Children's Identity Construction in a Multicultural Setting.

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CHILDREN'S IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION
IN A MULTICULTURAL SETTING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by

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December 2000
DEDICATION

To my family,

who encouraged and inspired me,

who sacrificed so much for my success in this endeavor:

Groves

Boyce Leigh

Richard

and

Stader,

and to the memory of my beloved parents,

Boyce Leigh Sadler Richardson and James Stader Richardson.
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Abstract

The study of cultural identity has thus far been rather unidimensional, portraying a child as a member of a single cultural group that has a homogeneous culture. Over the past twenty-five years, much of the research on the relationship between culture and education has looked at children's educational processes through the lens of group membership. This study examined six children from different cultures as they constructed their own identities within the multicultural classroom environment over the period of a year. It was designed to examine how individual children take on cultural "ways" that are associated with other cultural groups and thereby expand their concepts of self. This multiple-case, qualitative research addressed the following questions: (a) How do students perceive their own identities in a multicultural setting? (b) To what extent do children identify with cultural roots distinct from their own? and (c) How do social identifications change over time as students become immersed in the classroom culture? Results indicated that cultural identity is an additive process, and the role of the teacher is central in helping a diverse group find personal voice and positive interrelationships.
Chapter One: 
Research Problem and Study Introduction

Cultural Identity and Schooling

Today the people of this nation are more diverse than ever before. Both multicultural and multiethnic education are used in the literature to describe similar strategies designed to meet the social and educational needs of all Americans. It is ethnic group membership that often identifies people with respect to culture, and most references define ethnic or cultural groups as distinguishable (i.e., set apart from one another). Through a combination of new levels of immigration, especially from Central and South America and Southeast Asia, and of differential birthrates among whites and people of color, the non-white population of this country is mushrooming. By the year 2020, only one of two young people will be European American; 50 percent of the students in classrooms in America will be African-American, Hispanic, Asian, or Native-American (Au, 1993; Delpit, 1995).

The ethnographic studies by Au (1993), who delineated the importance of the "talk story" tradition in the education of the Hawaiian child, in addition to the aforementioned studies by Heath (1982), and Philips (1983), made great contributions to our general understanding of the backgrounds of children from different cultures. Now, we can take the many studies on culturally responsive instruction further through literature and research combining ramifications of cultural identity and individual identity that does not tie people to one identity.

Multiculturalism is as controversial as it is important. Multicultural education is one of the fundamental issues being addressed in this increasingly diverse United States,
even though there is not always agreement on a definition of this “umbrella” term. Numerous works have emerged that focus on the theory and practice of multiculturalism, and there are alternative perspectives. For instance, people do not always agree on what forms of diversity it addresses. Some think only about racial or ethnic diversity; others conceptualize gender, social class, and additional forms of diversity (e.g., Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Still others concentrate on the relationship of multicultural education to issues of public policy, such as bilingualism and immigration.

Over the past twenty-five years, most research on the relationship between culture and education has looked at children’s educational processes through the lens of group membership. An individual “belongs” to one particular group, and members of the group are portrayed as being the same culturally. Some of the classic studies (e.g., Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Heath, 1982; Philips, 1983; Valdes; 1996) of the “mismatches” between the cultures of home and school have presented students in this way. This is a kind of essentialism, in that a particular culture is portrayed as having specific characteristics that define it (cf. Banks, 1993). From this perspective, the student’s culture tends to remain rather static, as students are not seen as expanding or changing their identities in any way. Alternatively, the culture is reproduced and altered and elaborated through collective and interpretive processes.

In my study I examined how elementary-aged children as individuals constructed their own identities—not as something discrete and predetermined but as something multifaceted and even multicultural. Undergirding the study was the social identity theory (Israel & Tajfel, 1972). In this conception, an individual belongs to multiple social groups. Identity is “the individual’s knowledge that he/she belongs to certain
social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership” (Tajfel, 1972, p.31). Individuals are psychologically connected to social structures through their self-definitions as members of various categories (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). In other words, social identity is self-conception as a group member, influenced by individuals’ desire for positive self-evaluation. Social identity theory views the self-concept as a collection of self-images which vary in terms of length, complexity, and intensity.

There is a need for further investigation and fuller analysis of the linkages between individuals, their original cultural groups, and their acquired cultural groups; between personal and social identity, without thinking of people as intact groups. This theme emerged in my research about cultural identity in a multicultural environment, and in my questions of exactly how children from diverse backgrounds grew into their own identities. In cross-cultural studies the similarity aspect of identity is important, but the distinctiveness aspect is important, too.

My research explored how children construct and mold their own identities and how children expand their identities in association with other cultural groups. I examined cultural role-taking in an academic environment, how these children perceived themselves, how they placed themselves in the classroom, and how their social identifications changed over time as they became immersed in the classroom culture. Did they accept an assigned identity, did they construct it, or was it negotiated collectively with others? Were the children victims of what I termed “cultural profiling?” That is, were the children outlined by the characteristics of their culture without regard to their
personal identity or character? My purpose was to illuminate factors and practices in the elementary classroom that work to mold students as they go about making identities.

The examination of the individuals in the context of this 4th grade classroom challenged social categories, stereotypes, and cultural profiling. My study, situated in social identity theory, drew salient connections between the self-categorization patterns of social identity theory and Gee’s view of identity as ways of being in the world. Gee researched literacy, discourse, and linguistics focusing on social practices rather than the language alone. Gee (1989) pointed to the relation of culture and language when he spoke of Discourse as a saying(writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combination. In other words, it is not just what you say, but how you say it. He calls these combinations “Discourses” with a capital “D” to distinguish them from “discourse” with a little “d” which refers to connected stretches of language. Children acquire a primary Discourse through socialization early in life in the home and in their peer group. We have our primary Discourse, but we expand to acquire others—secondary Discourses. Importantly, we acquire different Discourses, or values, beliefs, and styles of interaction with others, as we become immersed in a new community’s practices. While Gee equates Discourses with identity, I think they are more like two components of self: Discourses equal self process; identities equal self structure. When speaking of identity, I am referring to the presentation of self in social relationships, individual perceptions of self.

Background to the Study

Cultures are dynamic, complex, and changing; however, in the schools, cultures are often perceived as static, unchanging, and fragmented (cf. Banks, 1993). There is little debate that what children know about language and that its use is learned at home as
part of the communicative routines of the group in which they grow up. Early home social environments shape the way children go on to understand the world. Discourses are not mastered by overt instruction, but by a gradual integration into and acquisition of social practices (enculturation), and encounters are not just academic discourse in schools. The various Discourses which constitute each of us as persons are changing, sometimes inconsistently, through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered them. As first used by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), scaffolding is a metaphor for graduated assistance provided to the novice, comparing it to the carpenter's scaffold. Vygotsky's ideas on the dynamic interdependence of social and individual processes extends this transformation of socially shared activities into internalized processes (1992).

In the following review, I will first discuss the debate over multicultural education. Then, I will conclude the section with a brief discussion of the remaining unresolved issue of multiple perspectives in the challenges of individual identity and schooling.

The Debate over Multicultural Education

Multicultural education focuses on equal educational opportunities for different groups within the national culture. Yet, it is a very broad and inclusive concept, and because it focuses on cultural differences, with language and dialect important components, attention can be diverted from the individual, and the individual's role in society. The two major positions are the assimilationist ideology and the cultural pluralist ideology. Both paradigms have led to problems in multicultural education.
In the early decades of this century, an assimilationist ideology, which viewed the United States as a melting pot, was predominant. However, resistance to assimilationist ideology among members of racial minorities has grown over the years because of the erosion of cultural identity and pervasive discriminatory mistreatment regardless of adherence to mainstream cultural expectations (Weinberg, 1977). In addition, the vision of this country as a melting pot continues to be seriously contested. It seems to be an argument akin to the “English only” platform since the “melting pot theory” requires giving away one’s own ethnic identity. Also, there is the question about which aspects of “the mainstream” culture should be acknowledged as worthy of explicit assimilation by ethnic minority youth (Delpit, 1988). Teachers struggle over appropriate mythologies and narratives to bring to the classroom. Another iteration of the debate at the university level is about what Americans should know, read, and learn and the appropriateness of the canon of western European Literature.

In contrast to the assimilationist view, there is a preservationist view, whose proponents want to preserve the uniqueness of a particular culture (see discussion by Banks, 1993). This cultural pluralist ideology makes assumptions that ethnicity and ethnic identities are extremely important in the socialization of the individual within our society today. Pluralists stress the rights of the ethnic group over the rights of the individual. Prominent among this group would be the Afrocentrists, who maintain that African culture and history should be placed at the center of the school curriculum (Asante, 1991). Instead of “melting together,” different cultures would co-exist equally, oftentimes conflicting with one another. A metaphor for this conception would be a
“salad,” with each ingredient remaining separate, but contributing equally to the whole (as opposed to the blended stew of the melting pot).

**Issues Left Unresolved**

There has not been enough attention directed toward understanding how people as individuals expand their identities by acquiring some traits that are associated with other social groups. Cultures are not “pure” cultures; they are combinations, particularly when brought down to the individual level. For example, Louisiana culture has become what it is because people of different heritage have acquired some of the cultural traits of other groups. Because individuals make changes, the culture expands and evolves.

Treuba (1990) touched on this issue of an individual being able to identify with more than one group when he wrote about cases of adult Chicanos in different professions, explaining that a monolithic, monocultural ethnic affiliation to Chicano culture is not necessary. Au (1993) applies Treuba’s point to school students as well, saying students can learn to be bicultural. I build on this cultural approach, but prefer to think about multiculturalism and cultural identity in an even more expansive way (i.e., multiples at the level of the individual).

Because of the complexity of the problem, there is an urgent need to examine multiple variables when trying to devise effective educational programs in our multicultural classrooms. Building on past cultural studies, an important body of work has begun to accumulate recently. An example of the sort of research that is now needed is Davidson’s (1996) study of six high school students in which she looked further at young students: “Marbella Sanchez on Marginalization and Silencing,” “Carla Chavez on
Masking and Isolation,” Sonia Gonzales on Craziness,” Ryan Moore on Fitting In,”
“Johnnie Betts on Recasting the Self,” and “Patricia Schmidt on Alternative Discourse.”

Davidson presented the first two as “unconventional identities,” the second two as
“conformist identities,” and the third two as “transcultural identities.” This work
acknowledges the complexity and multidimensionality of students’ identity construction
in a school setting. Davidson’s work was done with high school students. However, we
also need work with elementary students. It seems safe to say that identity construction
begins much earlier than the point at which Davidson began to look. I was interested in
seeing what patterns emerged among young children. Would there be evidence of the
“transcultural” among the elementary students I studied?

There is a further need for studies that combine thick descriptions from
observations, interviews, and artifacts. A thick description does more than just record
what a person is doing. It goes beyond facts and surface appearances. It presents detail,
context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that connect people to one another
(Denzin, 1989). The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative
inquiry have more to do with the richness of the information in the cases selected and the
analytical capabilities of the researcher than sheer sample size.

Social identity theory provides a means of conceptualizing the process. It is based
on self-categorizing (Turner, 1985), and it establishes the significance of an experience,
or a sequence of events for the person or persons. People construct their identities by
placing themselves in groups, seeing themselves as having the characteristics and features
of those that they associate with the particular groups (Tajfel, 1972). The society
contains the individual and, in a sense, the individual contains society (Cooley, 1934;
Individuals are psychologically connected to social structures through their self-definitions as members. I hope to extend this work by exploring the self-categorical bases of social identity among young children in the authentic setting of an elementary classroom.

Research Questions

The following questions guided my research:

1. How do students perceive their own identity (ies) in a multicultural setting?

2. To what extent do children identify with cultural roots that seem distinct from theirs in the multicultural classroom environment?

3. How do social identifications change over time as students become immersed in the classroom culture?

I have been asked how I became interested in these research questions. I can provide general points of reference. This study reflects my long-standing interest in how children grow and change within different classrooms. The central ideas around which it revolves emerged gradually from my own studies and travels, from teaching, and from discussions among friends, colleagues, and students. During twelve years of teaching in elementary classrooms in public, private, parochial, and military schools, I found that students do not react to schooling in a neatly predictable way according to any sort of ethnic or racial categorization.

I have lived as a foreigner—in Germany and Denmark—and as a minority member of society, in Hawaii. In those subcultures, too, I was made aware of the complexity and multidimensionality of cultural matters. As I pursued my graduate studies and read the research, my questions became more defined, particularly when I saw what had been done and what had not been done. Therefore, both my personal
background and graduate course work exercised their influence on the questions to be pursued in my dissertation.

Another reason I include my own experience here is to emphasize that thinking about the nature and goals of education cannot be done in a social, cultural, and historical vacuum. Each of us comes to our beliefs about what is normal, or even about what is real, in a particular culture at a particular time in its development. I also believe that just as individuals can have varying degrees of competence in more than one language, they can have varying degrees of competence in more than one culture.

Definitions of Terms

Terms used in this study are defined as follows:

Communicative competence refers to the ability of a member of a given culture to use language in a socially appropriate manner.

Culture is a system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting; a set of shared beliefs and values on which people rely to structure their world and to guide their social interactions.

Cultural profiling is a type of stereotyping that outlines everyone in a cultural group with the same characteristics.

Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network (Gee, 1989)

Ethnic group is defined as a group of people that shares a common ancestry, culture, history, and tradition.
Ethnography is an approach to research that refers to a description of the culture of a community or society. It is a description generated from within the community, involving some version of participant observation.

Identity is the individual’s knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership.

Identity Kit is James Gee’s reference to how one takes on a role that others will recognize through appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write.

Multicultural is a system related to or intended for several cultures.

Multicultural education is a focus on equal educational opportunities for different groups within the national culture.

Primary Discourse is the initial Discourse one acquires through primary socialization early in life in the home and peer group; the Discourse a child first uses to make sense of the world and interact with others.

Secondary Discourse is the interaction one has with various non-home-based social institutions; each of the social institutions demands one or more discourses to be acquired fluently to the extent that one is given access to these institutions and is allowed apprenticeship within them.

Sociocultural theory is an approach to learning based on the concept that human development takes place in cultural contexts.
Social identity theory explains the sense of involvement, connection and pride derived from one person's knowledge of sharing a social category membership with others, even without having close personal relationships within the particular group.

Summary

The research and representation of cultural identity has thus far been rather unidimensional, portraying a child as a member of a single cultural group that has a homogeneous culture. This study examined six children from different cultures as they constructed their own identities within the multicultural classroom community. This qualitative research offered the researcher an opportunity to explore how participants perceived themselves as both individuals and members of several groups, as well as the role of the teacher in helping a diverse group find personal voice and positive interrelationships.
Research into Cultural Identity and Schooling

The term *culture* comes from the field of anthropology as the central concept in the study of human behavior and custom. Identity is the individual’s knowledge that he or she belongs to certain social groups, groups that are self-chosen with emotional significance to the particular group membership. Just as individuals can have varying degrees of competence in more than one language, I believe they can have varying degrees of competence—and identity—in more than one culture.

Ethnographic research employs assumptions and methodologies from anthropology to study the language and culture of home communities and school communities. It involves making the strange familiar; making the invisible visible. Studies in classroom ethnography have provided valuable insights and substantial progress towards an understanding of the learning processes in culturally different children in bilingual and regular classrooms. Hugh Mehan’s (1981) *Ethnography of Bilingual Education* asserts that the process of education that takes place within schools has been overlooked when comparison between schools have been made, and fundamental consequences are obscured. He critiques the quantitative approach to classroom interaction suggesting, "There are serious drawbacks to an approach which limits its domain to behavior tabulated into discrete categories" (p.39). The various "cultures" of the classroom, American culture, school culture, classroom culture, cultures of individual students, are more readily recognizable in qualitative research.
Cultural Identity and Literacy Construction

In recent years there has been much interest in cultural identity and the role it plays in literacy development. A number of studies (e.g., Au, 1993; Fordham & Ogbu, 1991; Heath, 1982; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991; Philips, 1983; Reyes, 1992) have shown how cultural "ways" are also literate "ways." Many of these studies contrast the dominant, or mainstream, culture with that of other groups that are subordinate to it, thereby examining power relations that are associated with the discourse of schooling. They focus on the conflicts between cultures. They are based on large-scale social categories defined by language and culture (cf. Hogg & McGarty, 1990).

Considerable information about the literacy instruction of students of diverse backgrounds is currently available, and the research represented by these studies has been very important in drawing attention to the importance of cultural forces in schooling. However, taken to an extreme, it implies that the meanings, behaviors, and perceptions associated with a specific background are fixed, exerting an immutable influence on students' perceptions of who they are and their academic potential. The response it has received from a number of educators is to develop alternative modes of education that are a better fit with the students' culture, connecting the language minority students' home life and school life.

Since the early 1980s researchers have looked at ways to develop a closer connection between students' home culture and the school. This work has had a variety of labels including "culturally appropriate" (Au & Jordan, 1981), "culturally congruent" (Erickson, 1975), "culturally responsive" (Cazden, 1988), "culturally compatible" (Jordan, 1985), and "culturally relevant" (Ladson-Billings, 1995).
Heath (1982) compared the literacy events associated with three different subcultures in the rural South (working class whites, working class African Americans, and middle class whites). She found that the storybook interactions similar to those in school classrooms characterized the white middle class families only. After tracing the school progress of the children in the study, Heath found that success in school was closely associated with community membership. The success of the white middle class children was closely tied to the “bedtime story” and all else that went along with it, particularly the kinds of responses they learned to give to “what” questions.

Ladson-Billings studied culturally relevant pedagogy as being committed to the collective, not just individual, empowerment. She looked at the problem of discontinuity between children's home and school experiences, studying teachers of African-American students. She stressed the importance of students maintaining ties to their culture, and defined culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy of opposition. Ladson-Billings based this pedagogy on three criteria: "(a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160).

Ovando (1989) also addresses classroom adaptations by saying teachers must create bridges to standard English, while developing respect for and sensitivity to students who come to the classroom speaking anything other than standard English. He focuses on the sociocultural nature of language and language acquisition: it is learned, shared, evolves, and changes over time. He believes in using the home language of learners for instructional purposes, seeing it as transferable to the new language.
English. He concurs with Dell Hymes who looks at deeper implications that one's language affects one's chances in life. Ovando recognizes the strongly contextualized environment of the classroom, alluding to the fact that it can serve as an initial platform for building a self-concept in social relationships.

In their widely cited article, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) directed their attention to a phenomenon they called "acting white"—a socially enforced categorization that seemed to discourage bright young African Americans from appearing to do well in school. African American students in the study feared being ostracized by their peers if they demonstrated interest in or succeeded in academic or other school-related tasks. They believed that, by doing so, they appeared to be acting like white students. Fordham and Ogbu's further analysis of the group's structures and attitudes revealed to them that the group emphasized an identity as "black" and constructed a culture that opposed those activities that were viewed as being a valued part of white culture. Fordham and Ogbu's work points to the need for a greater understanding of the cultural peer group in constructing identity.

Philips (1983) worked with Native American children on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in Oregon, observing verbal and nonverbal communication in the socialization of children. She explored in an open-ended fashion the ways in which the Warm Springs Indians' use of language was culturally distinctive. Philips reported:

The fact that most of the tribal members spoke English as their first language was advantageous for the research. It allowed for the study of cultural differences in language use that could be separated from the structure of the language itself (p. 14).

Philips explored the possibility that cultural differences were contributing to difficulties Indian children were having in school, and, in her sociolinguistic research as a
participant observer, confirmed differences in attention structuring and the regulation of talk. The educational literature continues to characterize Native American children as nonanalytical, nonverbal learners. Applied to educational practice, these generalizations downplay the use of questioning and of speaking up individually.

At the same time, Philips concluded that Anglo and Indian children were similar in many ways due to a shared developmental sequence “derived from their common biological heritage as humans (p. 127).” Her findings challenge conventional characterizations of holistic/analytical and verbal/nonverbal teaching and learning styles. These characterizations, when applied to educational practice, can perpetuate patterns of learned dependence that extend well beyond the classroom to relations within the wider society.

Au’s (1980) research with Hawaiian American children in the Kamehameha Program in Honolulu have made literacy educators aware of different patterns of communication called “participant structures” that are associated with different cultures. Hawaiian children were used to structures (adult-child verbal interactions) that differed from those of the typical classroom. For the Native American children, the teacher control of communication was at odds with their cultural patterns, and for the Hawaiian American children the rigid requirements for turn taking was at odds with their cultural patterns.

Gilbert Harman (1974) in his critical essays on Norm Chomsky, explained Chomsky's framework for the construction of language and of grammars of particular languages. Chomsky looked at the subject of language and mind which crosses departmental boundaries introducing his theory of transformational grammar. He argued
that the child has an “innate schematism” for grammar, a “tacit knowledge” of principles of universal grammar. He concluded it was the speaker’s “linguistic competence”, his underlying knowledge of the language, that enabled him to understand and create sentences he had never heard before. Chomsky's book, *Syntactic Structures*, published in 1957, proposed, among other concepts, that rules of grammar were not adequate to account for all the syntactical facts of natural languages. He maintained that syntax can and should be studied independently of semantics. In other words, he distinguished between competence and performance; the idea being performance does not denote competence. This idea that form needs to be characterized independently of meaning in communication influenced the deeper structure of meaning in the recognition of the intelligence of children who enter an English-speaking classroom speaking no English. Learning to read and write English includes learning to participate in the culture of the classroom as well as in the larger culture.

The work of Giles (1978) and others highlighted the function of language as a marker and embodiment of identity. Sachdev and Bouhris (1985) consider the role of language in intergroup relations at both the societal and interpersonal levels. They conclude that the cognitive and motivational aspects of social identification both play an important part in distinctions between social groups.

**Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is a major component of Bandura’s (1986) social-cognitive theory, which contends that behavior is strongly stimulated by self-influence, i.e., people’s own judgments of their capabilities. Perceptions of efficacy serve as a behavioral predictor, and there is support for the relationship between actual behavior and individual
assessments of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Mitchell, Hopper, Daniels, George-Falvy, & James, 1994; Wood & Bandura, 1989). In a recent study, Harrison, Rainer, Hochwarter & Thompson (1997) differentiated individuals with high and low self-efficacy in hardware and software usage with the results that individuals with high self-efficacy reporting significantly more use of all hardware and software applications than did low self-efficacy individuals.

Since the self-efficacy construct is highly important as a basic element of individual behavior and attitudes, it must be connected with how one perceives one’s self. Bandura (1986) defined four informational cues that may influence self-efficacy. They include (1) inactive mastery, (2) vicarious experience, (3) verbal persuasion, and (4) emotional arousal. Each is as important in the elementary classroom as in the workplace. The impact of conceptions of ability is strongly related to social identifications. Looking at how young students perceive their own identities, and how their perceptions change in classroom circumstances, can lead toward an expanded theory of self-influence processes. Mead views the human mind and self as arising through the social nature of the underlying process. The individual act is seen within the social act; social participation is at its foundation (Mead, 1934).

Social Identity Theory

Since its first development by Tajfel in 1978, social identity theory has become a major theoretical paradigm in European social psychology. Tajfel (1981) defined social identity as referring to “that part of the individual’s self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group or groups, together with the value and emotional significance of that membership” (p. 225). A critical aspect of social identity
theory is the notion that in seeking positive self-identity, individuals will characteristically categorize people in such a way as to favor members of the group to which they themselves belong. Social identity theory suggests that strategies of social competition may occur, and advocates of social identity theory argue that such intergroup comparisons may lead to distortions in the perception of the outgroup, maximizing intragroup similarities and intergroup differences.

This concrete relationship ignores the fluctuation or the actual erasure of perceived boundaries; boundary distinctions are not clear and well-established. The significance of boundaries for the development and maintenance of social identity is important because both self-categorization and comparison with other identifiable social groups are part of the process of identity construction (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1985). Striving for positive social identity starts with one's own individual characteristics, but it goes further, involving complex intergroup comparisons in order to establish a positively valued difference between one's own group and the other group (Tajfel, 1985). It explains:

"The simple truth is that the boundary encapsulates the identity of the community and like the identity of an individual, is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction. Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be distinguished" (p.12).

Puddifoot (1997) examined perceptions of identity in the light of Tajfel's social identity theory. He described individual perceptions and reactions by members of a community in England, whose declining economic base caused dislocations concomitant with the rising fortunes of a nearby town. Respondents – 135 residents – identified
strongly with their hometown: "People want to have their own identity. It's an identity, and an identity is very important. People who have no identity become refugees" (Puddifoot, 1997, p.348). Results of this research showed community identification was established within the framework of each participant's initial self-identification.

A study by Ruschner, O'Neal, & Hammer (1997) looked at the stereotyping of a cultural group by the behavior of a single member. The participants in the study were 135 men at a private southern university in the United States who met in smaller groups of eight people. Each group viewed slides and listened to audio tapes involving negative behavior of a Latvian male as well as a group of Senegalans. These samples were chosen as representative out-groups, which the authors defined simply as those considered dissimilar to an in-group. The primary requirement for testing this hypothesis was a situation in which a single individual could be the initial representative of his or her group.

The results indicated clearly that American college students provoked by a Latvian student viewed other Latvians as dissimilar to American college students. Two important considerations here: (1) Mere categorization maximizes the differences between groups; and (2) These American participants had little prior knowledge of the cultural group involved. While educators have long been concerned with the discourse of diversity and its implications for schooling, this suggests a strong reason to begin our studies at an earlier age when the young are just forming their perceptions of themselves. There is certainly a role of significant others in general social perception and a need for the continued development and maintenance of social and cultural bridges between and among the multiple worlds in which the young must navigate.
Values

Values are most often viewed as central tenets of a society's culture. They are seen as relationships among abstract categories with strong emotional components attached (Fernandez et al., 1997; Hofstede, 1980). Rokeach (1973) viewed values as global beliefs that guide actions, describing them as learned mental programming that results from living within a specific culture. Research on culture and values has grown over the last 25 years in both amount and criticality (c.f. Fernandez, 1997). Given the expanding presence and influence of students of diverse backgrounds in our elementary classrooms, there has been an inadequate awareness of the classroom culture. We need new scales that are applicable to the individual or micro unit of analysis combined with a greater understanding of the cultural peer group in constructing identity.

It is informative to note that in the results of the study by Fernandez, et al. (1997) to reexamine Hofstede's classification of countries by their underlying work-related value structures, Yugoslavia was considered an individualistic country, indicating a strong preference for individual rewards over group welfare. One of the students selected as a case study was from Bosnia and was very self-motivated. Like the other students, he was subject to change subtly over the year's time period just as external environmental changes shape a whole society through its individuals.

Chen, Shafer, & Wu (1997) looked at stereotyping by physical attractiveness as related to Oriental people, specifically, Taiwanese. Since the vast majority of research on physical attractiveness stereotyping has been conducted in Western societies, this study questions the cross-cultural generality of this phenomenon. Chen questioned the sociocultural perspective that attractiveness stereotyping is less likely in societies that
value collectivism more than individualism (e.g., Asian cultures in which one's identity
depends not so much on individual attributes as on family, social position, and group
alliances that contribute to harmony and welfare). Chen's study defined culture as
referring to, among other things:

a set of shared beliefs and values on which people rely to structure their world and
to guide their social interactions. These shared beliefs and values, which can vary
dramatically across cultures, should be highly accessible to members of a culture
and thus may represent the dimensions on which stereotyping is most likely to

The similarities, differences, and difficulties with language in a classroom present
a salient challenge as one examines the influences of home culture and classroom culture
on the children. An examination of these influences seems to reiterates the importance of
not relying solely on classifications or labels placed on cultures by researchers.

The Relative Role of Attitude

A study by Abu-Rabia (1997) attempted to clarify the relative role of attitudes
toward second language learning and multicultural society regarding involvement in and
interaction with the new society by Arab immigrants. The participants were fifty-two
eighth-grade Arab immigrants (twenty-five boys and twenty-seven girls) who had
immigrated to Canada, a modern and open society, comparable to the U.S. and opposite
from conservative society in Arab countries. The main hypothesis was that a
multicultural social context facilitates second-language learning. Results found the
democratic atmosphere and the declared multicultural policy together enhanced female
identity and self-esteem. This, plus the fact that Muslim society forbids gender
intermingling and dictates women's form of dress, behavior, and lifestyle options,
accounted for the motivation of females to integrate themselves into the Canadian culture and adopt the English language.

Another recent study by Alreshoud & Koeske (1997) examined students' attitudes toward and amount of contact with Americans. Like most observers of students entering a foreign society, these researchers began with the premise that exposure to a new culture increasingly leads to a reduction of fear of discomfort and a deeper understanding and appreciation of the host culture and its people. It should be noted there are qualifying conditions for positive attitude change. Among these conditions might be the degree of cultural similarity, willingness to enter the new situation, voluntary or involuntary emigration status, the environment in which contact experiences occurred, and the possibility of out-group discrimination.

Participants in the study included a sample of seventy-four Saudi Arabian students attending an American university. They were between eighteen and forty-two years of age. In a survey they rated how often they had been involved in twelve different activities with Americans, on a scale ranging from never (1) to often (4). Overall, although contact, understanding, and desired contact were relatively low, the results showed respondents held a generally favorable attitude toward Americans.

Contact is thought to improve the chances for positive change because it gives the out-group member an opportunity to see and evaluate life from the point of view of the in-group member, but this hypothesis that social contact causes attitude change was not supported in this study of older adults. The causal-process analysis did provide clear support for the position that attitudes affect contact rather than for the reverse. Among the limiting considerations was the failure to look at self-perceptions as a significant factor.
mediator in a contact-attitude model. The conclusions are also limited by the self-report nature of the measures.

Additional Factors Relating to Cultural Identity and Schooling

In the sociocultural approaches to learning and development, the framework systematized by Vygotsky in Russia in the 1920s and 1930s continues to be relevant to today's studies. The role played by culture and language and the dynamic interdependence of social and individual processes are at the center of his theory. According to Vygotsky, learning leads development as children receive instruction from more knowledgeable partners within their "zone of proximal development." I agree with Vygotsky's position that individual construction of knowledge is mediated by social factors, and, in the classroom, it is my opinion that one of the teacher's roles is to accurately model this interdependence of social, individual, and cultural development for the students.

Ferdman (1990) asserts that cultural diversity has significant implications for the processes of becoming literate, asserting that literacy is culturally framed and defined. He argues further that the type and content of literary education that individuals receive can influence their cultural identity. Ferdman's conclusion is important to this study. He concludes that in spite of commonalities within an ethnic group, within-group variance will also be present, especially in a heterogeneous society.

Erikson (1968) suggested that the identity crisis is the central problem to be resolved during adolescence. A study by Levy (1997) looked at self-concept as an integral part of identity development in adolescents, with self-concept including different characteristics individuals use to describe themselves. His study of multifactorial self-
concept and delinquency in Australian adolescents used a self-reported scale of characteristics by 365 high school and state institutions for delinquent youths. The results showed a more positive self-concept corresponded with a lower level of delinquency. Further research is necessary since the influence of school and family was only weakly addressed on two items of the survey as “good student/bad student” and “good/bad son or daughter” (p.281).

Since a component of my study focused on actual facial expressions to convey information, I looked at a study by Nagashima & Schellenberg (1997) on situational differences in intentional smiling. This was a cross-cultural exploration involving forty-two American and forty-eight Japanese college students that looked at facial expressions as communicating impressions of the person smiling, while also conveying information about the situation in which they occur. Questionnaire responses resulted in support of the assumption that status differences (college student / college professor) lead sometimes to less, but sometimes to more, smiling at a person of higher rank. The more significant finding for my research was that the anticipated use of smiles does not greatly differ between these two cultural groups. Recent research suggests that the basic process of interpersonal perception are very similar in both Japan and the United States (Smith, Matsuno, & Umino, 1994).

A recent study looked at how people of different backgrounds (Italian and Greek) conducted their daily activities in Canada’s multicultural environment. Laroche, Kim, & Hui (1997) focused on acculturation and ethnic identification between the two groups. Results indicated that acculturation and ethnic identification can be distinguished from each other. Significant levels of correlation found between the two processes suggest
some loss of original ethnic identity occurs, but, importantly, participants were able to reside in two cultures, adopting both value systems simultaneously.

The Social Dimension

I doubt whether it is ever possible to describe and understand our world from a position entirely free of and outside the values that each society holds important. There is no way of escaping the taking of a value position. Eventually one must relate one's conclusions about particular social behavior to the wider social setting in which individuals operate. We have to take into account that we have some ideas about other people's values and that these are acquired through social interaction. People sort out and evaluate the society immediately around them. For Tajfel (1981), there can be no proper individual social psychology without specification of the social and cultural setting in which it occurs.

In any analysis of human social behavior and experience, assessment must be concerned with the role and origins of the values and presuppositions that are embedded within (Israel & Tajfel, 1972). One of the most important differentiating features of human behavior is the human use of symbols in social communication. There are many complex and conflicted viewpoints included in issues such as the following: the nature of theory in social psychology; the adequacy of the methods used for the analysis of "natural" social phenomena; the nature of the unstated assumptions, values, and presuppositions of a group of researchers determining theories and methods of research.

Social psychology has attempted to derive general laws of human social behavior from the presumed "universal" laws of individual motivation. Tajfel (1981) widens the discussion to consider three kinds of reductionism: the biological, the psychological, and
the sociological versions of reductionism. He contrasts the idea of “knowledge as a reflection of reality” with the idea of “knowledge as a construction.” One of his main concerns was with presuppositions of different kinds that form the background of theories (cf. Asplund, 1971). His perspective consists of the view that social psychology “can and must include in its theoretical and research preoccupations a direct concern with the relationship between human psychological functioning and the large-scale social processes and events which shape this functioning and are shaped by it” (Tajfel, 1981 p.7). To this position, the integration of individual interactions with their social settings, or communities, is critical.

Rommetveit (1971) extends discussions of social identity theory to problems of meaning and of psycholinguistics. He develops a model from the points of localization of the act of communication in time, space, and direction. Cognitive factors are important since our orientation towards the world is an orientation towards what we believe about it and toward the consequences that our behavior will have. Few deny the emergence of new structures in human beings, which are due to human cognitive and cultural development. Dell Hymes stresses the importance of "communicative competence," being able to get things done in the situation you are in. Many innate behavior characteristics are largely integrated into the complex new individual, social, and cultural systems. At the same time, we often use models or stereotypes indiscriminately for drawing conclusions and unwarranted generalizations about individuals, even groups and societies. Importantly, judgments of almost any aspects of objects, which are stereotyped, are not made in a vacuum; they are implicitly comparative. Tajfel (1981, 1987a, 1974; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner, 1975) formulates a testable relationship
between the strength of a stereotype and the nature of past experience that supports it. He emphasizes the inherently comparative nature of intergroup relations, as reflected in the process of social comparison has acquired a central importance in theoretical developments concerning intergroup behavior in the last fifteen years.

Tajfel conducted experiments to examine the polarization of judgments in the perception of people. He had a group of male subjects describe personal characteristics of young men in a set of ten photographs projected on a screen. An independent judge went through each subject's descriptions, collapsing the near-synonymous categories. Out of these, a list of eleven trait names was prepared for each subject: four of these were the highest ranking attributes he had used, four, the lowest ranking attributes, and three buffer attributes were added. They were then arranged in all their possible paired combinations (fifty-five in all). Three weeks after the first experiment, the same participants were called to look at each pair of characteristics and underline the item in the pair they felt was more important in a person.

The results held that attributes which appear early and which are repeated frequently in free descriptions of other people tend to be assigned more extreme ratings than attributes which have low frequency and priority, and they are judged as more important in a person. Thus, we see that in the evaluation of other people’s characteristics, there is a tendency to use more extreme judgments for those attributes more important to the rater. Knowing what is important to the raters may enable us to predict how and when they will tend to use their extreme judgments in how they perceive themselves and those around them. Salient findings may lead to deeper implications and connections between individuals in our classrooms.
Tajfel (1981) looked more deeply at the accentuation of social similarities and differences by examining the phenomenon of relative decrease in intra-class differences. He had participants judge the whole series of stimuli several times during the same experimental session and found the decrease in the subjective intra-class differences was very marked. When the subjects acquired more continuous experience with the classification, the differences were not as extreme. Tajfel’s direct inference from these results: “As a result of stereotyping, individuals who are members of a social group to which a stereotype is applied should be judged as more similar to each other only in certain attributes; namely, in those of their assumed characteristics which form part of the culturally accepted stereotype of their group” (1981, p.115).

A stereotype about an ethnic group is generally defined in terms of a consensus concerning the traits attributed to that group. If participants are given a list of attributes and asked to delineate those which they believe apply to a specific group, those chosen most frequently can be assumed to belong to the culturally held stereotype.

Few studies have attempted to demonstrate that specific individuals of an ethnic group were actually attributed traits which are presumed characteristic of that ethnic group. Two studies that originated in Canada are relevant here. Two groups of students in undergraduate psychology courses were tested two years apart. The first study (Sheikh, 1963) had two testing sessions. Twenty-five participants listened to four interviews conducted in front of the class in April, 1962, and right after each interview the participants had to rate the interviewee on a series of seven-point descriptive scales. For the first two interviews, a male Canadian and then a male Indian (from India) separately discussed their opinions about films. Then two other males, one Canadian and
one Indian, were individually interviewed about their favorite books. One week later the
twenty-five subjects rated the concepts “people from India” and “Canadians” on scales
identical to those used to rate the interviewees.

Two years later, in January, 1964, a second group of thirty-seven subjects was
tested. They were asked to select from twenty-five adjectives those which they thought
categorized most people from India and those which described most Canadians. The
adjectives on the scale were determined earlier by the ratings given by the 1962 group to
the concepts “people from India” or “Canadian.”

The stereotype of Canadians was defined as consisting of the seven most
frequently chosen adjectives. The nine adjectives chosen most frequently to characterize
people from India were selected as representing the stereotype about Indians. Both the
Indian and the Canadian interviewees were judged as more similar to the other
interviewee of the same ethnic group on those traits included in the stereotype than on
those not included. This indicated a minimization of the differences between members of
an ethnic group on traits which subjectively characterize that group. While this suggests
that a stereotype is operating, it doesn’t demonstrate what stereotype it is.

Influences on Identity

The acquisition of a new (additional) identity must be understood in terms of the
progressive creation of an actively interacting community of people. The discussion
about social psychology and social processes was a debate that engaged social
psychologists in the seventies (cf. Armistead, 1974; Israel and Tajfel, 1972; Poitou, 1978;
Schlenker, 1977; Strickland, 1996; Stroebe, 1979). It differed, however, from other
debates in that it was explicitly concerned with the failure of the traditional social
psychology to build a bridge between its preoccupation with interacting *individuals* and the wider social framework of the community.

Tajfel's interest was in research conceptions of the relation between human being's *individual* nature and the social setting in which the behavior takes place. The individual is both touched and changed by the behavior of other individuals. Tennyson's words: "I am a part of all I have met." are powerful. We must consider the category of environmental circumstances. "Man's social behavior is an adaptation of his general gain-loss strategy to the special requirements arising out of his being surrounded by other people" (Tajfel, 1981, p.34). People live in a social context which has its own laws and structures, and I am interested in the convergence of the psychological and the social processes and the way in which they shape one another. This research takes into account the diverse patterns of social relations as they effect early emotional development. My perspective includes the notion of flexibility in the relations between human beings and their environment. Do young children in a classroom perceive or define themselves as a group on the basis of the culture of that classroom?

Of course, everybody's ingroup has its outgroups. Tajfel(1981) expounds upon the fact that shared conduct is shared by those who have all accepted basically the same theory of social causation. In the classroom, we see the concept of the human as a rule-following being guided by conscious and unconscious roles and standards. Notions of appropriateness reflect the system of social norms and values. Tajfel (1981) defines norms as being an individual's expectations (shared with others) of how others expect him to behave and of how others will behave in given situations.

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Many of the studies of how members of the same culture learn the same way are impervious to the wider realities of social conduct, even though the course of relations between human groups of various kinds is one of the fundamental social problems of our time. Dealings between groups are ultimately problems of the psychology of the individual. In an infinite range of situations throughout the lives of all human beings, individuals feel, think, and behave in terms of their social identity created by the various groups of which they are members. The social setting of intergroup relations contributes to making the individuals what they are, and they in turn produce this social setting, with both they and it developing and changing symbiotically (Tajfel, 1981). Thus, theoretical principles can be formulated referring to the group as a unit, and, while they can be helpful in understanding generalizations, ultimately it is the individual who is the unit of analysis. He/she reacts to others, and others react to him/her.

**Relationships to the Present Study**

A significant impact of the sociolinguistic perspective is that it has heightened our consciousness about language as a social, and therefore, cultural construction (Pearson, 1994). With the contributions of researchers working within this framework, it became more apparent that reading was not only NOT context free but that it was imbedded in multiple contexts. Knowledge is relative to the society, and it is tied up with language. This is now being related to identity construction. Anthropological evidence (Brewer and Campbell, 1976) shows that groups' reciprocal perceptions need to be related to a wider cultural and social framework. Tajfel (1981) goes further making a clear distinction between theories that are “individualistic” and a theory that is concerned with socially-shared patterns of individual behavior. He describes an individualistic theory as one that
contains the unstated assumption that individuals live and behave in a homogeneous social medium, and says there is no room for it in a socially-shared organization of the system (in this case, the classroom).

Most of us can agree that social categorizations of various kinds may have profound effects on some interpersonal responses, but this must be seen in a much wider context. The formation of categories of people encourages social researchers to fit everyone into categories, and this can be particularly misleading. Each person is both an individual and a member of several groups, so literacy becomes an interactive process that is constantly redefined and renegotiated. Because culture is in flux, so even are the definition and consequences of literacy.

I join the critics of a one dimensional, static conception of identity. I believe that the information presented here is useful in giving an understanding of a more complex phenomenon of how a child constructs his identity and the groups in which he places himself in terms of membership in the culture of an American classroom. I feel that what is essential to qualitative research is not that it avoids the use of frequency data, but that it is primarily concerned with deciding what makes sense to count (cf. Erickson, 1981). There are genuine differences across research orientations. I have chosen qualitative because I hope to contribute to the understanding of the complex varieties of human experience, and show that teachers acquire a powerful set of connections when they get to know students individually.
Chapter Three
Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative study was designed to explore how elementary students perceive their own identities in a multicultural classroom and how they change over a period of one year’s time in this environment. It is an examination of how identity is constructed in the dynamics of everyday life in a classroom. As mentioned in chapter one, the focus of researchers over the past twenty years has been on studying ethnically diverse students through the lens of group membership and cultural differences. Many endorse the theory that individuals are decisively shaped and irrevocably defined by accidents of birth, by membership in a racial or ethnic group. I question this certitude that carries with it an undercurrent of stereotyping. I chose to look at how social identifications changed over time as students became immersed in the classroom culture. This study considers the experience of ethnicity from the perspective of diverse cultural backgrounds in the context of an American classroom, and my intent was to see how the meaning and practice of ethnic identity are shaped within this classroom context.

I have organized this chapter by describing first the overall design of the study, followed by a description of my approach and my role as a participant observer. I will explain my research design in the following order: first, discussion of the participants; second, description of the setting in which the study was conducted, including the classroom, the school, and the neighborhood; third, procedures data collection; fourth, procedures for data analysis; and lastly, my methods of protecting the privacy of the participants.
Multiple-Case Study Design

My inquiry was designed as multiple case studies of individuals from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds who became part of the same classroom community. Thus, in a sense, the class itself was also a case, since it was this “bounded system” that interested me. Miles and Huberman (1984) described a case as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). Yin (1989) says: “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Stake (1995) clarifies whether or not a phenomenon is bounded enough to qualify as a case by making the distinction as follows. “The case could be a child. It could be a classroom of children or a particular mobilization of professionals” (p. 2).

Through these definitions and ensuing discussions, I came to see my case studies as units around which there are boundaries. I wanted to learn about the particular classroom environment in which students would encounter various cultural practices, including those practices associated with American schooling, and to see how the students would go about expanding their discursive repertoires. It is an American place, but there is another invisible element: children bring their own very different perceptions to it. In addition to my own observations, I wanted to get an internal view from the students themselves to see how they perceived their identities, particularly in terms of the different groups with which they identified, and how those perspectives changed over time. Data collection began in May, 1997 and ended in June, 1998. The research reflected my voice in two important ways: first, as a researcher studying multiculturalism, cultural identity, and individual identity; secondly, as an elementary classroom teacher.
whose reflective teaching background supports the connection between students' self-perception and their school performance.

**Qualitative Perspective**

Qualitative research covers a spectrum of techniques – but central to the process are observation, interviewing, and documentary analysis, so I took a field-study approach, becoming a participant-observer who took notes, conducted interviews, and collected various kinds of artifacts related to literacy instruction. Interested in long-term changes, I was in the classroom on a daily basis for much of the academic year, from September 19, 1997, through March 1, 1998. Because my interest was in the students' literacy learning I timed my visits to be, for the most part, during the two-hour language arts period in the morning. To gain a broader view, I also observed the students in other classroom contexts besides that of their regular classroom: in the library, in a beginning course in the French language which included a computer lab, and in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. Three interviews were held with the ESL teacher; one, with each of the other instructors.

I began thinking about this project and jotting notes literally from the moment I decided on the direction of my research. *Everything* looked important at the outset as the focus of my study was to see if children see themselves differently when they are in an American classroom that includes students from vastly different backgrounds. The conceptual framework of my research design lay between the extremes of a loosely structured, emergent, inductively grounded approach to gathering data and that of the tight, structured design of a set of hypotheses and validated instrument with potentially generalized findings to determine students' identity construction.
I spent many hours selecting and wording the questions for all the interviews, trying to ensure that I included the least bias possible. In generating specific questions for this study, I tried to neutralize my influence so the responses could be interpreted clearly. Two questions helped me in this endeavor. "How are respondents' answers influenced by the form and wording of the question? How are they influenced by interviewer characteristics?" (Mishler, 1986, p.14).

Initial Observations

In the beginning I examined the dynamics of the whole classroom. This included taking notes on all interactions between teachers and students, and students and students, as well as describing the physical environment. I sat in the back of the room as an observer of this contextually designed case study research. I monitored what was happening by describing the context and population of the study. My focus became cases within a case, i.e., the people are all limited in that they all belong to this one classroom. This is a straightforward example of a "bounded system" in that my research had a common-sense obviousness, i.e., an individual classroom.

After the first two weeks, my major focus during these observations was on the students who would become my case studies. I wanted to understand processes of events, projects, and programs, and discover individual characteristics that would shed light on the issue of identity construction of children in a multicultural setting. I selected these individuals on the following bases: the diversity of their backgrounds, their parents' willingness to allow their children to participate in such a study, and their own willingness to participate. At the same time, I kept the boundaries of my social inquiry in focus. Stake (1978), said: "What is happening and deemed important within those
boundaries (the emic) is considered vital and usually determines what the study is about, as contrasted with other kinds of studies where hypotheses or issues previously targeted by the investigators (the etic) usually determine the content of the study" (p. 7).

The Role of the Participant Observer

As Patton (1990) explains, the choice of a role is not a simple choice between participation and non-participation; instead, there is a continuum of roles. In this study, I did not have a singular, identifiable role as either observer or participant. On some days I was mainly an observer, moving unobtrusively around the room to observe from different positions in the classroom according to activities. On other days, when the students needed extra help on their assignments and the teacher requested that I work with them, I moved from group to individual to intercede or accommodate as needed. I assisted in a limited manner in order to avoid placing myself in a role as an authority. The trust established was critical to success. Concomitantly, I was focusing on the questions that guided my study so I could record the students' actions and reactions as soon as I was free to write (sometimes in the back of the classroom; sometimes later at home that night). I tried to balance my participation with my observation of what had transpired during the interactions. I emphasized data gathering and analysis techniques characteristic of qualitative research, and the process of insight, discovery, and interpretation unfolded over the total period of time.

Throughout this investigation, I have been concerned with honoring the language and perspectives of the participants, specifically their efforts to construct coherent and reasonable meaning and to make sense of their present and past experiences. In taking my notes and writing my report, I have attempted to include their own words and show
the influence of personalities on the issue. While using prose to describe, to elicit images, and analyze situations in this context, I present documentation of events, quotes, samples, and artifacts.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do students perceive their own identity(ies) in a multicultural setting?
2. To what extent do children identify with cultural roots that seem distinct from their own in a multicultural classroom?
3. How do social identifications change over time as students become immersed in the classroom culture?

The Participants

This fourth-grade class included twenty-seven (27) students: twenty (20) native-born Americans (Nineteen [19] of whom were classified as African Americans, one as Caucasian) and seven immigrants from foreign countries. The latter included one child each from Bosnia, Guyana, Laos, Iraq, and South Korea, and two from the People's Republic of China. The total number changed over the course of the year as students transferred into and out of the classroom. Both Chinese students left in January. The father of one graduated from the university and accepted a job in Pennsylvania. The other was accepted into a gifted program at another school in the county and transferred there.

This was also an inclusion classroom where slower-performing students, classified as special education students, were mainstreamed into a general classroom. Eight of the students fell into this category.
In the beginning I became acquainted with the six students who were to become my major focus for the entire school year, as well as with two Chinese-born children who left the school in January of the following year. I selected them because they were all born in different cultures and, all but two, in different countries. The two native-born Americans were included, so this would not just be a study of foreign children in American schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Immigrant Status</th>
<th>English Proficiency</th>
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<tr>
<td>Song Yu</td>
<td>South Korean</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Voluntary Emigration</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>American, Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>American, Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mong</td>
<td>Laotian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Involuntary Emigration</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pasha**

Pasha was born in Bosnia. He and his family fled their war-torn country for Germany where they lived for several years. They moved from Berlin to this location in late September, and Pasha entered Mrs. Banner's fourth-grade class. At that time he spoke only German.

His family consisted of his mother and father and one sister, a year older than he, who was placed in fifth grade at the same school. The parents spoke their native Bosnian language as well as German, but almost no English. Both Pasha and his sister spoke only German. German was the language spoken at home.
Physically, Pasha was tall and slightly stocky, fair-skinned with light brown hair and eyes. From the beginning he wore oversized clothes, baggy blue jeans and t-shirts. He was a handsome child, with a strong physical presence, but he avoided eye contact with the other children for many weeks.

It was difficult for the teacher to gauge his educational background since he spoke no English in the classroom. Records from Germany were long in coming and gave little indication of the level of his intelligence or what was covered in his former schooling.

Ahmet

Ahmet was born in Iraq, of Kurdish descent. He immigrated to this city with his family and other Kurdish families in May of this year, 1997. From the beginning I noticed Ahmet was extremely respectful, always keeping his eyes on the teacher whenever she was talking. Even by the end of September he spoke very little English, yet, to Mrs. Banner's repeated admonitions to "... keep your eyes on me so I'll know you are listening," he always complied even without understanding what was being said. A shy smile came easily to him. At this point in the year he was still unable to say the name of the country from which he came in English. (He was able to understand enough to have his father write down his native country and bring it in the next day: “Iraq”).

His family consisted of his mother and father, an older brother, a younger sister, and his grandmother on the father's side of the family. English proficiency was extremely limited upon the family's arrival in the United States, and even at the end of the school year Kurdish was the only language spoken at home. Ahmet was olive-skinned with black hair and eyes – characteristics shared by every member of his family.
He was thin, of slight build but average height. His clothes were carefully fitted with his shirt always tucked inside belted pants.

**Song Yu**

Song Yu was born in Seoul, South Korea. He was one of the smallest children in this classroom and, at eight years old, the youngest. His family consisted of his mother and father and a brother two years younger than he. His father was working toward a doctorate degree at the state university and his mother was a homemaker. This was the family's first year in America, although the father had traveled here before. While the father and both boys had studied English in South Korea, the mother spoke almost no English. Korean was the language spoken at home—although the two boys would use English expressions intermittently in their conversations. ("Turn on the TV." and "I win!" are two examples.)

Song Yu was fair-skinned with black hair and black eyes. He wore thick wire-rimmed glasses and was always neatly dressed, often in khaki slacks and knit shirts with collars. Prior schooling records did not arrive until late fall. It was then the teacher learned Song Yu had completed only second grade in South Korea.

**Mong**

Mong was born in San Francisco approximately five years after his Laotian parents escaped from Laos. He was the middle of three boys of whom only the first speaks Laotian. Mong prided himself on being "cool" and dressing in typical American-style clothes and tennis shoes (Nike). Of average height for his age, 10, he had black hair, dark eyes, and olive complexion. He was a handsome child and popular with his classmates. He clearly identified more with native-born Americans — mostly black — in
his classroom, rather with new students from other cultures. He had been in this school since first grade and speaks only English.

When asked if he identified himself as Laotian, American, or Laotian-American, Mong responded “American.” Speaking from a different perspective, he pulled me aside one day in the fall to tell me his father had told him just the night before that he was a prince in his country. He wore a Laotian medal on a gold chain around his neck some days, but kept it beneath his popular American T-shirts.

Caroline

Caroline was the only Caucasian child in this classroom. Her mother, divorced from her father, was studying for her doctorate at the state university, and the family, consisting of the mother and three children, had moved south from Ohio in the past two years. Caroline was the middle child of the three girls. She had fair skin, blue/green eyes, and long straight blond hair.

Her prior schooling was in public schools in a mid-sized city in Ohio. Upon moving here, Caroline’s mother was so displeased with the administrators and teachers at the first public school in which she enrolled her daughter, she had Caroline transferred to Terrace School. She mentioned it was also closer to the student apartment where the family lived.

While somewhat reserved, Caroline got along well with the children of all different cultures in the classroom. The teacher often asked Caroline to help the students who couldn’t speak English. She was in the highest reading group, along with Song Yu, Da and Helen, the two Chinese students, and repeatedly completed her assignments before the majority of the class.
She was a friend of Helen (Beijing), and yet, when Helen transferred to another school in a gifted class at mid-semester, Caroline gave the following reason for not missing her friend because, “Now, I am the smartest in the room.”

Kevin

Kevin, a black, native-born American, was an intelligent child with all A’s on his report card from one grading period, although somewhat bellicose in his attitude. His mother, with three children, was on welfare, and Kevin was suspended more than once for fighting. I was unable to interview him for the final interview because he was suspended the last three weeks of school for altercations with the administrative vice-principal.

Kevin was not a discipline problem in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher. His problems erupted on the playground where supervision was at a distance. He was a child who enjoyed drawing and labeled himself the “class artist.”

He started the year in the voluntary French class that met each day, but dropped out when he felt the French teacher disliked him. The teacher explained he was sorry Kevin chose to drop French because he was one of the strongest students from Mrs. Banner’s class. Although the teacher tried to convince Kevin to continue French, Kevin refused with no clear explanation.

Kevin was among the tallest students in the class, and he was overweight. He moved slowly when asked to do something and rarely smiled. He ignored statements and questions sometimes from other children and was rarely asked for help by others in the classroom. At the same time, he responded to Mrs. Banner’s directions without complaint, clearly responding to the ways she found to compliment his intelligence.
Mrs. Banner

The classroom teacher, Mrs. Banner, was selected on the basis of recommendations from the school principal and fellow teachers I had known while teaching in the gifted program in this county. I introduced myself to her as a graduate student at the state university working on an independent research project. I outlined my qualitative study, and she graciously and willingly agreed to participate immediately.

Mrs. Banner came from and began her teaching career in a rural area where cultural diversity was limited and rarely considered in the educational process. This gives significance to her winning recognition as a teacher who directed her students' attention toward the various peoples and cultures of the world. While pointing out the differences in their social and cultural customs she was assiduously dedicated to teaching the basic sameness of people everywhere.

Her classroom methods involved what she called “around the world units” where she brought in parents and others from different countries to talk to the students and discuss native customs. At the American celebration of Thanksgiving, Mrs. Banner incorporated the food of other countries by asking the parents of her students to send one dish typical of their native country.

For her work and teaching efforts toward bringing children to a mutually respectful togetherness, she won the Brotherhood-Sisterhood Award at her school. She had articles printed in Instructor Magazine, one of which hangs framed in the hallway by the school entrance. At one time she was on the advisory board of this national magazine. She was elected by her peers as Teacher of the Year and Math Teacher of the Year and inducted into Delta Kappa Gamma, an honorary teacher society. For eight
years she was one of a group of teachers participating in “Dial a Teacher” on a local television channel helping students with math homework.

Mrs. Jackson

Mrs. Jackson was a certified special education teacher assigned to work with the special education inclusion students who were mainstreamed into the regular classroom. She worked in this class one-half day. Her times varied from day to day, with her other hours spent with special education students in a first-grade classroom.

Married with two children, Mrs. Jackson had worked with children for eight years. She was a large woman with very long black hair. She always spoke in a loud voice whether giving group instructions or individual help.

Miss Thompson

Miss Thompson was an aide who worked with different children according to the direction of Mrs. Banner. She was in the classroom every day and met approximately three times a week with the lowest reading group. She was somewhat impatient with the students from other countries. She often spoke in broad generalities, labeling students “lazy,” or “sneaky.”

Mrs. Dashion

Other teachers interviewed included the English as a Second Language teacher who met with three of the students in my study. She herself was from another country and gave me many valuable insights into languages and discourse structures tied in to how these children saw themselves among their peers. Five observations were held in her small classroom off the auditorium during the school year. I followed the students through different times and classes to help me understand how they saw themselves and
if their identifications changed over a longer time period and with smaller groups of their peers.

Mr. Oualion

The French teacher was a Canadian teaching in the United States for his first year. He taught French four days a week for 30 minutes a day to fourth and fifth graders in this school and one other. He willingly conveyed his own useful insights into these students as they performed in his class. Of slight build, he spoke English with a French accent.

Miss Dalon

Two additional taped interviews were conducted with a French-speaking student from Quebec who was interning through the special education program at the state university for the fall semester. In-depth interviews with the student teacher in the classroom, who herself was from another country, were held intermittently throughout the semester she was in this classroom, with one scheduled two-hour interview held outside of school. At twenty-four (24) and unmarried, she was the youngest—and thus, closest in age to the students themselves—adult interviewed.

Setting

The study was situated in southern Louisiana, a region known for its diverse background and population. The state’s language and customs are a blend of English, Spanish, French, Cajun, Native American, African, German, West Indian and others. Perhaps most noticeable is the French culture. The legal system is based on the Napoleonic Code, and parishes are the unit of government as compared to counties in other states. Mardi Gras parades and festivities heralding the end of celebration and the beginning of the solemn period of Lent are examples. French Mardi Gras-type parades
have strongly influenced the Irish celebration of St. Patrick’s Day—beads with trinkets thrown from decorated floats. French cooking has remained a part of the state’s cuisine, as have its music and art. Place names are often in French, and countless other French words remain.

African influences are strongly in evidence in music and art. Rhythm and blues, and zydeco, contributed by African-Americans, remain popular across all ethnic backgrounds, and African inspired carvings, paintings, and dress are clearly in evidence in museums and in the street. Examples of the black influence in foods are chitlins, sweet bread, collard greens, okra gumbo, and hogs head cheeses. The jazz funeral and many active hours spent involved in church activities are other important contributions to this mixed culture in south Louisiana.

Spanish, African, English, Native American, and German “ways” have converged and contributed to art, architecture, music, and culinary feasts. There is the prominent Spanish Cabildo building in one of the larger cities; Indian tribes and well-known Indian Mounds are located in others. “Gumbo” has even come to be a metaphor for a mixture of diverse entities or elements combined to create a unique composite, or synthesis.

This city setting is also the site of the main campus of a state university that draws students from all over the world. A school involved in research in many areas, it has a very large Association of International Students, another important factor in the many cultures found here.

Industrial development due to a strategic location on the Mississippi River brings its own global influences. An industrial corridor serves as home to more than 100
facilities. Many of these industries have connections to countries abroad, providing business associations with other cultures.

All of the aforementioned influences are reflected in the school system where the state department of education documented children from thirty-three different countries in the school selected for the study.

School and Surrounding Neighborhood

After gathering information on the schools, I chose Terrace Elementary because of its culturally diverse population, broad elementary program, and proximity to the state university. The school itself, Terrace Elementary, which includes kindergarten through fifth-grade students, was selected for the site of the study because of its great ethnic diversity. During the year of the study, children at the school were from thirty-three different countries and spoke forty-four languages.

The red brick school was built in 1956 in a predominantly white neighborhood. Many of the children had fathers and/or mothers at the state university as professors or graduate students. As more and more homes were bought as rental property and a huge new apartment complex went bankrupt in 1990, ending up under Section Eight housing, this inner-city neighborhood became predominantly black and economically poor. Lower rent university student housing spread its borders and created a mix of cultures in the surrounding neighborhood.

At about the same time, this school was designated one of three elementary schools in the parish where the High Intensity Language Training (HILT) for English as a Second Language Program was established. The HILT Program was started in the 1980-81 academic year to provide a system of meeting new directives from the Federal Office
of Civil Rights. The specific goals of the program are to enable limited English
proficient (LEP) students to learn English as soon as possible, make the transition into
mainstream classes within a reasonable length of time, and meet grade promotion and
graduation requirements (Evaluation HILT Program, 1996). Program components
address student achievement, curriculum development (including cultural diversity),
professional development of teachers, and parental involvement. The bounded context
of the selected 4th-grade classroom became the one in which I studied events, processes,
and outcomes of my study.

The conditions under which my entree were negotiated were positive, even
encouraged, by adults in authority at the school board and at the site of the school. The
spring before my study began I met with the administrators and chose the elementary
classroom in which the study would be conducted.

Today, thirteen frame temporary classrooms stand crowded together behind the
principal brick buildings. Three large air conditioning window units are encased in steel
straps to prevent theft. A metal fence surrounds the entire campus; gates are locked after
school. During the week cars are parked on every inch of extra space around the street.
Special parking places are marked for the principal, secretary, and outstanding teacher of
the year. “Buses Only” signs are lined up directly in front of the one-story main building.

The school is in view of the state university; it backs up to the practice field for
the university band, with married students’ apartments close by. Much of the school
population is drawn from these walking-distance apartment units. The most modern
building nearby is that owned by a Speech and Hearing Foundation. It is bright and
clean, neatly painted in contrast to this aging inner city school next door.
Across the street and along one boundary of the school property is a mixture of boarded-up and fire-gutted buildings. A cracked concrete block apartment unit adjacent to a weed-covered vacant lot is visible from the school. Down side streets are rows of low-income duplexes and apartments.

Terrace in some ways contrasts with the material poverty of the neighborhood. That is due in part to the technological resources provided. Due to technology grants awarded to the school and the involvement of the nearby university professors and graduate students, there are computers in every classroom as well as a computer lab on the campus.

The Classroom Environment

My study was set in a fourth-grade classroom. It was a self-contained classroom, and children stayed together here for most of the school day. Exceptions were the ESL class instruction held in a small room off the auditorium, and special classes offered in French and band, which were based on voluntary participation. The teacher’s expressed willingness to participate in the study was a strong factor in its selection.

The room was in a permanent brick building of four classrooms attached to the main building by a covered walkway. In addition to Mrs. Banner and her students, the classroom group, for much of the day, included a special education/inclusion teacher and an aide.

The only entrances into the classroom were two doors that opened into the hallway, one at the back of the long rectangular room by the teacher’s desk and the other at the front of the class. All four walls of the forty by sixty foot classroom were the same reddish brick of the outside of the original building. It was against this background that
two bulletin boards, one dry erase board, and all cabinets and shelves, both metal and wooden, were either attached or freestanding.

The linoleum-tiled floor was a speckled brown color; the old acoustical ceiling tiles were white. Six fluorescent lights were spaced across the room's ceiling. The teacher had attached strings to these fixtures from which to hang students' art works. A large brown metal air-conditioning unit was also hung from the ceiling. It was attached to four-inch pipes running along the upper half of two walls that disappeared behind wooden cabinets in the back of the room.

On the hallway side of the room four computers were placed on a long table pushed against the wall between the two doorways. Above these computers a large rectangular bulletin board had been attached and portraits the students had drawn of themselves were thumb tacked all the way across it. At the end of this table at the front of the classroom an old double-door wooden cabinet filled with old workbooks stood beside the door there. Two scratched metal four-drawer file cabinets, one white and one black, anchored the other end of the table in the back. Plastic bins were stacked on top, some empty, some filed with papers.

The wall opposite the computers contained seven tall windows covered by yellowed slatted Venetian blinds but topped by a cheerful blue and white valance the teacher had made in a past year. The slats were kept closed, and a poster with the words "Everybody's Reading" was paper-clipped to them. Bookshelves filled with children's literature representing different cultures were lined beneath the windows.

The dry-erase board stretched across most of the front wall. To its left, a wooden cabinet - overflowing with unused workbooks and old social studies books - was propped
against the wall. Atop this 6-foot storage unit there was an American flag (approximately twelve by eighteen inches stapled to a slender dowel rod) wedged in a box of books for support. On the other side of the dry-erase board a picture of George Washington and a poster of American presidents through George Bush were taped to the front wall. Below these was placed a two-tiered metal rack of encyclopedias. A globe had been placed on the top of a high cabinet at the front of the classroom and another globe hung from the ceiling at the back of the room. A world map that could be pulled down when needed hung above the dry-erase board.

In the front center of the room, immediately in front of the dry-erase board, there was a swivel captain’s chair painted a bright royal blue. On a daily basis, the teacher could be found helping students from here rather than seated at her desk in the back.

The wall in the back of this room had three double-door wooden cabinets covering the majority of its space. Clear plastic shoeboxes of art supplies were stacked on top in addition to the paper and other teacher supplies packed inside. The cabinet doors, two of which were impossible to keep shut, were decorated as bulletin boards. Brightly colored store-bought cutouts of different points of punctuation were taped to one door. One small area on the doors was associated with the seasons and had a monthly calendar taped to it, and another area was used to list jobs assigned to different students written on cutouts in the shape of hands. Between these wooden cabinets in the back of the room and the wall of windows was a small sink. Above the sink were open wooden shelves stuffed with old children’s books and textbooks. A chipped mirror was balanced on the wall behind the sink and a plastic paper-towel holder was attached nearby. Empty
plastic ice cream tubs were piled around the sink area, available as needed. The teacher’s
desk was placed in the back of the room, just in front of the wooden cabinets.

At the beginning of the school year, the desks were set in L-shaped groups of six,
with the teacher’s desk and a round worktable in the back of the room. Appendix D
shows this layout. At different times during the year desks were rearranged in twos and
again in straight rows with no desks touching. As the students moved from one group of
desks to another, as they often did to change subjects, I frequently sketched their seating
positions in the notebook I used for field notes. In addition to small group work, whole-
class activities and instruction were included in this setting.

Yellow tennis balls were cut and fitted on the four legs of each child’s orange
plastic chair. The teacher explained this was done to cut down on the noise of chairs
scratching the floor. It was effective.

Class rules were posted at the front of the room on another storage cabinet. The
only written rules were the following three that were hand-lettered on a piece of poster
board by the teacher before the school year began:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Rules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I respect my friends and my teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I want to get up, I ask permission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I want to talk, I raise my hand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Field notes for observation

Classroom activities were observed two hours a day, ten hours a week, forty hours
a month, for a total of two hundred, forty hours in this fourth-grade classroom over a six-
month period. Students who were selected as case study students were additionally followed at different times during the day to observe them in other areas, specifically in French, ten hours, ESL, ten hours, in a school play, one hour, and at recess, once a month, six months, for twenty minutes each observation.

I took notes in a spiral notebook designed for law students. Pages were divided in two sections, with the main section two-thirds of the width of the page, leaving a wider margin on the left side which I used to write my immediate thoughts and comments as opposed to the actual observations that I wrote in the main section. I filled one hundred pages in one notebook, and eighty pages in a second notebook. These notes were later typed.

My emphasis was always on gathering as much information and detailed descriptions of these students' behaviors, actions, and activities as related to their identity construction as possible. I looked at number and type of classroom interactions. In order to understand the classroom, the context of the study, as well as the individuals included in case studies, I made firsthand observations of interactions, sometimes engaging personally in those activities as a “participant observer,” and collected field notes through these observations, interviews, and document reviews. I reflected on the information gathered and fleshed out my notes at a later time, distancing myself in order to be critical of it, give it variant readings, and make judgments about it.

Initially, my field notes described everything I saw, unrelated to any hierarchy of importance, in order to assemble a complete picture of the social dynamic of this situated study. In order to find out how the children were accommodating to cultural norms of the classroom, I first wrote down descriptions of the classroom, the ongoing general
activities, and physical descriptions of most class members without respect to cultural backgrounds. My notes from the first days also included comments of all events-interruptions over the intercom about the lunch program, the daily schedule, the bus routes, and other administrative messages. In the continued process of data collection, my tentative sense about what to do and how to do it developed into organizational structures connecting me better to the students. This included expression of the face, attitude and gesture, the tones of the voice, words, and writing, all taken together.

Cooley's work relating self and community is relevant to this study: "The system of communication is a tool, a progressive invention, whose improvements react upon mankind and alter the life of every individual and institution. A study of these improvements is one of the best ways by which to approach an understanding of the mental and social changes that are bound up in them (p. 102)."

At several different times during the year I set up my battery-operated tape recorder on desks to capture free conversations in order to increase the comprehensiveness of the report. Unfortunately, the decibel level of the classroom made it difficult to record individual conversations. While this restricted the range of responses, I have included those that were audible in the individual case studies and throughout the writing of this research wherever appropriate.

**Interviews with students**

I held three individual interviews with each case-study student. Each interview was taped on a cassette with separate microphone, either in a private workroom of the library or in the hallway. We sat casually on the floor with the mike between us as we talked. All tape-recorded interviews were transcribed from the audiotapes. There were
two hundred and forty-eight typed pages of information from interviews held throughout the year.

An introductory interview was held in the fall—October and November; the middle interview, in January and February, and the final interview in May—July. In each interview I talked with each child about his or her experiences and perceptions, and the gestures and words each used to express and explain those experiences and perceptions played a prominent part in my seeing these children through their own eyes. Along with the challenge of creating substantively appropriate questions was that of the mechanics of choosing wording free of idioms or syntax that would lead the respondent or interfere with his understanding.

The initial interviews with the students selected for in-depth study, were based on a combination of scheduled/standardized and interview guide approaches (Patton, 1990) in which I developed the topics and issues in advance (Appendix C). This was intended as a time to become acquainted and build rapport. This interview included the following areas: self-description, family members, childhood memories, favorites (books, games, subjects, sports, television programs, hobbies, songs, holiday, animal, food), friends, locales in which they have lived or would like to live. In addition, I brought the self-portraits, which had been drawn by each child earlier, and had them describe themselves to me from these pictures. In follow-up questions about how they portrayed themselves in their artwork, I was able to gain some ideas of the extent to which they put themselves in various cultural groups. (Example: Kevin considered himself the “artist” of the class, not a “black artist”).
The second and third interviews followed a similar pattern of organization as the first, characterized by open questions and flexibility (Appendix C). These interviews encompassed questions that arose during the observations and review of artifacts. Certain questions were repeated, and during the third and final interview, the self-portraits drawn by each student were reintroduced with the students asked how they had changed during the school year since they drew their pictures.

**Interviews with parents**

Laslett and Rapoport (1975) refer to their approach to a study involving several interviews with family members as “collaborative interviewing and interactive research” (p.969). In order to increase the salience and relevance of the questions to the different individuals, I tailored my instrumentation to the respondents. After designing a list of specific questions I wanted answered by the parents about their children, I went over this interview guide instrument several times, adding open-ended questions that addressed specific family background experiences. One example that allowed them to speak in their own voice is in the question: "You have come a long way from [______]. I am wondering what brought you to this place?" (See Appendix C for the interview guide developed for the parent interview).

The parent interviews were conducted in the children’s homes, and they focused on their family histories, the parent’s hopes for their child (relevant to identity), and also on books and literacy experiences that were important to them and their children. In the interviews I made every effort to use language that was understandable and that fit into the frame of reference of the person interviewed. My goal in all the interviews was that
the persons being interviewed respond authentically in their own words to reflect their own perspectives.

Parent interviews lasted from one to three hours, fourteen hours total. All were tape-recorded. They were held in the spring of the year before the final student interviews which were held at the end of the school year. I chose to use a combination of Patton’s "informal conversational interview" and "general interview guide" approach in my qualitative interviewing (1990, p.280). The flexibility of the informal conversational interview allowed questions to flow from the immediate context, especially important when respondents come from diverse backgrounds. This method was highly responsive to both the adults and the children. The design of the interview guide, which is a list of prepared questions that are going to be explored during an interview, allowed me better use of limited time and helped draw similar information from the different people. This combined approach to collecting qualitative data helped me keep interactions focused and at the same time allowed individual perspectives and experiences to emerge in these open-ended interviews.

Interviews with teachers

The classroom teacher was interviewed at length (two hours) three scheduled times during the study. We met in the school, in her home, as well as in my home. There were also brief, unscheduled interviews held after school and during breaks the teacher had in her daily schedule. Additional hours were spent in three separate interviews with the other two teachers who spent part of each day in the classroom.

In each interview, my questions were organized in an interview guide approach, reviewing some of the same areas during each interview to categorize change, as well as
asking new questions precipitated by my daily observations in the classroom. Follow-up questions got at the extent to which they put themselves in various cultural groups.

Interviews with others

Interviews with the principal, the assistant principal, and two ESL teachers, as well as interviews with three students who left the program in January before my study was complete, brought the total number of hours devoted to interviewing to forty-five. In all, I tried to listen in order to assimilate the large amount of new information without bias and capture the mood and affective components while understanding the context from which the interviewees perceived the world.

Documents and artifacts

A major artifact was the self-portrait drawn by each child, mentioned earlier and shown in Appendix C. This was discussed at the introductory interview (soon after drawn as a class assignment), and again at the final interview when I asked how they thought they had changed in the picture they’d drawn of themselves at the beginning of the school year.

I also looked at various sorts of writing that the students produced, the informal writing in their journals and the formal writing they did to meet classroom assignments. I examined the books that they selected for their reading at school as well as the books at home that they indicated were important to them.

The teacher used many fill-in-the-blank worksheets and study sheets to prepare for national tests given in the spring. I was very interested in creative writing, but found little of this type writing during the year. More often, paragraphs were copied exactly as written on the board or an overhead projector.
Data Analysis

Interpreting field notes

Great care was taken to reproduce the participant's words in their original form and meaning without tidying up (organizing/clarifying) the grammar. All teachers and students were treated not as objects of study, but as active subjects of great interest and importance. All along their cooperation and insights were essential to the process of inquiry. Assessing the evidence from these diverse sources strengthened the reliability and validity of the information gathered.

First and foremost, my field notes were descriptive. I recorded notes about the following throughout the process:

- Program setting/physical environment
- Human, social environment
- Planned program implementation in the classroom
- Activities and structured interactions
- Informal interactions and fortuitous activities (patterns and frequencies among class members and teachers)
- Participants' language(s), including quotations from the people observed
- Nonverbal communications
- Documents, drawings
- Children's selections of texts and their interactions with them

I looked for displays of aspects of their ethnic identity. I looked at individuals and the larger context of the classroom to see how the children revealed their identities in their classroom interactions. I looked for educational practices by the teachers that elicited positive or negative responses from the individual students without downgrading their identities. I looked at verbal and non-verbal communication, noting how the participants in these relationships responded and reacted to events in the classroom. Each day, I read over my field notes asking if and how social identifications and perceptions changed for the children in this multicultural classroom, writing my own comments and
reflections on the left side of each notebook page. These included codes for individuals, codes for the type of classroom discourse and "other" discourse, and codes that reflected cultural membership (of family, mainstream culture, culture unique to this classroom). In developing and reshaping my interpretations and evaluating their accuracy, I also used reports of on-the-scene observers such as substitute teachers throughout the year.

Since I was particularly interested in their use of language (their primary language as well as the English they were learning) and their preferences to customs and traditions (those from their homes as well as the "new" ones they are learning), my field notes are full of direct quotes. I listened for use of American slang and idioms associated with mainstream American "child culture." I was also interested if or when a child began to appropriate something from another culture (e.g., references to Chinese New Year). I was interested in noting the discontinuities from and the shifts to the mainstream culture, as the teacher and some of the other students represent it. Their linguistic competencies as members of this community played a large part in their responses. Even with a perfect command of English, it is difficult to translate knowing into telling.

Throughout the year of research and observation, the students responded both orally and in writing. In the interest of connecting the child to texts, the strategy included observing books the children selected in class and in the library as well as their favorites at home. In document collection, a variety of personal writing as well as drawing was reviewed. One of the most valuable documents was a self-portrait drawn by each student in a class assignment and explained to me in personal interviews. I also took photographs of the participants at different times during the year. The self-portraits and photographs were displayed on a bulletin board during the course of the school year.
Coding the Data

My “start list” of codes included (1) the Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) pattern of instruction (Mehan, 1979) since it dominated classroom discourse in this classroom; (2) cultural mores of the home cultures (“HC”) as opposed to the general American culture (“AC”) and this specific classroom culture (“CC”); and (3) any type of data for which cultural membership was indicated. From the beginning there were discontinuities from and shifts to the mainstream culture, as the teacher and classmates represented it. Very gradually, markers of identity as key factors or variables in identity construction evolved into categories. I used verbalizations and body language of the participants. I also looked closely at the students’ selections of texts, their interactions with them, and their writing of their own texts. The patterns and frequency of interactions among class members and teachers were delineated as I went from initial through more focused codes, giving attention to the complex interplay between data collection and analysis.

Another focus was the students’ participation or lack of participation in the Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) patterns that dominant American classroom discourse (Mehan, 1979) and the interactions of the children in their small groups. I looked for markers of identity as the key factors or variables. For instance, it interested me when a child began to use slang and distinctly American phrases.

I found it difficult to collapse categories by looking for similarities among rules; my data collection was full of low frequency categories. I found very little overlap at first. As I became more knowledgeable about this classroom and school environment, I turned to confirming observed patterns in the behaviors of the individual students to
verify the data collected. When I noted regularities in one set of data, I looked for similar regularities in the other sets to provide for triangulation. One example: The hesitancy of students who had not mastered the English language to contribute to activities in the classroom led me to look for non-verbal reactions. The chief non-verbal reaction in this fourth-grade classroom: averting the eyes and pretending to focus on something else.

I looked for recurring themes and patterns, indicating them with abbreviations and symbols. I used descriptive codes for the chunks of information gathered. These codes allowed me to retrieve and to cluster the segments relating to particular questions and answers and according to particular individuals. The categories were collapsed as patterns become clear through my application of the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and as I moved recursively through the data.

Social identity theory provided a means of conceptualizing the process. My approach based in this theory in which social categories are constantly negotiated and changing as individual conceptions of one’s self change. The social identity theory is based on self-categorizing (Turner, 1985), and it establishes the significance of an experience, or a sequence of events for the individual. People construct their identities by placing themselves in groups, seeing themselves as having the characteristics and features of those that they associate with the particular groups (Tajfel, 1972). Therefore, in the process of trying to make sense of each other and construct a sense of place for themselves in this environment, these students had to mediate a range of cultural and intercultural phenomena as they sought to establish themselves. Was there a “collective identity” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986)? In questioning their perceptions of themselves, I found that group membership carries with it social and political meanings that make the
acquisition of language and culturally appropriate behavior difficult even in young children. In their words, no one wanted to be thought “stupid,” so they saw in a positive light the groups into which they placed themselves. Examples of this aspect included the following meaning-making labels: “Class Artist,” “Class Comedian,” “Class Smartest.”

Building Individual Case Studies

At the conclusion of the fall semester and during the following holidays, I wrote summaries of each of the students in my case studies. This forced my vague outlines to take on form and substance and acquire coherence. It also served the function of highlighting compatibilities and contradictions in these students’ growth and made later analyses and interpretations less difficult. Within my field notes I color-coded the pages on which each child was mentioned by using a different colored post-it note for each child to mark references to that student. This helped me pull and sort the information on each individual more easily. I reevaluated earlier categories and developed a more cogent understanding of the changes in their ways of thinking and acting, as well as linguistic changes in communication patterns. I learned from their daily efforts to respond meaningfully to situations in the classroom, and applied this to the whole vision of developing identities, not just the snapshot of a present situation.

Establishing Rapport with the Participants

In this research with children of such diverse backgrounds, I had to pay close attention to the fit between my subjects’ interpretations and their understandings of their classroom community and their place in this culture as they saw it. In this type of qualitative methodology, the efforts of prolonged engagement must build trust one interaction at a time. As trust was built through daily contact, with spoken and unspoken
interactions, it was solidified during hour-long personal interviews as two of us sat on the carpeted floor of the library workroom, the only available private spot in this entire elementary school. This casual environment was not inadequate to the study as I looked at how the students' understandings were related to their social, cultural, and personal circumstances because at least they were away from the pressure of their peers and the more structured environment of the classroom.

I also had to address the question of how different types of interviews facilitate or hinder respondents' efforts to make sense of what is happening to them and around them. Limited English proficiency of several of the participants was addressed by using simple English words, pictures, and the personal drawings. The description by each child of the self-portrait drawn as a class assignment—how they saw themselves as this school year began—was shown and discussed again much later in the school year, and this brought many problems into sharper focus.

All approaches were directed toward the understanding and analysis of individual narratives. When new interviews were not bringing any new knowledge about the level of social relations, I concluded this part of the research. This was at the end of the school year, with the exception of one participant who was suspended the last three weeks of school. This final interview took place in the summer of 1998.

Trustworthiness

Though studies employing qualitative methodology do not use the same methods for establishing validity and reliability of their data collection methods and final conclusion as do quantitative studies, these elements are no less critical in qualitative research. The researcher must persuade his or her audience that the findings are
legitimate and dependable (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), triangulation, the use of member checking, peer debriefing, and auditing heighten the probability that the findings of the qualitative research are credible. These features have been built into this study in the following ways.

**Triangulation**

My research strategies included these multiple means of data collection, observation, interviews, and artifacts, in order to carefully triangulate the data, and to contribute to the richness as well as the trustworthiness of the information gathered. Multiple methods of data collection increased both the reliability and validity to qualitative research (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

In addition, I have tried to make sensible methods decisions given the purpose of the inquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available, all of which involved critical reflection. Patton (1990) stated, “The validity and reliability of qualitative data depend to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher (p. 11). Therefore, I approached this fieldwork with a disciplined intention not to impose preconceptions, but at the same time I have included my insights, interpretations, and inspirations about what is happening in the setting. Patton (1990) corroborates this by stressing flexibility and creativity in revising plans made during design when important new possibilities and sources of data become available. “Creative fieldwork means using every part of oneself to experience and understand what is happening. Creative insights come from being directly involved in the setting being studied (p. 238).” A further dimension of an insistence on imagination and creativity is help in avoiding shallow reductions of ideas.
Member Checking and Peer Debriefer

Mrs. Banner read the field notes and transcripts for accuracy during the first part of my prolonged engagement, but she was unable to continue this through the total period of the study due to her declining health. Although Mrs. Banner, did not read all of the information gathered in the field notes or the transcripts of the interviews, she and I had frequent discussions of the data as it was collected and analyzed. These conversations served as an informal type of member checking because these dialogues allowed the researcher to substantiate the data.

The use of a peer debriefer as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) increased the accuracy of the information presented in this research. Throughout the entire process, the peer debriefer read field notes, discussed and debated the possibilities of the research, probed for biases, helped define coding categories, and served as a knowledgeable person to discuss questions and concerns. The peer debriefer, who is well versed in qualitative research methodology, is an assistant professor in early childhood education. The reviewer's experiences as a former classroom teacher increased her value in this role.

External Auditor

An external auditor (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was used to analyze data and provide dependability and confirmability. The auditor examined data after field notes were analyzed in order to carefully verify both the process and product of the research. By examining the process of the inquiry, the external auditor determined the process was acceptable and dependable. The auditor also examined the product (data and findings) to determine that the conclusions were reasonable and logical representations of the data. The inclusion of key data supported the main conclusions.
Confidentiality

One of my chief concerns was the observance of the ethics required in such an endeavor. For example, I dealt with the issues that protected the privacy of the students and their families and assured confidentiality of participants. All students, their parents, and all teachers were given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity. I also disguised the school in which the research took place with a fictitious name, even though research participants reflected an indifference to such matters.

Letters were sent home first to parents of all students in the classroom. The project was explained, and signatures of both parent and child were required. Next, letters were sent to the families of the children selected for case study, explaining the process further and requesting permission to interview their children and the parents themselves. Once again, signatures of both adult and student were required. For the explicit informed consent procedures, refer to the copy of letters sent in Appendix D.

My personal relationships with all the people I encountered in the field were open, honest, and free of pretense. I made no attempt to assume my research was value-free of researcher bias. Becoming immersed in my fieldwork, I developed a greater passion for understanding people and endeavored to reflect that interest. When teachers or others asked me what I was learning, I always gave a response that led away from particular individuals and toward the discussion of general concepts. This was to avoid violating my commitments to any of the participants and to avoid invading their rights of privacy. From the beginning point of informed consent, I was concerned with personal but unobtrusive data collection and rapport with participants, as well as with establishing interview climates that facilitated open responses.
Limitations of Study

The Lone Researcher

Katz's (1983) observations about relationships between researchers and subjects in the field acknowledge that one of the strengths of field studies is that researchers and subjects come to recognize and treat each other as “significant others.” Researchers, on their part, have to be attentive to the fit between their interpretations and their subjects’ understanding, which serves as a validity check on their findings. “Subjects respond to the researcher not simply as an ‘objective’ scientist but as a person with personal qualities and views, and their behavior toward the investigator resembles their behavior with others in their own worlds” (Mischler, 1986, p.125).

In assessing my capabilities as researcher, I felt I met Yin’s (1989, p.62) basic list of commonly required skills:

- A person should be able to ask good questions – and to interpret the answers.
- A person should be a good listener and not be trapped by his or her own ideologies or preconceptions.
- A person should be adaptive and flexible, so that newly encountered situations can be seen as opportunities, not threats.
- A person must have a firm grasp of the issues being studied, whether this is a theoretical or policy orientation, even if in an exploratory mode. Such a grasp reduces the relevant events and information to be sought to manageable proportions.
- A person should be unbiased by preconceived notions, including those derived from theory. Thus, a person should be sensitive and responsive to contradictory evidence.

Transferability

In the following chapter, you will read about the complex interactions between a teacher, her students and their parents. As you progress through the chapter, you will realize that data reported there is unique to this setting; the case studies communicate information about context that is grounded in the particular setting that was studied.
Therefore, the findings presented in the following chapter may not be transferable. However, the thick description present in a qualitative study enables readers to make independent judgements of the transferability of specific information from the context of the study to another context. By adhering to careful research protocols, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the research on the social identity construction of students in classrooms and expand the current understandings of how classroom teachers and students engage in a negotiation process to develop ownership, invent curriculum, and build a learning environment supportive to all.

Summary

Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect. The present study provided a detailed literary portrait of six students from diverse backgrounds in a 4th-grade classroom. Qualitative data were derived from daily observations in the classroom, through a number of interviews with the students, their teachers, and family members in the homes, and representation of artifacts, such as self-portraits from the students.

Multiple readings of the data to categorize and code responses helped in the recognition of emerging themes. I began by color-coding the data by student and student responses: teacher-student, student-student. Utilizing the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1967), I searched for important issues and recurring events or activities in the data in order to develop categories of focus. As themes emerged, broad categories were collapsed, or, divided into smaller categories. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to this as inductive category coding, and this step was repeated throughout the analysis in a complex, recursive fashion. Analysis was also conducted for commonalities and
differences in relationships across cultural patterns. The task of transcribing audio-taped interviews in addition to transcribing daily field notes was another of the many challenges which I faced as a qualitative researcher. I engaged a professional transcriber whenever necessary during the prolonged and deep involvement in this classroom culture in order to help organize the huge amounts of raw data in a timely manner.

I found it beneficial to write up observations of each student selected for case study at mid-year. I was careful to use the exact words of the students and the teachers whenever possible as they related to the emerging identities of the children.
Chapter Four:  
The Case Studies

Introduction

This chapter contains the stories of the six students who comprise the six case studies of this research project and how they came to be present in this classroom. Initial identification for participation in the study was based upon the diversity of backgrounds and the teacher's recommendations. Two native-born Americans were included to represent their cultures, European American and African American. I will show how these six students of very different backgrounds synthesized influences of the classroom into their own modes of understanding and participation. The influences of two Chinese students who left the school at mid-year are acknowledged and described as they affected this classroom community.

The case studies are divided into three categories: (a) personal history; (b) classroom interactions; and (c) home life. Each begins with the child's personal history, gathered by interviews with the individual child, the teacher, and his parents. This is followed by observations and self-perceptions of classroom interactions, as well as the children's own descriptions of their self-portraits. The final section of each case study is devoted to the home life of the children as observed through interviews with the parents in their homes. This approach led to the development of models that illustrate the diverse ways in which meanings drawn from children's family, peer, and school worlds combine to influence the students' perceptions of themselves.

A review of the table specifying the general backgrounds of the participants serves as a reminder of the research subjects and their cultural identities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Immigrant Status</th>
<th>English Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pasha</td>
<td>Bosnian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Involuntary Emigration</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmet</td>
<td>Kurdish</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Involuntary Emigration</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song Yu</td>
<td>South Korean</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Voluntary Emigration</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>American, Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>American, Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mong</td>
<td>Laotian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Involuntary Emigration</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pasha: Getting Past His Past

**Personal history**

Pasha was born in Bosnia. War-torn Bosnia was once part of Yugoslavia, which began breaking up a decade ago. There were always tensions between Muslims, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox Christians, but they managed to live side by side under the long dictatorship of Tito in the decades after World War II. Government, society, and laws were modeled after the Soviet Union, the country in which Yugoslavia had a customer that would buy almost anything they made.

In the late 1980's, the Soviet Union fell apart, and the Yugoslavian economy deteriorated with it. At that same time politicians such as Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic began promoting ethnic cleansing in the region. Serb paramilitaries backed by Milosevic were accused of the worst carnage in Europe since the Holocaust during World War II. According to the Associated Press, as reported in the Baton Rouge Morning Advocate (March 28, 2000), some two-hundred thousand (200,000) Bosnians died, hundreds of thousands became refugees, and an estimated twenty thousand (20,000) women were brutally raped. The massacre of thousands of Muslims at Srebrenica has
been repeatedly documented. In April, 1992, the town of Foca was overrun by regular and paramilitary units. The twenty thousand (20,000) Muslims who were living there at one time comprised slightly more than half the prewar population. After the war, no Muslims remained, and the town was renamed Srbinje. Atrocities of flaring hatred were commonplace. The preceding brief overview does not do justice to a complex and tragic situation, but this description is important in the layers of Pasha’s self-identification.

Pasha and his family fled bitterly divided Bosnia for Germany where they lived for several years. His teacher suspected that this family fled to avoid religious persecution; however, the family would not confirm this. They moved from Berlin to this location in the United States in late September, and Pasha entered Mrs. Banner’s fourth-grade class. At that time he spoke only German. For the first week he did not speak at all in class. He stared into space, avoiding eye contact with other students and the teachers, clearly withdrawing from his present surroundings. Since I spoke a little German, he and I were able to communicate in a limited manner. In the beginning it seemed he would have preferred to stay in the world of his mind, and I was intruding by making it possible for him to play any part at all in the classroom. At the same time, he began looking at my face when words were directed toward him, and a tenuous bond was forming.

Physically, Pasha was tall and slightly stocky, fair-skinned with light brown hair and eyes. He was a handsome child, with a strong physical presence.

His family consisted of his mother and father and one sister, a year older than he, who was placed in fifth-grade at the same school. The parents spoke their native Bosnian
language as well as German, but almost no English. Since German was the language
spoken at home, both Pasha and his sister spoke only German.

Classroom interaction. In the first of three personal interviews held outside the
classroom during the year, Pasha conveyed little of his personality or self-perception. He
did not smile, and his only response in English was "Don't know." In our developing
relationship, I translated simple thoughts into German, but even my limited command of
his second language failed to bring a smile to his face. The most animated he became
was in response to questions about his family. (At this time I did not know he had
witnessed his grandfather's death at the hands of opposing troops.) He made the shape of
guns with his hands, and, in a sweeping motion around the room, acted out shooting
everyone in sight. His words "Besser auf Deutschland." ("Better in Germany.") indicated
Pasha's way of explaining he felt more secure in a foreign country than in his homeland.

The middle of the three interviews with Pasha was held in early January. With a
growing command of English and a growing confidence in his abilities, Pasha clearly
enjoyed the person-to-person contact in the interview. The following excerpt from this
dialogue shows his growing grasp of English, as well as his grasp of the classroom
culture.

_Interviewer:_ Do you ever check out books from the library to take
home and read?

_Pasha:_ One time. My sister two times she bring books. I don't
read the books. I don't have time. Have to homework.

_Interviewer:_ Do you have homework every night?

_Pasha:_ Sometimes no Fridays. Sometimes another weeks.

_Interviewer:_ How are you learning so quickly?

_Pasha:_ I don't know many words to say.

_Interviewer:_ You have learned many words since we first talked.
Pasha: I can’t tell you what I don’t know. I don’t know many animals and names. I have to learn this for names for like if it is Pluto or Neptune I have the names to learn. I know sun; I know Earth; I know Pluto. The same words like in Germany Pluto. They say that Pluto like in cartoon.

Interviewer: How do you get help when you don’t understand an assignment or you don’t understand what you are supposed to do?

Pasha: First, try read. When I know I write it; when I don’t know, I raise my hand. Come Miss Tony or Mrs. Banner.

Interviewer: Do you ever get help from other students?

Pasha: No. First time I don’t know speaking English they helped me. Da helped me. You know who is Da. He’s gone. Maybe Montreal. I forgot.

During the time I came to know Pasha, I discovered he revealed a sense of self that was sometimes confused, sometimes resigned, sometimes lonely, sometimes fiercely proud. His strength of character was unusual in that its foundations were laid both in his war-ravaged homeland and in his first move to a foreign country, Germany, at age four. He was obviously strengthened rather than weakened by this, because his adjustment to and immersion in a third very different culture was more rapid in this classroom environment than the other students who entered under similar conditions.

Pasha’s first “academic” endeavor was to copy words of which he had no understanding from the board as assigned to the rest of the class. He copied each letter laboriously, his fairly large body hunched over his desk. He copied slowly just to have something on which to keep busy so he would be left to himself these first days. He clearly discouraged all interactions.

Two weeks later, in October, Pasha showed an interest in the computers in the classroom. He watched another child play a simple number game, then took his place at
the computer and did well immediately at the same game. It was an elementary game in which the player selected a number between one and ten which allowed him to choose that number of facial features to be placed on a large caterpillar, with the picture popping up as directed. [Example: in front of the picture of an eye, the player selected “eight” and the caterpillar was given eight eyes.] Pasha’s comment: “Cool!” This was the first word in English I heard him speak.

One hour later, when the class was called to lunch on the intercom, Pasha was still playing this game. During this time period four children, three boys and one girl, walked up behind his chair and watched, but Pasha ignored them completely. At one point, Lillian, from Nigeria, tried to help him with the mouse. He gave no response to her, “See, do it like this.” He continued on his own.

At this point there were still no recurring participation structures because Pasha was not participating. There was no recitation; no sharing student-to-student or teacher-to-student; no reading response. Pasha was on his own. This week, Mrs. Banner asked Da (Chinese) to change desks and sit beside Pasha and direct him in any way he could help. Da showed his displeasure with a frown and comment: “Why me? I don’t speak German! I speak Chinese!”

In late October the class was studying the digestive system. The assignment: Write a story about a hamburger going in your mouth, and describe how it goes through the digestive system. Pasha still did not understand enough English words to comprehend the assignment. Da and he exchanged hand motions, and Pasha used the tilt of his head and questioning eyes to signify his continuing confusion. Da repeatedly said
"no! no!", and both became frustrated because there was no transmission of understanding between them.

Caroline, observing the situation, stepped in to help without being asked to do so, but Pasha was never able to even begin the assignment. When it was time to change desks and move to another subject, the teacher spoke the command and all students stood up. Pasha saw this and stood beside his chair, but as the rest of the children moved to another group, he didn’t know where to go. Apparently bewildered, he merely stared straight ahead. Caroline pointed to a particular desk across the room and said the words: “You go there.” Pasha followed these directions and sat down without understanding any of the class discussion. Mrs. Banner explained the assignment was to find nouns in sentences in the language textbook and copy these words on a piece of paper. As soon as the others began numbering their papers, Pasha raised his hand showing his understanding of this class rule. It took several minutes for the teacher to respond; at that point, Pasha said one word in a questioning manner: “Computer?” He responded to Mrs. Banner’s affirmative nod by moving to the computer and remaining there alone for the rest of the period.

Pasha’s first spoken communication concerning subject-matter with the teachers came three weeks after his arrival. He looked at Miss Thompson who was showing him which answers to circle on a reading worksheet by pointing to the correct letter and spoke in appropriate English: “This one?”

To determine which page he was supposed to be on and in which book, Pasha repeatedly looked at the child sitting next to him, but after four weeks in the class he still
kept away from any involvement in activities. He did not see himself as a member of this community as illustrated by the following group activities.

Newspapers were distributed to each child in the classroom with instructions to search for abbreviations, proper nouns, common nouns, and verbs. The students were directed to cut out these words and glue them to a piece of paper. Pasha sat alone at his desk looking at some of the pictures in the section of the paper he was given. He later handed a blank sheet of paper to the teacher— with questioning eyes, not insolence.

On another day, a story was distributed on a worksheet, and students were assigned the task of reading the one-page story silently and using a highlighter to mark words they didn’t understand. Without understanding the assignment and after observing the other students’ actions, Pasha began highlighting words indiscriminately.

Ahmet, the Kurdish child who entered this class as his first American classroom, speaking no English, was the first child with whom Pasha shared an activity. Ahmet was looking through the humorous book, Teacher from the Black Lagoon, and Pasha looked over his shoulder at the pictures. Both looked at the pictures rather than the words. Neither spoke, but they made eye contact and smiled as Ahmet turned the pages. This was the beginning of a growing friendship between these two boys. It was strengthened in the ESL class, with Ahmet, in the beginning, helping Pasha understand the ways of the classroom. As his English improved, Pasha assumed the leadership position. They worked out their differences as friends.

In the second of the three interviews, Pasha was asked the following question: Is English easier for you now than it was in October? His one-word reply: “Little.” When asked the follow-up question “In what ways?” Pasha responded: “They don’t know I
speak English.” He was still choosing to isolate himself from the other students except when he chose to interact. When asked the question, “Who would you like to sit on either side of you in class?” Pasha responded: “Ahmet. Nobody on other side.”

In an early interview with the classroom teacher, Mrs. Banner worried that Pasha had closed himself off from all of the other children. His unfamiliarity with the intricacies of the classroom culture was obvious. The ESL teacher said he desperately wanted to be with his sister in her meetings with the foreign students, but that was not possible with the school-wide scheduling.

By the time of a later interview (November) the classroom teacher had a firmer grasp of some of the aspects of Pasha’s background as reflected in the following excerpts from that interview.

**Teacher:** Pasha likes to be the class clown right now. He has come out so much. Let me tell you a story. Do you know the story about Pasha? Did I tell you?

**Interviewer:** Only parts of it. I’d like to hear it all.

**Teacher:** About how his grandfather had his throat cut in Bosnia. His grandfather and his father were army people—were military people—and that’s the reason they came out of Bosnia because the grandfather had his throat cut. Pasha’s daddy felt the family might be next. As I understood it, his mother was also in the military, and she fought, too, to get out of Bosnia.

**Interviewer:** When the grandfather’s throat was cut, did they kill him?

**Teacher:** Yes, and from what I could understand of the father’s very broken English, he said Pasha saw this happen. He kept talking about Pasha’s nightmares after nightmares. He said night after night Pasha would wake up screaming and come get in their bed or sleep on the floor in their room because he was so frightened. But, now Pasha has come out so much, and that’s why he’s getting this little cutie attitude where he wants to be the class clown and make us all laugh. I figure if I let him do this, let him be the class clown, it may be helping him to overcome the horrible things.
Interviewer: And gain some acceptance at the same time?
Teacher: Yes, and see the kids accept him for who he is.

I found Pasha to be more highly intelligent and more perceptive than the majority of the children in this fourth-grade classroom. Over time, the teacher came to this same conclusion.

Interviewer: Does he like to ask for help? Will he ask?
Teacher: He will now. Yes, he’s beginning to ask me. On the practice tests for the standardized test we will be taking in the spring, he is beginning to say “Tell me what this word is.” He’s good in math. Let me tell you something. I had shown him one time how to do long division. I mean not the short division, but long division. And do you know on a test he figured out how to do it by himself? He had watched me do it on the board that one time and he just tried it and got it. He’s smart. He’s very smart. You see, we thought, well, we just thought the English was going to stop him from everything. But now he’s making his grades, and they are good.

Pasha’s self-portrait (Appendix E) seems to reflect some of the terror he experienced in his younger years with a blank, somewhat unbelieving stare. His head is tilted, and he appears to be looking at something unbelievably unpleasant. Despite that, the background color he chose was a bright yellow, indicating perhaps an unconscious positive outlook. He drew his portrait as he saw himself, with blue eyes, brown hair, and pierced earring in one ear. His nose and mouth with teeth were carefully drawn in and colored white. When shown this picture again at the end of the year and asked how he had changed, he replied: “I’m bigger. I smile more and can make people laugh. And I can’t wear my earring in my ear any more because of a stupid rule.”

Home life

The interview with Pasha’s parents took place in their sparsely furnished upstairs apartment located in an area of immigrants, both refugees and voluntary, and university
voluntary, and university students. The furniture consisted of one worn brown couch and
one dinette chair pulled from the laminate table set in a dining area. The only light was
from a broken ceiling fixture over the table with three of four dim bulbs working. In this
poorly-lit apartment, there were no pictures or photographs taped on the blank walls. The
lack of anything personal seemed to evoke impermanence and desolation. There was an
old black and white television which was on the two hours I was there. The two children
watched it off and on, but they mostly listened as their father tried to tell his story.

Pasha’s father did most of the communicating, bringing out the few family
pictures he had been able to keep. He repeatedly referred to a video made of the two
children in Germany he wanted to play on the TV but was unable to do so because of the
different electrical current. It was clearly very valuable to the family because he would
not let me take it out of the apartment to find out if it could be converted. Concomitantly,
his strong sense of pride would not let him take “charity” from strangers.

Pasha’s father, like other immigrants from Bosnia, worked at a car-wash. His
mother worked in a factory sewing children’s clothes. There was desperation in their
demeanor as they struggled to explain their present circumstances. We communicated in
broken German and English as Pasha’s father described his “high” position in the
military in his home country. As he explained it, he could not condemn prisoners to
death he was forced to arrest, and so he had to leave his country. He walked several
weeks, through four countries on foot, to find a safe haven for him and his family. He
managed to get his family to Berlin where they stayed for three years.

Pasha’s grandmother was still alive in Bosnia, and they had managed to speak
with her on the telephone twice in the past several months. Her son, Pasha’s father,
lamented the fact that Pasha remembered so little of his native language that communication with his grandmother was difficult. At the same time, the father wanted his son to master English because “it help his life.” He did not want Pasha participating in the French language lessons at Terrace Elementary, fearing they would interfere with his learning English.

When asked about his religion, he responded “no. no.” There was a combination of fear and pain on his face. When asked if he wanted to stay in America or hopefully go back to Bosnia, he responded emphatically “America! America!” When asked why, he said “Free.” His attitude seemed to reflect that of other displaced families. Before the war, Bosnia’s population was about 4.5 million people. Now, there are two million to two and a half million people in Bosnia, and most of these are displaced within the country. According to the United Nation Peace Keepers stationed in Bosnia, few have gone back to where they lived before the war (The Advocate, March 26, 2000).

Ahmet: Keeping a Gentle Spirit

**Personal history**

Ahmet was born in Iraq, of Kurdish descent. The Kurds are one of the largest ethnic groups in the world without a state of their own. They originated in the Middle East, where they descended from Indo-European tribes. There are approximately 30 million Kurds today, most inhabiting a region known as Kurdistan. This area is located where Iraq, Iran, Syria, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan intersect. Many Iraqi Kurds fled their homes after the Persian Gulf War and their failed uprising against Saddam Hussein. Ahmet was a part of this group.
Ahmet emigrated to this city with his family and other Kurdish families in April of 1997. His was one of six families, altogether 34 Iraqi Kurdish refugees, relocated here. Like the others, Ahmet’s family arrived with their few possessions packed in cardboard boxes. They were assisted by Migration and Refugee Services, a division of the Catholic diocese. A newspaper interview on June 1, 1997, with the translator for these families, was titled “Torn from home: Holding on to the old world; Discovering a new world.” The Kurdish speaker explained that they worked for a relief organization sponsored by American funds to design and implement water systems in northern Iraq. Civil war broke out, and Iraqi troops came to take prisoners. “They said we were spies because we helped the Americans. We had to leave or they would have hung us. We had only 24 hours. I couldn’t sell my house or my car. We had to say goodbye to my parents. They wept.” (The Advocate).

Ahmet was olive-skinned with black hair and eyes—characteristics shared by every member of his family. He was thin, of slight build but average height. His clothes were carefully fitted with his shirt always tucked inside belted, baggy pants. His hair was always carefully combed.

Ahmet’s family included his father and mother, two brothers, a sister, and a grandmother (his father’s mother). They temporarily lived with a sponsor, but soon moved into a two bedroom apartment in a low-rent area near the university. This area was populated by students and foreigners from many different backgrounds. Still, their living conditions are better than they would be in Iraq, and the Azad family appreciated this fact. The father described Iraq’s economy as still crippled by the decade of strict economic sanctions imposed after Bagdad’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Children had few
school supplies, sat four to a desk on one rickity bench, and survived on a piece of bread for breakfast and rice as the main dish for supper. This explained why the Kurdish refugees were so amazed at the quantity and variety in American grocery stores. "It's like a movie," said this father referring to the wide aisles brimming with food.

From the beginning of the school year I noticed Ahmet was extremely respectful, always keeping his eyes on the teacher whenever she was talking. The second day of my observations, I asked Mrs. Banner the country in which Ahmet was born. She, somewhat embarrassed, said she didn't know and went over to his desk to ask him. After wording her question several times with different, simple words, Ahmet still had trouble understanding the question. He indicated he would ask his father, but we did not know until the next day when he brought in the written answer whether or not he understood we were asking the name of the country in which he was born. (He was able to understand enough to have his father write down his native country and bring it in the next day: "Iraq.")

**Classroom interaction**

This fourth-grade classroom was Ahmet's first experience in American schools. His eyes were kind and bright, but, perhaps due to his shyness, there was little interaction between Ahmet and the other children in the class. Students gave him little notice, and he never complained. He was a passive individual, and I observed neither positive nor negative attention directed toward him. He had polite listening skills and a respect for the authority of the adults with whom he came in contact. When a group was told to go back to their desks, Ahmet was halfway to his seat while the teacher was still repeating the command for the others.
Many weeks of reading instruction focused on finding and understanding the main idea of paragraphs. In early October, after a lengthy explanation that included several examples of the main idea, Ahmet clearly understood nothing of this concept. The teacher spoke directly to him from the front of the class: “Ahmet, I’ll come help you in a minute; you get started.” Ahmet folded his arms on his desk and put his head on them with closed eyes. Over a period of twenty-five (25) minutes, during which the three adult teachers in the classroom walked around giving individual help, no one stopped to help Ahmet, and he did not raise his hand. He painstakingly copied a sentence from the board as best he could, then, wadded it up, walked to the waste paper basket, and threw it away.

Finding the main idea is somewhat of a cornerstone of our American school culture, one of the conventions of school. This is clearly a literacy event important in this classroom, but Ahmet took no part in it. He learned to copy the first sentence (written on the board for the entire class to copy), then began to look over at the papers of the students on either side of him and try to copy their letters and words. He copied without oral communication. Since Mrs. Banner had told the students to help Ahmet whenever possible, they did not complain when he copied words from their papers, but they went no further. Sometimes he would point to something on one of their papers, widen his eyes, and shrug his shoulders upward to ask what it meant. Little help was forthcoming. Much of his class time was spent staring around the room; he missed many opportunities to learn by not trying to use oral language. He continued with his private ways of communicating, i.e., questioning with his eyes, pointing to what he didn’t understand,
even walking up to the board to show the student next to him what he needed to know. Ahmet never showed frustration and accepted however much or little help was given him.

In math, too, Ahmet laboriously copied exactly from the board the right angles drawn there by the teacher. The student-teacher in Special Education from Canada helped Ahmet whenever she could. This involved working one word at a time on assignments in every area of the curriculum. Upon being given a scratch-n sniff sticker (scented), Ahmet was fascinated. He scratched it time after time, holding it up to his nose to smell the scent of lemon.

The first time Ahmet sat in front of one of the computers, he didn’t move. At Mrs. Banner’s suggestion another student showed him how to turn on the computer. He did not connect the picture of the apple or the word apple on the mouse pad, so did not understand the instruction that the “on” switch was right under the apple. After the other student went back to his seat, Ahmet pressed keys on the keyboard at random until the class was called to lunch.

Reading was not taught on a daily basis in this classroom. There was little dialogue. Mrs. Banner, trained in the IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) pattern of teaching in the classroom, used it almost exclusively. Recurring participation structures centered around worksheets and recitation, with little critical thinking endeavors provided. Most of the time the teacher read a sentence aloud with the students contributing simply the word that should go in the blank. Ahmet was in the lowest reading group, which involved reading four- and five-word sentences and filling in a blank with one of two words listed below each sentence. In the group instruction that consumed most of every day in his regular classroom, Ahmet always sat straight in his
desk with his eyes on the teacher. In the frequent lectures addressed to the entire class on main idea, Ahmet wrote nothing.

He was the weakest in spelling of the group of case study students. No accommodations were made on the weekly Friday spelling test for the non-English speakers. Ahmet’s highest grade in November was forty (40) out of one-hundred (100).

This child’s greatest success came in the ESL classroom where he was placed with a small group of 5 to 7 students from different countries. Here, his friendship with Pasha, from Bosnia, was cemented. Although still reticent, Ahmet laughed easily and often succeeded in answering the teacher’s direct questions. There was more structure in this small classroom and greater tolerance for incorrect answers, and this worked to the advantage of all the students.

By the middle of October, Ahmet was walking over to the computer more frequently. He usually stood beside whichever child was sitting in front of the screen and watched without comment, but absorbed the attitudes of the child. (Example: a cheer of “Y E S!!” when the other student responded that way to what was happening on the screen.) Ahmet began to understand more than he was able to explain. Evidence of this was observed when Pasha made a mistake, and Ahmet reached for the mouse saying “no, no.” He “pointed and clicked” the correct answer on the screen without saying a word.

The Thursday before Thanksgiving all students from different countries were asked to bring a food to share. Ahmet’s mother made sausage wrapped in a roll of dough, and pride clearly showed in Ahmet’s face as he handed his dish to the teacher that morning. None of the other students would try it when the teacher passed the plate
around, but Ahmet, true to his character, did not complain. If he took this as a slight, he did not show it. He ate his portion eagerly, as did this researcher.

That same week the class was given a worksheet with the American Thanksgiving story on it. The student teacher from Canada read it aloud to the class. Ahmet had been read a simpler version of this story in the ESL class just days before and recognized it immediately. He interrupted twice to say “Yes! Yes!” Unable to contain himself in his eagerness to show he knew “the right answer,” Ahmet interjected “Pilgrims die!” Even after the teacher stopped his disruptive responses, he continued to nod his head with the certainty he knew what she was talking about.

As Ahmet’s English very slowly improved, his personality emerged more defined. He continued to defer to the others in the classroom, but he tried more frequently to make his thoughts known to those who would listen. At times, his reticence made him seem almost invisible to the rest of the class. The exception was Pasha, with whom he attended ESL classes. Even with Pasha gradually assuming the dominant personality of the two, their friendship was a real and positive connection for Ahmet.

Looking at Ahmet’s improving abilities to communicate from another perspective, he was also getting a little more impatient. The more he understood, the more he wanted to learn – and to show he had learned. Even late in the school year, Ahmet had to work diligently to overcome his lack of experience with the English language. He continued to require one-on-one help with all assignments except math problems. While he was less passive and a more active participant in his classroom environment than in early months, when Mrs. Banner was out of class on sick leave for several weeks, he never went to the substitute teachers for help. He went to the special
education teacher and aides who had been in the classroom from the beginning of the school year.

Ahmet’s self-portrait (Appendix E) appears to me to reflect his gentle spirit (see Appendix C). He carefully drew his black hair, neatly parted in the center, black eyebrows, and coffee-colored skin. Interestingly, he colored his eyes the green color of the background he chose, although in reality they were black. When asked about this inconsistency, Ahmet replied: “It seemed like a good color, and I was using green for the background anyway.” He did not spend any time drawing in clothes; he concentrated on his facial features. An erasure mark obliterated his right ear, and he was concerned about that to the extent that he alluded to the mark in both the first and last interview. In that last interview, when asked how he had changed since drawing his self-portrait, Ahmet responded: “I am the same, but Pasha is my friend.”

Home life

The interview with Ahmet’s parents took place in their apartment on the first floor of a three-story apartment building in the same area near the university where many foreign nationals lived. The pot-holed parking lot ended at the doors of the six first floor apartments. There were no trees to break the run-down look of the boxy, rectangular building. It was located just off the main thoroughfare, across the street from a convenience store.

The interview was established through the father, and he did most of the talking during my two-hour visit. Having set the time of my visit at their convenience, I found the whole household waiting for me—without shoes. At my knock the father opened the door within seconds. He was carefully dressed in a black suit, white shirt and dark tie,
with no shoes or socks. We shook hands, and I immediately reached down to take off my
own shoes. In broken English and with hand signals, Mr. Azad indicated this was not
necessary, but I explained I enjoyed this custom. I stood my boots by the door next to
several pairs of tennis shoes.

Inside the carpeted apartment two mismatched couches were set at a right angle
against two walls with a small wooden table in front of one. There was a map of the
Middle East tacked above one couch and small pictures of flowers hanging randomly on
another wall. There were no doors into the kitchen so it was clearly visible from the
living area. A wooden table with only four chairs for the family of six had a plastic bowl
with fruit set on the clean surface.

While the rest of the family gathered quietly in the living room the father was
showing me the map covering the Kurdish homeland that included southeastern Turkey.
We are familiar with Saddam Hussein’s malicious treatment of this minority through our
participation in the Gulf War. In addition to this struggle, Turkey does not consider
Kurds a minority, and it is illegal to teach or even broadcast in the Kurdish language.
Speaking Kurdish was only legalized there in 1991. When asked the name of his native
country, Mr. Azad responded strongly: “Kurdistan, and language is Kurdish.”

I greeted the rest of the family who sat together on one couch, with the
grandmother dressed in a long dark dress with her head covered with the Muslim veil.
Her face was inscrutable, and she sat completely still with hands folded in her lap the
entire two hour interview. At the other end of the couch sat Ahmet’s mother dressed in a
knee-length, belted American dress. She smiled easily with the same twinkle in her eyes
as Ahmet and communicated with simple words and facial expressions corroborating the
things her husband was saying.

The three children sat between the two women. Ahmet seemed delighted to have
this “teacher” at his apartment, employing his same habit (characteristic?) noted at school
of following every spoken word with his eyes. His seven-year-old younger sister, up and
down changing places on the couch, and older brother, with averted eyes and a bored
facial expression, simply endured the intrusion. The father later explained his oldest
child at age 14 was more painfully shy than the others; he would not even speak on the
telephone. “Older one you see he shy. I am same thing. I myself shy.”

Mr. Azad, a civil engineer in Iraq, worked as a cashier on the night shift at a
Circle K store across the street from the family’s apartment. He said this was temporary,
but he was happy to have any job, and without a car, it was easy for him to walk back and
forth.

English proficiency was extremely limited upon the family’s arrival in the United
States. and even at the end of the school year Ahmet confirmed that Kurdish was still the
language spoken at home. The father’s mastery of English was clearly the most
advanced. Upon being asked if he had taken a course in the language, he responded:
“Yes. American language. I take one month; went to Catholic Center, but now I try
working as cashier and some customer come I try to speak to them.”

The following are Mr. Azad’s comments about language:

*Interviewer:* Is it important to you for Ahmet to speak English?
*Azad:* Real important.

*Interviewer:* How important is it for him to keep his fluency in your
native Kurdish?
*Azad:* That also important. My languages Kurdish, Persian, and
English. As child, in my time, I forced to learn Arabic. But, Kurd, the people; Kurdish the language.

Interviewer: What books are important at home?
Azad: We have one dictionary, English to English. I try with them to use this. We need dictionary Kurdish-English.

Interviewer: Do you have a copy of The Koran?
Azad: Yes.

Interviewer: In what language?
Azad: Kurdish.

Interviewer: Did you find a strong community of Muslims here or a scattered one?
Azad: I think a good community, but the Pakistani people are the very good ones. They are very helpful. They don't just speak, they give money also. I like Pakistani people. They try also keep their custom, and they are nice people.

Interviewer: I think it is important to keep one's own traditions and to be open to the customs of others.
Azad: That's right.

Interviewer: Getting back to language, how do you encourage your children to practice using English?
Azad: TV. I bring for them cable. I think TV is good for them because they learn language. Better than game Nintendo, but play Nintendo every day as well.

Interviewer: Does Ahmet ever read to you out of books from school or teach the family new words he has learned?
Azad: Most time he spend his time inside with TV.

Interviewer: Did you or his mother read books to him when he was a child in Iraq?
Azad: I say yes. His mother was their teacher and she know she teach about they learn in school.

Interviewer: Who helps Ahmet with his homework now?
Azad: No help.

Interviewer: Was Ahmet's decision not to take French at school his choice or your choice?
Azad: I think it is difficult for him to learn both languages same
time. I think he learn English better. After he can try to other language.

Interviewer:  Do you still consider yourself Kurdish?
Azad:  Yes. But we try to understand American custom and culture, and we try to learn new people and new culture.

Interviewer:  What is important for Ahmet - and for you - to retain from your Kurdish heritage?
Azad:  We try to keep all things. We try to keep religion, the culture, and if we have a chance we try to sometime see a happy Kurdistan. We hope for our new country and our old country.

Interviewer:  Do you plan to apply for American citizenship in the future?
Azad:  Yes. Of course.

**Song Yu: “A Stick Off My Dad”**

**Personal history**

Song Yu was born in Seoul, South Korea. He was in the United States for a very different reason than the previous students introduced. His father had his government’s financial help in studying for his Ph.D. in engineering at this state university.

The family consisted of his mother and father and a brother two years younger than Song Yu. His mother was a homemaker. This was the family’s first year in America, although the father had traveled here before. Song Yu made it clear, as did his father, that their stay in America was temporary.

Song Yu’s immaturity was evident from the first of the school year when he needed almost every direction given to the class repeated to him individually. In the beginning I suspected his command of English was the problem when actually he needed the repeated personal contact with an adult that is often evidenced in younger children.

Mrs. Banner discovered months later that Song Yu’s parents had told the school he was
entering fourth grade, when he came from South Korea having just completed second grade. Prior schooling records did not arrive until late fall. It was then the teacher learned Song Yu had completed only second grade in South Korea. His parents had heard American schools were behind Korean schools and wanted him to be “challenged.” What they did not consider was that Song Yu would have to adjust not only to the cultural norms of the classroom, but also to the norms of the children one to three years older.

While the father and both boys had studied English in South Korea, the mother spoke almost no English. Korean was the language spoken at home, although the two boys would use English expressions intermittently in their conversations, as observed during the home interview with the parents. (“Turn on the TV!” and “I win!” are two examples.)

The family lived in a modern duplex near the university, and they owned a car. Although the economy of South Korea had been in a downward spiral, this family was not suffering. Both boys were well-dressed each day for school, and all felt very positive toward the future they faced upon their return to South Korea. The strong family unit and confidence in intellectual abilities were integral to the way Song Yu constructed his own identity in a classroom built on diversity. At the same time, there was an insecurity that he tried to hide from his classmates. While he struggled with his immaturity, a good-naturedness was evident in most of his actions.

Physically, this child was one of the smallest children in the class, and, at eight years old, the youngest. Song Yu was fair-skinned with black hair and black eyes. He
wore thick wire-rimmed glasses and was always neatly dressed, often in khaki slacks, knit shirts with collars, and a belt.

**Classroom interaction**

Song Yu had a great deal of nervous energy, always swinging one foot under the chair, swinging an arm or hand. He got out of his desk frequently, often just walking over to look at the work of other children (particularly Da, from China, with whom he was especially competitive), looking for the ubiquitous lost pencil, throwing away paper, and, most frequently, asking the teacher or aides for help. One day, when Mrs. Banner told the class to look around the room and find an example of a right angle, Song Yu was the only student to physically get out of his desk to look around.

In the beginning of the school year, all three teachers in the class would take turns answering Song Yu’s questions and petitions. As time went by, he held his hand in the air for longer and longer periods of time. Many times he lowered it after over a minute of keeping it in the air with no response. Undaunted, he then got up and walked over to one of the teachers, who would then send him back to his desk with a reprimand to raise his hand. On some occasions he would respond aloud that he had raised his hand; on others, he just returned to his desk. Never did I observe this child lose his temper or petulantly demand help when his questions were ignored.

Although this was Song Yu’s first year in school in America, his instruction in English began in Korea, giving him a definite advantage over refugee children who had no previous instruction in a different language. At the same time, his English was not always intelligible to the other students, and they either ignored him or laughed at him. While sitting at the computer one day, he confided to a child watching over his shoulder
that he wanted to change his (real) name because it sounded like "donkey." The child immediately announced this piece of information derisively to the entire class, and laughter ensued. Song Yu fixed his concentration on the computer screen in front of him, keeping his back to the class.

On assignments, Song Yu was always intent and focused on answering questions directed by the teacher. Most of the lessons were on specific skills, and he did his best to master them, frequently balancing himself on one knee in his chair while hunched over his desk in contemplation. In unconscious movements, he would stand and sit intermittently and tap his pencil on the desk or on his arm.

At the same time Song Yu was not a self-starter. He repeatedly lost his concentration on independent work, and many times had to complete assignments late, even days late. If the teacher didn't specifically request his work, Song Yu let it slide, never completing the assignment. When forced to explain why he hadn't finished, his voice invariably dropped to an unintelligible level, and he tried to save face by distracting the teacher with another question.

He was also late returning the two permission letters I gave him. Only with repeated daily reminders, and finally another written note, did he return the second letter signed. The day he remembered it, he was thrilled with himself, "I got it! I got the letter!" greeted me as I entered the room.

Though his immaturity showed, Song Yu kept a certain formality in his responses that set him apart from the other students in this fourth grade classroom and reflected his cultural background. He always wrote his full name on papers, his less-developed motor
skills showing as he struggled with his writing, using large, uneven letters that went above and below the lines on the paper.

He veered from tenacious confidence to self-deprecating sensitivity. Examples of the way these characteristics are reflected in his self-concept can be understood best in his own words. In a conversation with Kevin, who was sitting next to him during a math lesson, Song Yu looked up from his paper saying: “Koreans in math are good. First grade: times and division! I remember times at six years old and forget.” Kevin’s only response, to no one in particular: “You’re not smarter than me.”

On this same subject of his intelligence, the following are Song Yu’s own words from his first one-hour interview in late fall.

*Interviewer:* Do you consider yourself a good student?
*Song Yu:* Yeah. Because I got a present, a prize from the school (in South Korea) because I study hard.

*Interviewer:* What an honor! Think about any times this fourth grade class is hard for you.
*Song Yu:* No times.

*Interviewer:* Tell me about your favorite subjects in school.
*Song Yu:* Hmm. Math and PE.

*Interviewer:* Is math more difficult here than it was in South Korea?
*Song Yu:* Korea is much more harder. In 3rd grade they have to do decimal.

*Interviewer:* How do you feel about reading?
*Song Yu:* I like [to read books] on science. In Korea, they have all kinds of science.

*Interviewer:* Do you check books out of the library here on science?
*Song Yu:* No. In Korea. More books there. And playing stuff.

Song Yu had a different opinion about the physical look he presented to the other students. When asked to describe himself, he repeatedly said he could not. Coming back
to this question later his response included these statements: “My eyes are black, and my hair is black, and ... my ... nose is big. My skin is ... peach ... like middle no black ... white ... It’s close to middle.” At this point Song Yu avoided all mention of his thick glasses and short stature. In the interview with the French teacher, this teacher spoke of Song Yu’s low self-concept. He quoted him as saying he hated his glasses. He said he knew he was funny-looking and ugly with them. Mr. D. was unable to convince him otherwise.

Toward the end of our interview, Song Yu, obviously thinking again about his physical appearance, spoke about how he did look just like his dad, and his tone was much more upbeat. “If my dad’s friend don’t know (how I look), I just gonna say one word: ‘My dad is same – is - I like, stick off my dad.’ I think – and my mom thinks so – like my dad’s DNA from all, everywhere...come to...remake in my body.”

Song Yu’s self-portrait (Appendix E) seemed to reflect his low opinion of his physical appearance. Although he wore glasses, he intentionally left them out of his drawing. He was, however, accurate in portraying the color of his hair, eyes, and skin tone. While he drew a prominent nose in the color orange, his mouth had no special outline. The portrait does reflect the influence of religion in his life with the symbol of a fish drawn on his white t-shirt. This influence was later confirmed by his father who said the family was closely involved with a Korean Baptist Church in this area. As mentioned before, Song Yu was the smallest and youngest child in the class, but he drew himself to appear much larger and more mature. Perhaps this reflected his awareness of his small stature. This insecurity about his physical qualities did not extend to his opinion of his intellectual abilities or outlook for his future. He had no doubts he would one day be a
scientist. When asked what he would draw differently in his portrait at the end of the school year, Song Yu responded: “I’m still stick off my dad, but I’m bigger now.”

Home life

The interview with Song Yu’s parents took place in a neat brick duplex which had both front and back yards. Once again the location was near the university, important to the father because he was a student there. A walkway led to a front door on which was tacked a small eucalyptus leaf with a gold star hanging from it. This was another culturally mixed neighborhood. As I waited for my knock to be answered, I observed two muslim neighbors talking with their children across the street, and two black families nearby.

The inside of the duplex was very neat, but sparsely furnished. A light-colored carpet covered the floor of this room, and just inside the door there were several sets of shoes. The father and both sons were in white athletic socks; the mother also wore white socks, but had Korean slippers on her feet as well. I removed my own shoes and set them beside the others.

To the right of the front door there was a couch with two pieces of material covering worn spots. One chair and a large-screen TV were placed nearby. To the left of the door stood an old upright piano. Song Yu’s father explained his wife was musically inclined, but, when asked, she shyly declined to play the piano in front of a “guest.”

A rectangular table with a rough wooden top was pressed against the back wall, next to the opening to a small linoleum-floored kitchen. On the other side of this table a short hall led to two bedrooms. The boys stayed back there for most of the visit, playing games on a computer. They were very quiet and orderly during the long two-hour
interview. Since my research concerned what languages, discourse structures, and customs were tied in with cultural identities, and since this interview took place in March, just before St. Patrick's Day, I took the family a cookie cake decorated with shamrocks and the words “Happy St. Patrick’s Day to Song Yu’s Family”. Song Yu was asked to read the written words. He could not get past “Happy,” and no one had heard of this celebration. I explained the custom and encouraged them to go to a parade being held the next day.

The father showed me where to sit at the table with his wife at one end and him at the other. His next words were: “When you said student I expected someone young.” In the Eastern tradition I let those words slide right over me. Like the other parents, he had been informed of the use of a tape recorder, but I asked again for his permission to use it before beginning the interview. He agreed, and I set the small recorder on the table. Frequently during the conversation I encouraged him to include his wife, speaking to her in Korean and translating her thoughts into English, but he preferred not to do this.

Excerpts from the interview show connections between the family, the culture, and the son:

**Interviewer:** You have come a long way from South Korea, and I am interested in what brought you to this southern city.

**Mr. Kim:** The main reason is because I am starting in the university. I am also a gifted candidate in Civil Engineering. I used to work in a... civil engineering consulting company. Now there is the economic situation in Korea is real bad, and I do not think the situation is going to change in a couple of years.

**Interviewer:** How did you pick this location?

**Mr. Kim:** One of the main reasons is there is a real good professor in my area. Also, the tuition
and living cost is cheap.

*Interviewer:* What adjustments have you had to make to live here?

*Mr. Kim:* When I was in Texas about 10 years ago it was not difficult for me to adjust. Here in Louisiana but my children, they have real difficulties. In their first semester, especially my small children, my younger children, he's very active, very energetic, so he run, I mean even in the home, and also I think he ran in the classroom, and he played with his friends. But here, talking in classroom or run in the classroom is never allowed so he had great difficulties in his first semester. One thing that was painful was his teacher.

*Interviewer:* Tell me about a typical afternoon when Song Yu gets home from school.

*Mr. Kim:* He is pretty busy. Once a week he goes to piano lessons. Two days a week he goes to martial arts lessons.

*Interviewer:* Does he watch TV in the afternoons?

*Mr. Kim:* Yes. He watch TV a lot. We encourage TV because that is the easiest way to learn English. They (both sons) understand cartoons, their TV programs rather than us - my wife does not understand English TV.

*Interviewer:* Song Yu mentioned wanting to change his name one day at school. Do you have a nickname for him at home?

*Mr. Kim:* Yes. When he was in Korea his nickname was a name meaning "Happy Boy."

*Interviewer:* What changes do you see in Song Yu's behavior after school compared with after school in Korea?

*Mr. Kim:* Here the amount of homework is much smaller than the amount of homework in Korea. Definitely the boys they like it. We give them some extra homework.

*Interviewer:* Is the extra homework in English or Korean?

*Mr. Kim:* Sometimes we give them some English
homework. Sometimes we do give them some Korean homework. We waiting now to get some more study materials from Korea. It's because when they go back to Korea they should adjust themselves to Korea again, and if they do not practice it continuous, they will have great difficulties. I think it's real easy for small children to forget their original language.

*Interviewer:* Song Yu's English has expanded, extending even to the use and understanding of idioms, considerably as I have observed him this year. Do you also feel it is easier to learn a new language at a younger age?

*Mr. Kim:* Yes. His brother is two years younger than him, and his brother's English is better. I think the younger the boys, they learn English faster.

*Interviewer:* Is it important to you for your children to speak English?

*Mr. Kim:* I think it's very good if he speak English fluently, but I also want him not to fall at Korea.

*Interviewer:* That was my next question. How important is it for him to keep his native tongue?

*Mr. Kim:* We are going back to Korea ultimately, so if he forget the Korean language, I mean what he can do in Korea? Many of my friends they have great difficulties to adjust their kids in Korea again.

At this time, Mrs. Kim brought three cups of tea in beautiful china cups from Korea. In a few minutes, the interview continued. It was apparent Song Yu had enjoyed advantages in his growth and identity development that contributed to how he saw himself as a student. Strong factors were his parents' commitment to education in a more expansive view of learning. They had hired an English tutor to come to their home to work with Song Yu on his language development and homework. This helped build his
intellectual confidence in two cultures. They allowed him to take French lessons offered optionally in fourth grade, as well as violin and piano lessons. He was the only student in the study who kept a journal, and this was a requirement of his parents at home. They called it a "diary," and explained that he could write in English or Korean, "but we just do not allow him to write everything in English."

Asked if he noticed any aspects of the Cajun culture in his son, Mr. Kim replied: "They like Mardi Gras because they can get lots of beads, colorful beads." The family had been to the celebration in New Orleans, another opportunity for broadening perceptions.

His father did not think the classroom environment was a positive one. Song Yu had pencils and money stolen, and students always denied taking them. He declined to speak further on this topic.

It was clear throughout the interview both Mr. and Mrs. Kim wanted their children to grow up with a strong Korean identity. When asked if they saw Song Yu becoming more like other American children as time passed, Mr. Kim responded: "I do not think so. Only his taste for food becomes more Americanized, but his behavior or habits it was not changed to me."

Mong: "Super Mario"

Personal history

The circumstances surrounding the journey that brought Mong to this classroom at this point in his life was unlike those of any of the other students. Mong's parents escaped from Laos separately during the turmoil there. They met in America, and Mong was born approximately five years later in this southern city. While his parents were
refugees escaping an oppressive government regime, Mong was in a different position from the children who faced the horrors of fleeing for their lives with their parents and leaving other family members behind. Although he was certainly influenced by his parent’s cultural identity, he saw himself differently.

Mong’s family consisted of his father, mother, and two brothers. He was the middle of the three boys. This was the only student of those selected for in-depth study whose family owned their own home. His father worked in a plant just outside of town and his mother was a homemaker. There was a wide variation in the mastery of English in this family. Of the children, only the first child could speak Laotian. He and his father spoke this language with the mother since her English was the most limited of the five immediate family members. Mong and his younger brother spoke only English.

Mong prided himself on being “cool” in both attitude and dress. His typical American-style clothes and tennis shoes were designer-labeled—Polo, Tommy Hilfiger, Nike. Of average height for his age, ten, he had black hair, dark eyes, and olive complexion. He was a handsome child and popular with his classmates. He was well-liked by both boys and girls, but he ignored the girls’ attentions. He clearly identified more with the native Americans—mostly black—in his classroom, rather with new students from other cultures. Unlike others in the study, Mong had been in this school since first grade.

When asked if he identified himself as Laotian, American, or Laotian-American, Mong responded “American.” Speaking from a different perspective, he pulled me aside one day in the fall to tell me his father had told him just the night before that he was a
prince in his country. He wore a Laotian medal on a gold chain around his neck some
days, but kept it underneath his popular American t-shirts.

Classroom interaction.

Academically, Mong was an above-average student, but he exhibited a general
lack of interest in his studies, and this led to achievement below his potential abilities.

He was not disruptive in the beginning of the school year, and while he had good rapport
with Mrs. Banner, this did not extend to the other teacher and teacher's aide in the room.

He simply ignored them, and since he never asked for help, this lack of communication
was reciprocated by the adults.

Mrs. Banner called on Mong frequently to help her or another student, often
Ahmet, in some way. He always did what she asked, but never did more voluntarily.

Mrs. Banner commented she wanted Mong to be a role model for children from other
countries, in particular Ahmet, but she was concerned about a "rebelling" attitude she had
begun to notice. Later in the year, Mrs. Banner expressed concern about Mong's "poor"
choice of friends.

Ms. Banner: Actually, I think Ahmet looks up to Mong, but I'm worried about Mong changing, a
rebelling attitude, different from the way that he first started off.

Interviewer: Is there anything in particular to which you attribute this change?

Ms. Banner: Well, he lives near one 5th grader that gives him a lot of trouble, stopping by his yard and
wanting to fight. So this may be where he's getting this rebelling attitude. He is taking on
habits that are not good for him from others in this classroom.

Interviewer: Have you spoken with his parents?
Ms. Banner: No. I need to talk to these parents and tell them to watch his attitude. Several times I
started to call them and just tell them what I see and say if you don’t work with him, just talk to him.

_Interviewer:_ Can you go into more detail about how you see him and how he sees himself in the classroom?

_Ms. Banner:_ He gets along with most of the students. He likes Monteal and Kevin (one of the children included in the case studies). All the girls are crazed. They think he’s just the cutest thing, and they will try to see if they can get near Mong. You’ll see one ease up and go sit down—if I don’t catch them doing it—just to sit near Mong. And they’re always kind of touching him or aggravating him just to get his interest!

_Interviewer:_ What is his response?

_Ms. Banner:_ He just looks at them as if to say, “What do you think you’re doing?”

_Interviewer:_ Please discuss what languages, discourse structures, and texts you have noted with Mong.

_Ms. Banner:_ Of course he will read anything I ask him to read, but he likes sports and things with action. He was in my independent reading... ...group. He usually did well on worksheets and tests, and he has a concise, legible handwriting. Mong never ever yells; he always speaks in a very quiet voice. But I don’t think I’ve heard him use his native language at all.

A person of few words, Mong did not reveal a lot of himself to others. Mrs. Banner did not know he had any brothers or anything about his past or home culture.

Recurring answers in all three of my scheduled interviews with Mong were “I don’t know.” and “I can’t remember.”, so many questions went unanswered. There were long
pauses before those he answered. Examples can be seen in the following interview excerpts of our first private conversation.

*Interviewer:* Do you consider yourself an American?
*Mong:* I don’t know.

*Interviewer:* How do you think of yourself? Do you tell people you are an American? A Laotian? Or do you see yourself as a Laotian-American?
*Mong:* Uh. Hmm. Laotian American.

*Interviewer:* If you were to describe yourself to someone else, what would you say?
*Mong:* Uh. I don’t know. What does it mean?

*Interviewer:* Tell me what you look like on the outside and what you are like inside.
*Mong:* Um—

*Interviewer:* Start with the color of your hair.
*Mong:* Black.

*Interviewer:* Your eyes color? Skin color?
*Mong:* Um. White skin. Um. Brown eyes.

*Interviewer:* If you could do anything you wanted during the school day what would you do?
*Mong:* I don’t know. Draw. I like to tell, to tell jokes, too. I like to build stuff... *[long pause]* with wood and clay.

When asked what groups he participated in, Mong mentioned drama, but he couldn’t come up with any particular play in which he had acted. When questioned about his friendships and how members of the class reacted to him, his response was “Nice.” He selected Kevin from this class and named children from other classes he played with at recess. His reply to the question to name the students he would like to sit beside him in the classroom: “I don’t know.” He gave the same answer when asked if he considered himself a good student.
Mong’s self-portrait (Appendix E) showed a serious face with the upper part of his body drawn in brightly colored clothes, revealing the importance of clothes in defining his image. The clothes seemed to enhance the magnetic part of his personality. His self-assurance had always seemed to be one of the qualities that drew people to him, and I saw a quiet reflection of this in his face. When asked to talk about his picture, he said, “It’s just a picture.” Mong had selected a neutral background. He obviously spent a great deal of time on his skin color, shading together brick red, brown and black. He drew and colored his hair, eyes, and lips in light black, bordering on gray. When shown this self-portrait again later in the school year and asked how he had changed, his only remark was, “I’m bigger, and my hair is longer.”

Home life

The interview with Mong’s parents took place in their home, property which they were very proud to own. Located about a mile from Terrace Elementary, the small frame house stood at the end of a dead-end street in the poor, inner-city neighborhood. It was painted a pale green color and completely surrounded by a chain link fence. When I arrived, Mong’s older brother, Mario, and three other teenagers were hanging around, admiring a Toyota 4-Runner parked behind the fence. I learned later it did not belong to the family; the boys were cleaning it. A large dog, part Doberman, barked viciously when I got out of my car. Mong acknowledged my arrival by going inside the house to tell his parents. One of the boys held the dog and opened the locked gate. The less-than-welcoming attitude on the part of this group was far outweighed by the generous welcome I received from Mong’s parents once inside.
The single door led into the small, clean kitchen. It was dark, but I observed a water cooler that dispensed Kentwood bottled water. Mong's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lanxang, met me there, and Mong disappeared outside again. Mr. Lanxang did most of the talking, explaining his wife's command of English was limited, but she was able to follow our conversation and was smiling and gracious throughout. On the lookout for shoes beside the door, I immediately found them there. As I began taking off my own shoes, both parents said "not necessary," but of course that didn't stop me, and they smilingly led me into the next room.

The floors were worn vinyl, with the living area part of the floor covered with a bright orange, red, and brown room-sized rug. The walls in this room were painted pink and ruffled curtains in a large flower print design hung at the two windows, both of which had iron bars on the outside for protection. There was a beige and black striped couch, loveseat, and chair in the room. Plastic and silk flowers were placed everywhere, even tied on two brooms against one wall, and pictures and curios hung on the walls. Asking about the meaning of the words under a picture of a pig painted on wood, both parents replied, somewhat sheepishly but with smiles, they didn't know what the language was—they just liked the picture.

Following Mr. and Mrs. Lanxang's lead, I joined them sitting on the rug. With their permission, the tape recorder was set in the middle, and for the next hour we talked. The youngest son, Daniel, a third grader, sat with us and contributed fluently.

The father, a welder, explained he was able to buy this house about three years ago. In his words: "It be lot better than renting." His wife clearly enjoyed decorating the home. She was very short, somewhat stout, with close-cropped dyed red hair. She wore
a white, short-sleeved t-shirt with a long brown skirt. The only time she left the circle we had formed on the floor was to bring in refreshments, fresh green grapes, two oranges, and a Dr. Pepper in a glass with ice. She drank her drink out of the can. She was able to explain she did not work outside her home and answered every question, many translated by her husband, with “yes Ma’am.”

Mr. Lanxang explained his arrival in this country in the following way:

Interviewer: How did you get from Laos to this city?
Mr. Lanxang: My country, when the Vietnamese, when it broke loose, the Communist people took over. We don’t like the way they run the country.

Interviewer: Was it difficult to get out?
Mr. Lanxang: Yes. I have to scrape, and I have to swim out of country when the sun down. It be like the Mississippi River that’s how far I had to swim. I am by myself at that time. My daddy scared, going to the wood, stay in the wood a long time. Then I found out my daddy came into Thailand. That’s why, that’s why I came first to Thailand, try to find my daddy.

Interviewer: Were you successful?
Mr. Lanxang: Yes. Me and my friend go, only us two, and we about 16 years old.

Interviewer: Did your parents ever get to America?
Mr. Lanxang: Yes they did. Both dead now.

Interviewer: How did you get from Thailand here?
Mr. Lanxang: I stay in Thailand like five years. I stay in refugee camp in Thailand. Then something called USCC help me come to United States. They be sponsor, like church. I stay first in San Francisco; then, find my sister already in this city, so I fly here.

When the Lanxangs were asked if they had noticed any changes in Mong’s behavior during his fourth-grade year, both said yes. In the father’s words: “Yes. I think he kind of change a little bit. He want to do what he wants most of the time. He want to
do his way most of the time. Like he come watch TV. If his brother [is watching,] he
turns to something else.” Younger brother, Daniel, confirmed this with “Always!” When
asked if there were any particular American habits they had observed in the way he
handled himself, Mr. Lanxang gave the following response: “Yes. He start cusses, stuff
like that. I don’t want any kind of cusses in this house. That’s what I keep telling him.”

None of the three could name any of Mong’s friends. The connections between
family, culture, and the son that were so evident in Song Yu’s family were not evidenced
in this family. When asked if it was important for Mong to know Laotian, the father
replied, “Oh, I don’t know. It’s going to be up to him what he going to decide to do.”

His response to the question: “Are there any books at home that are important to
you, and in what language are they written?” was “We don’t keep no books and stuff.”

On a final note, Mr. Lanxang explained he still considered himself a Laotian, but
he wanted to become a citizen of the United States later on when he had time to apply for
it. He worked a difficult six-day week to provide for his family, but his hopes were
higher for his sons. When asked what he wanted for Mong’s future, he replied he wished
he could be a doctor or lawyer, “if he can do.”

Caroline: Keeping Her Individuality

Personal history

Caroline was the only Caucasian child in this classroom. Her family consisted of
her mother and three sisters. The circumstances surrounding the journey that brought
Caroline to this fourth-grade classroom were different from each of the others. Her entire
family was from Ohio. Her mother and father had divorced in the recent past, and her
mother decided to move her daughters with her to study for a doctorate in archeology at the state university in this southern state.

The common thread she shared with the children from other countries was the fact that she was a great distance from her family and childhood friends. She lacked the support of an extended family and had few financial resources. Her mother qualified for student housing and had a graduate assistantship with the college.

Caroline’s prior schooling was in public schools in a mid-sized city in Ohio. Upon moving here, Caroline’s mother was so displeased with the administrators and teachers at the first public school in which she enrolled her daughter, she had Caroline transferred to Terrace School.

Caroline was the middle child of the three girls. She had fair skin, blue-gray eyes, and long, straight, blond hair. When asked to describe herself, Caroline replied: “Hmm. I have blue eyes and what me and my mom we thought of for the color of my hair we call it dirty blonde.” She was a pretty child, as well as a serious one, who did not smile readily or often. She wore clothes her older sister had outgrown, never the optional school uniform of navy dress or long shorts with a white blouse.

While somewhat reserved, she got along well with the children of all different cultures in the classroom. The teacher often asked Caroline to help the students who couldn’t speak English. She was in the middle reading group until after the Christmas break when Mrs. Banner moved her into the highest reading group, along with Ling and Chi, the two Chinese students, Song Yu, Kevin, and one other student. Even though she found it “a lot harder,” Caroline was very proud of being a part of this group.
She was a friend of Chi, a Beijing native whose father was studying at the university, and yet, when Chi transferred to another school to enter a gifted class at mid-semester, Caroline gave the following reason for not missing her friend: “Now, I am the smartest in the room.”

Both Caroline and her mother felt the school was academically lower than her elementary school in Ohio. Caroline talked of school activities there in every interview and how much more reading and writing she did in her former school than here in this fourth-grade classroom.

Due to her mother’s interest in history and geography, Caroline had a stronger sense of location and place in the world than most of the other students in this class. She referred more than once to the fact that she would be living in Ireland next year, where her mother would continue her studies. She also stated she would like to go to Mexico, too. A broad range of interests included art, animals—her favorite were horses even though she had never owned one—and “playing gymnastics” in the yard of her apartment.

**Classroom interaction**

The school-day observations of the case study youth were integral for providing insights into how students perceived themselves and presented themselves outside the three personal interviews. This was just as true for American-born Caroline, who from all outward appearances was a well-liked member of the classroom community. She talked with other students and got along with them. While she participated in whatever activity the teacher assigned, she protected her inner thoughts and feelings. She saw her own stance in the classroom change when Chi left this school; she asserted a more
intellectual identity. Even the teacher contributed to this identity by selecting Caroline’s story on alligators to transfer to the overhead projector and use as a model of writing style.

In January, after Chi and Da moved, Caroline was moved into the highest reading group, “Trails and Dales.” Asked how she felt about this change, she commented: “It’s harder than the ‘Crossroads’ reading group. I didn’t really get finished with that ‘Crossroads.’ I never really read it much because it had boring stories that I didn’t like much.” When asked about chapter books she liked, she responded: “Sometimes I don’t like them because I’m a very slow reader, and it takes me a while to read them.”

When encouraged to talk about the new reading group, it was clear there was status connected with being a part of it in Caroline’s perception. “Well, since we’re in ‘Trails and Dales,’ and that’s the highest group, we’re independent workers; we have to read by ourself. And then, after you’re done reading the story, you answer questions and stuff. They’ll have stuff like, stuff that will say like the crocodile story we had to write a story about it afterward. There are questions at the end that say like crocodiles use their tails for steering them through the water, and you’ll have to write if that was true or false and stuff. When we wrote the whole story, Mrs. Banner said mine was the best, so she had it made into an overhead because it had the most least corrections.”

Though she did not show a great deal of enthusiasm in either independent or group academic endeavors, Caroline organized her efforts and preferred order in the classroom. The following excerpts are from our second interview.

**Interviewer:** How did the class change when you had a substitute in Mrs. Banner’s place?

**Caroline:** It was really rowdy and everything and really loud, and we hardly got any work done and nobody learned
anything because the only thing the teachers were doing was handling the fights and trying to calm everybody down. Everybody was fighting because they thought since Mrs. Banner was gone we could do whatever we want.

**Interviewer:** Describe the way the substitute teacher organized the classroom.

**Caroline:** Well, it was a mess. A lot of times when the substitute was there they would lose a lot of our papers, and they would blame us for it that we didn't turn it in, and they wouldn't have much grades on people.

**Interviewer:** Do you think the students are still following the class rules that have been posted on the front wall since the year began?

**Caroline:** No. Nobody ever follows them. Never! They don't even raise their hands any more. It happens all the time. The teacher says it's a rule from the beginning of the year. Well, the rules from the beginning of the year people forget and think since they've gotten this far, they're not going to have to worry about the rest of the year. I think me, Chi, Kevin, and Montreal were probably the best leaders. Everybody else was always screaming and stuff and passing notes and stuff like that.

Caroline went on to explain how the classroom community was different in another way when Da and Chi, both superior students, left.

People were always getting more help [when those two were still in the class] because Mrs. Banner, Mrs. Sampson, and Miss Tony were always feeling better because they didn't have to put up with going to everybody trying to help because once Chi and Da and everybody that was quick and stuff and knew their math and stuff like that were done, they would go around helping people, and Mrs. Banner and Mrs. Sampson and Miss Tony could sit down for a little while. But now that they're gone, it's not very easy. I don't like going around helping people either because a lot of people don't understand what you're trying to say.

Caroline participated twice a week in the school band. This was her first year playing, and she chose the violin. When asked if she thought of herself as a musician, she answered “no.”
In her self-portrait (Appendix E), Caroline spent time drawing a grid to space her facial features. When asked about this method of showing herself, she explained she had been taught to draw by her aunt, who was an artist. In her efforts to show her artistic accomplishments, this actually resulted in an unflattering portrait. When asked to describe herself, Caroline replied: “Hmm. I have blue eyes. Me and my mom thought of words for the color of my hair, and we call it dirty blonde.”

She drew eyelashes around blue eyes and red lips on her pink-colored face, giving it an unsmiling, serious look. For her hair, she used a combination of yellow and brown chalk to create the way she saw herself as a “dirty blonde.” Caroline, like Mong, drew a very detailed picture of the clothing she was wearing that day. In the last interview, when shown the picture she had drawn of herself in the beginning of the school year, and asked how she had changed, her first remarks were about the blue and white dress she had been wearing. “I still have that dress; it's one of my favorites. My hair is longer, and I'm prettier now.”

Home life

The interview with Caroline’s mother took place in the family’s apartment in the university’s student housing section. The building was located across a major four-lane street from the university and about one and a half miles from Terrace Elementary. The complex of two-story buildings was part of the inner-city neighborhood, yet, separate. Caroline’s apartment was located on the first floor in the middle of one of three buildings standing in a U-shape around a grassy, treed yard that bordered the parking lot on the fourth side. American children and children of international students were playing in the yard as I walked to the correct apartment.
Caroline opened the door with her mother, Mrs. Kirkland, behind her. Inside, the small living area of the cinder-block walled apartment was a couch and a wooden table with four chairs around it. The only books in the room were stacked on a three-shelf bookcase. These were college texts and materials related to Mrs. Kirkland’s studies. The kitchen area was to the right of the living area, and two small bedrooms opened directly off the back wall of the room. After her mother and I introduced ourselves and sat down at the table, Caroline silently went into the kitchen and returned with a raw white potato which she ate while listening to the adult conversation.

Caroline’s mother briefly explained that her divorce from the girls’ father and her interest in moving to a different part of the country to get a doctorate in anthropology led her to this state university in the South. She commented on the great diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the area, and credited this to the large population of international students at the university.

When asked if her daughters’ perceptions of themselves had changed or expanded in any way through new group associations, she responded: “My kids knew they were Americans. They knew they lived in the United States. But, they didn’t classify themselves. I think they have a more global view now and see themselves belonging to a particular country with particular characteristics.”

*Interviewer:* To what extent do you observe Caroline identifying with cultural roots distinct from her own?

*Ms. Kirkland:* She doesn’t seem to have close friends in the classroom, but the friends who live around us are from Uganda, and Middle-Eastern countries, and similar interests seem to be what draws them together. I mean, she identifies with or rather likes to play house, play store, climb that big oak tree in the yard, make mud pies, and the people she is drawn to enjoy those same things. Her best friend is from Uganda.
Interviewer: You think the shared pleasure in specific activities and social exchanges is more important than distinct cultural roots in social identifications with others?

Ms. Kirkland: Yes. Caroline is confident and sure of herself. It is to all my daughters' advantage that there are many international families living around us. There are more arguments among the sisters than with friends. At the same time, I moved Caroline out of two elementary schools she attended here last year. I can only describe both environments as "countersocial."

Mrs. Kirkland encouraged Caroline's exposure to different cultures and languages such as her participation in the French classes offered at Terrace School, saying she herself listened to Spanish and German tapes when she had the time.

Her enthusiasm concerning a possible move to Ireland for several months to do research was clearly communicated to her daughters. In this discussion, Caroline injected she already spoke some Irish: "My name in Irish is Meshaley. And you know how it's a disaster in Belfast? Well, my mom got this sign that says 'Belfast 7,' and since my room is always a mess, she hung it right on the wall facing—pointing—into my room. She was very serious during our home interview, but at this point Mrs. Kirkland responded with laughter "I saw the shadow and it was my mother!"

Kevin: Art and Anger

Personal history

Kevin, a black, native-born American, was an intelligent child, as evidenced by all A's on his report card one grading period. At the same time, he was somewhat bellicose in his attitude toward others. He, too, attended this inner-city neighborhood school because he lived nearby. His mother, single with three children, was on welfare. Kevin was the middle child; he had an older sister and a younger sister living with him in
the family’s two-bedroom apartment. He explained his family also consisted of a brother and his dad who lived in Chicago, and that his sister’s daddy was from Nigeria.

Kevin was not a discipline problem in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher, but problems erupted with other children on the playground where supervision was at a distance. He always insisted other children picked on him, calling him “fat” and “dumb,” and his mother supported his claims. Suspended more than once for fighting, I was unable to interview him for the final interview on the scheduled date because he was suspended the last three weeks of school for altercations with the administrative vice-principal.

Kevin was a child who enjoyed drawing, and he labeled himself “the class artist.” After completing assignments, he would pull out his current pencil drawing (often warriors with swords and shields) and work on it. He was a large child, well-liked by the teacher and most of his classmates. A sensitive child, he did not smile or laugh often, but he identified with his black friends and with Mong, of Laotian heritage.

He started the year in the voluntary French class that met each day, but dropped out when he felt the French teacher disliked him. The teacher explained he was sorry Kevin chose to drop French because he was one of the stronger students from Mrs. Banner’s class. Although the teacher tried to convince Kevin to continue French, Kevin refused with no clear explanation.

Kevin was among the tallest students in the class, and he was overweight. He moved slowly when asked to do something, sometimes ignoring statements and questions from other children. A brittle temperament left him somewhat unapproachable. He was
convinced he was belittled by other students, yet, he commanded more respect than he realized.

Classroom interaction

Mrs. Banner had a strong rapport with Kevin; she frequently praised his academic endeavors to the class openly, to Kevin privately, and to this researcher. She saw potential, encouraged it, and this child responded.

Kevin had a very active imagination, and this frequently resulted in exaggerations, distorted truths, and things that were totally untrue. For example, his claim that he had three dogs, a rotweiler, a doberman, and a pit bull, which kept his sister’s dog, a poodle, on top of the refrigerator all day, was completely refuted by his mother. He also had a tendency to boast, saying he had “made straight A’s all through my life.” Actually, this was the first year he had excelled in the classroom. His mother explained that at one time he had been placed in a special education class.

With Kevin, it was difficult to separate fact from fiction. For instance, in my first interview with Kevin, he claimed he had lived in the Arctic region, and wanted to live there again. He also said he lived in a house in the neighborhood rather than an apartment. Both these statements were proved inaccurate in the home interview.

In the next breath, his familiarity with different authors proved to be accurate. He showed his clear recognition of R.L. Stine, selecting him as his favorite author. The following is an excerpt from the conversation:

Interviewer: Who is your favorite character in R. L. Stine’s books?
Kevin: Umm. The green slob.

Interviewer: Why the green slob?
Kevin: Because, uh, he can jump on people’s faces and suck their brains out, and he can turn into them.
Kevin was also able to name his favorite story in the reading text, “Brother Wind,” as well as recognizing Harriet Tubman as one of his favorite biographical books. He seemed able to connect to the story on a deeper level than the majority of students in this classroom.

Although Kevin seemed dogged by fights on the playground, when asked who were his closest friends in the class, he listed six children, followed by the words: “Almost everyone. Everybody.” Asked about the students from different cultures, he responded: “Sometimes they see me as a big help to them, and a help with English, but Pasha, Pasha thinks I’m just a big toy. He always make noises about everything he see, just to make people laugh. He’s wrong.”

In his self-portrait (Appendix E), Kevin showed his pride in his distinction as "class artist," by spending several days working on his picture. He carefully colored his black hair and eyes, complete with eyebrows, and a profile of a nose outlined in black. He used white to accent his eyes as well as his carefully drawn teeth inside full, pale lips. He drew a distinctive neck and very broad shoulders extending from one side of the paper to the other. When shown his portrait at the last interview, Kevin remarked: "I am a good drawer, but I put too many teeth in my mouth. I wouldn't change anything else."

Home life

The interview with Kevin’s mother, Mrs. Johnson, took place at 2:30 in the afternoon in the family’s third-floor, walk-up apartment on a day Kevin was sent home from school for fighting. When I arrived, Mrs. Johnson was taping her car window which had been broken by vandals. She later explained in the interview the car had sat there for three years because she was unable to fix it or buy insurance. We walked up the
three flights of concrete steps and entered her apartment plastered with religious quotations and pictures on the walls and in the front window.

There were two gray couches covered with unfolded clothes and one blue plastic chair in the kitchen area. A microwave oven was placed next to a glass, rectangular fish aquarium, empty of fish and stuffed with papers and notes of all sorts. Her family's living quarters reflected their poverty. We sat together on the shag-carpeted floor with her younger daughter and the tape recorder between us.

Mrs. Johnson explained she hoped to become a nurse's aide. Throughout the interview she wavered between hope and despair concerning her future and that of her children. Concerning Kevin, she said "I just got a bad report from his school. I had to go get him a few minutes ago. They said he had said some ugly things. He stays so worried about the fights and all of that; you know, they bully him. It worries me so that they want to crucify him. You know we can't promise our children anything. Kevin wanted to know how I felt about his trouble and I told him, you always have to focus on what is right. I told him I count it as a joy that you are able to admit the fact that you were wrong even if you weren't."

Mrs. Johnson said she had to remind herself daily of her religious beliefs because she said she keeps failing. She reminded herself daily "There is a Jesus. There is a Jesus."

When the topic switched to financial matters, Mrs. Johnson replied, "I'm not making money just yet to support the things we need. There were times I was working for the owners here picking up the grounds and cleaning apartments for seven years. And
I was making only half of what I was supposed to because I'm on welfare. A lot of times I would have to find clothes out of the garbage can."

Responding to a question about Kevin's neighborhood friends, she said, "I don't even let him go out. I would be afraid. You have to fight to play; you have to fight them to play. It's sad. He would love to be outside every day; he would love to ride his bike. There's a whole lot he wants to do. Instead, after school my children goes to a Pentecostal Church program. They pick them up and they let them off afterwards."

When asked what she wanted for Kevin in his future, Mrs. Johnson replied:

O.K. I want very much for all my children to prosper the best they can. If he decides to play sports, I imagine him playing baseball. He's wanting to play football, but I'm going to have to get him checked out; I'm a little worried about his breathing. I also want him to be a doctor.

Kevin is a talented and promising child. If given the opportunity and proper guidance, he can become a successful member of society. At the time of this study, he constructed his identity around his artistic ability and placed himself in the role of a classroom leader. This was due in great part to special mentoring by Mrs. Banner. At odds with this positive view reinforced by his classroom teacher, he seemed to be receiving and interpreting confusing signals from different teachers, adults, and peers outside of this classroom. Also handicapping his situation was the lack of a male role model in the family and a single mother who had to struggle to provide basic necessities. Fortunately, in the context of his learning environment, Kevin's positive perception of himself as a member of this larger group favors his future growth in the same direction.
Chapter Five  
Findings and Implications for Future Research

This study examined how students perceived their own identities, the extent to which they identified with cultural roots distinct from their own, and how students' social identifications changed over time. Two primary influences had an impact on the children: their home culture and the classroom environment. Salient findings indicate perceptions are dependent on both.

In this chapter, the teacher's influence on identity construction will be discussed first. This will be followed by a discussion of findings related to the identity construction of the six students presented in case studies. Finally, other factors influencing identity construction and changes of perceptions these children held will be discussed.

Concluding comments in this dissertation will focus on implications for further study.

Teacher-Student Relationships Communicate Messages

In the context of this classroom, like that in all classrooms, the teacher was the critical influence. She was the bridge between home and school cultures to her students. As previously established, this was a class of twenty-seven children which included 8 special education students, 4 with no English proficiency, 9 from different cultural backgrounds. Clearly the influences on identity construction were unique to this group, and the teacher had her work cut out for her in building a community of learners and allowing all children to find places here. She worked to make real connections to the students' already developed set of understandings. She created opportunities for student and teacher together to collaboratively build a shared set of meanings. The following four

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strengths of this teacher combined to affect students' engagement with school and learning:

**Acceptance of Diversity**

Mrs. Banner accepted and appreciated the diversity in cultures by recognizing and establishing the thread of commonality connecting all people. She saw the students not as simply representatives of their culture, but as representing themselves. It was because she valued them as individuals that they gained the confidence in themselves to interact with their peers. This strengthened a sense of identity in each individual while broadening their perspectives of themselves as members of this classroom. This finding is consistent with other research in social identification of the individual (Tajfel, 1981; Gee, 1989) and in studies of separate cultures (Au, 1993; Cazden, 1988; Delpit, 1988; Heath, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ogbu, 1991; Ovando, 1989; Phelan, Davidson, Cao, 1991; Reyes, 1992). There is agreement that discourse and multicultural experiences add to learning and help students from different backgrounds gain a deeper understanding of themselves as well as others. In other words, increased contact with diverse populations increases understanding and acceptance.

**Students' Trust**

Students from every background trusted Mrs. Banner. They trusted her to never embarrass them, not to raise her voice, and to keep their classroom safe from fights. She conveyed her expectations, and as best she could, she organized encounters between individuals so they could come to know each other. At different times during the year, all came to the realization they could not depend solely on adults, and they had to participate themselves.
In a mid-year interview, Mrs. Banner explained she saw her students as “all alike.” Although some may view this as a negative statement, in this case, it had positive results in building community in this classroom. The value in this to the students from different cultures was that they were not singled out as being “different.” She stressed similarities over differences, and it worked because of her understanding of the heightened sensitivity needed in cross-cultural settings. She allowed everyone to keep their individuality because she exhibited the sensitivity to and respect for other people’s values, norms, and worldviews needed in all multicultural settings. Patton corroborates this “sensitivity” aspect further: “Interviewers are not in the field to judge or change values and norms. Researchers are there to understand the perspectives of others. Getting valid, reliable, meaningful, and usable information in cross-cultural environments requires special sensitivity to and respect for differences” (1990, p. 340). This is also extremely relevant to teachers in all grade levels.

**Classroom Management**

Mrs. Banner kept order. Even though the students did not follow the posted rules, their respect for this teacher seemed to discourage most tendencies to make fun of others. The results of this study showed that children, placed in a multicultural setting with firm direction and instruction, can learn to see themselves and others in a similar light. This awareness of “being in this together” fortifies one’s own sense of identity and allows perceptions to change as people place themselves in different groups over time.

Although Mrs. Banner’s ability to maintain discipline was one of her greatest strengths, this, too, required sacrifices. Due to the wide range of both academic abilities and personal backgrounds of the pupils, teaching the class was a tremendous drain on the
teacher's energy. She worked so diligently to get the students to adapt to this fourth-grade classroom, it was ironic that academics appeared to be suffering. For example, there was not a diverse array of activities in reading. Teachers were constrained by time and the established curricula of conventionally organized programs. Reading groups did not meet every day, and there was no time set aside to read for pleasure.

Most of the class work was concentrated on worksheets in preparation for a nationally standardized test to be given in the spring of the year. Much of the time, in order to prepare for the IOWA Test of Basic Skills, students worked to complete practice test booklets. Even as English was gradually mastered by this diverse group, they did not learn how to read articles critically. An example of this was observable in the repeated efforts throughout the year to find and comprehend the main idea of paragraphs.

Whole class instruction dominated much of each day; creative writing involved copying sentences from the board on an assigned topic and adding one to three additional sentences; individual questions often went unanswered; and incomplete assignments were overlooked in many cases. When asked in the final interview to name written texts and stories they had produced in the classroom, the only response of each was “the Louisiana Scrapbook.” Since the class followed a specific outline of information to be included in this project, all final products were similar.

Flexibility, Child Development, and Peer Collaboration

Flexibility allowed Mrs. Banner's pupils to find their own niche through exploration. The teacher's expectations were in line with what each student could give. Respect for authority never congealed into rigidity. For example, Mrs. Banner allowed each of the students who entered the class speaking no English to use the computers at
their own request while she was instructing the class in another area. There was no insistence that they try every assignment.

In addition, Mrs. Banner encouraged collaboration. She asked students to help others who struggled with different phases of classroom participation. Though the enthusiasm of the response varied, all complied with her direction. Students determined their own level of participation based on their comfort level.

Dialogue between and among the students changed over the year as classroom associations grew. One example of this was in the relationship between Pasha and Ahmet. Ahmet assumed the "leader/teacher" identity when Pasha entered the classroom, and he was eager to share the knowledge he had gained about how this classroom worked. He understood because he had so recently been in Pasha's position, new to the classroom, new to the country, and unable to speak the language. Mrs. Banner understood this and encouraged their communication. As the year progressed, Pasha assumed this "leader" position between the two, and the friendship broadened to include other children.

Personal Coping Mechanisms

As stated in chapter three, Mrs. Banner was out of school with a major illness for two months. In addition to her health, the daunting task of teaching such a diverse group, both ethnically and academically, was almost overwhelming for even this veteran teacher.

In order to protect her personal health, Mrs. Banner had her own coping mechanisms to meet the basic needs of her students and balance them with her own needs. One was to narrow the scope of skills taught. For example, in language, verbal
and written skills centered on finding the main idea to the exclusion of other concepts. While it did not always have positive results, another method this teacher used to conserve time and energy was to keep home communication to a minimum. For example, she was unaware of the number of siblings in the families of the students selected for case studies, and she did not know the occupations of the parents. After several weeks of school, she did not know Ahmet’s country of origin and had to have him bring it in the next day. She felt that her experience and understanding of child development allowed her to competently meet the needs of her children in spite of the fact that she did not communicate with all the parents.

The Students’ Identity Construction

Social identification plays a fundamental role in all our lives; there is a need for individuals to relate in some way to other people in their environment. How we perceive ourselves determines the bonds we form with others and can broaden or narrow the dimensions of their world. In this study, the children’s perceptions of themselves were linked directly to their roles in this classroom.

Examining closely how these students perceived their own identities, it became evident that home cultures and ethnic backgrounds were not erased, but they did recede at various times. Identification with home culture was tied more closely in students who were new to the country. Children who had been in the United States for a longer period of time—or who were born here—were less dependent on their cultural roots. For example, Mong, the Laotian child who was told for the first time by his parents that he was a prince in their native country, told no one outside of this researcher this fact. Possibly he didn’t tell because he felt it would affect his position as a “cool American
His assimilation into the local culture made the importance of being a member of royalty less important than his present perceptions of himself as a leader in his fourth grade classroom. Mong presented a clear example that those further removed from their home cultures were less likely to be intensely influenced by them. This was reflected in his home culture when the parents, unhappy with his language and attitude, explained they didn't know how to change him.

Some of the students had experiences from their pasts that were horrific. They were afraid for their lives, so their own personal identities were rooted very deeply in survival, surviving along with their families. Their emotional insecurities were reflected in their behavior at school. For example, Pasha begged the ESL teacher to allow his sister to be in his class. Another example, the two survivors from Iraq and Bosnia, Ahmet and Pasha, were drawn together from the beginning, even though their personalities were very different, and there was no common language between them. The shared experience was that both came from families who were forced to escape their countries to avoid the atrocities of war.

Just as some were trying to create a place for themselves in this classroom, other students didn't "buy in" to the classroom culture to the same extent because they knew they were going back "home." Song Yu and Caroline are two examples of students who did not have as much invested in this classroom culture. Although they perceived themselves as members of the "leaders" group, academically and socially, they seemed to be simply progressing through the school year.

Finally, one student in the study was rooted in a "welfare culture," a position of hopelessness, with nothing of strength on which to hang his identity. Because of this,
Kevin did not appear to be grounded at home, so he had to base his identity on what was happening in the school classroom. Fortunately, this teacher was particularly significant in his life. She recognized that even though the others were at risk because they did not speak the language or were transient for one reason or another, all had strong traditions and influences at home. However, Kevin was at risk because his perception of himself depended almost entirely on his place in the class. The danger in this is that the next teacher may not nurture Kevin, and his perception of himself may shift to reflect that of his teacher.

Motivations That Helped Broaden Individual Identity

What motivated these children to construct the identity of themselves that they did during the time they spent immersed in this situated classroom culture? In addition to internal stimuli and encouragement from home, observable influences included the teacher, the environment, the peers, and the computer.

First and foremost, the teacher played a fundamental role by the environment she created, even more so than peers who grew in importance as they came to know each other. None of the other adults who spent time in the classroom or the school administrators appeared to have significant impact on how these students perceived their own identities. The exception was the ESL teacher. She contributed immeasurably to students' feeling of acceptance and of finding similarities among themselves as they learned together to speak a new language. In the ESL class, none of the children felt like outsiders. Through this small, inclusive grouping, confidence in one's self transferred to the larger fourth-grade classroom group. As the year progressed, the students, through positive and accepting experiences in both these classrooms, awakened to the realization
they were a part of a community and had a role in it. This was very motivating and legitimizing to them.

Will these teachers' impact on these children’s lives be permanent? Perhaps not, but the influence of the classroom environment can not be taken for granted as to how it affects a child’s future. The elementary classroom is often the first place outside the home where children have the opportunity to identify with cultural roots distinct from their own. Here, the American culture has a strong influence on students from diverse backgrounds. This was evidenced by their dress, the expressions they chose to convey themselves: Pasha’s frequent use of the one word “cool;” Song Yu’s quick adaptation of “I win! I win!” to both computer and classroom challenges.

Data showed social identifications did change over time as students became immersed in the classroom culture. People can move from one category to another and see themselves as empowered, and these children were influenced by their peers. Pasha presented a classic example of this as he moved from isolated loner to finding a positive place for himself by making his peers laugh. Pasha also began to exhibit a characteristic he acquired from other students when he began ignoring class rules to raise a hand to speak or to ask permission for different activities. Caroline’s perception of herself changed when she identified herself as the smartest one in the class after Chu moved away. Kevin blossomed after being identified as the class artist.

There were also negative social identifications observed. Mong acquired a certain insolence toward others outside a group of students he joined. By the middle of the year, he was less interested in academic excellence, completing just enough of assignments to
get by. Mrs. Banner was concerned about his choice of friends and that these friends would have a negative influence on him. She spoke to Mong several times about this.

In addition to American influences on students from different backgrounds, I was hoping the research would show American children incorporating facets of other cultures. I looked for examples such as American students questioning gestures and meanings of words in a language foreign to them and adapting them to use in the classroom. However, during the time this study was conducted, adaptations along this line were not observable. It appeared that a longer period of time is needed to determine the extent to which American children identify with cultural roots different from their own.

The classroom computers were important in many academic ways, but in this study they were also valuable as an “equalizer” for all the children. Students could work at their own pace, meet challenges at their personal level, and by the design of the programs, receive positive visual reinforcement on the screen. Each student who was a case study participant found some level of success at the computer. In mastering a “game,” different members of this peer group were drawn to the particular child at the computer, even though they probably would not have interacted in other circumstances.

Discussion of Research Questions

1. How do students perceive their own identities?

These students did this in two ways: through the home culture and the school culture. Influences of the American culture, classroom environment, and identification with their peers led to group membership. They molded identities within the boundary of this classroom composed of this unique group of individuals. All brought their primary
cultural identities from home, but these identities were expanded based upon the role they created for themselves in the classroom.

Issues of culture, language, and instruction have been addressed by Delpit, (1995); Ladson-Billings, (1995); Michaels, (1981); Ogbu, (1991); Ovando, (1989) Reyes, (1992); among others in this field of study. Appadurai (1997) looked at the problem of intimacy in this era of globalization and the complexity of the field work involved, concluding that even carefully built relationships in a contextual setting constantly reveal the outlines of more than the ethnographer can capture. Kay Deaux (1996) states:

Identification is distinct from a simple physical grouping, in which the individual stands along side others who may or may not share similar characteristics. Rather, through the process of identification, each person forms a psychological bond with others that can exist independently of any physical contact. Almost all analyses of identification incorporate an explicit notion of psychological inclusiveness, a consideration of how a person thinks and feels the self to be part of a larger grouping. (p. 777).

2. To what extent do children identify with cultural roots that seem distinct from their own?

These students built community and identity across languages and cultures. They had to adjust their ways of being in the world through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who had already mastered their chosen role, at first the teacher, later other members of the class. They adjusted their actions to what was acceptable in the classroom.

The experiences of the children discussed in this dissertation indicate there can be connections made between a child's sense of ethnic identity and additional perceptions and identifications related to becoming immersed in the classroom culture, a larger grouping. Children give expressions of how they wish to be perceived by their peers.
Our country’s growing diversity and shifting economic structure have sometimes meant hardening of the line between races. The classroom is a place that can be designed to encourage and value young people to develop an ability to negotiate the social and cultural borders that inhibit communication. Additional study of children in a multicultural setting will reveal more and more useful information. Only collaboratively can we promote cultural diversity within the school environment where the individual is genuinely valued. In its simplest terms, this means developing an awareness that there is a classroom culture, and that identification is developmental in nature.

3. How do social identifications change over time as students become immersed in the classroom culture?

The students in these case studies did not build their identities or find places for themselves in this classroom through overt instruction, but by enculturation into accepted social practices there through scaffolded and supported interaction with those who had already mastered the Discourse (Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1982; Gee, 1989). Each built on his or her primary socialization, the foundation that occurs early in life through interactions in the home, so their new roles in the classroom were changing and not fully consistent with each other. This was particularly clear in the reversing leader/follower relationship between Pasha and Ahmet over the year’s time. It is through individuals that wider cross-cultural parallels can be seen.

The findings indicate that the students in this study did not react to school in predictable ways according to their racial or ethnic identity, but rather their identities were directly influenced by the other members of the classroom and their teacher. Tajfel and Gee concur that language is a huge part of social identity, but involves more than
language use (Gee, 1989; Tajfel, 1981). The findings support the work of Gee in that the discourses in the home and school life of all six students integrated words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, body positions, and clothes (Gee, 1989). The students in this study were learning to speak, think, and act like their perceptions of fourth graders in the context of this classroom. Just as the participants in Gee studies, Mong developed an “identity kit.” His “identity kit” included always dressing in latest fashions and a casual attitude that belied his interest in a leadership role. He projected a cool indifference to being popular which served his purpose of increasing his popularity and the respect he got from his peers.

All parents wanted their children to be successful. Davidson (1997) did an investigation of adolescents’ sociocultural worlds and found that all the parents of the children in his study wanted their children to be successful both academically and socially, and all the parents had high aspirations for their children. This supports the findings in this study. All parents, despite the most limited circumstances wanted their children to be successful. This was perhaps most evident in the words of Kevin’s mother, who hoped her son would become a doctor. It was also apparent in the case of Song Yu, whose parents placed him in a higher grade because they thought American schools were behind those in Korea.

I have argued for a fluid conception of social categories, that identity is constantly recreated, and that schools in general and classrooms in particular participate in negotiating the meanings the students attach to their individual identities. This study defined a small, specific research population, but my experiences reaffirmed my dedication to the worth and dignity of every individual. An important result was
confirmation that teachers must provide opportunities for their students to interact in deeper ways with those who are different. As elsewhere, group membership mattered in this American classroom. A very relevant finding here was that the successful acquisition of culturally-appropriate behavior in the classroom community did not render the home culture obsolete.

Implications for Teachers: Their Power in the Classroom

Through this research and sensitive examination of all the data collected, I believe even more firmly than I did before that teachers must open possibilities for their students and emancipate them from limiting expectations of their culture, their family, or themselves. Poring over the lives and perceptions of these six students illuminates discernibly the fact that there are some conflicts a teacher cannot resolve for them. We as teachers must be aware that each student will make his or her own sense out of the things we say in the classroom, and although we say “I want you to be free to choose to be whoever you want to be,” we may really be saying “I want you to be just like me.”

Many researchers have alluded to this fact. Although it is not the focus of this study, the concept can never be ignored. Peter McLauren (1995), Paulo Friere (1970) and Henri Giroux (1985) address this issue of the underlying political process in learning and literacy, citing cultural forms of resistance in depth, but I have chosen the words of Maxine Greene to describe the relationship of power in relationship to my study. In an invited address at Louisiana State University, Greene stated:

I want teachers to be aware of the problem of power in the classroom. Like it or not, if I stand in front of the classroom with the knowledge people think I have and the degrees and diplomas on the wall, I am power. Somehow or another if my students are to experience the kind of freedom I hope they will experience, they must, in some
way, resist my subtle attitudes and subconscious prejudices. I want to be loved, but I want to be resisted" (1996, June).

Greene warns of the danger of forcing children’s perceptions of themselves down narrow channels. She explained:

I have had to reexamine the way I teach. I now leave so much to the students – how to make sense of their learning environments, how to create a multicultural tradition, how to get inside books written about and by people who are different from the way they are. I am having to rewrite myself. I am what I am not yet (1996, June).

We, too, as teachers must be open to rewriting ourselves. In other words, we must think more critically about how our cultural backgrounds enter into our own prejudices and perceptions as well as those of others. Belief in diversity takes imagination because we were not brought up that way. Acquiring a new, broadened perspective is not a short or easy process. Before teachers can realistically promote diversity, we must develop an awareness of our own culture and recognize how it influences our perceptions of ourselves and others. John Mayher, in his book Uncommon Sense, reflects on his teacher training: “So, I was certified to teach as I had been taught: to bring democratic literacy skills and an elite cultural heritage to the youth of America." (1990, p.16)

What are the ramifications in regard to these young students’ experiences for the way in which we conceive multicultural curriculum? Relations with teachers, with peers, and access to informational resources are three important influences with ethnic and social relevance. The manner in which the adults in the school environment use power as they seek the attention of the diversity of pupils in their classrooms works to strengthen or weaken the students’ perceptions about their ethnicity, as well as their individuality.
within that ethnicity, and social differences in general. Having the willingness and ability to understand cultural differences will help teachers make instruction more effective.

Implications of this study are that we do justice to cultural studies by showing students at every grade level (1) somebody is there for them and recognizes their individuality; (2) the classroom culture is a culture of trust; (3) we believe in people's freedom to think and to communicate differently; and (4) we value diversity and find ways to show this.

Positive affirmation is far more effective than bitter divisiveness. While the children from each culture had different problems and perceptions, their lives, friendships, memories, and networks came together in this category of community in an elementary classroom. Pasha's father's honest and moving description of the struggle he had in getting his family out of Bosnia speaks directly to the challenge of identity perception and changing social identifications over time. To survive and succeed, this family had to make peace with the issue of their cultural backgrounds in this multicultural community.

Recommendations for Educators

This researcher strongly recommends the inclusion of a sequence of both ESL and child psychology courses in teacher preparation through the universities, with participants learning various methods of assessing communicative competence. This is especially beneficial now with trends of mainstreaming students with learning disabilities, students for whom English is a second language, and students for whom standard English is a second dialect. Students must read, write, speak, and listen in purposeful and active ways if they are to develop. Teachers need to be taught how to
develop positive educational relationships with the diversity of students they will encounter and how to elicit students’ understandings about the world and themselves.

Documenting the ways in which people behave differently in different cultures is valuable. Characteristics of learners from different cultural backgrounds must be integrated with characteristics of individual learners in teacher preparation courses. Methods must be taught for facilitating literacy development that are both culturally responsive and child-appropriate, designed around an awareness of identity construction. Teacher knowledge of the cultural heritage, of the nature of language, and, as a result, of the ways to facilitate language development are so important. Education today demands teachers with a wide repertoire of knowledge and skills who can employ them appropriately as needed.

In this fourth grade classroom, the teacher did not ignore the discontinuities that existed between the cultures of home and school or between the different levels of economic stability, intellectual, or religious backgrounds of her students; she made accommodations for them seem natural. We must address what becomes internalized in self-concept, and waiting until the age of adolescence is too late. A mapping of differences within different classrooms should provide a basis for understanding such issues as how we negotiate different identities. Research in cultural identity and literacy instruction, in combination with insights from social identity theory, provide a valuable framework for the analysis and understanding of identity construction as well as another way of thinking about multiculturalism and cultural identity.

Additionally, instructional methods can be changed to produce an environment where students feel honored for who they are and where interpersonal skills grow as
students work together to meet their goals successfully. The goal is to take a class of unique individuals and lead them to become a community of learners. Creating opportunities for student and teacher together to collaboratively build a shared set of meanings has powerful implications for school practice.

Recommendations for Further Study

Culture is real and must be addressed. In the past, a child has been identified as belonging to one culture, yet, what makes him an individual is pulling in other parts of other cultures. There is significant need for further investigation of the linkages between individuals and their groups. Future studies must address the relevance of the fact that unique identities are derived on the basis of particular combinations of experiences and group membership. Other multicultural settings need to be explored in depth. Further analyzing how social identifications change over time as students immerse themselves in the classroom culture can lead to a stronger foundation of understanding for the teacher as well as specific appropriate practices that encourage positive identity construction.

It is important that we continue to seek angles of vision that help us see the classroom culture clearly and understand more about its role in how it influences its members’ perceptions of themselves. We must be aware of the dangers in stereotyping our children, reducing them or being over simplistic. This is a significant responsibility shared by all educators in an increasingly fragmented world. Open, respectful dialogue can begin much easier in the small classroom community of children than in the larger global community. Here, children can come to understand that properties we share as a species are what make us more alike than different. The teacher helps reinforce these similarities, as does sharing with peers in the classroom.
Ultimately, there is no substitute for primary research undertaken in our own classrooms. Such research need not be experimental in a formal sense, but it does require a concerted effort first to uncover the biases and assumptions which may be coloring our observations, and then, to try to observe classroom life in as systematic, objective, and unbiased way as possible as first suggested by Mayher (1990). In facilitating reading acquisition, as well as all learning, we are trained to attend carefully to students' emerging understanding and communicative competence. We can expand this focus to emerging identity, an instrumental facet of how children grow and create a place for themselves in society.

Summary of Study

The study looked at identity construction at the level of the individual. It was designed to examine how individual children take on cultural ways that are associated with other cultural groups and thereby expand their concepts of self. I studied specifically the ways children interacted in the context of this multicultural inner-city classroom. I was not studying groups simply in the sense of groups of students in the classroom, rather, I was studying six individuals' self-perceptions as members of a cultural group.

This multiple-case qualitative research addressed the following questions: (a) How do students perceive their own identities? (b) To what extent do children identify with cultural roots that seem distinct from their own? (c) How do social identifications change over time as students become immersed in the classroom culture? Procedures included field notes based on observations in the classroom, systematic interviews (taped) with the children, the teachers, and the parents, and a collection of documents in the form of students' writing, drawing, and class assignments. Participants included six students
selected on the basis of the diversity in their backgrounds, four from different countries whose proficiency in English varied and two native-born Americans from different cultural backgrounds.

Three general findings emerged in response to the research questions. First, results showed another way of thinking about multiculturalism and cultural identity, challenging the portrayal of a child as a member of a single cultural group that has a homogeneous culture. We acquire additive identities as we become immersed in a new community’s practices. We bring our primary conceptual connections from home, but we expand to acquire others. Secondly, the teacher was the keystone in structuring social perceptions, and, therefore, the actions of the students in her classroom. Thirdly, the influences of our families and our personal histories—often enmeshed in a web of complex social and natural forces—do not stop human beings from an additive construction to their perceptions of themselves and connections to others.

Implicit in these findings is the need for further study to connect the old and the new research for genuine, purposeful use. Well-designed longitudinal studies in naturalistic settings are underutilized and offer considerable potential for discerning future theoretical and practical direction. Earlier analysis of younger students’ perceptions of their own identities is also under-investigated. My goal was to provide increased awareness of critical features of context—here, the multicultural classroom—for children’s exercise of social identities. I believe that insights from multiple perspectives are valuable. Recent work in relevant studies by Davidson (1996), Deaux (1996), Ferdman (1990), Phelan, et al (1991), and others contributes toward moving us toward a more multifaceted conception of social identity that is neither fixed nor rigid.
At the same time, Dewey and Vygotsky still have much to offer this new directional focus on the individual within the culture. Moving forward does not mean disregarding the works of the socio-historical theorists. It means adding on new understandings, and a tolerance of multiple identities in our students and their families. The problem of developing potential for excellence in all students is one of the core issues facing today's educators, and we must keep in the forefront of our reflections the recognition that there is no knowledge without a knower. I believe that just as individuals can have varying degrees of competence in more than one language, they can have varying degrees of competence in more than one culture, and since cultural identity is an additive process, we must ascertain that none of us will be reduced to some particular identity.
References


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Bosnia mission confusing, ex-police officer says. (200, March 29). The Advocate., p. 4B.


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Appendix A

Guidelines Used for Field work

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Appendix A

Guidelines used for fieldwork

1. Be descriptive in taking notes.

2. Gather a variety of information from different perspectives.

3. Cross-validate and triangulate by gathering different kinds of data—observations, interviews, program documentation, recordings, and photographs—and using multiple methods.

4. Use quotations; represent program participants in their own terms. Capture participants’ views of their experiences in their own words.

5. Select key informants wisely and use them carefully. Draw on the wisdom of their informed perspectives, but keep in mind that their perspectives are limited.

6. Be aware of and sensitive to the different stages of fieldwork.

7. Build trust and rapport at the entry stage. Remember that the evaluator-observer is also being observed and evaluated.

8. Stay alert and disciplined during the more routine, middle phase of fieldwork.

9. Focus on pulling together a useful synthesis as fieldwork draws to a close.

10. Be disciplined and conscientious in taking detailed field notes at all stages of fieldwork.

11. Be as involved as possible in experiencing the program as fully as possible while maintaining an analytical perspective grounded in the purpose of the fieldwork.

12. Clearly separate description from interpretation and judgment.

13. Provide formative feedback as part of the verification process of fieldwork. Time that feedback carefully. Observe its impact.

14. Include in your field notes and evaluation report your own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. These are also field data.

Patton, 1986, 273-274
Appendix B

Permission Letter to Teachers

Dear Teacher:

I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Louisiana State University. To fulfill the requirements for my degree, I have developed a research project to look at interactions of children in a multicultural classroom.

I will be observing in Mrs. Banner’s classroom this semester as well as in the ESL, computer science, and French classrooms – September through January. I will be taping some of the lessons and interviewing six selected children.

I would like your permission to interview you during this school year (at times convenient to you) for your insights and any information you can give that will be relevant to this study. These interviews will be taped. In any portions of the lessons and interviews used in my dissertation or any other reports, I will protect your identity by using a pseudonym, guaranteeing your anonymity as well as that of everyone who is concerned in this project. At the end of the project, I will share what I have learned with you.

Thank you for the opportunity. I can be reached at 555-1212 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Taylor Powers

Please sign here: ________________________________________________
Return by (specific date).
Initial Permission Letter to Parents

Dear Parents:

I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Louisiana State University. To fulfill the requirements for my degree, I have developed a research project to look at interactions of children in a multicultural classroom. This letter is to request your permission for your child to be in this study.

I will be observing in Mrs. Banner's classroom this semester as well as in the ESL rooms – September through January. I will be taping some of the lessons and will photocopy some papers the students write. What I am doing will not affect the child's grade or performance, and privacy and confidentiality will be maintained. Nothing any child says will be identified with the child's name; all participants are guaranteed anonymity.

After the study begins, I will be happy to meet with you at any point to share with you what I am learning. Please feel free to call me at 555-1212, if you have any questions.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Taylor Powers

Please fill in below and return to the school office by (specific date).

___________________________(child's name) has my permission to participate in this research project. I understand that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

___________________________(parent's signature)  _________________________(date)

___________________________(student's signature)  _________________________(date)
Dear Parents:

Thank you for allowing your child to participate in my study. My work is going well, and at this point I have a further request. I would like your child to be one of the six students to provide more detail in our interviews. I will examine selected writing and pictures they draw, in addition to taping some lessons and interviews. The interviews will be conducted in class and on the playground, and I would like to arrange one home visit at your convenience so that you can participate in the interviews.

As always, your child's identity will be protected. Your identity will also be protected. If I do use something in my paper, pseudonyms will be used. This will be my dissertation for Louisiana State University. It may be presented at a future conference or in a journal article.

Please call me at 555-1212 if you have any questions, and return this form to the school office.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Taylor Powers

Please fill in below and return to the school office by (specific date).

_________________________(child's name) has my permission to participate in this research project. I agree to participate too by interviews at home which will be taped. I understand that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

_________________________(parent's signature)  _________________(date)

_________________________(student's signature)  _________________(date)
Appendix C

Interview Questions
Appendix C

Interview Guide Developed for First Student Interview

1. What is your full name? Why were you given that name?
2. Were you named after someone else?
3. What do your classmates call you?
4. What do family members call you?
5. When you came to the U.S. did you choose or were you given a different name?
6. Where were you born and when?
7. Do you have any brothers or sisters? Tell me about them.
8. How did you come to America?
9. How long have you lived in Louisiana? In Baton Rouge?
10. Are any other family members here with you?
11. How is your family life different here than where you lived before?
12. Do you wish you lived somewhere else? If so, where?
13. Do you consider yourself an American?
14. How do you get to school each day?
15. How are things different in your school here as compared to earlier years?
16. Tell me about your favorite subject in school.
17. What is your least favorite subject? Why?
18. What kind of books do you like to read?
19. Can you give me the titles of some you like?
20. Do you like American books or books from your country?
21. Which is your favorite character (in each book)?
22. What do you like about this character? Are you like him/her in any way?
23. What do you do in reading class?
24. What do you think about this fourth-grade reading text?
25. Which story in the text have you liked best so far? Tell me about it.
26. Do you have a favorite book from when you were little? Tell me about it.
27. What are some of the books you have at home?
28. Do you ever read aloud to your parents?
29. Do your parents read to you?
30. What was the first language you learned to speak?
31. When you are with your family, do you speak English or your native language?
32. When did you start learning English?
33. What differences do you notice in the two languages?
34. Which are you more comfortable with?
35. Do you have a favorite game to play at home?
36. What is your favorite game to play at school?
37. Tell me about your favorite subject in school.
38. What is your least favorite subject and why?
39. Who do you enjoy playing with at school? Why?
40. Name a good friend you have known for the longest period of time. How many years have you been friends?
41. What do you like to do when you’re not in school?
42. What are your hobbies?
43. What is your favorite television program?
Interview Guide Developed for Teacher Interview

1. What is your role in the classroom?
2. How are the discourse structures you follow different from those of Mrs. Banner?
3. What are your perceptions of the classroom culture?
4. How have you learned to participate in it?
5. Does it bother you when a child asks you questions directly instead of raising his hand?
6. Do children who come from other cultures have problems with classroom rules?
7. How do you see them operating within the classroom culture?
8. Are they undermining or reproducing the discourse patterns Mrs. Banner established?
9. Would another way work better?
10. How might this classroom affect a child’s perception of his or her cultural identity? Could you give examples?
11. What type of student is (each)?
12. What is your philosophy of teaching? Your philosophy of how children learn?
13. What are the best methods to use with students, particularly in respect to language?
Interview Guide for Second Student Interview

This interview, at the midpoint of the study, focused on further observations made in the classroom and follow-up questions from their first interviews. Different questions were designed to build on information provided by each in the earlier interview.

1. Tell me what kind of things you did over the Christmas holiday. Did you get to see any of your classmates?
2. How did you feel about starting back to school this January?

Reading

3. What are you learning in reading now? (worksheet example. Get at institutional patterns.)
4. What is your favorite story?
5. What character in the story do you like best?
6. What do you like about this character? Are you like him/her in any way?
7. What is the main idea in this story?
8. Have the reading assignments gotten more difficult than they were at the beginning of the year? In what ways?
9. Do you like to listen to stories being read aloud? Do you teachers read aloud to you in class?
10. What do you do in the library?
11. I'd like you to make me a list of all the books you have read so far this year. You can bring it to me next week.

Classroom Organization

12. How did the class change when we had a substitute instead of Mrs. Banner?
13. What did you think about the way the substitute teachers organized the classroom?
14. How was it different from the way Mrs. Banner organizes the class?
15. Which way were you able to do your best work?
16. How do you like the way your desks are arranged?
17. How do you get help when you don't understand an assignment?
18. Do you think students follow the class rules that have been posted since the year began?

Social Organization

19. Is there a student leader in your class?
20. Do the leaders follow the class rules?
21. Who would you like to sit on either side of you?
22. Is the class different without Da and Cho? In what way?
23. What can you tell me about the two new students?
24. Are they adjusting to the classroom? Has anyone helped them adjust? Describe to me how you think they might be feeling in this classroom right now.
25. How is that different from the way you felt when you started this year?
26. Have there been ways you have helped them with English? How do you make them understand you?
27. Is English easier for you now than it was in September? In what ways?
28. What are some of the ways you are more like an American child now than were when you first came to Baton Rouge? Are you still a (Bosnian, Laotian, Korean, Iraqi) child?
29. Have you heard from Lillian since she moved?
Interview Guide Developed for Parent Interview

Background

1. You’ve come a long way from [_____] here. I’m wondering what brought you to Baton Rouge?
2. What jobs did you have to make a living in your native country?
3. Do you have family members here with you?
4. Louisiana must be quite different from [______]. What adjustments have you had to make to live here? (What changes have you noticed in your family life in America?)

At Home Activities

5. Tell me about a typical afternoon when [_____] comes home from school.
   Possible follow-up questions:
   5a. What does [child] do after school?
   5b. How much TV does he watch?
   5c. Does he have a favorite show or identify with any character in a show?
6. Tell me about your supper preparations.
   Possible follow-up questions:
   6a. Do you use American products?
   6b. How have your foods changed?
   6c. What are your family’s favorites?
7. Does [_____] have a responsibility or special job to help the family?
8. How were his jobs at home different in [native country]?
9. What changes do you see in his behavior after school compared with school in [native country]?
10. What do you do as a family together?
11. Who are [_____]’s friends? Are they in the neighborhood or from school?
12. Does he enjoy playing with one child or with a group of children?
13. Do his friends ever spend the night in your home?
14. Does he/she ever go to other people’s homes?
15. Does [_____] go shopping with you?
16. Does he talk to the clerks for you? (Go after child’s role as a translator.)

Literacy Related Activities

17. What language do you speak at home?
18. Does [_____] speak English or his native tongue at home?
19. Is it important for him to speak English?
20. How important is it for him to keep his native tongue?
21. What books are important at home?
22. What books did you read to [_____] when he was little?
23. Do you read with him?
24. How much does he read?
25. Have you ever gone to a public library in Baton Rouge?
26. Were there public libraries where you lived before?
27. Does anyone in the family read the local newspaper?
28. Who helps him with his homework?
29. How do you help him with his homework?
30. Does he do any writing at home?

Language, Literacy, and Identity

31. Tell me about his school.
32. How do you think he is doing in school?
33. Have you kept any of his things from school?
34. How is he progressing in learning English?
35. Why did your child decide not to take French at school?
36. What changes have you noticed over this school year? (American habits? Words?)
37. What are your own cultural roots?
38. Do you see any aspects of the Cajun culture? Do you identify with this culture at all?
39. Do you see [child] becoming more like other American children as time goes on?
40. Who does [_____] talk about when he comes home from school?
41. What kind of student was [_____] in his earlier school?
42. Compare that to the kind of student he is here in his 4th-grade class.
43. Do you still consider yourself [Bosnian]?
44. Are there any ways in which you are beginning to see yourselves as part of the American culture? Are you becoming more American over time?
45. Do you plan to apply for American citizenship in the future?
46. Do you want [_____] to continue to speak and read [Bosnian]?
47. What is important for you and him to retain from your native country? (Ways of doing things?)
48. What do you want for your child in his future? (What aspirations do you have for him?)
Interview Guide Developed for Third Student Interview

Begin with self-portraits drawn at beginning of year.

1. How have you changed?
2. Tell me about “Culture Day” at your school. What was it like? How did you participate?
3. How has the year been for you?
4. In looking back, what do you feel best about doing this school year? (Highlights?)
5. What are you best at in school?
6. What do you think you’ll need to work on? (Get at weaknesses.)
7. How do you think you could improve, get better, in your toughest subjects?
8. What written texts have you produced this year?
9. What kind of books and stories did you read this year?

Classroom culture

10. What were the classroom rules?
11. Are there any other rules that aren’t written up there?
12. Do you follow the rules?
13. Is it important to follow rules?
14. Who follows them best?
15. What advice do you have for a student who is going to be in this class next year?
16. How does a new student learn the ways of the school?
17. How does a new student learn English?
18. How did your instruction in English begin?
19. You’ve learned it; you speak it; do you ever get in trouble with it?
20. How has your language changed?

Social categories

21. What groups do you put yourself in? (class groups, gender groups, friends)
22. Have the groups expanded to include other children?
23. Is there any group you have moved out of? How do you feel about that?
24. Who are the people in your class that you enjoy being with?
25. What are some ways you collaborated with other students on work projects or play in this classroom?
Cultural texts

26. Tell me how you prepared for the IOWA test. Was it important for you to do well on it?
27. How do you see the IOWA test as being important to the school? Or, is it unimportant?
28. How do you feel about the worksheets given to you in every subject? What do you learn from them?
29. How has the ESL class been different from your regular classroom? (Consider texts and interactions.)
30. What are your favorite computer texts and games? Describe them to me.
Appendix D

Classroom Layout
Appendix E

Student Self-portraits

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Appendix F

School District Permission Letter
September 3, 1997

MEMO TO: Taylor Powers, Doctoral Student
Louisiana State University
3524 Westdale Drive
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70808

FROM: Dr. Bernadette Morris, Director
Planning, Evaluation, Research, and Development
Curriculum and Instruction

SUBJECT: Letter of Permission to Conduct Study
Children's Identity Construction in a Multicultural Setting

After reviewing your request to conduct the investigation described in your proposal, you have permission to begin your study.

Authorization to conduct this study is granted with the following stipulations:

1. The principal of the school agrees to participate. The principal must be given a copy of this memo.

2. Written permission is granted by the parents/guardian allowing their child/children to participate in the study. A copy of the permission form must be housed at the school.

3. The information obtained from the students will be anonymous and will remain confidential.

4. This department will receive two (2) copies of the completed study.

This authorization is based on the information submitted to this office. If you should deviate from the proposal, please contact this office.

If you have any questions, contact me at 922-5464.

Approved: Don Mercer, Associate Superintendent
Office of Curriculum and Instruction

cc: Dr. Gary Mathews
Gladys White

Quality and Equity: Our Children Are the Reason
VITA

Edith Taylor Richardson Powers was born in Alexandria, Louisiana, to Boyce Leigh Sadler Richardson and James Stader Richardson. After graduating from high school, she attended Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia. Following two years of study there, she transferred to Louisiana State University where she graduated with a degree in elementary education and a minor in history. She is the mother of two children, both recent college graduates.

Taylor Powers earned a master's degree in elementary education from Louisiana State University in 1972. She has traveled extensively, residing in Germany, Denmark, and in Honolulu, Hawaii. She taught for twelve years in public, private and military elementary schools. She studied for three years in a mentored program, "Education for Ministry," through the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee.

Taylor is currently completing the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction. That degree will be awarded in December, 2000.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Edith Taylor Richardson Powers

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Title of Dissertation: Children's Identity Construction in a Multicultural Setting

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

July 7, 2000