’re going to get to share with your buddy all of your memories and then after that, we’re going to gather in a circle and you’re going to get to share your favorite memory that you wrote down. But before that, there’s a neat book that goes with this unit called When Frank Was Four. And it’s written by Allison Lester” (10/1/02).

She began to read-aloud with a natural enthusiasm -- admiring and pointing out the illustrations, giggling at story characters’ antics -- that immediately drew all our attention to her. *When Frank was Four* is a story that traces events from each age, years 1-7, of a number of children. Mrs. Soleil asked, “Boys and girls, what are some clues they are giving you that it’s age 1 and not age 5 or 6 or 7? Raise your hand if you can tell me. … [W]hat are some things that you see happening that lets you know these are the age of the kids?” Throughout the read-aloud, Mrs. Soleil made “text-to-student connections” and it became evident that she had reviewed the homework previously and thus was able to easily connect story events to the significant memories students had listed on their papers (Calkins, 2001; Collins, 2004). Lucy Calkins and Kathy Collins of the Teachers College Writing Project refer to three types of connections readers make to text to assist in the comprehension of what they are reading; these include: text-to-self, text-to-text, text-to-world. It is also important to consider that she had looped with eight students and therefore knew them quite well. In addition, while reading, she made connections to the children’s lives such as remarking that a character’s wish sounds
similar to those of two students, or that a character’s experience resembles several students’ storyboard entries:

She reads “And Rosie’s pony arrived on Christmas morning” and then adds, “That’s what Taylor--that would be like what you’d like to see on one of your Christmas mornings, right, Taylor? ... You and Isabelle, I know” (10/1/02, 11).

She reads “Rosie got a baby sister” and comments, “I know that came up in a lot of your memories, baby sisters and brothers coming along” (10/1/02, 13).

Mrs. Soleil also made connections between the story and her own childhood memories, “when my brother was around 1, he grabbed the toilet paper and unrolled the whole thing, all over the house!” This seems to set the tone for the students to excitedly share their own adventures at particular times in their lives as a reaction to an event in the story, such as when Alexis announced “I spilled spaghetti on my head when I was a baby!” At the conclusion of the story, students were asked to share their memories with their buddy and then to select one memory to present to the large group.

Once in the large group, Mrs. Soleil gave the following instruction, “You can say what your favorite memory was and maybe why you picked that.” As part of the circle, I was asked to share one of my own significant memories as well. As the students went around the circle and shared, the teacher modeled active listening, by keeping her gaze on the child speaking, leaning in toward him/her, and making various emotive comments and facial gestures. In addition she drew out some students by asking probing questions that seemed to be formulated based on what she already knew about a student. She introduced the term “accomplishment” in terms of describing several students’ answers:

A lot of these favorite memories could be a favorite place you went to, but it’s all- -I’m noticing it’s, like, an accomplishment you had, like, learning to do something, going, you know, learning to do the monkey bars, learning to ride two wheels, learning to walk, those are big accomplishments (10/1/02, 23).
There was also a child who did not have her assignment with her and Mrs. Soleil ensured that she was still included in the lesson.

“Now, Riley doesn’t have a paper, but she sure remembered all of these memories. So what’s your favorite?”
“I fell asleep in the snow when I was 1.”
“Oh, my goodness. Was it just so tiring playing out there? What happened? Do you know the story from your mom and dad?
Child nods.
“Oh, neat. That’s kind of a neat memory ’cause it’s so unique and so different from what we’ve heard before” (10/1/02, 30).

To end this lesson Mrs. Soleil conducted what I will refer to as a “common ground” experience. After listening carefully to all of their favorite memories, she asked students to stand if they included a particular event on their storyboard. “We’re going to do a stand and sit thing… listen to these clues. Okay. And let’s see how many of the similar things that we have.” She chose “going on a special trip… having a new baby brother or sister … [and] something you learned how to do, like an accomplishment, like learning to walk, or talk, or ride” as experiences students shared in common with one another. For the first two memories, several students stood and looked around regarding one another without saying a word and then sat down. When Mrs. Soleil mentioned the last category - an accomplishment – half the class stood up and many students were smiling at one another, and one child was actually pointing to each person standing up and counting. Her closing comments included connections to several unit foci such as, building a sense of community, engaging students in identifying “physical and behavioral changes, and [reflecting] on events in their lives that signify growing up” (MSD, 2000, 4.2):
It’s kind of neat to do this because, number one, we learned about each other, but all these things kind of make you the person you are today, all these memories that you have, things that you’ve done and things that you’ve—places you’ve gone sort of makes you who you are. … Wow. And boys and girls, haven’t you come a long way from these baby pictures? Think about all the things that you can do now that you couldn’t do back when you were just that--at that age (10/1/02, 42-43).

The lesson concluded with the children singing several songs from the unit’s songbook. Energy level was low for many students as it was the last minutes of the school day. Some boys were leaning their chins on their hands; the several girls, on the other hand, were more active as they rocked side to side while the music played.

The curriculum document suggested that this read-aloud could be used to have students “identify physical and behavioral outcomes that occur by age 6, 7, 8 and think about the changes to come” (MSD, 2000, 4.39). In addition, the document proposed that by sharing multiple memories students would come to comprehend what “significant” meant. Mrs. Soleil’s comments guided the students in this direction, helping them articulate what is so special about the memory they chose to share. She expressed great interest both verbally and non-verbally in each person’s articulation of a life story. Her modeling of desired behavior, regarding listening to others’ stories, was salient throughout several lessons as she capitalized on her status as a role model for students.

The lesson touched upon the notion that an individual’s identity consists of a collection of memories, implying that memories shape who a child is. There were also moments where the notion of competence as part of one’s identity was expressed by students and named as “accomplishments” by the teacher. The main aspect of identity that came across was that of growth and change over time; it was emphasized by both the read-aloud text and by the assignment students had to complete at home and share during
the lesson. The share-time allowed all students to discuss their favorite memory and to express their interpretation of significance. Students’ memories centered on sharing increasing capabilities and access to experiences as they grew older. During the sharing, students expressed memories that depicted increasing capabilities over time and When analyzing the Dial a Memory handouts that students completed, the memory mentioned most frequently was traveling (11 out of 16, 69%), nine out of sixteen (56%) shared memories of playing a sport and the same amount of students shared learning how to walk as a significant memory. Others included learning to ride a bike, losing teeth, and beginning a particular grade. Many of these “recalled memories” of events in the early years of students’ lives were actually recalled by parents and reappear in later lesson/activity responses. This phenomenon is important to consider when assessing what forces come together to shape a child’s self-representation. If a significant “other,” like a parent, deems a particular memory to be special this may have a great influence on the child’s desire to identify with what that event may represent.

The curriculum writers included a song book and recording of all the songs in the resource box they provided classroom teachers. They felt strongly that music and art facilitate community building. With regard to the music portion of the lesson, a few things must be considered. First, these lessons were mainly taught during the last hour of the day, and thus the singing occurred in the last few minutes of the day. Most teachers find that this part of the school day is often not as productive as they would like since students can feel tired and are never quite as productive as earlier in the day. Secondly, many of the students were learning to read and although there were many proficient readers in the class, students found it difficult to read at the pace the song was sung by
the artist on the recording. Therefore, participation was limited to physical movements or
singing memorized parts of songs. The lyrics of the last song sung, *I Must Be Growing*
by Glenn Bennett (MSD, 2000, 4.43), coincided closely with the theme of the lesson and
most students participated in the singing of the chorus.

> I must be growing. I must be growing.
> Either I’m growing or the world keeps shrinking round me.
> (repeat)

It was interesting to look at girls and boys during the singing; it seemed as if students of
the same gender were observing one another as they decided what their level of
engagement would be during the class sing along. It was a powerful illustration of peer
influence on participation. One of the youngest boys mirrored the casual uninvolvement
of the older boys he was sitting next to, while two groups of girls who were sitting next to
one another were creating small “chorus lines” with synchronized movements and
singing. This lesson seemed address several objectives such as celebrating capacities,
sharing accomplishments, and getting to know one another.

*“I can…” Journal Entry*

The Living in Harmony unit integrates language arts and social studies
instruction. One of the tools that clearly facilitated the integration of these two
disciplines was the Investigator Journal. “The investigator’s notebook is a place for the
students’ very own writing. It [is] a place the students can write about how they feel and
what they think” (MSD, 2000, 2.23). The unit uses the term investigation to set a tone of
seeking information from oneself and from others in order to learn how to live within a
community. Students were given an opportunity to write in their journals during the independent work time section of their literacy block each morning.

Journal entries were completed during morning literacy blocks and had specific themes and prompts designated by the classroom teacher. One important journal entry was entitled “I can…” The students were asked to write down what age they were and to list as many things as they could to complete the following prompt, “This is what I can do …”. As an incentive to try to come up with as many examples as possible, the teacher set up a contest to see who could write the most. The young boy who won was quite proud when we spoke of it. “I won, I got the most things. … the things I CAN do”.

A sampling of students’ responses include:

“I can tell a secret”
“I can sit up by myself”
“I can try”
“I am potty trained”
“I can listen”
“I can build with blocks”
“I can get wows”
“I can grow”
“I can help out”
“I am learning to play the piano”
“I can help my little cousin”
“I can spend my allowance on art supplies”
“I like to do the monkey bars”
“I can be smart at math”
“I can do what Big Kids can do”

Asking students to complete this journal entry appeared to give each child an opportunity for private self-reflection regarding their competence, capacity, and growth and change over time. Two key themes emerged from their responses. One is that there are several statements that echo unit themes, such as being potty trained, walking, and being able to
grow which most likely come from discussions during the first month of the unit where students considered the human growth and development aspects of self-awareness.

Another is the value placed on being helpful to others through the unit that was demonstrated by the statements “I can help my mom” or “I can help others.” There are also items mentioned in their “I can” lists that students discussed with more depth during their interviews. For example, one typically shy and quiet young boy wrote “I can play football” and during his interview this statement proved to be the key to getting this child to begin speaking freely and he spent quite a bit of time articulating his knowledge about football. After a lot of mumbled answers or nods, I asked about this particular statement and he shared, “I play flag football, we played against [Eagles] …” I asked what position he played. “We don’t get to pick … [on] defense I play cornerback and [on] offense I play quarterback.” I asked for clarification on the cornerback position. “It’s wide out … [you] don’t let them (opponents) get to the up outside ‘cause if there’s no one there… they’d just come around” (Logan, I1:133-152). What this signified to me was that although the journal entry may have seemed at first like merely a laundry list of activities, students did choose carefully and thoughtfully as they stated what they believed they were capable of. In addition, discussing the statements on their list evidenced that the unit provided the journal as a place where children could express things that they truly valued.

Literacy development as demonstrated by their journal was a source of pride for many students. When the teacher read student journals she would comment on them, sometimes placing a “WOW” at the top of a page. One child even included her performance in the journal in her response to “tell me a little bit about you” in our first
interview. “Ummm I’m a quiet person, I’m a very good worker, and I have eleven WOWs” (Riley, I1:32-35). Another child took the time to explain to me what the teacher’s WOW comment on a journal entry meant to her:

Well it means... you’re one of the great umm greatest in the class and last year if you got a WOW you would get a sticker and if you had like ten stickers you would get a coupon cause we had like a little store over there ... and then I got a WOW here and a WOW here (Hailey, I1, 205-218).

Many of the students counted how many wows they had in their journal; one young girl so clearly explained,

“This I got a WOW on.” I asked what that means. “Well, everyone’s working hard to get one ‘cause they’re like really important.” I asked what it meant again. “That you did a very good job” (Isabelle, I1, 161-173).

It is evident from several student interviews that displaying and enumerating a series of WOWs was an impression management tool a student used to let me know that he/she had begun to develop an identity as a writer.

**I Like to be Little by Charlotte Zolotow**

Prior to this read-aloud Mrs. Soleil led a discussion that began with this question: “What do you like about being a young child? ...being the age you are now?” Students raised their hands and shared multiple responses. Rather than listing them in order of appearance, I have grouped student responses into two categories: “what we don’t have to do” and “what we can do” in an attempt to illuminate commonalities in responses. Some of the actions from which children were spared from due to their young age included:

“You don’t get grounded as much”  
“You don’t get as much HW (homework)”  
“You don’t have as much work”  
“You don’t have to do everything for someone else”
“[You don’t have to] drive and pay all of the bills”
“You don’t have to buy things on your own”

Perceived benefits to their youth included:

“You can be activer [sic] [than babies]”
“You’re still excited about learning”
“You can chew bubble gum”
“I can lose my teeth”

The curriculum document suggested that this particular read-aloud “can help students recognize the advantages of childhood and being young” (MSD, 2000, 4.68). The idea of celebrating one’s youth was represented through the main character of the book as she speaks to her mother of the many things she enjoys doing as a young and small person such as “making forts under the table.” Once again the teacher shared a “text-to-self connection” (Calkins 2001; Collins, 2004) by adding “that’s why I like this job, because sometimes I like acting little.”

After reading the book, the teacher created a Venn Diagram on the dry erase board that had circles labeled “kid only,” “grownup only,” and the intersection was labeled “both.” After approximately ten students shared their ideas, the “kid only” section included “front flips, somersaults, and field trips.” The “both” category included “cartwheels and surfing,” while the “grownups only” section included “order stuff off TV” and “drive a car.”

From the comments shared in the discussion prior to the read-aloud, it seemed that these children did recognize many of the responsibilities that adults have in terms of caring for children and supporting them. It also seemed that they were aware that their youth bought them some mercy with regard to punishments and homework. The comment “you’re still excited about learning” regarding a benefit about being young
stood out to me. It’s possible that this child had an older sibling or friend that discussed their dislike of schooling and this child associated the change in enjoyment of school with age or accepted that learning changed as one grew older. What also surprised me was that the discussion after the read-aloud did not elicit as many varied examples of what young children can do compared to the discussion prior to the read-aloud, and that made me question the value of the read aloud beyond simply celebrating youth. There may be other picture books that can provide more information or reference points for students to consider the ideas the teacher was trying to elicit in the post read-aloud discussion. The students’ ideas for the category “grownups only” seemed to indicate that they imagine adulthood as an opportunity for using power to acquire what they want, as well as for the agency to go wherever they want to, which will be evidenced further in the next section. In addition, it seemed that another focus for this lesson included exposing students to the term and idea of responsibility, which was revisited a few times throughout the unit, and was one of three school rules along with respecting yourself and respecting others.

“When I get bigger…” Journal Entry

This journal prompt was a follow-up to the read-aloud from the previous day, I Like to be Little by Charlotte Zolotow. The curriculum document stated that it would be an opportunity “to help students recognize what they can look forward to doing as they grow” (MSD, 2000, 4.64). From these journal entries we get a glimpse of what children envision themselves capable of doing in the future and also a look at their current desires. Some children looked into the near future, “I want to climb a tree because I like to climb” or “I want to buy candy.” Others looked to possibilities of adulthood employment for
their journal entries, sharing “I want to be a professional horseback rider” or “I want to be a rock star.”

Another way to categorize their entries is by considering what the child seemed to desire. The journal entries can be divided into three general areas by separating responses into plans for what they want to do, be, or have. Power and autonomy can be read into some children’s entries, for example, as one wrote “When I get older I’ll be able to be the boss and it will be fun because I won’t be the one being bossed around” and another shared “I want a car so I can drive anywhere I want.” Money and ownership were linked in the following students’ comments, “I want a job because some jobs are fun and I want to earn money …to buy clothes,” “I want to be rich because I want a remote control car,” and “I want my own car, my own TV, my own computer.” A majority of the group, ten out of sixteen, (62.5%) wrote about a car in their future, stating things like “I want a car so I can drive anywhere I want” or like the following generous student who included in her journal response, “I want a car so I can drive all over and take people places.” The next most appealing possessions were pets, TVs, and computers. As far as jobs students that considered desirable, professional sportsplayers came in first, followed by being a mother or a teacher, and two students wanted to be just plain rich without specifying a source of income!

The curriculum document indicated that the focus of this assignment allowed children an opportunity to reflect on “what they look forward to doing as they grow” (MSD, 2000, 4.38). A child’s perception of fate, or what may lie ahead in their future, relates directly to McCandless and Evans (1973) statement that “identity implies future development: awareness of group membership and the expectations, privileges, restraints,
and social responsibilities that accompany that membership” (390). Therefore, accessing students’ notions of their future possibilities allows us a glimpse at their current conceptions of social status. The themes of control, autonomy and agency appear throughout their statements of future plans. It is probably because at such a young age, between 5 and 8 years old, most of their experiences are controlled by the adults in their life.

**Uniqueness**

**Introduction of a second Me Book**

This lesson began in a morning meeting where students gathered on the rug in a circle. The routine for morning meetings was that students greeted the person to their right and went around the circle in one direction and then proceeded in the same manner but in the opposite direction. Mrs. Soleil introduced a new “Me Book” that the students were to complete, described as “similar to the last one.” Students were asked to work on this book at the rate of “one page a day” during their independent time in the literacy block. She explained unique features of the format for this Me Book that the children appeared excited about; the book pages were half sheets of paper stapled to a full sheet of paper with a space for the child’s self-portrait. When the book was completely assembled it “appeared” as though the child’s self-portrait was peering over the pages of the entire book.

The teacher proceeded to describe all the pages and where appropriate, delineated specific instructions for how to complete a page. For example, for the page that stated “I am _______ years old,” she instructed students to draw in and color the appropriate
number of candles on a drawing of a birthday cake. For open-ended pages, such as one that had a drawing of a newspaper’s front page with a headline that read: “Read All About It! You are good at doing something special! I am good at ____________,” the teacher brainstormed different options with the class that they might have wanted to draw and write about. Mrs. Soleil shared a personal story when she explained the page that stated, “I get scared when __________.” “I still get scared. I’m 34! My son will sleep with me when my husband’s out of town” (field notes, 10/8/02). After explaining each page, Mrs. Soleil explained that all the pages would be available in their literacy folders and then the students were dismissed.

During the initial analysis phase, the pages of this Me Book seemed very simplistic, shallow in content, and not providing much latitude in personal identity expression. This book was produced by the Education Center, Inc. and included:

All About Me by __.
I am __ years old.
My favorite color is __.
My favorite book is __.
Special News Headlines, Read All About It! You are good at doing something special! I am good at __.
I am happy about __.
I get scared when __.
My family has __ people.
__ is special!

Upon further analysis I found it important to consider that many of the children were emergent readers and writers and therefore this type of cloze booklet, in which the student uses context clues to complete fill-in-the-blank statements, could allow students at this literacy level to feel competent and successful, supporting a positive identity in language arts. Looking at the categories of information particular pages elicited, the “
am good at” page referred to a notion of competence and/or proficiency, the “happy/sad” pages asked students to reflect upon and share the sources for those emotions. The “favorite book” page was to encourage the child to express preferences especially in reading, an area that receives a great deal of emphasis in the early grades.

On the “I am good at ___” page, most students, fourteen out of sixteen (87.5%) felt proficient at a sport or physical activity such as climbing or riding a bike. One student thought herself especially skilled at “making [her] tooth go backwards,” while another identified “being a good friend” as her special skill. During one of our interviews she explained further, “I help people out when they’re sad … I think they really need to have someone there to cheer them up at recess, [naming a child from another class] was once crying … because her friends didn’t want to play with her … so I cheered her up” (Alexis, I2: 211-258). Completed booklets evidenced that overall, family members (including pets), themselves, and friends made students feel happy. The page that asked students to describe what scared them included a picture of a flashlight with a space for students to write within the beam of light. It is possible that this imagery insinuated a specific response was desired, possibly being in the dark (3 students responded this way), although it is plausible that being in the dark is a common source of fear for many at this age. Four students responded that being alone made them afraid, two mentioned spiders, one stated when a “snake is under my bed”, and another when “my [teddy] bear is not with me”.

After this assignment was given, I wondered what alternative formats for these types of books were available and if they included the same notions of identity, especially since the teacher had mentioned that this book was “similar to the last one.” I asked Mrs.
Soleil if she could share some information about the Me Book that students created previously. She gave me a blank copy of the format and explained that this version of a Me Book was based on the book *I Like Me* by Nancy Carlson. She shared that the book is about a pig that has very high self-esteem and “look[s] in the mirror and say[s], ‘I like me!’ and ‘Hey Goodlooking!’ every morning” (TI2, 37). The pages of this Me Book included the following text at the bottom of each page with the rest of the page available for the child to illustrate as they saw fit.

“I Like Me!, Retold by __. Based on the story by Nancy Carlson”
“I have a best friend. That best friend is me!”
“I do fun things with me. I ___.”
“I ___ and I ___!”
“I like to take care of me. I ___. I ___.
“When get up in the morning I say, “Hi ___!”
“When I feel bad, I ___.”
“When I fall down, I ___.”
“When I make mistakes, I ___.”
“I like my ___, my ___, and my ___.”
“No matter where I go, or what I do, I’ll always be me, and I like that!!!”

There are quite a few concepts that differentiate the Me Book described in the lesson above from the one children completed before this study began. First of all the I Like Me! book template has a strong message of independence, that an individual is in charge of taking care of oneself and being one’s own best friend. In addition, it is also implied that one’s negative emotions and mistakes are a natural part of life and that there are multiple ways of coping. Finally the message of the last page is of continuity of character and self-acceptance. This version of a Me Book may have been used to address the following unit goals for students: “to recognize importance of good self esteem [and to] identify positive traits that help them to like themselves” (MSD, 2000, 4.10).
When asked to describe themselves in individual interviews, twenty-five percent of students interviewed responded with what seemed to be an introduction script. It resembled the sentence structure of the second set of All About Me Books each student had completed.

“I like soccer and I like reading and writing and I like school and I have a brother and I have no pets” (Chloe I1: 11-12).

“Well my favorite color is blue and I have six people in my family and I like to read a lot” (Hailey I1: 7-8).

“OK, I’m seven, I have 5 people in my family, I have a guinea pig, a dog, and a fish” (Ethan I1: 11).

“I’m seven and I’m in second grade, my favorite color is green and my birthday is February sixteenth and my favorite activity is math (Noah I1:12-13).

The above quotes demonstrate the potential of shaping language through classroom assignments and in this case specifically, the power to shape self-presentations through exposing students to particular language patterns through cloze, or fill-in-the-blank activities.

**Me-puzzle**

Mrs. Soleil began this class session by asking the class to recollect certain community building lessons from the first month of school. “Why do you think we did the class puzzle?” asked Mrs. Soleil, revisiting a class project from the beginning of the year. The “People Puzzle” she was referring to was designed “to encourage students to introduce themselves [as] they are working together to assemble a class puzzle” (MSD, 2000, 3.13) and was hung prominently at the front of the room. This was an activity where each child decorated a puzzle piece and put their name on it, then the whole group worked together to make the puzzle pieces fit together to form a poster. One student
explained, “’Cause we--you wanted to see what we liked and kind of make a community out of all the things.” The teacher remarked that the class was like a family that needed to work together and even though she wanted to know more about each student, she really wanted them to get to know one another as well. Mrs. Soleil asked the class if they could think of another example of a way they have been working to get to know one another. After a student recalled the “Classroom Friend” class riddle book, Mrs. Soleil reminded them that they, “wrote down things (with parent assistance) … that were unique to you … we had a riddle about every single person and then we gave clues every day to figure out who it was. And we’ve gotten to learn a whole lot about each other” (10/8/02b).

Referring to the larger themes of the unit, she chose to frame this next assignment in the following manner. This class assignment and activity were not part of the curriculum document; the handout students were asked to complete was one of Mrs. Soleil’s own resources. The handout resembled a puzzle with seven puzzle pieces of abstract shape that fit together. Each puzzle piece would include a particular detail about the student, so that in completing the puzzle and putting it together, the students would have another representation of themselves. Mrs. Soleil posed a challenge by asking the students if they considered themselves active listeners and if, throughout the unit, they had been paying attention to their peers and learned about them. She stated that the next activity was an opportunity to see just how well they did know one another.

To explain the procedures to complete the Me-Puzzle, Mrs. Soleil held up a blank puzzle page and explained each puzzle piece to the class, particularly for the emergent readers and writers.
For a few pieces, like “what you like best about school,” she also guided the class in discussing what possible responses they could write in.

See this funny middle piece here? It says, write two words that tell about you. Like if you’re someone who’s always walking around with a smile, you might say happy. If you’re someone who’s not always—maybe you’re someone who doesn’t like to raise their hand all the time and they’re just kind of quiet, you might write quiet or you might write shy. Or if you’re someone who loves to talk, you might write talkative (class cracks up and teacher giggles). Or if you’re someone who loves to tell jokes, you might write funny… Or you can put—just write two words, but you might write—if you like to draw, you might write illustrator, artist, something if, you know, something that describes how you are, okay? (10/8/02).
She explained that the students would have to be very private about their answers on the sheet because after everyone completed their personal puzzle, which they were not to put their names on, she would lead the class in guessing who the puzzle belonged to. A few students couldn’t contain themselves and were sharing their responses with their neighbors on the rug as the teacher described the categories. This handout was also published by the Education Center Inc. and puzzle pieces were labeled as follows,

- Color this puzzle piece your favorite color.
- Write or draw what you like best about school.
- Write the title of your favorite book.
- Write two words that tell about you.
- Draw and color your favorite food.
- Write two things that make you happy.
- Draw and color a picture of your family.

The students loved the mystery aspect; this was evidenced by the seriousness with which they undertook setting up their private desk walls made out of two pocket folders supported by pencil boxes and whatever they could get a hold of. The class went completely silent while they were completing their individual puzzles. While the students worked diligently, Mrs. Soleil and I had a moment aside where she whispered that another student had told her, “I don’t know what two words to write about myself” and that she responded to her, “think of what people say when they are asked about you.” The child responded, “They say I’m blond, have blue eyes and am quiet.” I also fell into this same counterproductive explanation when I interviewed this child, without realizing that in fact I was not encouraging the child to choose her own self-description but rather reiterate how others described her.

The culmination of this lesson and what insured privacy during self-reflection (writing and drawing of responses) was the anticipation for the mystery puzzle guessing
game. After reading a few pieces of a student’s puzzle out loud, Mrs. Soleil asked each
student who made a guess to share why they thought the puzzle represented a particular
person. This game caused so much excitement and all students participated. Here are
some of the reasons they gave for guessing and/or recognizing a particular student.

“she has blue eyes and she’s a little shy”
“she has a brother”
“baby brother”
“large family”
“a brother and sister”
“he said he liked a Pooh bear story yesterday”
“raw oysters are her favorite food”
“we know he has a large family”

There was not enough time to complete the game, so Mrs. Soleil announced that the
game would continue during morning meeting the next day.

The notions of identity this guided opportunity for self-reflection addressed
included personal preferences (color, school activity, book, and food), sources of
happiness, and self-description. Completing the puzzle pieces provided students with an
opportunity to not only consider what ideas/feelings/images they would ascribe to
themselves using these particular categories, but to also learn additional categories of self
description that can be used when presenting themselves to others. Students were able to
express their thoughts in writing and/or drawings which increased the level of access for
emergent readers and writers.

The representation of self, in this case through a puzzle, may provide for children
a metaphor for self-definition which includes multiple spheres of influence and sources
which all interconnected to form a whole. The fact that the teacher couched this lesson in
terms of a mystery lent itself to focusing student energy on discovering who each puzzle was describing, thus her approach built up a feeling of curiosity about one another.

The expressions of identity I focus upon in this analysis are when the child is asked to select two words to describe him/herself and the “two things that make you happy” responses. In their self-descriptions most students included considering their personality traits with “friendly” listed most often, followed by “funny” or “quiet,” and then “happy”. One student described herself as “talented” as well as happy. Behaviors listed for “write two words to describe yourself” included “active,” “artist,” “like to play hide and seek,” and my personal favorite, “eater” and “taster.” When I asked this child for an explanation of these terms, he responded, “because I like to eat and I like to taste” (Noah, 12:122). In addition a few students used phenotypes to describe themselves, for instance, “blue eyes,” “pretty,” “blonde,” and “tall”. These categories of self-description resemble those identified by Damon and Hart (1988) which they termed “physical self,” “active self,” and “social self.”

This lesson brought two issues to light for me. First that an assignment’s structure, in this case a handout, shapes possibilities for self-representation through language and symbolism and therefore thinking. The metaphor of a puzzle was interesting in that it implied a certain complexity and multidimensionality to a person’s identity and self-expression. Could the metaphor of a puzzle indicate the idea that the varied elements, represented by pieces such “two things that make you happy” as well as “my family” are to fit together to form your identity? At first glance, the areas within the puzzle seemed trivial ways to describe oneself, such as favorite color and favorite food. But when considering Gee’s (1990) work describing affinity identity as how common...
experiences and traits can define someone as part of a group and therefore a certain type of person (105), I have had to consider that sharing favorites is an important way of making friends and finding common ground with someone you may not know well. What other questions could we ask children to consider when describing themselves? Should Me Puzzle pieces be left blank so a child may choose other aspects of their identity to share?

The second issue that this lesson brought to my attention was that recognition is a key element of self-awareness. You are defined as far as someone recognizes you as a certain kind of person. Thus I wonder if when students are completing their me-puzzle they are thinking “will someone recognize me from this information?” I think that may be true for some and not for others since when the guessing game was going on some children celebrated being recognized, and others really wanted to stump their peers.

When reviewing the transcript I kept thinking of how much time was spent with students listening for the clues and then trying to guess, and the fact that the game had to be continued on the next day. I wonder what it would have been like if the posters had been put on the board and children had to write down their guesses (like in baby photo guessing contest) and write/draw what was the clue that they based their answers on. Then the owners of the Me Puzzles could go and stand by theirs. The advantages would be increased student participation as well as informing the puzzle owner about what characteristics his/her peers recognized in, or related to, them. One final note is that when students were questioned as to why they guessed a particular person for a puzzle, most responses included knowing about that student’s family. This may mean that family had been a topic of discussion in the previous month or last year’s unit, or maybe that the
students live in a small community where they know each other’s families well or that family compositions are so unique and diverse within this class that they are easily recognized as pertaining to a particular classmate.

The most common form of self-identification used by 75% of students was listing their “likes” or affinities. Half of the participants identified reading as an activity they liked to do. Three out of sixteen (19%) mentioned that they enjoyed writing. Athletics were mentioned as strong affinities for six out of sixteen students (38%), including football, soccer, snowboarding and gym. None of the children identified their gender, ethnicity, hair color, etc. when asked to describe themselves. This was probably due to the fact that we were sitting face to face. The fact that many unit assignments, such as the All About Me Books and the Me Puzzle, had students exploring their “Affinity-identity” may have also influenced their responses, in that they were representing themselves as having allegiances with peers or participating social groups that were desirable (Gee, 2001).

**Me-Bag share out**

Mrs. Soleil met with students in small groups to describe the next assignment. Students were asked to bring 5 items they felt represented them in a paper bag lunch sack to school. The teacher recalled that during the small group discussions during which she introduced the assignment, “they all said well … there’s just too many things… everything I have is way too big” (TI1, 6). Collectively they discussed that although a dog, for example, is too big to fit in a lunch sack, that something that represents the dog could be included like a toy or photo. When the time came, the students were excited to
share and Mrs. Soleil had them share their bags in small groups before choosing one “special treasure” to share with whole group.

The items students selected to show to the whole class can be grouped into toys, photos, and objects that represent hobbies and it was a challenge to restrict students to sharing only one treasure. Once the Me-Bags were open the children wanted to share all their items! Many stuffed toys were considered “special treasures” with the children explaining that they often either slept or played with them. One toy story stood out from the rest as the only example of a student celebrating her agency and power; a child explained why her plastic toy dog was special, “[I] bought it with my own money at the gift store and he doesn’t take up room.”

The photos that were shared included images of family, friends and pets. The photo that mesmerized the whole class belonged to a young girl who typically did not volunteer to speak in front of the whole class. She held up a photo of a hummingbird in a box and explained how she found it, “took pictures, and kept it in a box, like its nest, … [it was] just sitting there the whole night, on the edge of the cup, … mom took it to a rescue place” (10/10/02). Mrs. Soleil complimented her on her efforts to help the hummingbird and added, “That would be a great story to write down sometime, sounds really special to you.” This comment reflects the intersection between language arts goals and social studies goals in the unit.

After all of the students had an opportunity to share, the teacher tried to use the objects to help students find common ground. “Listen to some of these questions, if this is you, stand up,” Mrs. Soleil instructed. She asked the children to stand if they brought in a photograph of someone in their family or a pet and commented, “a lot of people [for]
their me-bag thought to tell about themselves they would bring a picture of people who are special or a pet whose special.” She asked students to stand if they brought “something in that tells about what your hobbies are, what you like to do,” “a special stuffed animal that you like to sleep with or play with,” or “something that you made.” When the students stood up they once again remained quiet and just looked around at one another. To conclude, Mrs. Soleil inquired, “did anybody learn something new about somebody?” Several children responded, “[he] likes Disney,” “he can build really good,” and “Abigail helped a hummingbird.”

Previously I discussed how curricular language and activities may guide students’ self-descriptions and notions of identity. In this case, the students were asked to choose how they would represent themselves to their peers. The only limitations were that there could only be five items and they had to fit in a lunch sack. The items students brought in represented groups that they belong to, loved ones, and favorite pastimes. The notion of uniqueness was raised by the teacher when she met with small groups to introduce the assignment. She explained that the students, “talked about significant, what’s the definition of something like special to you, what makes, when somebody opens, y’know takes out these 5 things, [how are] they gonna know it’s (child’s name) and they’re not going to think [it’s someone else]” (TI1, 6). The fact that students could bring in a variety of objects provided an opportunity for multiple representations of self. The photos provided an interesting benefit in that most students expressed concern during interviews over the realism they could achieve through their drawings. Pictures were considered an accurate representation and therefore served as springboards for the students to freely explain the story behind the image in their hand. The objects, mainly
stuffed toys, also served a similar function. It is my belief that because the students had an object to hold, they could focus on and recall relevant facts during their telling of the story and also may have felt more comfortable sharing in front of the whole group. Both the classroom teacher and I commented on this observation during an interview; Mrs. Soleil shared “(referring to the child that told the story about the hummingbird) I never dreamed she would have expressed [herself so well]” since she was typically so “quiet… in front of the whole group.” It is important to note that the students were also given an opportunity to share all of their Me-Bag items in front of a small group where there was also more time for questions and answers. The teacher considered this activity to be an extension to the me-books where the students fill in or complete the boxes to categories that are predetermined; this activity was open ended in that students chose individually how they wanted to represent themselves and therefore expressed their values, or things they found to be significant.

**Individual within a Community**

*The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain

On the rug, the discussion began with Mrs. Soleil asking who remembered what was addressed at the last primary level gathering. “What are those things called? Like happy, sad, angry?” Students responded that the topic was feelings. Mrs. Soleil announced that she had dug through her son’s special box to find one of his favorite books, *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain, for the day’s read-aloud. Showing the cover, she asked students to guess what the child was feeling. “Silly,” a student guessed correctly. Mrs. Soleil shared that one of her favorite games with her son was where they made silly
faces to see who could make the other laugh first. Some students shared that they enjoyed that game as well. She introduced the lesson by questioning whether any student thought they could tell how someone felt simply by their facial expressions, “Would you say that probably you don’t have to hear what someone feels to see how someone feels?” and almost all raise their hand. To make her point, Mrs. Soleil asked students what they thought she was feeling as she walked around the class in an angry fashion (pretending, of course) to see if the students could “read” her expression.

Mrs. Soleil also had students consider how someone could use facial expressions to set a mood or tone for those around them as well. Mrs. Soleil asked, “What do we know about smiles?” One student responded “they always make people happy and that means you’re happy.” At this point, the teacher encouraged the students to try and smile at one another and see how “smiles are contagious.” She commended those that demonstrated the power to make another child smile and even giggle.

The story *The Way I Feel* had both a main character that expresses her feelings in a very candid way and amazingly vivid illustrations. An example of the text follows,

```
Angry is how I feel right now,
I shout with a mighty roar.
I mostly want to frown and growl
And stomp upon the floor.

If someone says hello to me,
I suddenly feel so shy.
Instead of saying “Hi” to them,
I hide my face and walk on by.
```

Before reading a page, Mrs. Soleil showed the illustration and asked if anyone could figure out the emotion by the expression on the child’s face. After she read a page Mrs. Soleil asked students to “put on” facial expressions for the feeling she read and turn to
show one another. While reading the various emotions such as jealousy and frustration, she questioned the group regarding whether it was ok or not to feel a particular way. For certain emotions, she used the opportunity to discuss ways one can deal with their feelings as well.

She read, “I’m frustrated because I can’t do it. It’s hard and I wanna cry. I don’t know whether to give it up or to give it another try.”
Then asked, “What should you always do though?”
Students’ choral response was, “give it another try.”
She added, “Sometimes though if you’ve tired and tried and tried is it ok to take a break from it? Can you do something else and then go back to it? Is it also ok to ask for help if you get frustrated?”
Students respond, “Yeah” (10/15/02, 128).

Throughout the story the children raised their hands to share anecdotes that explained their own reasons for feeling a particular emotion, making text to self connections.

“Boys and girls, can you tell me of a time when you were really disappointed?”
Students shared, “[I was] supposed to go somewhere and then … couldn’t,” another added, “’cause there was a funeral, that’s what happened to me,” and “I wanted to go bowling but dad said we were going miniature golfing instead”

For feeling shy Grace shared, “whenever I go to soccer and I’m late I am afraid to go to the soccer field by myself, but I’ve been playing soccer for two years now”

For excited, one student shared, “when my dad got me my dog”

For proud, another shared, “when I got the training wheels off my bike”

This pattern of engagement with the text and then their peers allowed for a high level of student engagement; all students made their facial expressions in an animated fashion and raised their hands to share their life stories. To segue into the next portion of the lesson, Mrs. Soleil made another important point, “Let me read you this last page about feelings, ‘feelings come and feelings go, I never know what they’ll be, silly or angry, happy or sad,
they’re all a part of me’ and that’s true, you could go through one day and feel ten
different things.”

The next portion of the lesson included presentations by small groups of mini-
posters about particular feelings, such as happy, sad, mad, etc., that were created
previously. On a letter size sheet of manila paper students had written a sentence about
why caused the feeling and then draw a picture to illustrate the circumstances. Students’
individual mini-posters were all glued on to large pieces of butcher paper by the
paraprofessional who, inspired by the read-aloud text, had created titles with fonts that
resembled the feelings expressed (i.e., shaky letters for feeling afraid). After a group of
students presented their poster about feeling angry, Mrs. Soleil made a connection
between the lesson and some recurring teasing issues on the playground; she commented,
“Oh boy! We’re realizing that words can hurt feelings can’t they?” capitalizing on a
genuine moment for students to reflect on an issue that had been surfacing recently in the
class community and that many could relate to. Examples of the feelings students shared
on their posters included:

I feel angry when:
   no one plays fair
   my friends call me names
   my brother takes my things
   my neighbor calls me names
   my sister calls me names

I feel sad when:
   my brother broke my snow globe
   I get hurt
   my friend doesn’t give me back my things and she promised
I feel afraid when:
   I am lost in the grocery store
   I see a shark
   I’m all alone
   I’m lost

I feel happy when:
   my friends play with me
   I play my favorite game
   I play with my dog

The outcome that formed the foundation for this lesson was, “Identify[ing] the four basic
human emotions – happy, sad, mad, and scared – and recogniz[ing] what can elicit these
feelings” (MSD, 2000, 4.174). Discussing emotions, their triggers and how to name
particular feelings are valuable intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and allow students
to express their feelings and learn how to listen to others’ feelings. Mrs. Soleil chose to
enhance the discussion by choosing a read-aloud outside of the unit that included more
complex emotions as well. This lesson allowed students to listen to interpretations of
emotions the main character felt during the read-aloud, as well as listen to their peers’
emotional triggers when they shared anecdotes in response to the story. All students
were involved in creating and discussing examples of what triggered particular emotions
in their lives for their mini-posters (MSD, 2000, 4.175), which enabled self-reflection as
well as realizing the common ground they shared regarding feelings.

The class had previously expressed great interest and appreciation regarding
discussing their feelings in response to the “I am __” books about feelings. Mrs. Soleil
explained,

these books they love, I’m Feeling Angry [for example], they love them because
it’s about a little boy or a little girl. The biggest thing I like about those books is
that it validates their feelings. It’s ok to be angry, some of these kids think they
are not allowed to feel (interrupted) I mean, I think some of the kids are surprised
when I read parts of some of these stories, it’s ok to be angry, and they’re like, ‘it
is?’ ‘cause they’re confusing that with, ‘no, it’s not ok to throw a toy through the
TV or against a wall, [they’re not separating] the feeling and the behavior” (TI2,
11).

In this lesson, Mrs. Soleil continued to address the varied emotions each person can have
and linked this idea with current community issues such as teasing, pointing out “the
negative effect name calling can have” (MSD, 2000, 4.176). It did seem that name
calling was an issue and it also seemed an interesting way for students to “see,” privately
and publicly, that their peers have similar emotional experiences, such as “I’m afraid
when I am alone.”

Although many students shared anecdotes and comments during both the read-
aloud and poster presentation, it was important to Mrs. Soleil to “[help] students identify
and record events that caused them to feel happy, sad, mad, and scared” as well as proud,
excited and frustrated. She chose to have students reflect privately on these emotions
during the next day’s journal time. One student was so inspired by the opportunity to
share her emotions that she continued on her own to add her trigger for a feeling that had
not been discussed previously, “I feel lonely when no one pays attention.” Another
young girl took her journal entry a step further as well; instead of simply completing the
statement “I feel __ when __”, she added “because __” to further explicate her emotions
and even combined emotions that are related. Here are a few examples from her entry, “I
feel frustrated when I try and try but I don’t do it because it wastes my time” and “I feel
sad when my dog runs away because I get scared ‘cause I think she might get runned
over.” It seems that the students’ naming of their emotions and triggers were broadened
by the read-aloud and discussion from the day before and this opportunity in their journal for self reflection.

**I-messages**

The next assignment was designed to guide students “to independently solve problems… and communicate how [they] feel in a respectful, positive way” (MSD, 2000, 4.211 and 4.215) by having students complete two structured cloze sentences, “I feel __ when __ because __. I need ___ to stop.” The class had discussed a few examples of feelings to share prior to students’ independent work time during literacy centers. One child explained when to use an I-message as follows:

“like if someone’s teasing you or yelling at you or something” Then I asked, “do you, do you ever give someone an I message, … do you ever use it?” “no, … I just had to make one up” (Avery, 12:156-168).

The I-messages students wrote in their journals demonstrated strong emotions and rationales for wanting to be treated in a fair and just manner. The emotions that many students seven out of sixteen (44%) discussed included mad, sad and happy, while a few others included feelings such as excited, frustrated, afraid, scared, and angry. Following are several examples,

“I feel mad when people yell at me because it hurts my feelings. I need the yelling to stop.”

“I feel sad when my sisters bother me because I can’t do what I want to do. I need them to stop.”

“I feel happy when somebody helps me up because I am hurt. I (she had crossed out “need”) like having friends.”

“I feel sad when my friends call me names because I do not like it. I need the name calling to stop.”
“I feel frustrated when people argue because we can’t go on with the game. I need the arguing to stop !!!!!!! [punctuation in original]”

“I feel happy when I read because reading is fun. I want to read everyday.”

“I feel sad when people tease me because it hurts my feelings. I need the teasing to stop (below the sentences the child had drawn an illustration that showed one person, smiling, calling another, who was frowning, a ‘weirdo’).”

The curriculum supposes that “an I message can open the doors to successful problem solving” (MSD, 2000, 4.215). Yet, most children claimed never to have used I-messages, or if they had used an I-message they explained that it was not as effective as touted.

“mmm sometimes I use it to my brother when he’s fighting with me or something … and taking my things … (in a very assertive voice, sounding like a commercial voiceover) hey, I feel sad when you take my stuff, because I want my stuff, I need you to give me back my stuff”
I asked, “Do you really say it to him like that? … and what does he say?”
“[child nods] he says NO and he runs away holding my things … then I go screaming and running after him … finally I ask my mom, and then I have to catch him and bring him to my mom” (Hannah, I2, 104-136).

“I use them when my brothers tease me”
I asked, “oh when they tease you and does it work?”
“yeah, (giggles) just for the rest of the day though” (Alexis, I2, 87-91).

There are several circumstances that may explain why students had not “seen” the effectiveness of the I-message. First, many children saw the I-message as a statement to be made to the large group, “[the teacher] lets you sit, stand in front of the class and say your I-message” (Hannah, I2:100). Also, the wording of the I-message was a language pattern that the students had difficulty remembering, even though the teacher did put up a poster that had a blank I-message to help students remember the phrasing. The final and ultimate reason I believe the students did not use the I-message strategy is that they did not hear it used by the adults in their lives, and also because as one student expressed, “[it might work]… but you really have to listen to ‘em” (Connor, I2: 244). In essence, both
people involved in the disagreement needed to understand and respect the purpose of an I-message.

Mrs. Soleil explained that the class revisited I-messages several times, even though the curriculum only suggested one lesson on this approach (TI2, 4). She also felt that one of the reasons the students did not use the I-message may have been because it was adult language, “and even adults don’t use that [phrasing] in their language … maybe I need to be using more I-messages” (TI2, 1; 4). One aspect she felt was a benefit of the I-message, and the reason she would teach this strategy again, was that she felt it allowed the person who was being victimized to have a cool down period and search for words to explain how they felt versus using their hands or body in a hurtful manner (TI2, 5). The curriculum suggested that completing the cloze sentences, “provides opportunities for students to practice the ‘I-message’ outside of the problem” (MSD, 2000, 4.211) and this is probably true but it does not address the lack of applicability in real life.

*Oliver Button is a Sissy* by Tomie DePaola

In the curriculum document this text was described as part of a lesson facilitating “taking pride in what we do” but the classroom teacher also attempted to use this text as a springboard for contemplation of gender stereotyping and teasing. To forge a connection between the read-aloud topic and previous lessons, Mrs. Soleil asked about the lessons about teasing the guidance counselor had been leading with the class, “Why do you think you shouldn’t tease?” A child responded, “you’re hurting someone’s feelings, you’re not just hurting someone else, you’re hurting yourself” while another added, “if you’re nice
to them they’ll be nice back.” The teacher also reminded students of the school’s three rules about respect and responsibility, emphasizing respect and eliciting a choral recitation of the adage, “treat others the way you want to be treated.” She explained the relevance of the text content to their personal lives in the following manner.

I noticed when we did I messages last week, that a lot of people did a lot of I messages about being sad, or angry or upset about being teased about their name, or about how they dress or their work or about something they do, so that’s why I’ve been focusing a lot on the teasing because sometimes you might not just be making up some crazy name for someone, but sometimes you don’t even realize that you are teasing, ‘cause I was surprised to find out that there was some teasing going on in here, on the playground and things, because I know we’ve talked about respect and treating others the right way so I was little surprised to find out, that’s why I thought we needed to review teasing, so I’m going to read you a really neat story (10/22/02).

As an introduction to the read-aloud the class discussed other books they knew that addressed teasing, such as *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes where the young mouse is teased about her name and *Hooway for Wodney Wat* by Helen Lester where the young rat is teased because of a speech impediment and shyness. Before opening the book, as Mrs. Soleil continued to describe the main idea behind *Oliver Button is a Sissy*, she encountered a challenge in trying to explain gender stereotyping and gender biased language when she started to use the word “normally” (see quote below). She began by inquiring whether someone knew what the term “sissy” meant. After a student responded, Mrs. Soleil tried to clarify the context for the use of “sissy” in this book, someone might be called a sissy if they are scared or something, sort of like another way of saying you’re like a scaredy cat, umm, you’re going to find out in this story that there’s some people that call this boy a sissy because he likes to do something that normally, normally (higher pitch), usually, you see girls doing, he is like a dancer and people tease him because he does something, does that mean boys can’t dance?
Choral answer “no”

No and some boys, just like you can’t say, ‘girls shouldn’t play football cause that’s a boy’s sport’ or y’know ‘boys shouldn’t dance cause that’s a girls sport’ Really should anybody be able to do anything they want? Whatever they’re good at? Maybe there’s a boy, see you’re going to find out that Oliver wasn’t interested in sports, so he wanted to try something different, so that’s why it’s called this (10/22/02).

In order to demonstrate he understood the concept, Avery, a boy that was very knowledgeable about sports shared, “I have an example of ‘girls can’t try out for football’ yes they can, because a girl kicker just tried out for the Bucs.” Other students still had some misconceptions, “Just like basketball there’s a ladies team and a men’s team” which sounded similar to the separate but equal mentality, and not necessarily what this story was trying to get at. Mrs. Soleil attempted to clarify by having students recall how there were boys and girls on many of the current youth sports teams the students were a part of.

Mrs. Soleil began reading the story which was summarized by a Merrymount District curriculum specialist in the following manner.

Oliver is different. He doesn’t enjoy playing ball, but instead likes to read, draw, [and] walk in the woods. Of course the other boys tease him unmercifully, especially after he begins [taking] dance lessons. The point about cruelty toward those who don’t conform is not belabored but it can’t be missed” (MSD, 2000, 4.131).

The first people to tease Oliver are grown men, his father and his coach, followed by the older boys at school. Girls try to help Oliver which only causes him more strife.

Throughout the story the students were very quiet, serious and toward the end a bit anxious as the teacher turned each page to see how Oliver would fare; several children were leaning forward, straining to look at the illustrations, and one particular student
moved from the back of the rug to the front row. The story ends well with both Oliver’s family and his school friends displaying their admiration for his talents.

The lesson continued with Mrs. Soleil asking for volunteers to practice some role-playing of I-messages. The first role plays ensued rather awkwardly, because students had to participate in “pretend teasing.” Unsure of what to say, students needed Mrs. Soleil to whisper ideas in their ears; this “perspective-taking” proved to be more difficult than it sounded at first (Harter, 1999a). Many times role-play is an effective strategy to facilitate students’ acquisition of language to express feelings and respond to others, yet in this case that required students to tease one another as part of the strategy, the stakes were too high and the children who volunteered became nervous. Once the students became familiar with what their teacher wanted them to try and do, all hands raised to volunteer and the role plays continued in a smooth fashion, with an opportunity arising for the teacher to ask students who “resolved” their issue to shake hands. The teacher asked the class if anyone had used an I-message on their own, with the only positive response coming from a non participant in this study who had shared his I-message in front of the whole class.

At this point in the lesson the teacher chose to change gears and “instead of focusing on teasing … [we’ll] do this really neat compliment [game].” She put a plastic wide mouth jar in front of her and explained that in the future this jar would be available for anyone to write a compliment for a classmate on a piece of paper and put it in the jar. Compliments would be read out loud once a week and then would be distributed to their recipients to keep! Only one student seemed excited about this prospect. Mrs. Soleil continued by saying that for this game the jar would serve another purpose, which was to
hold little cards that said either “me” or “you” so that we could all practice giving and receiving compliments. When explaining the “me” card and giving oneself a compliment, Mrs. Soleil asked the class, “If you don’t like yourself can you be able to like, are you able to like anybody else? (choral response “No”)” She also reminded the class of one of their favorite stories, and a touchstone text for many class activities, “remember we read the funny story about the pig? And she just loved herself, but wasn’t she always happy? She would look in the mirror and say, ‘Good Morning beautiful!’” (laughs)

The game began with a child who selected a “you” card. The child remarked, “(classmate), I like your shirt.” The teacher reacted, let’s review, we can give a compliment about what someone is wearing, about something that somebody does well, right? About the way you are, like “I love the way you are always smiling or I love the way you always listen to the teacher …It doesn’t always have to be something that somebody has or is wearing… it could be about how they look, something they do well, or how they behave or something like that … and you can pass … (10/22/02).

The next child selected a card that said “me” which he was unsure of how to respond to; Mrs. Soleil coached him by suggesting that he think of something he was good at. The child complimented his running ability. The next child selected a card and looked at a classmate across the circle and said “Hayden, I like the way you can get so many wows on your journal.” The next boy, one who typically automatically said “pass” in these types of share-out situations, chose a card and Mrs. Soleil immediately expressed how glad she was that he was going to participate. He complimented another boy on his haircut. His classmate thanked him and Mrs. Soleil added, “People who are getting compliments are saying thank you and that is part of the process.” The next six students
compliment one another on socks, hair, eye color, shirt, etc. Then it is my turn and I pick “me,” and I must say that it was a challenge to think of a compliment, which Mrs. Soleil supported by saying sometimes “it’s hard to do that.” The teacher also interjected at this point that whoever had the jar should consider complimenting someone who had not already received a compliment. After a few more compliments for outfits and shirts, a young girl complimented herself on her reading and writing abilities. Mrs. Soleil was the last to choose from the jar and she complimented Ethan by saying “I think you are a really good classroom citizen and you are a nice friend to others.” She led the class in clapping for themselves and asked the students to bring out their songbooks. The first song was hard to follow because it was a rap. This time the boys are really into it – making moves similar to the wave at a football game, while others, including girls, are pretending to play instruments. The next song was The World is a Rainbow which had movements that went along with it. All the children could be involved and remember the lyrics to participate. A few boys put their arms around one another and rocked side to side; then some girls followed their lead. An excerpt of the chorus that shows the link to the lesson:

The world is a rainbow
with many kinds of people
It takes all kinds of people
to make the world go ‘round

For the next song, Like me and you, Mrs. Soleil explained, “it’s talking about different kids, in different countries, are really just like us.” The chorus:

and each one is much like another
a child of a mother and a father
a very special son or daughter
a lot like me and you
The fourth song was sung slowly enough for children to read and sing along and although Mrs. Soleil claimed it was a “perfect song for today,” it was sung in somber fashion, like a church hymn, which contradicted its upbeat message. During the last song, *Everybody has a Happy Place*, the children were active, “playing” their imaginary instruments.  

This class session had begun with a brief class meeting about teasing since there had been several instances on the playground involving children in the class teasing this student. The teacher asked the student to come to the front and give an I-message to the entire class. It seemed like the child was comfortable doing so, but reflecting upon the comments students shared in the section above I could see why this did not seem like an appealing problem solving approach. Some students may have seen this as a high pressure situation in which to share hurt feelings and hope for a positive response.  

It interested me very much that Mrs. Soleil was so transparent in her explanation of why she chose to share *Oliver Button is a Sissy* with the class. She expressed that she was surprised that members of the classroom community had teased one another on the playground, connecting the lesson to concrete experiences such as playground incidents. My interpretation of the underlying message behind her commentary was “I expect more from all of you.”  

According to the curriculum document, “The intent of this [read-aloud] is to help students realize that gender should not limit a person’s choices” (MSD, 2000, 4.131). Mrs. Soleil attempted to raise this issue at the beginning of the lesson but struggled with the term “normally” as she tried to discuss gender stereotyping in child friendly language. An introduction of this nature, that centers on gender stereotyping, requires a careful
consideration of language and potential examples to bridge student understandings without reinforcing stereotypes inadvertently.

It is possible that if she would have started with a Venn Diagram, such as the one she used when discussing differences and similarities between children and adults and what they could do, but instead labeling it boys and girls, it may have jump started a debate among students about girl and boy expectations. Of course this is a suggestion that arose in hindsight and not a criticism of her approach.

With regard to the teasing role play, it may have been more effective and less awkward if students would have been given an opportunity to either revisit their I-statements or Feelings journal entries which they then could have acted out and practiced different ways of resolving a problem using I-messages. In addition, in light of the commentary students shared about the perceived lack of effectiveness of I-messages, some role plays could have included the giver of the I-message being ignored by the recipient, or the recipient practicing ways to respond to an I-message in a positive and polite manner. For example, “I hear what you are saying. I did not realize that you felt that way. From now on I will not treat you that way” versus no response at all.

When it came to the compliment game, it proved difficult for students overall to spontaneously give compliments of real depth, regarding the person’s actual personality or character traits versus just something they were wearing or had, although the teacher did make many efforts to steer the class away from those types of compliments. In our discussions, Mrs. Soleil shared that she “loved the compliment game,” (TI2, 39) and that she felt the biggest success was that the students concerned themselves with making sure everyone got a compliment, remembering that one student even asked, “who hasn’t been
complimented?” and selected a girl who didn’t have many friends to compliment her shirt (10/22/02).

_**I Forgot by Mercer Mayer**_

Mrs. Soleil began this lesson by guiding students in brainstorming their ideas about “responsibility or being responsible.” She informed the class that the word “responsibility” was a word they would hear many times throughout their lifetime, in many contexts, such as school, home, and their future jobs. She mentioned that being responsible was so important that it was even one of the school’s three rules. Students’ ideas about responsibility were represented by a word web on the board and Mrs. Soleil explained that it was her desire to elicit responses from every student. Students’ conceptions of responsibility included:

- It means like, you have to start taking care of stuff
- Like letting your dog out
- Take care of the dog, like let her out and pick up trash
- Homework

When Ethan suggested, “Don’t litter, pick up trash,” Mrs. Soleil asked if he meant to take care of the earth, as opposed to another student’s example of picking up trash. The student nodded.

- Do your chores
- Do your job, like make your bed,
- Be a good student
- Do your committee jobs (It is interesting to note here that all students are on committees in the classroom, such as Discovery committee, Math committee, etc.)
- Follow the rules
- Brushing your teeth

Mrs. Soleil stopped the discussion and then asked for clarification about what students meant by “taking care of stuff.” A student volunteered that it meant, “being in charge of”
and Mrs. Soleil responded, “In charge of, that’s what I was looking for, in charge of, responsible, that is like a synonym, it’s stuff that you need to, and who are you in charge of in this class?” Students responded in chorus, “Yourself!” She inquired further, “Are you charge of anyone else in this class? Am I even in charge of all of you?” The discussion that ensued included the teacher demonstrating that she could not possibly work with each child, holding his/her pencil, for each task and that that would not be helpful to a child either. She reiterated that each student in the class was on a committee, and that they were responsible for their committee work as well as their own personal work and learning, giving the example of how each student was responsible for writing in their journal during independent literacy time.

At this point, Mrs. Soleil explained that each child would have an opportunity to share family chores, as well as two of their own, in small groups and then later in the circle they would have a chance to share one chore with the whole group. She then posed, “Who can answer this really challenging question? Before I read this story, … why do you think it is important to have responsibilities at home and at school?” A student responded, “so you can be a happy person” and Mrs. Soleil rephrased his response to include that one could feel happy and most importantly proud when they could do things on their own. She named this notion of being able to do things on one’s own as independence. (At this point in time the first snow of the season was falling outside and the class’ energy and focus was difficult to contain.) Students added that responsibilities help them to know what to do when they grow up. Mrs. Soleil asked students to consider if it was fair to have their parents do all the work in the house, or if was fair for her to stay after school for hours doing things that students could have helped
her do. The class agreed that that would not be fair. Then she pointed out that some of the students may be doing more work than their younger siblings already.

To introduce the read-aloud, *I Forgot* by Mercer Mayer, Mrs. Soleil explained that she felt that this author wrote books “to teach kids lessons about life, like having a brother or sister, or having a special time with mom or dad, or what it’s like to have responsibilities and sometimes forget” (10/29/02). The read-aloud is a story about Little Critter and how he is able to remember to do some things, like put the cereal away but then forgets to close the refrigerator door after taking out the milk. When the story turns to Little Critter’s responsibilities for taking a bath, Mrs. Soleil laughed out loud and shared, “that’s what [my son] tries to do with me, he’s in his bath on his own now, and I’ll go in there, and say he’s been playing in there, and I’ll say, [son] did you even use soap? And he’ll say, Nope!” The class burst out in laughter at this personal story. She added, “But he’s learning so I have to teach him!”

Returning to the text, where Little Critter said he forgot to use soap and the class was laughing, she took the opportunity to ask students if they ever said they forgot a responsibility when they actually really didn’t want to do it in the first place. Almost all the students raised their hands. At the completion of the read-aloud, Mrs. Soleil dismissed the students by committee membership to share in small groups. Unfortunately the small group I was assigned to only had one participant and three non participants in my study so I did not take notes on our discussion. Our small group discussion focused mainly on trying to sneak a peak at the larger and larger snowflakes that were falling while briefly discussing the chores that mom and dad had to do versus their own.
To maintain individual student focus and engagement as students shared their chores around the circle, Mrs. Soleil asked students to put a thumb up if they heard a chore that they also had to do in their home. Students’ chores varied from pet care, to setting the table, to making the bed, to a family who rotated chores because they had so many members in the house. The most interesting comment was when one child shared that each family member had the responsibility of “making our family a family;” when pressed for clarification, she explained that each family member was responsible for using kind words toward each other, helping each other, etc. Mrs. Soleil concluded by asking,

Does everybody see why it is important for you to have jobs at home and at school? Because if you didn’t have any jobs when you are in school and at home, you would have a hard time when you get older…cause as you keep getting older you keep getting more and more, it’s like going up a staircase of responsibility, right Genevieve, share some things that you have in college, that you have to do (10/29/02).

I shared that I had to learn to do many things when I moved out on my own and that every day I realized more and more that I had not always been so helpful around the house and had actually called my parents to apologize. Mrs. Soleil asked students to think about all the things that moms and dads do for them, and that it would be nice if they gave their parents a compliment once in a while. She mentioned that someday they would be parents and would take care of their children too; the class thought that was hilarious and made all kinds of silly faces, and then they were dismissed.

It was interesting to find that this read-aloud was in the section of the curriculum that focused on students understanding multiple aspects of the learning process, particularly, that learning from mistakes is inherent to the learning process. Mrs. Soleil
felt that this story lent itself better to a discussion of personal responsibility as well as responsibility to a family or a class. It turned out that in the previous weeks, students had been blaming their parents for forgetting their backpack, snack, homework etc. and that was why Mrs. Soleil chose to frame this lesson in the way she did (TI2, 54). This is another example of how the classroom teachers’ flexibility in curricular decision making facilitates instruction relevant to students’ lived experiences. The curriculum’s outcomes regarding responsibility included discussing what it means to be responsible, identify what it means to be responsible for yourself, and brainstorming ways to be responsible at school and at home (MSD, 2000, 4.15).

This lesson addressed personal responsibility, or responsibility for oneself, in varied arenas such as home and school. Being in charge of oneself was defined through discussion as including health, learning, and family membership. Mrs. Soleil also emphasized how the children’s increasing responsibilities as they aged were part of a trajectory of independence that moved them toward complete autonomy and responsibility for others in adulthood. The students were guided to consider that their chores now were practice for their future roles as grownups.

Responsibility or the lack thereof was represented through the main character of the story, a lovable creature that many students could relate to since he was faced with many tasks to remember to do. The students had an opportunity to share responsibilities that they already took care of through the homework assignment about chores at home, and were able to compare their responsibilities to their classmates’ by participating in both the small and large group share outs. It is interesting to note that previously students
were excited about the responsibilities that motherhood or driving brings, but in this lesson, they definitely displayed an aversion to adult chores.

As a reflection of the influence of community membership on individual identity, some children when describing themselves chose to use phrases that were ascribed to them as members of the classroom community and by the teacher as a figure of authority. Only two female first graders used phrases that implied personality descriptors such as “very quiet… quiet person… good listener… good worker” (Riley 11: sixteen, 35; I2: 348). and “I have lots of friends” (Abigail 11: 9). The question that comes to my mind is whether the child who described herself as a quiet person, etc. was simply repeating how she has been described by the teacher; the terms she uses, “good listener… good worker” sound like teacher talk (Pagano, 1978, 90). When questioned about these comments further, Riley responded, “ummm, I just like, like shut my mouth a lot… ‘cause like, well I don’t know, ‘cause like everybody is talking… and it needs to be quiet” (I2: 284-289). Later on when she shared that she had received 11WOW comments from the teacher in her writing journal she explained, “I just write very well ‘cause I like follow all the directions” (Riley I2: 346-348). The oldest boy in the class also expressed skill in an area identified by the classroom teacher, “I have really neat handwriting, that’s what [Mrs. Soleil] says” (53-54).
Chapter 5
Implications

In the first section of this chapter I propose a curricular model of identity education based on the intersection between the findings of this study, the processes of identity development that appeared to be lacking, and theories of identity development. In the second section I make a case for the inclusion of identity education in elementary curricula by exploring aspects of the I Am Special curriculum that support student achievement. The third and fourth sections of the chapter address implications for curriculum development and professional development respectively. The fifth section provides a description of the limitations of this inquiry. A discussion of directions for further research is included in the final section.

This study provides an empirical basis for fuller models of identity development curricula. The aims of this study were to explore potential avenues for addressing, representing and eliciting young children’s notions of identity. Both teachers and curriculum developers can use this case study narrative as a reference point to reflect upon classroom vignettes as well as young students’ language choices regarding issues of identity. Educators need to expand their conceptions of what young children can handle discussing, as exemplified by work such as that of Bickmore and her colleagues (1999) who expanded conceptions of elementary students’ capacity to comprehend and discuss global politics (a discussion of this study can be found in Chapter 2). It is with classroom-based examples that teachers can make connections to their own classrooms as well as see intersections and possibilities for modifying and expanding their curriculum and praxis. In my vision of education, the purpose of schooling is to foster self-
actualization, the achievement of one’s potential; helping an individual come to understand and accept herself as well as learn of different ways to care for the self are foundational skills for self-actualization (Maslow, 1968).

My definition of identity includes how an individual sees himself as well as the processes he undergoes to define himself and represent himself to others within varied contexts. Curriculum focused on identity development can illuminate the complexity of identity constructs such as valence and domain-specific identities (Harter, 1999), provide practice in employing agency in identity development as one searches for idealized “fits,” and engage students in exploring the balancing of social and individual life experiences. Identity development is not typically considered the responsibility of the school or curriculum for that matter, it is ultimately an individual endeavor that occurs within multiple social settings. Yet, as an institution that imposes authority over the individual for 12 or more years of his life, school experiences have a significant influence on an individual’s identity development (Akerlof and Kranton, 2002). Notions of identity develop on their own, without a curriculum, yet there is a need for a deliberate curriculum so that students can seriously consider the social processes that shape identity development and therefore identify, assess, question, co-opt, modify, and enhance them.

The identity dimensions addressed in elementary curricula and elementary textbooks are superficial. For the most part, curricula such as the one examined in this study and book sections focus on physical characteristics and competencies, simplistic preferences and emotions, or present the child with adult-defined models for an idealized self. With the intent of boosting a child’s self-esteem (Bronson, 2007) and creating cohesiveness via illuminating similarities among classmates, curricula designers have
ignored the ongoing processes of identity development, the intangible qualities of personhood, as well as the dualisms, tensions, valence, interdependence on interactions with others, and domain/context specificity of self-perceptions. Wouldn’t conversations started in schools make for juicy dinner conversations with family members? Then maybe children could learn about their relatives’ experiences and how those shaped them, and begin to consider how their own experiences will shape their emerging identities. What are the dangers to these conversations occurring in the educational setting? Could students become more vulnerable to the critique of peers if they expose their inner thoughts and feelings? In what ways can teachers create both public and private spaces for identity exploration to protect students’ confidentiality? Children would be better served by curricula that expands their concepts of identity to include the above mentioned dimensions in order to explore and understand the factors at play when searching for ways to define and/or represent the self and to understand how self-concept influences how each of us thinks and behaves.

The categorical definitions of self, explored in the traditional Expanding Horizons model, were substantiated by antiquated perceptions of children’s developmental capacities. Based on limited interpretations of Piaget, Freud and Erikson’s theories of developmental psychology, curricula for youngsters during the period of middle childhood (ages 7-11) were designed on the premise that children at this age are in a period of latency, where their focus lies on developing concrete knowledge and skills that reflect cultural values, and their “emotional drives are quieter” (Berger, 1998, 353). Within socialization processes that occur in school, values such as individuality and competition are elevated and their manifestations praised and rewarded. What does this
mean for a child who does not place 1st, 2nd or 3rd in any competition? It is a common belief that children need to feel good about themselves in order to be successful at learning, that a children’s levels of self-esteem impact how they participate in the learning process. Based on this concept many elementary curricula have outcomes designed to boost self-esteem, but do we do so to the point of entitlement? (Bronson, 2007). I propose that we continue to teach students about competition, individuality and encourage positive self-esteem, but that we also balance this instruction with concepts and skills such as learning to live within a group, understanding how the people one is around influences how one thinks, acts and sees oneself, as well as an individual’s power in defining oneself.

Several professional education organizations have published documents and guidelines indicating the importance of acknowledging the whole child in both curriculum and instruction. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards’ policy statement entitled “What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do” includes indicators such as those listed below under their first core proposition: Teachers are committed to students and learning,

- “They recognize the individual differences that distinguish their students from one another and they take account for these differences in their practice.
- They respect the cultural and family differences students bring to their classroom.
- They are concerned with their students’ self-concept, their motivation and the effects of learning on peer relationships” (NBPTS, 1989, 8).

The statements above highlight the fact that the consideration and treatment of the individuals that exist in our classrooms cannot be relegated to the hidden curriculum but rather must come to the forefront and serve as a framework for curriculum that is
meaningful to children. Educational psychology theorists describe how motivation and effort levels are linked to a child’s desire to learn as well as sense of efficacy, or sense of being able to complete or produce a desired result or effect. I believe that efficacy is directly related to self-concept and competence. Socio-cultural theorists consider the level of student participation as directly affected by self-concept and sense of efficacy. A student’s availability for learning influences their level of participation. When considering that in middle childhood a youngster is becoming increasingly aware of her peers and comparing herself to them, it is understandable that selective attention, or her ability to concentrate, will be a challenge when it comes to learning since social status concerns are rising in priority. This emerging priority points to another clear connection between a child’s notions of identity and learning. If a child is worried or anxious about how his classmates will react to the answer he gives to a teacher question, then that child will not take the risk of raising his hand to give an answer or to ask a question or to advocate for himself. This limitation of participation directly limits access to learning (Zins et al, 2004).

Schools are powerful institutions and teachers are significant adults in children’s lives and, therefore, alongside family members, can potentially have a great influence on a child’s identity development (Goleman, 2006, 279). Therefore, the notions of identity that a district, school, and teachers emphasize form clear indicators of an idealized self. There needs to be deliberate consideration of what aspects of identity development can be addressed in elementary curriculum and instruction. Unfortunately, few colleges of education prepare teachers to achieve these aims (Marlow and Inman, 2002) and
therefore teachers are left to research and conjecture ways to meet these aims on their own.

The pedagogical intent that drove this study reflected my own need to seek out reference points in the form of concrete, classroom based examples, to develop an understanding of how a teacher can address students’ individual psychological, social, and emotional needs while simultaneously meeting their academic needs as well. The only way that these needs will be addressed is by implementing an identity curriculum, meaning explicit curriculum and instruction in the processes involved in identity development whereby students are actively engaged in self-exploration (Marcia in Neimeyer and Rareshide, 1991).

There are several reasons to create curricular spaces that include opportunities for young children to explore their sense of identity. To begin with, students’ life experiences shape schemata and the perspectives they bring to learning as well as influence their access to information presented and their representations of knowledge and understandings. Enabling teachers to become informed about the people that populate their classrooms through the provision of sanctioned time and resources for exploration of students’ identities is integral to meaningful curricular decision-making. Curriculum planning and enactment becomes based on complex, real people rather than solely on stereotypes, limited interpretations of developmental psychology, and standardized test scores. At the very least, students’ lives outside of school affect their daily demeanor and their desire and ability to interact positively with peers. Finally, classrooms provide a social context for knowledge construction and encompass experiences through which students come to see themselves as valued and significant, or
not. If a child feels a connection with peers and his/her classroom teacher, then participation in learning and academic risk taking becomes possible as well (Levin and Shanken-Kaye, 1996).

The observations, interviews and analysis conducted in this inquiry have informed and broadened my conceptualization of the ways in which curriculum and pedagogy can create learning experiences that can invoke a child’s expressions of identity regarding being an individual within a community, uniqueness, growth and change. The time spent in this classroom also inspired me to consider what other processes of identity development one can engage young children in: continuity, reflexivity, and agency. In addition, all of these aspects need to be represented as ongoing processes an individual undertakes across his or her life span.

A Curricular Model of Identity Education

School personnel and peers are powerful sources for the development of identity concepts. Children are reading, interpreting and internalizing perceptions of how others view them at all times, especially in middle childhood when their cognitive abilities to compare via formal operations are in full gear. Currently I teach second and third graders and they are obsessed with their comparisons to others. We frequently discuss how people create perceptions, multiple intelligences or “ways of being smart,” and about how a strength or ability in one area does not automatically generalize to all other areas in life. When I began this research endeavor I was looking at self-study in a very simplistic manner, to boost self-love and knowledge in order to encourage academic growth. This came about because my first teaching experiences were with children living in poverty.
Now that I have conducted this study in a mostly upper-middle class neighborhood, and currently work in an environment with children that are very affluent, I question my initial perceptions of the purposes of an identity curriculum. Making children feel special and important is not so simple; it is also imperative that I help them engender compassion and create realistic self-perceptions as people capable of so much while simultaneously accepting of their own frailty and mistakes as part of their identity development.

The curriculum implementation that formed the case for this inquiry intended to present a set of instructional and learning experiences for young children that worked toward the development of self-awareness and positive self-esteem toward facilitating students’ building constructive relationships with one another. This expected correlation was not evident in the data collected. Self-awareness was activated through guided reflective assignments. Self-esteem was boosted through eliciting and reinforcing children’s perceived capabilities as well as areas of efficacy. The ways that the teacher attempted to influence the development of both self-awareness and self-esteem was through learning experiences that emphasized reflections upon the following identity functions: (1) growth and change over time, (2) what makes someone unique or special, and (3) the consideration of feelings and responsibilities that come with being a part of a community. It is understandable that these aspects of identity development would be emphasized within this curriculum since increasing competence is an area of observable growth in early childhood and balancing the ego and being a part of society are the purposes of socialization practices in school. Throughout data collection and analysis of this unit implementation it became apparent that several significant identity functions were not addressed: (4) seeking continuity, (5) practicing reflexivity, and (6) employing
agency. Exploring all of these functions may facilitate a child’s understanding of identity formation as multiple, ongoing processes rather than a static set of categories. Therefore I propose a model for identity curriculum that encompasses the three identity functions presented in my analysis of this curriculum discussed in chapter 4 – growth and change over time, uniqueness, and individual within community – yet proposes deeper self-awareness in terms of exploring balance between identity functions (Gee, 2001) including those that were not addressed by this implementation of the unit – continuity, reflexivity, and agency (please refer to Figure 5).

Figure 5 below depicts a model I have developed as a framework for the design of an identity curriculum that incorporates learning about the processes involved in identity development. In the following sections I will define each identity function and concept in the model, key relationships, and their significance within identity development. This model incorporates the findings presented in chapter 4, theories of identity development, alternative interpretations of developmental psychology theories, as well as research on the relationship between socio-emotional competencies and student achievement. My vision of children as capable, inquisitive, intuitive, and powerful human beings shaped the lens that I used to read and interpret self-identity development theories. The elements of identity development that I found to be overlooked yet significant are those that illuminate the flexibility of identity, that allow for various self-concepts, and that are changed or strengthened by interactions with others (in person or even via reading about a story character). I have experienced these elements of identity development as a person. I have fashioned my identity as I saw fit whenever my family moved to another location, or in later years when I relocated as an adult. They were conscious choices,
choices that gave me the freedom to see myself in a different light and to experiment with new ways of being. Therefore, Reflexivity, Agency, and a search for Continuity amidst change, are lifelong identity functions I want to teach children about alongside the functions of living as an Individual within Community, Uniqueness, and Growth and Change over Time. Identity functions are processes the I-self undertakes as it interacts in the world. Key identity concepts to understand additional relationships among identity functions are listed within circles.
Figure 5: Identity Curriculum Model

- Personal trajectory as a lifelong quest for stability of personhood
- Uniqueness
- Continuity
- Individual within Community
- Socio-cultural influences of groups of origin and affinity groups
- Reflexivity
- Growth and Change
- Agency
- Naturally occurring and self-directed evolution

I-Self
In the center of the diagram in Figure 5 is an isosceles triangle that represents the I-self, the entity within each of us that makes decisions about how to represent our various Me-selves in different situations (James, 1890). On each side of the triangle sits the base of a balance scale; in total, there are three balance scales that will be described. The scales are symbolic of the interdependence, balance and mobility of identity functions. I will begin and end my discussion of the components of the model with the Individual within Community function since learning takes place in varied social contexts.

**Individual within Community and Uniqueness Balance**

On the pans of the balance scale on the left side of the triangle, sit two identity functions: on one pan “individual within community” and “uniqueness” on the other pan. The individual within community function involves the acknowledgement that one needs to share the world with others, manage the desire and ability to belong to particular groups (inclusion and exclusion), as well as accept that one belongs to groups that are not chosen but part of “Nature-identity”, such as gender, race, ancestry, age, etc. (Gee, 2001). The uniqueness function is the process driven by a person’s need to see oneself as distinct, one of a kind, or special (Damon and Hart, 1988). In elementary schools children face balancing the functions on this scale in new ways each school year as they enter a new classroom. It is valuable to consider how important social standing is to a young child and to understand that the beginning of the school year may be viewed as a dilemma or opportunity for growth. Academic success has no place outside of the social dynamics of the classroom community; I have often watched students work at balancing
these identity functions as they anxiously “read” the faces of their peers during instruction in order to decide whether to avoid participation altogether or to dominate classroom conversation. Based on my professional and personal experiences, the ability to balance one’s needs with the needs of the community is integral to a public life.

**Growth and Change and Continuity Balance**

On the pans of the scale on the right side of the triangle are “continuity” and “growth and change.” The continuity function is driven by the individual’s “quest for constancy” (Erikson, 1968) or a sense that there are certain personal characteristics that persist over time, defining the “kind of person one is” (Gee, 2001). The growth and change function is directly correlated to the natural biological function of survival and adaptation. Every person is designed to evolve and learn from experiences. These functions are not mutually exclusive because through the work of growing and changing an individual discovers what aspects of personhood s/he wants to keep or discard. This is why both processes are depicted on the one scale. The balancing of this scale requires exploring the self through trying on varied selves and reflecting upon what kind of person one is and wants to be.

This relationship between identity functions is one that is generally ignored due to the cultural importance we give to consistent improvement, especially due to the fact that developmental psychology stage theories heavily influence the focus of elementary curriculum development. Most interpretations of Erikson’s work point to middle childhood as the time when children are most concerned with building a sense of “industry versus inferiority” (Erikson, 1959). Erikson also expressed that the search for
identity is a lifelong process and that people seek to find “constancy,” in terms of personal characteristics that remain stable over time, among the many identities they have developed (Marcia, 2003; Harter, 1999a). Although Erikson chooses to use the term constancy to refer to stability, its connotation includes a notion of changelessness. Instead I choose to use the term continuity because it implies sameness and connectedness over time. It is this continuity that gives an individual a sense of personal stability amidst growth and change.

**Reflexivity and Agency Balance**

The scale at the bottom of the triangle holds “reflexivity” on one pan, and “agency” on the other. Reflexivity refers to an individual’s ability to meditate and deliberate upon the forces that are influencing how s/he sees herself or himself in a particular context (James, 1890; Cooley, 1902). The individual constructs notions of how others see him or her, and based on those perceptions, chooses how to represent the Me in each particular social environment. Therefore the process of reflexivity incorporates Cooley’s “looking glass” theory and James’ discussions of I-self and Me-self. In addition, peers have a strong influence on identity; whether a child is wearing the “right” clothes and speaking or behaving in the “right” way is subject to what “valued” peers recognize and validate (Penuel and Wertsch, 1995). The influence of parents and teachers loses ground to the influence of peers over time. Peer group judgments seriously influence a child’s social status and therefore management of these judgments takes up much energy and attention. This is when the ability to be reflexive comes into play.
In this model I use the term agency to describe the process of consciously taking action or exerting power over self-definition based upon one’s own values and desired outcomes. A child begins to understand how to act in particular ways to get attention or certain responses from those around them between birth and age 2 (Piaget, 1960). This power evolves to include the ability to make selections regarding how to represent and define oneself, and the ability to accept or reject how others’ attempt to define the self. I believe this ability can be very important throughout schooling in that school structures and teachers may define children as static entities via labels, standardized testing, and classroom management strategies. A child has the power to accept or reject a teacher’s characterization depending on its alignment to his or her idealized self.

These two processes are on the same scale because the ability to exert power in defining the self is always influenced by one’s social and cultural surroundings. There are groups we belong to that are chosen – soccer team, theater troupe – and there are those groupings that have not been chosen – race, family of origin, gender; a child needs to understand how to navigate both groupings. This scale represents the balancing of one’s power to define self with appraisals of others’ perceptions of self.

This intersection is informed by James’ (1892) consideration of the I and Me and the ability to reflect on oneself. Balancing several sources of self-appraisal (Baldwin, 1895; Cooley, 1902) can be challenging yet students need to be given an opportunity to consider the fact that they do not have to accept others’ interpretations or representations of who they are. This includes interpretations by authority figures as well as peers. In that realization lies an opportunity for a personal choice of how to represent the self. Institutional identity is “a position authorized by authorities within an institution” (Gee,
In the institution of school, teachers hold powerful roles of authority and therefore need to be vigilant of how they define the students in their classroom.

**Intersections between Balance Scales**

The scales in Figure 5 represent identity development functions that need to be balanced with one another. The functions on the balances are interrelated in ways that extend beyond the dualisms and tensions represented by the scales. The circles in the diagram encompass concepts that inform the relationship between identity functions on adjacent scales.

The circle at the top of the model connects the functions of uniqueness and continuity by linking the concepts of personal trajectory and Erikson’s theory of identity development. Personal trajectory is a term that signifies each person is on his or her own unique path through space and time, and according to Erikson (1968), the drive for constancy is what fuels each person’s journey. The circle that links the functions of growth and change and agency links two forms of evolution, biological and psychological. Biological development is unconscious while agency is the conscious drive to align one’s ideal vision of self to one’s actions, words, and thoughts (McCarthey, 2001). The third circle links the processes of reflexivity and learning to live as an individual within community. It indicates that although the individual will have to mediate the influences of communities he or she was born into, the individual also has the opportunity to engage in communities of his or her choosing, usually considered affinity groups, and these communities, too, will have influences on the self that will need to be managed (Gee, 2001).
In our current educational environment, bringing learning experiences that bring identity development out of the hidden curriculum can only be rationalized through considering the relationship between identity and student achievement. In their chapter titled “The Scientific Base Linking Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) to School Success,” Zins et al state, “Social and emotional curriculum involves teaching children to be self-aware, socially cognizant, able to make responsible decisions, and competent in self-management and relationship-management skills so as to foster their academic success” (Zins et al, 2004, 6). Figure 6 lists the person-centered key SEL competencies that support academic achievement recommended by Zins and his colleagues (2004, 7). Their explanation for how and why these competencies facilitate student success is that learning is a social experience and if children have the skills to understand themselves, as well as the skills to relate to others, then they will be able to focus their energy and attention on the processes of learning.
In this section, I use the competencies in Figure 6 above as a framework, and as subsection titles, to discuss what learning experiences within the implementation of the unit observed are considered foundational to student achievement and also which competencies need further exploration. It is my intent in this discussion to begin to build a repertoire of learning experiences that can support the development of SEL
This I Am Special unit implementation involved students ages 5-8 and therefore, when considering the exploration of SEL competencies we must consider that with this particular age group many of the lessons expose students to particular ideas rather than enable them to develop proficiency in a particular competency. Yet there is still room for growth in the area of articulating and generating conversation with young children regarding these competencies in order to create foundational schema and experiences for future reference throughout identity development.

**Self-Awareness**

Developing self-awareness was an explicit aim of this particular unit. Students had several opportunities to practice “identifying and recognizing emotions.” For example, the lesson on feelings involved students “reading” the facial gestures of the main character and sharing their experiences with similar emotions. In addition, students shared their individual mini-posters about feeling a particular emotion and explained the cause for their feelings. Students were also given an opportunity to be reflective about the causes and solutions to certain feelings as they completed their I-message cloze sentences for their journals. The classroom teacher provided literature in the classroom library about several emotions as expressed by young characters as well as read aloud several picture books about feelings. Although the class discussed various emotions, no strategies were examined or practiced to help students manage emotions beyond an identification of triggers.

Instructional experiences that encouraged students to practice “recognizing strengths, needs and values” and “self-efficacy” included writing all the things they can
do in their journal as well as consider possibilities for their future in the “When I get bigger…” journal entries. If there had been a discussion or debriefing of students’ responses there would have been an opportunity to examine their desires for independence as well as their desires for material things. I did not see evidence of students identifying their needs during the five weeks I was in the classroom, and it is important at this point to reiterate that the prior four weeks of the unit were not part of this study. The students and teacher may have addressed these issues prior to my entering the classroom.

There was a page in the All About Me book which students completed that required students to consider a task/skill/activity that they were “good at” which could be construed as having students consider one of their strengths. Although this is valuable in terms of encouraging positive self-esteem, we still need to question what values we espouse when we ask students to identify what they are “good at.” It would also be valuable to ask students to identify the areas they are not successful in and to share strategies and coping mechanisms they use to open a discussion of struggle and mediocrity as a part of life.

**Social Awareness**

The unit observed was part of a larger district-wide unit on conflict resolution and therefore, learning how to live in a community of learners was an overarching goal. One of the competencies that the teacher had the students explore was that of “perspective taking” with not much success. That particular instance of perspective taking was extremely challenging for the reason that “teasing” was already established as a negative
behavior through both classroom and school norms, and this notion was reinforced in the read aloud immediately prior to the role play. Therefore, asking students to role play or “pretend tease” was too much of a stretch in that it asked students to suspend their typical self-regulatory behaviors and invent something to critique a peer about. In addition, one can be jokingly teased, yet one will always question how much of the comment was “for fun” and how much was truly how the jokester feels about the person being teased. A colleague of mine believes that teachers need to contrast the terms teasing and taunting because teasing is actually a common practice within caring relationships and is often seen as a humorous interaction between friends (Marshall, 2006). Teaching young children about distinctions such as these bring relevant issues to light, facilitate a discussion of intent when analyzing another’s behavior, and allow students to generate potential ways to respond to such a situation.

Another skill the teacher attempted to engage students in exploring was empathy, defined as “identification with and understanding of another’s situation, feelings, and motives” (American Heritage Dictionary). Routinely, Mrs. Soleil had all students participate in “share outs” which typically included the entire class sitting in a circle on the floor listening to each student share a memory, life story, chore, etc. In *The Way I Feel* lesson, children were asked to share their feelings in “round robin” style as described above. An interesting idea to note is that these activities, where students discuss personal feelings and stories on a regular basis, communicated to children that discussing emotions and the reasons behind them is a form of interacting with others and getting to know one another. For example, when students shared objects from their Me-bags that they identified with, their peers had an opportunity to potentially learn a
different aspect of the speaker’s personality, such as the child who was proud to have used her own money to buy a stuffed animal or the child who so eloquently discussed how, together with her parent, she nursed an ailing hummingbird. On the other hand, with children this young, they often lose interest after they have had an opportunity to share their comment. They become fidgety after sitting for too long and allowing for each of 20 students to share his or her thoughts keeps students sitting passively on the rug for an excessive amount of time. What do we teach children when everyone is asked to share? We can consider that this practice exemplifies equity and validates each student’s experience or that it presents an unrealistic scenario.

Developing a level of respect for others was a school norm, classroom norm, and unit aim. Displayed around the school were “The Three R’s posters -- respect yourself, respect your classmates, and be responsible. The classroom management strategies the teacher used, whereby she praised positive behavior and listened respectfully to each child when he or she spoke, were powerful daily reminders that respect was a value in this classroom community. In addition, every year the faculty and principal put on a play for the students based on a favorite storybook with messages of acceptance and respect. The previous year the play was based on *Wodney Wat* by Kevin Henkes and during the year of this inquiry the play was based on *Oliver Button is a Sissy* by Tomie dePaola. The fact that the school community came together to perform stories with strong messages sends a concomitant strong message to students about the importance of respect.
Responsible Decision Making

Students engaged briefly in problem identification and situation analysis as they completed their I-Message cloze sentences in their journals. Students responded thoughtfully and used specifics in their journal entries, yet this information was not shared with the group at large. It would have been interesting for the children to discover what patterns or connections emerged when looking at the problems their peers shared. In addition, lessons like the *I Forgot* read aloud, where a discussion ensued regarding chores and the difference between adult and child responsibilities in the home, engage students in considering the role of responsibility plays in their lives. It is important to consider that taking care of a chore, whether at home or at school, is not the same as responsible decision making since the chore is assigned by an authority figure, not the child. The lessons mentioned above address personal responsibility, but not moral or ethical responsibility. This seems a serious point to make in light of all the taunting that was occurring throughout the day. Although the terms moral and ethical may be too abstract for children, their notions of fairness and justice are quite advanced at this age.

Self-Management

This curriculum did not particularly address impulse control or stress management directly. Although students were asked to share a whole range of emotions and make attempts at determining causes or triggers, classroom discussions stopped short of examining possible responses, problem solving strategies, or coping skills. Currently there are innovative studies focusing on teaching children strategies such as deep
breathing, stretching and mindfulness as ways to handle emotions and impulsivity (Ritchhart and Perkins, 2000; Zylowska et al., 2006).

The practice of having daily independent time during the literacy block is one attempt at giving each student a chance to learn how to manage oneself. Students had approximately 20 minutes of independent working time that gave them an opportunity to learn how to manage their time. The physical arrangement of the room facilitated independence because all personal and communal materials were available to students; they were stored within reach and available for them to access when they needed. Also, goal setting is a practice the entire district engages in where a child will sit with his or her teacher and decide on areas to work on throughout the year. These goals are revisited and assessed throughout the year. Finally, the school and district have been implementing another form of self-assessment for over a decade via the use of student portfolios; these portfolios allow a student to select what materials they feel represent their best work. These practices provide children with an opportunity to exercise self-assessment, self-representation, and a chance to share their notion of an idealized self.

**Relationship Management**

The unit section that followed the I Am Special unit was on friendships. Although that unit was not part of this study, I witnessed several lessons that could be considered foundational to students’ understanding of relationships. An understanding of one’s own motivations, feelings, and concerns forms the basis for how one views another’s behaviors and potential emotions. With regard to communication, like most classrooms, discussions were, for the most part, mediated through the teacher. Mrs.
Soleil did make a concerted effort to ask students to share and work with buddies and in small groups. These different groupings may have allowed for students to practice interpersonal skills. There was no evidence of any direct instruction regarding communication skills other than the I-messages. Practicing expressing one’s emotions and needs in this fashion was mainly a written exercise. This written activity could be seen as expressing the message: you have the right to say how you feel and to be heard. The only verbal example students experienced was when a student who was not a participant in the study shared his I-message in front of the whole class. One thing that would have been beneficial for students to learn was how to respond to someone’s I-message.

The lesson that focused on students mimicking facial expressions that expressed various emotions could have been extended to include a discussion of how one may use the ability to “read” a person’s face to interpret how someone is feeling and decide the manner in which one will communicate with that person. An example would be to discuss how to approach a friend who is tight-lipped, red-faced, and a furrowed brow. Many programs that work on teaching students the skills to get along forget to address how to let a friend down, or explain to someone that one is not interested in spending time with that person or being their friend. A curriculum that does not address these issues communicates that everyone should be friends and puts pressure on a child to always accept an interaction with a new person and that not doing so equals “being mean.” It is of value to young children to learn how to manage these instances, using language versus physical actions, so that they are better able to express potentially negative emotions in a civil and authentic manner. In the adult world, all people are not
friends nor are they expected to be; it is more important for students to learn how to live and work together as peers or fellow community members.

Implications for Curriculum Development

The curriculum model described above is the result of my investigation of the first research subquestion for this study, regarding what notions of identity were addressed in this case study, as well as my understanding of what additional notions of identity need to be addressed within an identity curriculum. The following section expands the findings that informed the second and third subresearch questions - how notions of identity were represented and what instructional experiences elicited students’ notions of identity - to include the identity functions included in the model presented in Figure 5.

Merrymount district’s decision to write the I Am Special curriculum as an integrated unit, involving language arts and social studies instruction, was effective in that students were able to express their ongoing thoughts about their growing self awareness in written and verbal form. Although the lessons observed included some drawing and coloring, integrating Art would have provided a powerful vehicle for emergent readers and writers to increase their access to and representations within the unit. In her work with elementary and early childhood students, Avetisian (2007) uses the process of creating multimedia artwork to engage students in self-discovery. Through several opportunities to represent and symbolize the self, students have encountered dualisms within their personalities, explored opportunities to create idealized notions of self and ultimately participated in activating their agency in self-definition. Avetisian
encourages artists to present their work to one another throughout the creative process and claims that the dialogue between students is as powerful as the artwork itself.

The literacy block within the classroom studied included guided and independent reading and writing. Research on approaches to literacy instruction such as the Writers’ Workshop (Calkins, 2001) and Author’s Theater (Paley, 1992) have demonstrated a strong relationship between these models and student identity development (Dyson, 1994; McCarthey, 2001; Van Sluys, 2003).

In the Writers’ Workshop model students are invited to work as authors of the stories of their lives. Students work independently on their writing while the teacher conferences with them, coaching them along through the writing process. Many of the students write personal narratives since the teacher usually does not provide generic prompts for all children to address. From her study of one immigrant child’s writing over three years, Van Sluys (2003) learned how powerful a vehicle the workshop model proved to be as a tool of self-negotiation and self-discovery for this young child in a new country.

The writing workshop and authoring cycle take the perspective of learning as a life process. Writing work in such contexts means beginning with the known and moving recursively between the steps of the process to create writing that shows the world who the author is and is becoming (Van Sluys, 2003, 182).

Author’s Theater is an approach to literacy development that integrates the writing of fictional yet personal narratives with the performance of stories written by classmates. Dyson (1994) concludes from her study of students in an urban second grade classroom who wrote stories about heroes and villains, that participation in Author’s Theater “provided a routine where children could voice their comments and questions as
individuals and members of groups.” In Dyson’s study children were engaged in discussions about gender and power as they worked through the multiple processes of creating a performance.

In future implementations of this unit, teachers and curriculum writers might consider preparing scenarios in advance for children to act out based on familiar storylines in books, so that students can step into roles and relationships between characters that have been clearly defined. One example would be to consider referring to the Junie B. Jones series of books where a young girl shares the trials and tribulations of losing and making friends at school. Also, it would be valuable for the class to discuss multiple ways to resolve such teasing incidents by using “one-liners… so they learn to defend themselves verbally” (de la Sota in Siegel, 2006). A teacher could use games as a platform for discussing scenarios about fairness and have students practice the cognitive skill of perspective taking by considering their position and feelings depending on what role they play in the game scenario. In the adult world we are not all friends or expected to be; it is more important for students to learn how to live and work together as peers or fellow community members.

**Implications for Professional Development**

Many new professionals entering the teaching force [as well as those who have been teaching for some time] need training in how to address social-emotional learning to manage their classrooms more effectively, to teach their students better, and to cope successfully with students who are challenging (Zins, 2004, 4).

Teachers that are considering implementing identity curricula need to consider several issues when preparing to address identity development with their students. These issues
include the level of personal information one is willing to share with students, the norms required for discussions of identity to ensue safely, and in what ways to involve families in the curriculum. When asking students to share their “selves” within a classroom, it is important to consider how much of a teacher’s identity will and should be shared. In this case study the teacher’s desire and ability to bring herself into the discussion as she asked her students to do similarly, was a powerful, motivating force. Her comfort with sharing stories of fear and joy modeled “self-talk” for students. Mrs. Soleil shared many personal stories, demonstrating how to use language to share of oneself, to share a memory, a preference, or something significant.

Research shows that when teachers use other kinds of conversational strategies, such as offering their own reflective observations, this can encourage pupils to do likewise and can generate longer and more animated responses from pupils (Mercer, 1995, 29).

An introduction to socio-cultural theories would be of value when preparing teachers to implement such a curriculum in that they would benefit from considering what situations would engage or exclude children from participation in discussions about identity.

In the case of an identity curriculum implementation it is important to engage students in the creation of norms that reflect the needs of all members of the classroom community, including the teacher. Norms are classroom and community expectations about rules, roles, and relationships. There are classroom teachers who set norms and teachers who negotiate norms with students. Through a discussion of norms, students and teachers address how to create a physically and psychologically safe place for all members of the learning community to share their thoughts. Throughout the year this discussion can be revisited in light of problems that arise, and through these conversations mutual trust can
be built through the perspectives heard and resolutions achieved. Creating a classroom community in which spaces are created for students to share and listen to one another’s feelings is one way to validate one another’s lived experiences and forge connections. Through these opportunities students and teacher can explore feelings of empathy as community members respond to classmates’ anecdotes. In consideration of students’ sense of vulnerability with regard to sharing personal information, teachers need to provide students with the option to keep certain things private and to set class norms to include respect of confidentiality.

One of the larger aims of this unit was to facilitate students’ self-awareness. This was enacted through engaging students in activities that provided time and guidance for self-reflection. Educators have to remain cognizant of the fact that opportunities that are created for reflection inherently imply desired traits. As in the read aloud discussion for *Oliver Button is a Sissy*, language used to describe gender stereotyping, speech and language issues, or learning disabilities has to be carefully considered, chosen, and prepared so as to steer away from framing these circumstances as deviations from the “normal.” Word choice shapes how students reflected upon their personal traits as exhibited through the teacher’s conversations with the class and the curriculum designers’ language on handouts that students were asked to complete. It is important to state here that I am not claiming that young children have solid, unalterable identities at this point in their lives but rather that they would benefit from the opportunity to explore various ways of defining themselves. It is through these processes of selecting self-representations that children can try on varied selves and see which aspects they choose to keep or change about themselves (Deegan, 1999).
Family involvement is key to successful curriculum implementation with regard to such personal matters as identity development. In this curriculum implementation parents were asked to support students with many assignments given for homework. One assignment that asked families to “help” the child recall events that were significant in their child’s life from age 1 to the present, stands out in my mind. This particular assignment puts the act of assigning significance in parents’ hands, whereby they directly emphasize their notions of ideal traits for their child. The child when discussing these “recalled” memories to the class, identifies with these traits and internalizes them. This may happen anyway, but sharing with classmates solidifies the effect of others defining the self. At this point it may be important to question who the assignments are really for, children or their parents?

Limitations of this Inquiry

Students in the classroom studied ranged in age from 5-8 years old; this accounted for a large range of literacy skills, with many emergent readers and writers. Many of the assignments that were used as data were in written form and it is possible that expressions of identity were missed due to a child’s inability to express him or herself in writing. Due to this factor, the teacher wrote several keywords on the board to assist those students who were struggling with writing. This also influences the results because young writers could be apt to copying “sanctioned” answers from the board rather than attempting to generate and write down their own ideas.

A classroom community needs time to get to know one another as well as to recognize a need for privacy, so that all members can feel safe to take both academic and
social risks. On the other hand, this unit began during the first week of school and I can imagine that norms, language, behaviors and culture were being established and could have provided the foundational context for understanding more about students’ self-representations and what forces came together to shape/facilitate them. Another aspect of the research process that I honored, yet struggled with, was that of not directly recording data about students whose families did not consent to take part in this study. This proved to be challenging because of the nature of the relationships between these students and participants in the study as well as the relevance of curriculum aims to personal issues these students were experiencing. For example, the entire series of lessons about feelings, I-messages, and the effect teasing has on someone’s emotional state centered around one particular student who had not consented to participating in the study. Finally, with a unit such as this one that carefully integrated social studies and language arts along with student experiences in the classroom and the playground, it was a challenge to observe and participate during “unit times.” Times such as morning meetings and primary level gatherings during which students viewed the Groark videos were observations that were missed. The Groark videos, mentioned as a favorite part of the unit by many students, employed the use of puppets to demonstrate several situations students might face and model mistakes anyone could make, such as finding the teasing of a peer humorous, how to accept responsibility for actions, and repair hurt feelings. These videos provided a version of an idealized self that would have been valuable as a reference point for analysis of student interviews and student documents.
Further Research

The findings of this study may be extended through future studies that explore multiple aspects of identity development as well as varied vehicles for self-study. One study could examine young children’s notions of continuity in terms that go beyond the question, “Do young children conceive of aspects of constancy or not?” This research would seek to identify what aspects of self they recognize as remaining the same as well as which aspects of identity they consider mutable. Another informative study could focus on an exploration of students’ agency when presented with alternative texts that represent the All About Me book genre. For example like the book *I Like Me!* by Nancy Carlson. Students could be prompted to consider issues or tasks that they struggle with and how they handle stress, disappointment, etc. Considering that these experiences/feelings may actually teach them more about the person that they are rather than only reflecting on those things that they do well, the results of this study would be quite interesting. The National Council for the Teaching of English has pursued research considering ways to give children opportunities to develop personal narratives as an effective way to meet social and emotional needs; I’d like to see this research extended to include an examination of personal narratives as identity exploration tools. Also it would be informative to explore Author’s Theater as a method to guide students in role-plays and experimenting with identity “fits.”

Theories of child development that describe the period of middle childhood as latent, emotionally quiet, concrete operational, and focused solely on competence need to be revisited as well. Educational researchers need to reconsider the stage theories that have shaped so much of what we do in schools. Personal trajectory as well as Erikson’s
parallel continua throughout an individual’s lifetime (Miller, 1993, 165) should also be considered. In addition there is a need to incorporate new research about identity development into traditional conceptions of middle childhood. This means that there is a need to reconsider interpretations of Erikson’s work to acknowledge that significant, although transient, identity explorations are taking place at this age and that they influence cognitive development and learning (Damon and Hart, 1982). Finally, I would like to pursue studies that examine possibilities for instructional experiences guided by the model introduced in this chapter. These could include studies that explore how to facilitate students making sense of seemingly opposing identity functions such as the mutability and stability of identity over time, as well as notions of being both unique and ordinary at the same time. In conclusion, the relationship between identity development and academic achievement needs to be further examined via empirical studies. These might focus on juxtaposing student academic performance with both teacher observations and student self-reports on growth in SEL competencies (Zins et al, 2004; Goleman, 2006).
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Appendix A

Informed Consent and Assent Forms

for Parents, Students, and Teacher
INFORMED PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Exploring young children’s notions of identity within an implemented community building unit

Principal Investigator: Genevieve S. Duque

1. The purpose of this research is to explore the ways first and second grade students express their understandings of identity in the context of an implemented language arts and social studies unit in one public elementary classroom.

2. Your child’s participation in this research will include being observed and video taped during regularly scheduled language arts/social studies classes from 10/1/02 to 11/8/02, and participation in audio taped interviews and reflective discussions regarding his/her assignments for the community building unit between 10/1/02 and 12/20/02. Audio taped interviews will also take place in child’s classroom.

3. There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Many of the questions within the three interviews will be of a personal nature, relating to your child’s self-awareness, class participation, and class work. See attached letter to parents/guardians and sample interview questions. Please note that the primary investigator, as a professional and certified teacher, is obligated by professional/ethical standards to report to the appropriate agencies any concerns for a child's well-being.

4. The benefits to participants include an increase in self-identity awareness. The benefits to society include a greater understanding of the complex nature of young children’s identities. This information could help in the continued revision of early childhood and elementary education curriculum and provide educators with data to enhance their knowledge regarding teaching young children.

5. Your child may be interviewed a total of three times, for no longer than ten minutes at a time, will be observed, and participate in discussions of assignments, during regularly scheduled class sessions. Interviews will take place in the classroom and will be audio taped. Also, the entire class may be video taped during regularly scheduled sessions. Audio tapes and video tapes will be accessed by the primary investigator only. Recordings will be securely stored in the primary investigator’s home and will be destroyed no later than 12/20/04.

6. Only the primary investigator will know the identity of your child. If this research is published, no information that would identify your child will be written. Class video recordings are only to assist the investigator with the collection of field notes. The primary
investigator will be aware of which students are/are not participants and only data regarding participants will be recorded in field notes and used in the study.

7. Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. Contact Genevieve S. Duque at (814) 861-6969 or via email at gsd111@psu.edu with questions. If you have questions about your child’s rights as a research participant, contact Penn State’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

8. Participation is voluntary. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time by notifying the primary investigator. Participants can decline to answer specific questions.

If you consent to allow your child participate in this research study and to the terms above, please fill in your child’s name, sign your name and indicate the date below. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

____________________________________  ____________________________________
Participant (Child) Name                  Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

____________________________________  _____________________
Investigator Signature     Date
IRB# 14677  
MINOR ASSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH  
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Exploring young children’s notions of identity within an implemented community building unit  
Principal Investigator: Genevieve S. Duque

Oral description and assent request for participants who are minors

“Hi, my name is Genevieve and I am going to college to learn more about teaching and children. I am interested in the I Am Special unit that is taking place in your class. I will be visiting your class often to watch and listen to your teacher and all the students in your class.

Sometimes, I may want to ask you some questions about you and your classwork during the next month or so. You do not have to answer my questions if you do not want to.

Do you have any questions for me?

(1) Would it be alright with you if I ask you questions about you and your classwork when I come to visit?

(2) Would it be alright with you if I tape record our conversations to help me remember what we talked about?

Child’s responses:

(1) NO YES

(2) NO YES

_________________________________ ___________________
Child’s name Date

_________________________________ ___________________
Signature of witness Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

_________________________________ ___________________
Investigator Signature Date
Title of Project: Exploring young children’s notions of identity within an implemented community building unit

Principal Investigator: Genevieve S. Duque

1. The purpose of this research is to explore the ways first and second grade students express their understandings of identity in the context of an implemented language arts and social studies integrated curriculum in one public elementary classroom.

2. Your participation in this research will include being observed during regularly scheduled language arts/social studies classes from 10/1/02 – 11/8/02, and participation in interviews and in reflective discussions regarding your curricular and pedagogical decision making for the community building unit between 10/1/02 and 12/20/02.

3. There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

4. The benefits to society include a greater understanding of the complex nature of young children’s identities. This information could help in the continued revision of early childhood and elementary education curriculum and provide educators with data to enhance their knowledge regarding teaching young children.

5. You may be interviewed a total of five times, for no longer than one hour at a time, in addition to being observed. Interviews will be audio taped and the entire class may be video taped during regularly scheduled sessions. Audio tapes and video tapes will be accessed by the primary investigator only. Recordings will be securely stored in the primary investigator’s home and will be destroyed no later than 12/20/04.

6. Only the primary investigator will know your identity. If this research is published, no information that would identify you will be written.

7. Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. Contact Genevieve S. Duque at (814) 861-6969 or via email at gsd111@psu.edu with questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Penn State’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

8. Participation is voluntary. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time by notifying the principal investigator. Participants can decline to answer specific questions.
If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

______________________________________  _____________________
Participall’s Signature     Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

______________________________________  _____________________
Investigator Signature     Date
Appendix B

Interview Protocols
Student Interview Protocol

1st interview  “As you know, I am here because I am studying teaching and children. I think that a good way to learn about children is to talk to them and get to know them….Please tell me about yourself. … Can you tell me about what you wrote in your journal?”

2nd interview  “Thank you for sitting with me last time and letting me get to know you. Today I have a different reason for talking to you. I think a good way to learn about teaching and learning is to ask students to talk about their assignments. Please tell me about the assignments you’ve included in your portfolio for the unit…. Thank you.”
Teacher Interview Protocol #1

1. What sources of information did you rely upon to make decisions regarding instruction within the “I Am Special” section of the unit? Please explain how you gather information from those sources and use the data provided to make instructional decisions.

2. Have there been any particularly distinct moments during the first portion of the unit, from September 3, 2002 to September 30, 2002, that have guided the direction or focus of instruction thus far? Please describe.

3. What, if any, language/terminology/definitional issues have arisen regarding dimensions of identity within the unit lessons? Please describe.

4. Have there been any particular moments when students have spontaneously applied or referred to unit activities/lessons/topics? Please describe.
Teacher Interview Protocol # 2

The next time we meet, I was hoping we could discuss the unit in retrospect and also consider the next time you will implement this unit. Possibly, a walk through of your lesson plan book would help us to discuss the scope and sequence of lessons implemented, as well as assist with remembering events that have taken place over the last two months.

Following are questions we can discuss.

Last year, you worked with a different section of the Living in Harmony unit, this year you worked with the “I Am Special” portion of the unit, how did you plan differently for this portion of the unit?

What activities or lessons would you repeat or not use the next time you teach the unit?

Are there any specific lessons, activities, or trade books you would suggest the primary teacher team try next time?

What excited you about this particular group of students and their interactions with the unit?

How did students interact with the unit in ways that were unexpected?

What surprised you about concepts or topics the students did not take up?

Were there any resources: trade books, videos, etc. that you found particularly effective?

This is a district unit, if you had the opportunity to design your own unit, what would you do differently?
VITA

Genevieve S. D’Arcy

The author graduated from Florida International University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education. She then earned her Master of Education degree at the Pennsylvania State University. After completing her doctoral coursework in Curriculum and Instruction at Penn State she worked in Miami-Dade Public Schools in Florida as an elementary teacher. Inspired by classroom teaching to pursue the intersections between students’ identity development and curriculum and pedagogy, she returned to graduate school. Once the data collection phase of this inquiry was completed, the author worked as an elementary teacher for Irvington Union-Free School District in New York. She is currently a Demonstration teacher at Corinne A. Seeds University Elementary School, a laboratory school on the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research interests include action research, curriculum studies, applications of socio-cultural theory, and social justice praxis.